ADAPTING TO RESEMBLE OTHERS IN A COMPETITIVE ARENA?: THE FEDERAL
EXECUTIVE INSTITUTE 1993-2013

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ABSTRACT

This study uses the theoretical framework of institutional isomorphism to examine the organizational change of a unique organization, the Federal Executive Institute (FEI). As a government institution in a training arena in which the majority of its peers are not governmental institutions, FEI operates under a different set of assumptions, regulations, and market conditions than its peers, and is a unique organization within its field. Specifically, this research examines if this distinctive institution has adapted over time in ways that align with the understandings of institutional isomorphism by adapting towards the leaders in the field. Throughout this research, topics such as the expansion of the leadership development field, the theory of institutional isomorphism, and research on adaptation in higher education are examined to provide a framework in which to examine the Federal Executive Institute and the ways in which this unique organization does or does not adapt in ways that align with understandings of institutional isomorphism.

The following research questions are addressed: 1) Has FEI altered its goal of developing leaders for government service throughout the past 20 years? If so, in what ways? 2) How do FEI faculty and staff describe the cultural norms of the organization that have shaped the goal of developing leaders for government service throughout the past 20 years? 3) How do FEI faculty and staff describe the ways that competition from industry-leading providers of executive education and training has affected the management of FEI throughout the past 20 years? 4) What patterns of similarity and difference do FEI faculty and staff identify between industry-leading executive education and training competitors and FEI? 5) Has pressure from the Office of Personnel Management induced FEI to adapt over the past 20 years? If so, in what ways?

The findings from interviews and document analysis suggest that FEI has benchmarked its activities and success against those of its peers. However, being a government institution in a training arena in which the majority of its peers are not government institutions, FEI operates under a different set of assumptions, regulations, and market conditions than its peers. Results of this research do not demonstrate that FEI focused on adapting to competitive peers, though some aspects of FEI's actions throughout its history are guided by and highly influenced by its peers and competitors. This analysis is supported by the findings that while FEI has made changes, these were not as dramatic as the overall changes in the field. FEI has remained an outlier and unique in its field, rather than fully adapting to resemble leading institutions, through its organization, student cohort, courses offered, or focus of the institution.

DEDICATION

To MJM.

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This project would not have been possible without the loving support of my family and friends. To my parents, Lizzy, John, and Jeremy- thank you for always believing in me and providing unending love and support. I am so lucky to have you in my corner. To the Moynihan/ Garey/ McKendry family- thank you for your love, encouragement, and support through the many years of this project. To my dear friends, especially my higher ed friends and Lauren- thank you for listening, providing great advice, and for being awesome people.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Organizational theories are used to provide frameworks for the ways in which we view

and research organizations. These theories provide guidance on common ways in which

organizations, and the people within them, function. This study uses the theoretical framework of

institutional isomorphism to examine the organizational change of a unique organization, the

Federal Executive Institute. Specifically, this research will examine if this distinctive institution

has adapted over time in ways that align with the understandings of institutional isomorphism.

The theory that the tendency of organizations is to become homogenous over time by

changing to resemble the perceived leader of their field is known as institutional isomorphism

(DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). A component of new institutionalist theory, institutional

isomorphism contends that institutions adapt to emulate leaders in their organizational field. As

higher education organizations operate within a field of other higher education organizations,

this theory contends that the practices of individual organizations will begin to resemble each

other as they compete for legitimacy in their arena. Though the change can often occur through

incremental processes (Eckel & Kezar, 2003), organizations in competition become more similar

over time (Zha, 2009). To expand organizational research, this study examines a unique

organization to determine if its changes follow the expected path of adaptation toward the leaders

in the field.

Throughout this research, topics such as the expansion of the leadership development

field, the theory of institutional isomorphism, and research on adaptation in higher education are

examined to provide a framework in which to examine the Federal Executive Institute and the

ways in which this unique organization does or does not adapt in ways that align with understandings of institutional isomorphism.

The Emergence of the Leadership Development Field

Leadership development is the process of building better leaders through the enhancement of leadership skills at the individual and/or organizational level. As leadership development has evolved and expanded in the past 45 years, both non-profit and for-profit training institutions have influenced the field. Changes in the field led by these two sectors encourage governmental training providers to also change to adapt to the field.

The Federal Executive Institute (FEI) is one of the oldest and most prestigious leadership development centers in the U.S. government. FEI competes to train government employees with other leadership development centers, the majority of which are outside of the government. These competitors, leading executive education programs at business schools and stand-alone leadership development centers, create the leadership development arena. This arena can be thought of as the executive education arena for government leaders.

As the field of leadership development emerged post-WWII, distinct differences in best practices for training leaders in non-profit and for-profit organizations appeared. As the two sectors often have different business practices and measures of productivity and efficiency, leadership development began to be tailored to the unique needs of each of these sectors (Fairholm, 2008; Guyot, 2008; Van Wart & Dicke, 2008). Certain training providers began to focus more on one sector's needs while other training providers focused primarily on the other sector. Throughout the development of the field, the targeted sector of each training institution can be easily identified.

While there are many similarities between training for-profit leaders and non-profit leaders, the distinctions between the two fields often caused a tension in the delivery of this training when multiple methods were taught to an audience comprised of leaders from both sectors (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Carter, Giber, & Goldsmith, 2001; Van Wart & Dicke, 2008). Because the majority of training centers established during the development of the field were focused on for-profit management, institutions that focused on non-profit leadership began to distinguish themselves through providing different content geared towards a distinctive audience. However, the majority of institutions continued to focus on for-profit management, while offering a few academic offerings for non-profit leadership.

Over time, the distinctive curricular and mission of training providers for non-profit institutions became problematic. Through the 1980s, leaders who sought training had to choose between the well-known training providers who, for the most part, focused on for-profit management, and the lesser-known training providers who focused on non-profit leadership development (Carter, Giber, & Goldsmith, 2001). Not satisfied with these options, many non-profit institutions, including governmental agencies, began to institute in-house training programs to ensure that their specific needs were met. While the development of in-house training programs within non-profit, governmental agencies progressed, a conflict developed between non-profit institutions that trained their own leaders versus those that outsourced their training to providers that focused mainly on for-profit leadership. The question of whether the leadership training needs of non-profit institutions were best met in-house, or outsourced, has consistently been debated.

It can be argued that leaders in the for-profit and non-profit sectors can learn from each other; i.e., it would be beneficial for non-profit leaders to be trained using training approaches

designed for leaders in the for-profit sector, and for for-profit leaders to be aware of non-profit approaches. This would expand the perspectives of all leaders, as they are exposed to different ways of operating. This might also encourage competition amongst training providers. Another arc of research, however, discounts the value added of such competition and encourages non-profit institutions to develop training programs that focus training on the unique needs of this sector (Carter, Giber, & Goldsmith, 2001; Van Wart & Dicke, 2008).

The distinct approaches to leadership training create conflict for non-profit leaders pursing leadership development. It also puts pressure on non-profit leadership training programs to justify their unique approach, and to preserve it over time. This study seeks to address the question of the degree to which the Federal Executive Institute has come to emulate for-profit providers over time.

A unique sector.

The development of non-profit leadership has been unique for a variety of reasons. First, while government-located leadership development training centers operate within the non-profit sector, these institutions operate specifically within a smaller arena of the non-profit sector, the federal government training sector. This is a distinct set of institutions operating under a different set of models, rules, and regulations than other organizations in the non-profit sector. However, leading providers of non-profit leadership development may also look towards leading providers of leadership training in for-profit organizations. They may also adapt behaviors and structures over time in order to stay competitive with those leaders in that field. As such, government-located leadership development training centers may compare themselves to the executive education programs at leading business schools, as well as the leading independent executive education providers. If government-located leadership development training centers consider

their peers to be two distinctly different types of leadership development training providers, these centers may be challenged to preserve their distinctive identities as the larger leadership development field changes and evolves. Throughout their existence, government-located leadership development training centers have had to position their training in light of the range of institutions that they consider their peers. It is that process of positioning that is at the center of this study. How has one prominent government-located leadership development training center evolved as the field has evolved? What characteristics of a leading leadership development training center in the federal government have not changed? What characteristics have changed? In what ways have any changes been due to this institution's location in the federal government?

The Development of the Federal Executive Institute

The Federal Executive Institute (FEI) is a government-located leadership development training center located in Charlottesville, Virginia. As a part of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), FEI provides leadership development training to top federal civil servants with grades GS-15 and SES.[1] FEI is an institute that trains only federal government executives. Since its creation in 1968, FEI's flagship program, Leadership for a Democratic Society (LDS), has graduated over 25,000 government executives and has developed a strong cadre of supporters employed throughout the government and in its freestanding alumni association.

FEI was created during the eras of the Great Society and the Civil Rights movement, when the government played a strong role in a changing society. Throughout the 20th century, milestone events contributed to a view of the government as a key site for moving society forward. The expansive governmental support provided through the New Deal programs demonstrated political support for the idea that one way for the country to emerge from the Great

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[1] GS 15 and SES: The paygrades General Service 15 (GS 15) and Senior Executive Service (SES) are the two highest paygrades in the civil service system.

Depression was for the federal government to create jobs and other opportunities. Similarly, following WWII, much of America's economic recovery came through government-sponsored projects. In the mid 1960's, as the U.S. was experiencing extremely turbulent times and markets were struggling, the government again became the place to advance national interests through such efforts as the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968 and the Great Society movement (Sherwood, 1971).

FEI was founded in 1968, though plans to create an advanced center of study for federal senior executives had been discussed for at least the previous 15 years. In 1953, the Society for Personnel Administration published a proposal for a "Federal Administrative Staff College," a center that would be the culminating step in creating a series of centers for training government executives (Society for Personnel Administration, 1953). The Government Employees Training Act of 1958, signed into law by President Eisenhower, gave the power to agency and department heads to appropriate funds for training executives at both governmental and non-governmental training sites. Not only was the Civil Service Commission assigned to regulate this training, it was tasked with promoting and coordinating training activities (Sherwood, 2010).

In 1963 and 1966, the Civil Service Commission established centers in Kings Point, Long Island and Berkeley, California, respectively, to train executives in General Service (GS) grades 14 and 15 who showed leadership promise. However, the supergrade positions which had been created in 1948, GS 16, 17 and 18, did not have a dedicated training site to meet their unique needs. In 1966, the Plan for the Federal Executive Institute was developed, creating a center for the supergrades, FEI. By the spring of 1968, several key components of this institute had been decided, including several distinguishing features. FEI reported directly to the Chairman of the U.S. Civil Service Commission, which is a placement that later changes over time with increased

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administrative layers between FEI and the head of OPM. The program was to be a two-month long residential program that served supergrades from throughout the federal government. In addition, agencies paid to send their executives to this program (Sherwood, 2010).

Decisions on the teaching methods and activities of the center followed the creation of the basic structure. Some felt that the institute should be an innovative and creative center that both trained the supergrades and served as a center to do research on the best practices of supergrades. Others felt that the center should emulate those created earlier in the decade for GS 14s and 15s, resembling less a university based on innovation and research than a traditional training center.

FEI opened to its first LDS class in October 1968 without a clear understanding of which of the positions on pedagogy and curriculum that it would take (Saraff & Mosher, 1974). This conflict has challenged FEI throughout its history. Since its creation, FEI has adjusted its position based on many factors, including its leadership, the current political climate, and the influence of the institutions it would compete with for students.

Though they undoubtedly had many alternatives to achieving the government's executive training goals, such as supporting the establishment of private enterprises that trained federal executives, President Johnson and Congress created FEI in 1968 as a government agency and as the leading training center for government executives. When FEI was created, the government was seen as a key site for accomplishing public goals and government provided leadership training of government executives was seen as essential to the public interest. This line of thinking was modeled to some degree after the training practices of the military, which at the time predominantly trained leaders directly in its own culture, rather than outsourcing training.

As the President and Congress sought a distinguished method for training government executives, they chose to create a government program, the Federal Executive Institute.

Statement of the Problem

Status, culture, context, and structure matter when studying how organizations adapt and change. Organizational theorists suggest organizations within a field come to resemble one another over time. Despite this, significant questions remain unanswered. Over time, will all organizations in a field look essentially the same? Or can organizations remain unique, tailored to meet the needs of distinct populations?

As a government institution in a training arena in which the majority of its peers are not governmental institutions, FEI operates under a different set of assumptions, regulations, and market conditions than its peers, and is a unique organization within its field. Given the competitive pressure from competitors within its arena, it is worth investigating how FEI's status, culture, context and structure have impacted its evolution over time.

This study explores whether FEI, identified as an outlier in its market due to its location within the government and its serving of government executives, has preserved its own culture and mission or whether it has adapted to resemble its competitors. Given that FEI was established as an innovative public provider, it is worth investigating if FEI has moved away from the beliefs of its founding over time. This research seeks to understand the degree to which FEI has shifted to resemble private sector organizations due to pressure from the changing competitive arena.

FEI is overseen by OPM. A secondary purpose to the study is to understand the degree to which specific OPM agency pressures have motivated FEI to change throughout its history.

Though the theory of institutional isomorphism suggests that FEI might change to adapt to the field, there are many reasons that FEI might not change. Two of the most significant reasons are its status as a government provider and its unique history. As a government provider, FEI operates under a different set of regulations, assumptions, and culture than its university-based or free-standing institutional peers. As such, it may not follow the expectations of the institutional isomorphism theory as it is fundamentally different from its peers. In addition to its role as a government provider, FEI's unique history may inhibit or reduce the chance of change, though institutional isomorphism may predict such change. FEI's history as an institution that teaches a Constitutional-based curriculum is focused entirely on educating government executives, and that its mission to serve the American public through the development of government leaders creates a unique institution, one that may not follow the predicted path that the theory suggests.

These themes are addressed throughout this research in order to pursue the following research questions.

Research Questions

1. Has FEI altered its goal of developing leaders for government service throughout the past 20 years? If so, in what ways?

2. How do FEI faculty and staff describe the cultural norms of the organization that have shaped the goal of developing leaders for government service throughout the past 20 years?

3. How do FEI faculty and staff describe the ways that competition from industry-leading providers of executive education and training has affected the management of FEI throughout the past 20 years?

4. What patterns of similarity and difference do FEI faculty and staff identify between industry-leading executive education and training competitors and FEI?

5. Has pressure from the Office of Personnel Management induced FEI to adapt over the past 20 years? If so, in what ways?

Definition of Terms

Center for Executive Leadership (CEL): Created in the mid-1990s, this component of FEI offered open enrollment and custom courses to government executives, organizations, and agencies. Upon the creation of this center, FEI offered programming through its flagship four-week Leadership for a Democratic Society program as well as shorter and more customized programming through CEL.

Executive: This term refers to professionals who are either in charge of large numbers of subordinates and/or who manage large departments and large budgets.

Executive Education: This term is defined as programs at graduate level business schools or independent providers that deliver programs to upper and middle level managers and leaders. These programs are not usually degree granting programs but instead are programs that offer practical learning experiences and develop leadership skills.

Executive Leadership Development: This type of leadership development is tailored towards the needs of executives, as defined above, in their role as leaders in organizations.

Federal Executive Institute (FEI): The Federal Executive Institute is a part of the human resources solutions division of OPM. FEI trains high-ranking civil servants, primarily GS-15 and Senior Executive Service (SES) members in leadership development. FEI also refers to the grounds on which FEI is located. FEI is located in Charlottesville, Virginia near the grounds of the University of Virginia.

FEI leadership; FEI is led by a Director and a Deputy Director. The faculty is led by a Dean of Faculty. It is these positions that comprise the FEI Leadership.

GS15: As defined by OPM, the General Schedule is the most used pay scale in the federal government. GS15 members are the highest ranking of the 15-point system. This position refers to federal government employees who are high-level supervisors or researchers.

Independent leadership development programs: These are programs at independent centers that offer executive education training. Examples of these programs include the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) and the Brookings Institute.

Leadership Development: In this study, this term is defined as the process of developing the leader as well as the notion of leadership as a process. Leadership Development draws upon concepts such as interpersonal relationships, team dynamics, organizational factors, leadership styles, and personal learning styles.

Leadership for a Democratic Society (LDS): The Leadership for a Democratic Society program is the flagship program at FEI. First operated in 1968 at the creation of FEI, LDS has transformed from an eight-week residential program to a four-week residential program over its 40 year history.

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM): This independent agency of the United States federal government manages the civil service workforce of the federal government. Its responsibilities include employee services, retirement and benefits, merit system compliance, federal investigative services, and human resources solutions, which includes leadership development.

Senior Executive Service (SES): Formerly defined at supergrades, the SES is the pay band of civil servants above the General Schedule system. SES members operate as the link between the Presidential appointees and the rest of the federal workforce.

University-based executive education programs: These are leadership development programs housed in universities. Examples of these programs include the Darden School of Business at the University of Virginia, multiple programs at Harvard University including programs in the Harvard Business School and the Kennedy School of Government, the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, and the Maxwell School at Syracuse University.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review has two major sections. The first section explores the literature on the concepts of institutional isomorphism and structuration. The second section examines three major areas of research within executive education throughout the past century. The goal of this section is to provide an understanding of the leadership development and executive education field and present the literature underpinnings of the conceptual framework, institutional isomorphism, through which FEI's actions will be examined.

Organizational Theory

In order to best understand how institutions change over time, the theory and literature of new institutionalism and structuration is utilized. New institutionalism highlights the internal and external pressures on institutions to have focused and specific missions. At the same time, they are expected to compete within an organizational field. Structuration focuses on the understanding of social interactions at the organizational and inter-organizational level that precede structural changes. Institutional isomorphism and structuration will be used as the theoretical framework to explore the question of the degree to which a unique training organization that has faced competitive pressures over a significant period of time has adapted to emulate its competitors.

Institutional Isomorphism

Institutional isomorphism is the concept that under competition, the tendency of organizations is to become homogenous over time as they adapt to resemble the perceived leader in an organizational field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). A component of new institutionalist theory, institutional isomorphism contends that institutions adapt to emulate leaders in their

organizational field. This theory contends that the practices of individual organizations will begin to resemble each other as they compete for legitimacy in an organizational field.

Assumptions

There are three major assumptions in DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) work on institutional isomorphism. These assumptions are 1.) that in a competitive environment, political and cultural forces produce coercive isomorphic change (or change encouraged by competitive forces); 2.) that organizational responses to uncertainty produce mimetic isomorphic change (or imitative change that is beneficial to the organization); and that professionalization and socialization produce normative isomorphic change (or change brought about by similar training and education resulting in similar solutions to issues) (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Though these assumptions are analytically distinct, Mizruchi and Fein (1999) find that they are less clear when attempting to distinguish them empirically.

Predictors of Change

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) identified two types of change predictors, those at the organizational level and those at the field level. Organizational level predictors address ways that, during times of change and growth, organizations strive to compete with others in their field, and in the process, become more like the other organizations. Organizational level predictors take into account that organizations will change at varying rates to become more like their peers based on the speed in which they respond to external pressures from the organizational field level (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). These pressures shape the norms and beliefs that are institutionalized by the organization (Goenitzka, 1999).

In addition to organizational level predictors (or internal pressures), field level predictors (or external pressures) describe how an organization functions within its field and the factors that

will influence the actions of the organization. For leadership development centers, the field level is the leadership development arena, specifically the leading organizations in the arena, those with high levels of perceived legitimacy. Field level predictors affect all organizations in a field to some degree regardless of each organization's individual actions (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Together, the organizational and field level predictors indicate that the isomorphic change that organizations experience is a result of pressures at the organizational level, within the institution itself, and at the field level. In this study, the acknowledgement of these two levels of predictors will help to identify and classify the competitive pressures on FEI.

Some of the limitations of DiMaggio and Powell's model are found in subsequent studies. Ashworth, Boyne, and Delbridge (2007) found that issues of power, contest, and informal structures "had been inappropriately downplayed with a consequent loss of explanatory insight" (p. 3) in DiMaggio and Powell's work. More recent reflections on institutional isomorphism have focused on the rate of continuity and change, and how this may differ greatly among organizations and organizational fields (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Scott, 1994).

Despite these limitations, institutional isomorphism provides a useful model for the study of how organizations change and the characteristics of the levels in which they face pressures to change.

Institutional Isomorphism and Adaption in Higher Education

Research on adaption in higher education finds that higher education institutions are becoming more alike over time. That is, organizations functioning in uniform environmental conditions of competition become more similar over time (Zha, 2009), though the change can often occur through incremental processes over time (Eckel & Kezar, 2003). Morphew and

Huisman (2002) discuss the changes that occur in several state higher education systems, finding that smaller, often newer, and less comprehensive institutions are changing to more closely resemble peer institutions that are older, larger, and more prestigious. Morphew and Huisman (2002) discuss these changes through the lens of research by Berdahl (1985) and Birnbaum (1983) on academic drift, which is defined as "a drift toward the structure and norms typical of more prestigious universities." The notion of academic drift is defined by Jaquette (2013) as "a shift away from an organization's historic mission towards the mission of another type of organization" (517), and is consistent with new institutionalist theories. In discussing the role of faculty in academic drift, research discusses several possible factors that drive faculty members. While some of these factors, including increased specialization and discipline-specific trends, can be connected to behaviors based on the perceived values of higher education institutions, other factors, such as suggestions for new degree programs based on demands of students and business leaders, are driven by faculty members' motivations (Morphew & Huisman, 2002). These different causes of academic drift, including institutional policies such as institutional reward structures, often work in tandem to drive drift. In addition to a focus on faculty members, research also attributes academic drift in higher education to efforts to be more efficient, manageable, and accountable to meet challenges such as growing enrollment, increased international competition, and less reliance on public support (Zha, 2009).

Research on adaption in higher education also turns attention to the diversity of institution types. Citing Birnbaum (1983), Morphew and Huisman (2002) find that diversity in institutional types "is valued because of the belief that greater institutional diversity promotes efficiency, productivity and quality in higher education systems" and that within the U.S., higher education policies have been created to protect against the homogenization of institutions.

Additionally, Morphew (2009) cites research by the Carnegie Commission (1975), Clark & Youn, (1976), Stadtman (1980), and Trow (1979) when making the argument that institutional diversity has been recognized historically as a "positive and unique attribute of the U.S. higher education system."

Aspects of adaption in higher education include the adoption of different strategic responses based on policy pressures (Bowl & Hughes, 2014), pressure from rankings systems (Erkkilä, 2013), increased homogeneity within higher education institutions (Morphew & Huisman, 2002), institutions competing on the breadth of their programmatic offerings rather than their strengths (Zha, 2009), one aspect of an institution's identity taking precedence over other components of its identity (DeJordy, Almond, Nielsen, & Creed, 2014), and the desire to generate enrollment-related revenue (Jaquette, 2013).

Culture

Kezar and Eckel (2002) discuss the role of culture on organizational change. Their work builds on previous research that studied the ways in which culture shapes an institution's change processes or strategies by acting as the modifying element, rather than the subject of the change (Kezar & Eckel, 2002). In their work, culture, which is defined as "the deeply embedded patterns of organizational behavior and the shared values, assumptions, beliefs, or ideologies that members have about their organization or its work," strongly impacts comprehensive change in higher education organizations (Kezar & Eckel, 2002, p. 438).

Prior research also addresses why higher education institutions may be more susceptible to drift and adaption than other types of organizations. Morphew and Huisman (2002) and Morphew (2009) find that organizations with technical and clear outputs, such as a specific manufacturing process, often have a need for more efficient processes, and that the success of the

organization can be determined through very clear markers. However, in organizations such as higher education organizations, in which the output, learning and knowledge, is difficult to measure, these types of organizations often look to peer organizations to determine practices in order to better themselves.

Several authors connect DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) research to higher education. Specifically, the research links forces such as the impact of professional values and professionalization in higher education (Morphew & Huisman, 2002) and the function of professional associations and normalizing the professional field (Atkinson, 2008) with DiMaggio and Powell's normative forces. The impact of governmental policies and regulation on homogenization (Morphew & Huisman, 2002) and society's cultural expectations (Atkinson, 2008) are linked to coercive forces. Additionally, copying behavior such as emulating more prestigious institutions and adopting successful innovations at other institutions (Morphew & Huisman, 2002), modeling themselves after prestigious institutions in the northeast U.S. (Atkinson, 2008), and "striving" to increase their institution's social status to be like more prestigious institutions (Hazelkorn, 2015) are linked to mimetic isomorphism. Through these contexts, the associations between higher education and institutional isomorphism are clearer.

Institutional isomorphism in higher education institutions has also been characterized as the attempt to balance the need for innovation and entrepreneurship with the pressure to adjust to the practices of other institutions (Stensaker & Norgard, 2001). They find that "universities are increasingly facing a double-sided pressure: to be innovative with a specific organizational mission while at the same time being an integrated part of a growing, and higher interconnected, internationalized and standardized higher education 'industry' " (p. 473). In balancing these two forces, universities are pressured both internally and externally. An additional challenge to

higher education institutions is the specific pressures that one component of the institution's identity, such as a religiously-affiliated higher education institution, has on its overall identity. Research finds that the demands of one component of an institution's identity may take precedence over, or conflict with, other demands on the institution's identity (DeJordy, Almond, Nielsen, & Creed, 2014). Further exploration of how these pressures affect change within universities addresses how universities are affected by the pressures of stratification and hierarchy (Dey, Milem, & Berger, 1997). These notions, when combined with organizational and field level predictors of change, demonstrate the complexities of the tendency of universities to emulate each other as they compete for legitimacy in the higher education arena.

Structuration

The theory of structuration was developed by Anthony Giddens (1979) as a theory of action in social systems. Structuration serves as a framework for understanding organizational change by exploring the relationship between structure and agency (Pozzebon & Pinsonneault, 2005). While theories from functionalist perspectives focused on purposes, reasons and motives of action, structuration focuses on power, change, and institutional analysis (Giddens, 1979; Callahan, 2004). In defining structuration, there is a clear delineation between structure and agency. While interactions between people create social systems, the rules and guidelines in which people interact also shape individual and organizational agency. As there is an intrinsically connected relationship between agency and structure, when people exercise agency with each other and create systems, structure is also being created and changed through the interactions within the systems. That is to say that as people create relationships, the guidelines in which the relationships operate also change based on the relationships (Callahan, 2004). The

concept of structuration, then, "refers to the process by which actors reproduce and transform social practices across time and space" (Staber & Sydow, 2002, p. 412).

Through this perspective, individual actors are "both constrained and free, operating within social structures but able to change them" (Trowler, 1997). Commenting on the role of agency in higher education, Paul Trowler finds that:

> It is strange, then, that in the study of higher education there is a predominant model of organizational and professional culture as enacted, of policy as inexorably imposed and of individual academics as passive and unwilling participants in events largely outside their control... This is doubly strange when, even in current circumstances, most would agree that academics have more resources (of all sorts) at their disposal and more latitude for action than, for example Lipsky's social services bureaucrats (p. 302).

Structuration and Change.

Structuration offers a balanced and comprehensive approach to organizational uncertainty as it simultaneously deals with the creation and maintenance of structures as well as change and continuity (Staber & Sydow, 2002). Structuration refers to the process by which actors reproduce social practices. This reproduction process is part of a structure that may serve to enable or constrain the processes. Thus, it is not the structure that determines the action of the actor; instead, it is the actor's agency and engagement within the structure that determines the changing of the structure.

Although structuration as a concept is complex and often criticized as too abstract (Callahan, 2004; Pozzebon & Pinsonneault, 2005), its emphasis on the constitution and reconstitution of social practices, such as policy implementation and the active agency of actors, justifies the use of structuration to better understand and examine structures of FEI throughout its history and the actions of the actors with FEI to shape those structures. The understanding of social interactions at the organizational and inter-organizational level will help with the evaluation of any structural changes at FEI.

Institutional Isomorphism and Structuration Literature Summary

Organizational theories, and the concepts of isomorphism and structuration, provide a useful lens for the study of change over time at FEI. Together, these ideas illuminate the complications of implementing policy and change within an organization. They focus on the need to understand that policy changes are greatly affected by political maneuvering, that policy often becomes distorted as it trickles down to the local level, and that often the actual implementation of a policy does not reflect the intent of that policy. These notions frame the exploration of the ways that competitive pressures have influenced and changed FEI throughout the past forty years.

As the literature shows, organizations will react differently based on an array of internal and external pressures that they face. The goal of this study is to better understand how FEI understood, and interacted with, its competitors throughout its existence.

Leadership Development and Executive Education

Terms similar to executive education are often used interchangeably in the literature. These terms, leadership training, development and education, all highlight the notion that executive education is an in-depth learning process that combines intellectual and values-based endeavors with skills training. This process requires insight and interpretation of the information and experiences being shared as a part of the learning experience.

The field of executive education[2] has changed greatly throughout the past fifty years. Research suggests that upper level managers and leaders seek professional development through executive education, and the development of this field is impacted by the need for innovation in contemporary management practices. With goals including organizational change and a better

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[2] Executive education and leadership development are used interchangably here

understanding of organizational culture (Toppings, 1997), executive education throughout time has highlighted the role of leadership training in facilitating organizational change (Burke, 1997). Since organizational change has been constant throughout the past fifty years, there have been many significant shifts and transitions in leadership development. Major changes within the field include new leadership development theories, the shift from a reliance on theory and lectures to a combined focus of theory and practical applications; a shift from a location primarily in business schools to the inclusion of independent providers; and a shift from predominantly open enrollment programs[3] to the addition of programs created for a custom audience[4]. This literature review investigates these four major changes throughout the past fifty years to support the hypothesis that executive education programs have changed greatly over the past fifty years.

The Development of Executive Education.

Executive education as a field has been rapidly growing and developing over the past five decades. A practice that grew out of the need to teach leadership and management skills to senior employees in for-profit companies has developed into an expansive business consisting of public, private, and governmental institutions offering a myriad of executive education options.

As the field of executive education was developing and expanding after WWII, programs were focused on the individual within a corporation. Training programs were created based on a typical forty-year career with steady increases in responsibilities. In reflecting on career progressions, according to Vicere and Fulmer (1996), there are four developmental phases, each linked to the age of the worker and job responsibilities. In the first phase, "Learning the Ropes" occurs in workers during their mid-20s to early 30s and is focused on the person as an individual contributor. Following this phase, the "Rotational Assignments" phase occurs during the early

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[3] Programs open to anyone in the appropriate audience to attend
[4] Programs created for a specific organization and delivered solely to that organization

30s to early 40s when workers are midcareer and seen as promotable. The third phase, "Becoming a General Manager" occurs in the early 40s to early 50s when workers are experienced midcareer employees. The final phase, "Foundation for the Future" occurs in the early 50s and beyond, as employees transition to the roles of senior leaders and statesmen.

The practices of leadership development programs need to correspond to the goals of the organizations that are seeking to benefit from leadership training (Intagliata et al., 2000). As the needs of organizations have changed over time, their needs for executive education have also changed. Three of the major changes within the executive education field are discussed below. First, the shift from a reliance on theory and lectures to a combined focus of theory and practical applications will be discussed. Following this, the discussion will focus on the shift from a location primarily in business schools to the inclusion of independent providers. Third, the shift from predominantly open enrollment programs to the addition of programs created for a custom audience will be discussed.

Methods of teaching.

Theory, research and practice.

Executive education programs in business schools are often criticized for failing to provide capable graduates, based on several alleged deficiencies in instructional strategies, including that the fundamental issue is the traditional method through which theory is taught in executive education courses (Vaara & Fay, 2011). Other critics have pointed to a strong emphasis on theory instead of on the development of cross-functional abilities. Research suggests that executives often do not use the skills they learn in courses until months later, at which point they may have forgotten how to apply their knowledge. It is also argued that the "batching together" of courses creates an impediment to achieving the desired outcomes of

executive education programs. Scholars point to a gap between theory and practice in these programs, such that many executive education programs deliver highly standardized knowledge without a clear linkage to practice (Thomas & Wilson, 2009). Within business education in general, programs have been referred to as silos without sufficient integrative elements (Teece, 2001). Critics also call for an increased focus on softer areas, such as people management, interpersonal interaction, and leadership skills, to correspond with a desire among corporations for candidates that possess complex interactive skills (Vaara & Fay, 2011). There has been a movement in the last decade to rebalance business education, with more focus on the associated skills and attitudes required for effective application of theoretical knowledge (Datar, Garvin, & Cullen, 2010). In the business community, an integrated perspective is seen as essential, as business leaders need to develop the ability to link ideas together and frame complex problems, which involves enhanced judgment. If the ultimate goal of business education is to produce students who have the skills, flexibility, and training to compete in a new economy defined by globalization and technological change, then business schools are tasked with producing "graduates who can make better decisions than practitioners who have not had a business education" (Teece, 2001).

There are several ways in which business programs are responding to the criticisms outlined above. Trends for implementing curricular change that are particularly relevant are addressed here. Datar, Garvin & Cullen (2010) point to key skills such as gaining global perspective through global management courses, mandatory international trips, and international campuses; developing leadership skills through leadership courses, more labs and group work; and honing integration skills through framing problems in a holistic context and restructuring courses to be more integrative and functional.

Changes in Executive Education.

Executive education is the training of corporate and other organization leaders through short programs that are generally found in universities. As FEI is an executive education provider, it is important to explore the changes within the executive education field.

Spearly and Baker (2005) find that there is "diminishing interest in traditional classroom instruction, business simulations, and case study methodologies." Instead, customers are interested in action and experiential learner pedagogies including applied projects and other applied work. Both university and non-university providers are finding it more productive to integrate program evaluation in a systemic way into the program design process (Eiter and Halperin, 2010).

Eiter and Halperin evaluate three models that demonstrate the inclusion of program evaluation in executive education programs. These models and their influence on program curricula demonstrate a change from a reliance on theories to the inclusion of practical applications. The first model presented by Eiter and Halperin is Roland Deiser's model of *Expanding the Paradigm of Learning*. This model encourages adapting the paradigm of learning as it includes "learning embedded in practice to a much greater extent, contributions to learning that move beyond the personal to the organizational strategic level and ethical, social, and political dimensions." (p. 13).

The second model presented is *Linking Program Design and Assessment* by Yorks, Beechler, and Ciroren. In their research, Yorks et al. (2007) find that practices that begin 8 weeks prior to an executive education program and continue for 18 months after the program lead to the formations of great connections. The authors developed a process for executive education program activities that includes activities 8 weeks prior to and 18 months after the program.

They demonstrate that activities combined over 18 months cohesively come together to form strong connections.

The first set of activities takes place before the formal program begins. Starting at 8 weeks before and again at 3 weeks before the program, students participate in or complete pre-program interviews, participation pledges, 360 feedback instruments, learning style surveys, logistical questionnaires, job descriptions, and personal case studies, which also continues during the program. A third set of activities occurs during the program. These include faculty and small group sessions, the development of learning and social styles, leadership learning groups and personal cases studies, as well as one-on-one coaching. The fourth and final step focuses on activities that occur after the program is completed. These activities are designed to "capture the learning" and consist of: post-interviews and learning assessments five months after the program; virtual learning groups that meet seven months after the program; post 360 feedback and reports back to alumni 10-12 months after the program; one-on-one 360 degree coaching 12-14 months after the program; and alumni activities and an alumni weekend 6-18 months after the program.

A third model presented is *Learning in a Web 2.0 World* by Meister and Willyerd. This model recognizes the changes that technology, specifically the concept of Web 2.0, has on education. Historically programs have been based on formal programs in a top-down manner. However, the community aspect of Web 2.0 is challenging this notion that learning should be organized in a top-down manner. Eiter and Halperin find that Meister and Willyerd's model "suggests a movement towards more learning occurring in peer-to-peer communities of practice that are organic, emergent, and definitely not controlled only by HR or senior executives. In this world, evaluation of impact is much more about who is contributing and who notices and values these contributions." The model provides descriptions of learning based on the intersection of

two continuums: "Competency Based Learning to Context Based Learning" and "Created by Organization to Created by Users."

Executive Education Providers

In the early history of executive education, programs were predominantly housed in the business schools of universities. The development of these programs benefitted greatly from their location within universities due to several factors, including the social cache of the universities as well as university resources. In the 1970's and 1980's, the field of executive education grew to include industry associations, conferences, and academic journals. Executive education programs began to be offered by two distinct groups - independent providers and university business schools. These two major groups of providers of executive education now compete for students, from sectors such as federal and state government, Fortune 500 companies, growing companies, and companies going through great change.

Albert Vicere, in discussing general trends within executive education, finds that participation rates in executive education programs, both those within universities and offered by non-university providers, were expected to continue to grow. However, a growing source of competition for these programs is emerging from within-company education and training programs (Vicere, 1998).

When deciding to pursue executive education outside of one's own company, Vicere found the following attributes to have the greatest appeal. First, programs should provide specific skills. Second, programs should provide opportunities such as broadening participants' perspectives, expose executives to experts and information, provide networking opportunities, provide a forum for discussion and ideas, and provide interaction with senior management. Third, it is important for programs to enhance competitive intelligence by developing a greater

understanding of competition and competitive capability. Fourth, logistically, programs should provide education in a timely manner. Fifth, it is important for programs to focus on the development of culture. The sixth and final category of attributes is alignment with other education opportunities.

Along with the growth of executive education programs, there is a growth of the potential clients for these programs. While historically these programs have been designed for top executives, programs throughout the past two decades have been courting rising leaders as well as new leaders. The expansion of the potential audience for executive education programs is creating more room for the growth of executive education programs in general, both in university settings and in independent provider settings. Vicere finds that as the potential audience for executive education grows, not only in overall numbers, but more importantly in a higher percentage of the workforce, there will be even more competition between the two sectors. (Vicere, 1998).

Vicere found the following to be the top criteria that executives use when selecting executive education vendors outside of their companies: content/program quality, the reputation of the vendor, faculty, cost, length, and program effectiveness.

When discussing overall trends within executive education, Vicere (1998) made the following predictions. First, executive education and development would continue to grow as companies focused on competition. This growth would be seen in both in-company and external programs as well as through the growth of customized programs in both formats. Second, this growth, along with increased spending on executive education and development, would move toward a greater formalization of the field. This specifically would include improved succession management processes and greater accountability for the return on investment in executive

education and leadership development. This accountability push would further result in action learning to continue as a successful learning methodology as well as a greater focus on program evaluation. A third theme identified by Vicere was the rise of distance learning methodologies in executive education and leadership development. A fourth theme identified focused on the increased prevalence of experience-based development methods such as taskforce and project assignments, job rotation, on-the-job learning, and action learning. A fifth theme was that short-term programs, rather than longer-term external programs, such as general management programs, will lead the growth of the field. The sixth theme was a back-to-the-basics movement that includes experience-based development techniques and performance feedback. Seventh, Vicere identified that emerging leadership competencies such as flexibility and adaptability, the ability to learn, and business acumen would be significant developments in the field as they reflect the competencies of leaders the changing new, flat, networked, global organization. The final theme identified by Vicere was the changing position of university business schools from the center of the executive education and leadership development arena to a focus on companies and organizations at the center of the field.

In researching preferences among executive education customers, Spearly and Baker find the following skills that universities were most valued for and those that they were criticized for. The outcomes they were most valued for included breadth and depth of content expertise; research providing insight to best practices and alternative strategies; program design; teaching experience; learning methodologies; and flexible, cost effective solutions. Universities were seen as most often criticized for impractical, academic perspective without corporate experience; off the shelf design that was one size fits all; charging for development of materials that already

existed; and for charging too much. They were also seen as adopting a short term perspective resulting in lack of effort and commitment to building deep relationships within student groups.

Vicere (1998) found the following to be the learning methodologies that are most sought after in executive education: active learning, classroom instruction, simulation, experiential learning, distance learning, computer and internet based learning, and interactive video.

Spearly and Baker found that to stay relevant, no matter whether the executive education provider is within a university setting or is an independent provider, a new business model may be required that focuses on consulting relationships and organizational practices and challenges such as corporate strategy, leadership challenges, and culture.

When comparing Vicere's 1998 research and predictions with the 2005 work of Spearly and Baker, one finds that the continued growth of the field is predicted in both works. Both works discuss increased participation rates as well as the expansions of the levels of managers and executives that will take part in executive education. Spearly and Baker's work highlights the growth of the consulting industry and the importance of consulting relationships to the future of executive education as well as a consideration of skills more than some of the logistical components of executive education discussed by Vicere.

In more recent literature, research indicates areas of growth for executive education, such as leadership character development (Crossan, Mazutis, Seijts, & Gandz, 2013), the use of coaching alongside multisource feedback (Hoojberg & Lane, 2013), and the importance of transformational executive education programs (De Vries & Korotov, 2007).

Types of Executive Education Programs

In 2005, Spearly and Baker identified the differing goals of custom executive education as a major issue within the field of executive education. While there are several commonalities

between open enrollment and custom program topics, such as leadership skills and strategy, business acumen, and values, there are considerable differences between the two types of programs. Key unique topics within open enrollment programs include a focus on talent development, the ability to grow the business, building long-term value, creating alignment with the client organization, and customer focus. Custom programs, on the other hand often focus on global business, consultative relationships, consumer behavior, customer centric innovation, growing the business, organizational design, and upgrading the talent of the organization. In comparing open enrollment and custom provider selection factors, there are also similarities and differences. Both types of programs focus on faculty input and content expertise, price, alignment and fit with the client organization, and reputation. When compared, open enrollment provider selection factors often include location and preferred supplier aspects, while custom provider selection factors include experience and impact.

In examining custom education programs, Spearly and Baker found a number of trends related to the growth of custom executive education programs. First, the growing investment in custom executive education programs by providers and customers continued. Second, there has been a rising interest in consultant activities as a component of executive education (Spearly and Baker, 2005).

Sensemaking

Sensemaking is a key factor in understanding the mission and goals of leadership education. Developed by Karl Weick in 1971, sensemaking theory considers participants' individual perspectives as part of the ongoing work of an organization. Sensemaking theory argues that organizational meaning, explanations, and solutions come from how people perceive the organization, tapping people's impressions and ideas as a system of understanding. Weick

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(1995) suggests seven foundational assumptions of sensemaking theory. It is: grounded in identity construction (requiring sensemakers), retrospective (sensemakers' perceptions are eventually analyzed and reflected upon), enactive of sensible environments (meaning, action, and environment all affect one another in the sensemaking process), social (dependent upon the processes of human beings), ongoing (a perpetual, dynamic process), focused on extracted cues (sensemakers' perspectives are dependent upon the cues they observe), and driven by plausibility rather than accuracy (upon discovering a potential answer, human beings stop considering potentially better alternatives).

The concept of sensemaking is useful in this research because the research questions that frame this research focus on the individual FEI staff and faculty members' perceptions of the organization and how these perceptions and understandings shape the organization and its direction.

Previous Research on FEI

In order to understand how this study builds upon the previous research on the Federal Executive Institute, prior research on FEI is presented below. There has not been a significant amount of academic research conducted on the Institute over its history. Major contributions include a master's thesis titled "Market Behavior and FEI" by Joseph Coffee, a dissertation titled "Executive Development Programs: A Framework for Coherence" by Terence Tipple, a dissertation titled "Rocky Top, Rocky Road, Solid Rock: Thirty Years of Intellectual History of the Federal Executive Institute" by Tammy Hall, and the book "The Early Years of the Federal Executive Institute "by Frank Sherwood, the first Director of the Institute. In addition, there have been additional articles published in public administration journals as well as other academic writings.

The Hall dissertation studied influences on the "intellectual stream running through FEI" by examining programmatic decisions as well as the materials taught in FEI programs, with a focus on the Leadership for a Democratic Society program (Hall, 1998, p. 3). Hall's work utilized a variety of resources that reflect her focus on the programmatic shifts. She examined materials taught in the classes as well as the reception of those materials; founding materials; annual listings of the programs, courses, and faculty; U.S. Civil Service Commission evaluations from 1969 and 1971; course listings; anniversary symposium materials from 1968, 1978, 1988, and 1993; articles on FEI published in journals such as Training and Development, Public Personnel Management, The Bureaucrat, and Government Executive; and personal interviews with former directors, assistant directors, faculty, alumni, and OPM employees. Her work provides a detailed analysis of the programmatic offerings and the intellectual strand of the courses from FEI's founding until 1998. Though it clearly states that is it not the history of FEI, her research presents a detailed review of the history of FEI through the lens of its programmatic offerings. Key findings of this work include the strong influences that specific leaders have had in shaping FEI; the influence of politics on the organization in the 1970s; and the revitalization of FEI in the late 1980s and early 1990s when FEI renewed its focus on the role of public sector executives in a constitutional system.

In "The Early Years of the Federal Executive Institute," a book written in 2010 by Frank Sherwood, the first Director of the Institute, Sherwood provided a history of the founding of FEI and the early years of the Institute. He also presented some reflections on the trajectory of the Institute. Sherwood's book, which provided detailed accounts of FEI from 1968-1976, clearly articulated Sherwood's understanding of the purpose of FEI on the development of the very top level of civil servants. The skills development of this cadre would then better prepare the

government for the changing world. Sherwood's work, both explicitly and implicitly, found that

significant changes have occurred in the purpose of FEI throughout its history. He writes:

> My premise today is that the challenge of change has only accentuated since 1968, and
> the need for support to the top career echelons of the Federal services is greater than ever.
> The ideas we had over 40 years ago, despite the rocky shoals most of the concepts
> encountered, still have relevance and constitute a useful departure point for
> contemplating approaches that might be undertaken today. While there appears to be no
> groundswell for such an effort, there is little doubt in my mind that it is desperately
> needed (p. xi).

> He went on to write:

> It is an imposing residential training facility which continues to attract large numbers of
> Federal employees to Charlottesville, Virginia, and to do a great deal to prepare Federal
> employees for important management responsibilities. This is a very significant
> inheritance from the original Federal Executive Institute. But the mission is different. The
> concern at today's FEI is not with the very top but with those layers of managers charged
> more directly with seeing that things work (pp. xi-xii).

Sherwood's work, then, highlighted his perspective that the purpose and goals of FEI

have changed over time, as FEI no longer seeks to develop the cadre of Federal employees at the

very top of the workforce and instead develops high-level managers. This shift in purpose,

according to Sherwood, then greatly impacted the influence that FEI could have on the Federal

workforce, the Federal government, and our country.

Previous work on FEI highlights the concept that FEI develops federal executives, the

tools provided to the executives, and the influences on FEI throughout its history.

Literature Review Summary

Through this review of literature, which explored organizational theory, institutional

isomorphism generally and specifically within higher education, and changes within the

executive education field, it is clear that there is a gap in the literature on organizational

adaptation and change as applied to the specific field of leadership development within the

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government. This research, then, addresses that gap by presenting data on the ways in which a very unique organization within the federal government has adapted over time.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Research Questions

1. Has FEI altered its goal of developing leaders for government service throughout the past 20 years? If so, in what ways?

2. How do FEI faculty and staff describe the cultural norms of the organization that have shaped the goal of developing leaders for government service throughout the past 20 years?

3. How do FEI faculty and staff describe the ways that competition from industry-leading providers of executive education and training has affected the management of FEI throughout the past 20 years?

4. What patterns of similarity and difference do FEI faculty and staff identify between industry-leading executive education and training competitors and FEI?

5. Has pressure from the Office of Personnel Management induced FEI to adapt over the past 20 years? If so, in what ways?

Design

In order to study the degree to which FEI is adapting to competitive market pressures in its operation, this research conducted a qualitative case study using interviews and document analysis. It has been found that pattern theories, like institutional isomorphism, are well suited to qualitative inquiry, such as a case study, as cases help to explain the many connected relationships within an institution. Case studies, then, can serve to build and extend the existing theory on change within institutions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

A case study is often focused on a single unit of analysis that has boundaries (Merriam, 1998) such as an organization or system (Tellis, 1997). The case study method is used to

examine an organization "over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information" (Creswell, 2012, p. 97). Additionally, this study incorporates several of the defining features of case studies as identified by Creswell, including:

- The identification of a specific case, here an organization, FEI, "that can be bounded or described within certain parameters, such as a specific place and time" (Creswell, p. 98). In this research, the clearly defined organization of the Federal Executive Institute will be examined from 1993-2013.

- FEI is a unique organization within the field of executive education. As such, a case study methodology was chosen "to illustrate a unique case, a case that has unusual interest in and of itself and needs to be described and detailed" (Creswell, p. 98).

- By using a variety of data collection methods, including interviews and data collection, this study will present an "in-depth understanding of the case" (Creswell, p. 98).

Data Collection

A range of data collection methods is a great strength of the case study method when used systematically to provide an in-depth perspective of a phenomenon (Soy, 1997). For the purposes of this study, interviews and document analyses are used as the primary means of data collection. The following is an organizational chart of the current organization of the FEI faculty members. This chart is presented to explain the choice of interviewees and their relative positions within the organization.

Figure 1

Organizational Chart of FEI
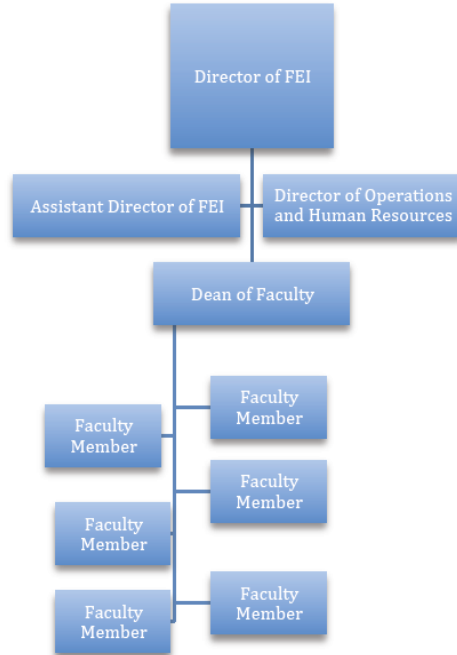
Interviews

One of the primary means of data collection for this study was interviews with individuals possessing considerable experience with FEI. These interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions. An interview protocol was used to ensure that there was consistency among interviews and that pertinent information was gathered (Appendix B). Twelve people were interviewed for this research.

Interviewees were chosen based on two criteria; their roles at FEI, and the time spent at FEI. Relating to their roles at FEI, there were four identified groups of people to interview to gain perspective on the organizational changes that have occurred at FEI throughout its history. The first group were former directors of FEI. As the director of FEI is the administrative, and at times, the academic head of the institute, a former director would have firsthand knowledge of

the pressures on FEI during his or her time. As the director oversees the entire institute, this person would have an understanding of changes that FEI made in academics, types of faculty employed, and facilities, among other aspects. This person is also the primary liaison to the leadership at OPM, and would have a clear understanding of the pressures that OPM felt related to FEI's role in its arena. The second group of interviewees were former deans of faculty. The dean is the head academic official at FEI and would likely have a firm understanding of the ways that FEI's academic offerings changed. The third group selected was comprised of faculty members. As some faculty members have served FEI for decades, longstanding faculty who would have served under multiple deans and directors were interviewed. Finally, the fourth group was made up of any other people affiliated with FEI who were identified as appropriate to interview during the interviews of the first three groups of people. The interview population was intentionally left open to additions in order to ensure that the people who were most knowledgeable of FEI's status and practices over time were interviewed.

In addition to the criteria of the individual's role at FEI, the second criteria used to identify interviewees was the timeframe that the individual worked at FEI. To ensure that this research included the viewpoints of individuals whose work at FEI spanned all 20 years of this study, interviewees were chosen based on the following time periods: 1993-1997, 1998-2002, 2003-2007, and 2008-2013.

Interview Procedure

Merriam (1998) states that interviewing is a necessary data collection technique in several instances that are applicable to this study:

1. When we cannot observe the behavior that is occurring, which is relevant here because the study spans the past 20 years.

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2. When we are interested in past events that cannot be recreated, as in the time period near FEI's creation.

3.When conducting intensive case studies of one or a few selected cases, which is done in this research with FEI.

Pre-interview procedure

To contact the interviewees, contact information was obtained for each of the interview groups through FEI and public records. Each interviewee was contacted by email, the request explained the research and asked if the email recipient would be willing to be interviewed for this research (see Appendix A for interview request email). In this contact, information was included on the research along with an IRB approved consent form. Participants were asked to review the information and decide if they would like to participate in the research. Upon obtaining agreement to participate in the study, each interviewee was presented with the consent form. In addition, the consent form was reviewed with each interviewee prior to each interview.

The interview context

The interviews took place in-person for individuals located near Charlottesville, Virginia and by telephone for individuals who were located outside of Charlottesville. The researcher was able to visit Charlottesville to interview several current or former FEI employees who reside in the area. Additionally, several current or former FEI employees were interviewed at other locations in the Charlottesville area. Each of the 45 minute to one-hour interviews was recorded with an audio recorder.

Conducting interviews

At the beginning of each interview, the approved IRB consent form was reviewed, the research was described, and the order of the interview questions was outlined. During each

interview, notes were written to document emerging themes and to shape follow-up questions. Immediately following each interview, as outlined by Stake (1995), additional notes were written, beginning the process of creating analytic interpretations of the interviews.

Post-interview process

Interviews were carefully transcribed with attention to confidentiality. Following the production of the transcriptions, each transcription was reviewed and edited based on the audio file to ensure that the transcriptions accurately reflected the interviews. A copy of the transcribed interview was then emailed to each interviewee. At that point, each interviewee had the opportunity to make changes to the interview transcription, such as changing word choices, correcting information such as dates, acronyms, and the names of institutions, and adding more information to clarify points. Interviewees returned the transcriptions with additional approval to use that information in the research. This step was taken to ensure that the data to be analyzed was accurate according to the interviewees.

The following table aligns the key themes of the research presented in this dissertation with the research questions and interview protocol questions. (See Appendix B for complete list of questions.)

Table 1

Alignment of Themes, Research Questions, and Interview Questions

Themes	Research Questions	Interview Questions
Structure of FEI	1, 3, 4, 5	15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21
Focus on and Determination of Competitors/Peers	1, 3, 4, 5	12, 13, 14, 15, 16
Changing Organizational Culture	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21
Pressures against an entrepreneurial organization	1, 3, 4, 5	15, 16, 20
Values of the Organization	1, 2, 3	4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 18, 21

Document Collection

In addition to interviews, data were completed through document collection. The primary source for document collection were public records housed at FEI, and those found online. Among the documents collected were FEI's institutional strategic plans, annual reports, mission and vision statements, institutional budget information, enrollment and growth data, as well as plans relating to growth in the facilities, technology, and external relations of the institute. A selection of the documents analyzed was obtained from the FEI archives, and other documents were provided by interviewees or found in publically available searches. This was necessary because some of the documents have not been consistently maintained in the archives of FEI. The documents provided by individuals included personal correspondence, newsletters and journal articles, and published research conducted while at FEI. The documents were analyzed according to codes established to provide data needed to address the research questions and to inform the interviews.

Data Analysis

Merriam (1998) states that "the right way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection" (p. 162). This method of data collection and analysis was used in this study. This allowed for better management during data collection so that duplicative or extraneous data were not collected. Additionally, it allowed for the continuous adaptation of data collection methods to the needs of the study based on the data that have already been collected, which created a flexible data collection and analysis process. This continued until sources had been exhausted and the continuation of data collection resulted in only small increments of new information (Merriam, 1998).

Based on the work of Coffey and Atkinson (1996), which found that multiple strategies for qualitative analysis can be used in a complementary fashion, multiple methods were utilized to analyze the data in this research. First, all interview transcriptions and selected documents were uploaded into NVivo9. In addition, based on Erikson's (1986) interpretive approach, the interview notes, post-interview reflections, interview transcriptions, and documents were examined holistically. Following this, *a priori*, thematic codes were used based on the research questions to code the data uploaded to NVivo (See Appendix C for the *a priori* coding structure). Following this, multiple analytic strategies were used to allow for full and appropriate answers to each of the research questions. Information was marked with multiple codes if it related to more than one theme. The coding process for each research question is described below. In addition to the use of the coded data, all of the data were reexamined in their original form. This allowed for the accounting of themes within each interview or document in a different manner than analyzing the coded material. The combination of these analysis strategies produced a holistic and thorough analysis of the data.

The data analyzed included the interview transcripts, researcher's interpretations, and historical documents which were analyzed using a thematic content analysis approach for patterns or themes. This technique follows the findings of Stake who states that "the search for meaning often is a search for patterns, for consistency, for consistency within certain conditions" (1995, p. 78).

Coding process for Research Question 1

RQ1: Has FEI altered its goal of developing leaders for government service throughout the past 20 years? If so, in what ways?

To code data that aligned with RQ1, the founding purposes and current purposes of FEI were explored. Through this exploration, information was uncovered related to the founding of FEI, the mission and goals of FEI for the development of government leaders at its founding and currently, as well as identified changes in the ways that FEI developed government leaders.

When coding for this research question, some of the topics explored included the current and future plans of FEI, the amount of direction and pressure from FEI's parent organization OPM, and the types and focus of the programming at FEI. This coding strategy was designed to better understand how FEI identified itself in its field and the types of programming that the organization wanted to provide to federal executives, as well as to better understand the unique needs of the government executives that FEI served.

Coding process for Research Question 2

RQ2: How do FEI faculty and staff describe the cultural norms of the organization that have shaped the goal of developing leaders for government service throughout the past 20 years?

To code data that aligned with RQ2, factors concerning FEI during its founding through to the present were explored. The coding strategy was applied to analyze several topics, including the founding of FEI. The goal of this coding strategy was to better understand why FEI was founded and to identify unique and distinct traits in its founding and its early years. The coding strategy also addressed the current cultural norms and purposes of FEI. An understanding of the founding of FEI was a key component of mapping its change over time, and this thread of data collection was both important to explore and a natural and comfortable starting point for interviews. Following the discussion of FEI's ideals during its founding and its early years, the interview progressed to discussing the current cultural norms and purposes of FEI.

Some of the codes identified for this research question included the history of FEI; ways in which FEI was described, including the affection for FEI that interviewees described, FEI's reputation and prestige as a leadership development center, and the pride in FEI's mission and its focus on being a government organization serving fellow federal government colleagues; as well as the values that FEI stands for, which include adult learning and the Constitution.

Coding process for Research Question 3

RQ3: How do FEI faculty and staff describe the ways that competition from industry-leading providers of executive education and training has affected the management of FEI throughout the past 20 years?

When coding data for RQ3, data were explored on competition, as to either continue on the same path or change, based on the activities of competitor organizations or the field in general. When asked, interviewees were comfortable with the use of the terms "peers" and/or "competitors" to describe other organizations as well as the understanding that FEI was operating within a particular market or arena. Interviewees presented accounts of the extent to which FEI focused on competition during their tenure at FEI, as well as the ways in which FEI looked at competition and any changes made based on competition or market trends.

Specific themes examined in the data include discussion of competitors, including specific competitors identified; discussions about the leadership development market or arena; reflections on FEI, including the amount of time spent considering competitors and possible future activities at FEI based on competitors or trends in the field; the type and frequency of institutional reviews to learn more about competitors' programming and initiatives; the types and focus of programming at FEI; and the explanations for new programming.

Coding process for Research Question 4

RQ4: What patterns of similarity and difference do FEI faculty and staff identify between industry-leading executive education and training competitors and FEI?

Specific themes examined in the data include discussion of competitors, including the identification of specific competitors; discussions about the leadership development market or arena; as well as the types and focus of programming at FEI, and how they compared to programming at other institutions.

Coding process for Research Question 5

RQ5: Has pressure from the Office of Personnel Management induced FEI to adapt over the past 20 years? If so, in what ways?

Codes analyzed for this research question included questions about the type of direction that OPM provided, specifically related to the focus and programming at FEI; the frequency of that direction or pressure; and how that pressure and direction changed over time.

Data Presentation

Consistent with the IRB protocol and the consent forms, and to preserve the confidentiality of the data, participants' names and titles are not used in this research. The data presented in the findings and discussion sections of this research are drawn from interview transcripts and FEI documents. The analysis focuses on themes from those documents.

Trustworthiness

This study utilizes two of the basic strategies outlined by Merriam (1998) to ensure credibility. First, triangulation was conducted by using multiple sources of data to confirm the emerging findings. This ensures that the findings present a comprehensive portrayal of the organizational changes that were occurring. This was accomplished by collecting data from sources within FEI as well as those outside of it, such as articles published in journals and

magazines, in order to fully capture multiple perspectives on the changes that were occurring at

FEI[5]. Second, member checks were used to insure accuracy. By rechecking data and interview

transcripts with the information sources, which in this study were primarily those people who

were interviewed, it is more likely that the analysis accurately reflects the data that was gathered.

Generalizability

In order to heighten the generalizability, or transferability, of the findings, this study

utilized the following technique outlined by Merriam (1998):

1. Rich, thick description - Describing the cases in great detail and depth ensures that

readers will have enough information on the organizational changes that were occurring

at FEI to determine whether the changes that occurred are transferable to other, similar

cases.

Overall, ensuring credibility and transferability though triangulation, member checking,

and providing a rich description can create a case study analysis with reasonable validity.

Role of Researcher

As a former employee at the Federal Executive Institute, the researcher was, at one time,

a member of the organization being examined in this research. However, in the role as a

Graduate Research Fellow at FEI, the researcher was neither a member of any of the potential

interviewee groups detailed above nor directly privy to the decisions made on the focus and

direction of FEI. While the researcher was not employed by the current director of FEI, the

researcher was employed at FEI during the tenure of two previous directors of FEI and one

previous Dean of Faculty. Professional relationships formed during the researcher's employment

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[5] Triangulation will also be used to establish dependability by ensuring that the results are consistent within all of the sources. This will help to establish dependability by demonstrating that the results presented in the case studies stem from the data (Merriam, 1998).

with FEI had a minimal impact on the dynamic present during interviews as the researcher has a professional relationship with only a few of the potential interviewees.

Limitations

This study focuses on the ways that competitive pressures may have altered the goals of FEI throughout the past 20 years. This research does not attempt to detail every change that has occurred at FEI, as it is not a history of the institution. The data collected and analyzed are limited to their relevance in answering this study's central questions.

An additional potential limitation of this research is the small set of appropriate interviewees. There were a limited number of people who could possibly provide insight into FEI's organizational history. However, though a small number of interviews were conducted, saturation in messaging was achieved throughout the interviews based on the depth of information provided and the similarity of themes that were heard in many of the interviews.

A third potential limitation of this research is missing data. There were some instances of reviews of competitors or specific documents that were mentioned but could not be found. When this occurs, the presence of the review or document is discussed in this work but not specifically cited.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of this research. The findings from both the document collection and interviews are presented in response to each of the five Research Questions. Within each section of the five Research Questions there are subheadings that share findings of a specific component of that Research Question.

Findings for RQ1

The first research question in this study asks: Has FEI altered its goal of developing leaders for government service throughout the past 20 years? If so, in what ways?

Findings from this research question explore both the founding purposes and current purposes of FEI. This question produced information related to the reasons that FEI was founded, how FEI leaders thought about the development of government leaders at its founding and currently, as well as identified changes in the ways that FEI developed government leaders. For RQ1, there are three topics that are explored below:

1. History of FEI

2. Describing FEI

3. Current and Future Plans

RQ1: History of FEI

An important component of understanding whether FEI has altered its goal of developing leaders for government service in the past 20 years is to first confirm the goals of FEI at its founding and throughout its history leading up to the 20 year period that is the focus of this study. As such, the following section provides information on the founding of FEI, including its goals and ideals.

When describing FEI's founding and initial values, each of the interviewees mentioned one of the following: that the vision was supported by President Lyndon B. Johnson, the intentionality of placing FEI within the government, the need to educate or train leaders, and the notion that FEI was something innovative and new. These findings provide evidence of innovation and originality.

Founding and History

Several documents memorialize the official plan for the creation of FEI. As one example, "The Plan for the Federal Executive Institute: November 1966" is a detailed, 54-page document that presents the plan for the creation of the Institute. The topics discussed in this plan include the central purpose of the Institute, the organization of the Institute, the student population, and research to be conducted at the Institute. This plan serves as a blueprint for the creation of FEI. The document demonstrates that there were very clear plans for the Institute, including the way that it would be organized and led, as well as plans for the numbers of students who would attend, the sources of students, and the composition of student groups. Another key finding from this document is that the curriculum and research to be conducted at FEI was integral to its mission, and as such, was well defined. It discussed topics such as the sources of lecturers, sources of instructional materials, the application of scientific research findings, and participant research. This document is used here as an example of the planning and thought that went into the creation of FEI, as well as to provide insight into the specific characteristics of the Institute, such as the organization, student population, and research, that would guide the formation and development of the Institute. The document also serves to demonstrate that FEI's founding and placement within the government were very intentional and a representation of the times when the government was seen as a venue for addressing many of our nation's challenges.

In 1967, FEI was established as a component of Executive Order 11348: Providing for the further training of Government Employees. The Executive Order states that the training of government employees should take place within the government:

> It is the policy of the Government of the United States to develop its employees through the establishment and operation of progressive and efficient training programs, thereby improving public service, increasing efficiency and economy, building and retaining a force of skilled and efficient employees, and installing and using the best modern practices and techniques in the conduct of the Government's business.

The document highlights the government's intention to serve and meet the needs of both federal government employees and the citizenry at large through the high performance of government employees.

On May 9, 1968, a press release from the Office of the White House Press Secretary officially announced the creation of FEI. The release noted the establishment of FEI in Charlottesville in collaboration with the University of Virginia, the organizational placement of the institute within the Civil Service Commission, and the institute's role as a government-wide initiative to improve training programs for federal employees. It also presented the areas of focus of the institute, the focus on GS-16 and above, and the plan to offer 8 week programs for 60 people at least 5 times a year. It also promoted the understandings that those sent to FEI were the agency's "ablest people- those who will benefit most from this program of training, and who can be expected to make the greatest contribution to Government in the years ahead," and that the inclusion of teaching insights from the academic community and private sector would be used to further inform government training. This document demonstrated the commitment of the federal government to train its employees through an in-house program, while noting that outside influences, such as the academic community and private sector, would be beneficial to provide additional guidance.

Supporting memoranda, including a memorandum to the heads of departments and agencies from the White House on May 9, 1968 and a memorandum to heads of departments and agencies from the United States Civil Service Commission on May 17, 1969 echoed the theme of the importance of establishing this institute within the government as the best place to achieve the goal of improving government training.

When asked about the founding of FEI, interview participants echoed similar themes to these found in the documents: the importance of President Lyndon B. Johnson and the placement of FEI within the government. These documents were of such importance to interviewees that they often quoted founding documents in their responses. As an example, the following two interviewees brought copies of Johnson's decree to the interview to quote directly.

> "The critical importance of our federal programs demands the highest level of talent in our career leadership. So to increase the capacity of top civil service executive and professionals, I, President Johnson have directed the civil service Chairman John Macy to take steps to establish an advanced study center. And today I have approved and announced the creation of such a center to be known as the Federal Executive Institute and to be located at Charlottesville, Virginia in collaboration with the University of Virginia. This new training enterprise is part of our joint effort to improve the quality of government for the American people. I ask you and your associates to support this new program fully and enthusiastically. And its successful operation can be ensured by the assignment of your most talented and promising people to the programs it will offer." Interviewee A reading from a document when asked about the founding of FEI (personal communication)

> "The president was urged to direct civil service commission to establish program intensive full time residential training for career executives, which will 1) Enable them better to supply continuity and responsiveness in government operations. 2) Provide them with concepts and knowledge that they can use toward further development. And, 3) enable them to render more valuable service to agency heads, the President and public." Interviewee E reading from a document when asked about the founding of FEI (personal communication)

A perspective on the role of FEI in developing leaders for government service throughout its history was presented in an article by Frank Sherwood, the first director of FEI. It was written for *The Public Manager* in Spring 1994, and focused on the origins and early years of FEI

(Sherwood, 1994). In this article, Sherwood discussed topics such as the challenge in creating an organization designed "to prepare executives for a future no one can predict," the plan for the intellectual climate of FEI to parallel that of a university, and the importance of the creation of a space for executives to examine major issues in society while exchanging ideas with leaders from across the government. It also addressed the challenge and importance of training well-educated and successful executives through professional development and a focus on leadership responsibilities. The latter effort is of particular interest, as it is a challenge that was discussed almost continually throughout FEI's history. Many executives who attend FEI's courses have had very accomplished careers; however, they may not have had any training in leadership, which is key to their continued success and the ability to guide the government forward. Introducing new leadership concepts to skilled and accomplished executives is a goal that is examined throughout FEI's history. Related specifically to the founding and first years of FEI, this tension between professional development and leadership training helped to inform some of the structural and curricular decisions made in the early days of FEI, in order to meet the goals of the institute.

When asked to describe the purpose of the founding of FEI, interviewees responded that it was important for the institution to be placed within the government, and that there was a clear need at the time to provide training to the highest levels of civil servants to help guide and shape the country's future. The following selected quotes highlight specific themes discussed in the documents above: the executives sent to FEI were to be top performers, that this center would provide training for executives across the government in order to allow executives with varied job responsibilities and career histories to learn from each other. They also mention some of the

details of the program, such as the length, location, and initial connection to the University of

Virginia.

The following quote provides an example of interviewees' perception that executives

chosen to attend FEI were expected to continue their development and become leaders in the

government:

> So the intention was that the best and the brightest would be sent to FEI to become even
> better leaders than they already were. Not to make them leaders, because the assumption
> was that they were already leaders. It was just our purpose to– I guess you'd say polish
> the rough edges or provide a little bit more in the way of learning that they might need to
> fill in any gaps or whatever.
> Interviewee A (personal communication)

In addition to training future top performers, FEI also provided executives with the then

rare beneficial opportunity to work with and learn from peers in agencies throughout the federal

government. The following quote illuminates this distinctive feature of FEI.

> Obviously, the government-civilian classifications have changed since the time that FEI
> was founded; but FEI was founded for the executive level of leadership in government.
> The need was for expanding the education and broadening the experiences of senior
> executives. Unfortunately that need still exists, that there was and remains much stove
> piping within the federal government. The senior leaders at times are not broadly
> educated across agencies, have limited networks, and lack a broad interagency and/or
> global perspective. FEI was designed to eliminate that weakness; it was established to
> develop a cadre of leaders who were able to move across agencies and lead from agency
> to agency. That was a very admirable goal; a vital one and that still remains today.
> Interviewee I (personal communication)

Specific details of the program, including its targeted executive population, as well as the

uniqueness of the center and the program are highlighted in the quote below:

> My understanding of it and its founding in 1968 was that at that point it was conceived as
> a school for supergrades. There was no senior executive service at the time; it was just
> the general schedule, which went all the way up to grade 18, now it just goes up to 15.
> So basically FEI was conceived as a school for those at grade 16 through 18, which later
> became the senior executive service. And at the time, I mean there really was no federal
> government educational program for those people… so it was very restricted, it was a
> long program, it was eight weeks when it started. And it was put in Charlottesville, I
> think, primarily for two reasons. One to get it away from Washington DC so that people

wouldn't constantly be running back to their agencies, so that people could separate from their work. And also originally, there was an attempt at being connected and ultimately moved to house FEI at the University of Virginia, but that never happened.
Interviewee J (personal communication)

To understand the leadership-training efforts of FEI, it is important to note that at the time of FEI's founding, the federal government was often looked to as a source of solutions for societal struggles. The following quote highlights the perceived difference between the perception of a government executive around the time of the founding of FEI and now.

There was a great value in the early days in the incredible importance of being a federal civil servant. It was not a time where people were bashed for working for the government, quite the opposite.
Interviewee L (personal communication)

The role of Lyndon B. Johnson in its founding, the location of FEI within the government, and the need to train government executives for the demands of the changing world were key findings from the interviews. These concepts demonstrate that the founding conditions of FEI were a key part of FEI's development, as many people affiliated with FEI related the story of the founding of FEI. In addition, the location of FEI within the government was a key theme within government documents, as well as in interviewees' reflections on the history and founding of FEI.

The Concept that FEI was Innovative

Another common topic mentioned when discussing the founding of FEI was the notion that FEI was an innovative concept. The following interview quotes demonstrate the understanding that FEI was an innovation at the time of its establishment and that while existing programs and agencies influenced FEI, its curriculum and executive population were unique. The first quote shares that the program was unique, though it was influenced by other programs.

So it was strictly for senior level government, there wasn't anything like it. It was modeled to some degree after the Harvard program and it was very flexible. Most of the

people who came initially and formed it came from the University of Southern California. Interviewee B (personal communication)

The following quote highlights the influence that the military model of education and

training through job progressions had on FEI's founding.

> The concept of FEI was very visionary. There were very senior people who worked in the government who recognized that there was no vehicle for education and training for senior civilian government officials. They looked at the model for the military– in the military, at every promotion there is education and training from Private to General. They looked at that model and recognized nothing was available for civilians. So a group of leaders pushed for support from Congress, got approval, and in 1968 Lyndon Johnson decreed that FEI would be established for leadership and development for senior civilian government employees.
> Interviewee H (personal communication)

Interviewee K shares the uniqueness of FEI's model of sharing information, rather than a

one-way flow of information.

> I believe the Institute operated on the belief that Federal executives should be innovative, flexible, and dedicated to the service of the American people. FEI was designed to be a learning community where students and faculty could learn from each other. The program was not designed to teach specific information such as federal budgeting or personnel, it was to develop and teach leaders how to learn and how to lead other people. The whole concept was that it would be a learning community. I won't say that the program was radical, but it was just different. There were no executive development programs for senior level civilian employees in the Federal government, so the Institute's program was bold and innovative.
> Interviewee K (personal communication)

Interviewee E highlights the new types of leadership development that FEI instituted.

> What they had done in terms of practice was, in '68 when this place was founded, on the very cutting edge of leadership development. Very few in the industry of that time were doing the kinds of behavioral-experiential types of leadership development things FEI was doing. In fact, one of the reasons that the FEI founders wanted to come to Charlottesville in the first place was to get far enough away from Washington D.C. where they wouldn't be caught or questioned for the innovative things they were doing.
> Interviewee E (personal communication)

These quotes demonstrate that FEI was intended to do something different than other

training centers or training options for federal employees and that FEI was on the cutting edge of

leadership development. FEI's uniqueness and the role that it would play for government executives and for the government in general were intentional.

The findings on the history of FEI from document analysis and interviews conclude that: there were great changes occurring in American society in the 1960's; there was a strong cadre of civil servant leaders within the government that were tasked with leading the government through the changing times; that these executives needed training; that this training would take place within the government; and that this training would be of a new and innovative nature to meet the needs of the executives, government, and citizenry at large.

RQ1: Describing FEI

The second component explored within RQ1 was the way in which FEI was described in documents and interviews. To understand if FEI has altered its goal of developing leaders for government service, it is important to explore the way that FEI was originally described. The literature cited earlier in this work details the importance of understanding how organizations are viewed and how the culture of an organization is described. It is also important to explore the types of programming that FEI has offered throughout its history, as this is a representation of FEI and is a key manner in which to describe the institute. The following information provides details on the way that FEI is described in documents and interviews, including goals and areas of focus, purpose, values, and the culture of FEI.

Rather than focusing solely on the development of skills, FEI focused on the development of the individual as a leader. A document titled "Why Do We Have to Do the Touchy-Feely Stuff?" is currently shared with all Leadership for a Democratic Society program participants to describe and explain this element of FEI's program design. The goal of this document is to assuage participants' uneasiness with the notion that they must share personal

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information about themselves that they may be uncomfortable sharing as well as to enumerate the benefits of disclosing that information in order to further one's leadership journey and the leadership journey of one's classmates. The three benefits detailed in this document are: to more accurately assess leadership strengths, to improve thinking, and to help others learn.

In discussing this notion of the development of the individual as a leader, several interviewees noted its presence in the description of FEI's goals. One interviewee specifically discussed components of FEI's programming that highlighted this feature: a focus on behavioral sciences and learning to understand and work with others; a focus on adult learning, which featured interactive and often reflective work; a recognition of the differing needs of FEI's executive population; the need to create a program with flexibility to meet the variety of needs of the attending executives; a focus on the executive as a whole person, including physical, emotional, and financial health; and an inter-agency focus that promoted the development of relationships between executives across the federal government.

To better understand the types of programming offered at FEI throughout the years examined in this research, a selection of Leadership for a Democratic Society (LDS) course syllabi were explored to examine themes and goals of the LDS programming. Key features of the various syllabi used throughout the 2000s are presented below to demonstrate the guiding features of the program. The objective of the course is described as improving "the leadership skills of senior career government executives (GS-15s and members of the Senior Executive Service) and by doing so to enhance their performance and the performance of government agencies." The specific learning outcomes of the program are divided into four categories: (1) Personal Leadership [note: this is later described as Values Based Leadership], (2) Transforming Organizations, (3) Policy in a Constitutional System, and (4) Global Perspectives. While the

courses offered varied within each program, each of the offered courses was designed to fit within one of these four themes.

Another component of the syllabi describes the multiple organizational and leadership opportunities for participation, as well as the types of courses that were offered in the program such as the Community Committee and Executive Forum Committee. The types of classes (seminars, workshops and plenary sessions), programming (Executive Forums), and assignments (The Leadership Challenge and Personal Development Plan) were also described in this section, as they were guiding contributors to the program design.

In addition to findings from documents, interview data described the types and focus of programming at FEI, including the transition from an eight week program to a four week program, the importance of personal values in leadership development, and the creation of the custom and open enrollment programming in the 1990s, which expanded the programming at FEI from the flagship LDS program to include additional programming. Additional components of the types and focus of programming includes the focus on the individual as an agent of change in LDS, the importance of federal civil servants and interagency classmates, and the need to meet the requirements of the changing government workforce which is increasingly highly educated and technically competent.

By exploring findings within the framework of describing FEI, key details emerged which inform RQ1. These insights include the importance of focusing on leadership, rather than technical skills; the type of information, that if shared, promotes leadership development for participants; the ways that learning outcomes of the program influence programming; and specific areas of focus of the programming that serve as defining features for interviewees.

RQ1: Current and Future Plans

The third component explored within RQ1 was the nature of planning at FEI. FEI's current and future plans were examined through a focus on topics such as FEI's programming support of the five executive core competencies needed by government executives to advance their careers. These competencies are leading change, leading people, results driven, business acumen, and building coalitions. There was also discussion of the interest in offering online courses, interest in offering programming in locations other than Charlottesville, and impacts of the sequestration on agency training budgets.

The following quote discusses the changing requirements of government work, and the desire, from both executives and agencies, for executives to have additional skills, capabilities, and education to lead the government:

> … Certainly the complexity of the work done by government executives has changed. In the last few years government leaders have received an additional requirement for advancing to the executive ranks, they must demonstrate their mastery of five executive core competencies. Those did not exist when FEI was established. Learning how to effectively convince the evaluation board that they have mastered these competencies is frequently requested from the executives who come to FEI. When FEI was created, it was for the Super Grades, what is now SES. Today most of our participants are GS-15 who are hoping to move into the SES.
> Interviewee I (personal communication)

In recent years, there have often been discussions within FEI about the changing platforms in which executives learn, and the ways in which other organizations were training leaders. One of the commonly discussed topics has been online education. The following quotes present current activities at FEI related to online learning.

> One of the things that we're in the process of doing is implementing our own learning management system. As we put together the learning management system, one of the primary purposes is to offer e-learning courses. The ability to offer e-learning courses allows us reach that we haven't had before such as increasing our ability to support the needs of our allied governments. So, we're looking at our competitors, universities as well as private organizations, and even some agencies that deliver development courses through e-learning and we haven't taken advantage of that mode of delivery in the past. What we know is that the world is different and that we can't only be a brick and mortar

institution. So, that's one of the things that we're moving toward at full speed and we expect to have a number of courses that we'll be delivering next year.
Interviewee I (personal communication)

The following quote, in particular, discusses why FEI needs to consider how the field is

changing related to technology and impacts that this may have on FEI:

One thing we haven't talked about is the impact of technology. And I think it hasn't been major yet, but I think it's going to be in time. And I'm not sure if FEI's positioned well to deal with that.
Interviewee J (personal communication)

Similarly, another interviewee discussed the potential impacts on brick-and-mortar

institutions from online learning this way:

That hasn't happened here yet but I could see it happening. In fact I could see it happening even easier here, because federal agencies are really good about technology, although their filters are wired to prevent doing some things at some agencies. But I can see that the power of technology, the increasingly wider availability of executive learning through that technology at a lower cost than we can do here, the pressures on travel budgets, pressures on the federal budget overall, pressures on people's time, all of those things would say to me that at some point, [a] significant number of people are going to say, "There must be a more economical, efficient way of getting people into executive education than sending them off to FEI or anywhere else for that matter for four weeks or something." So I think that's coming and it's going to be really tough for FEI to deal with.
Interviewee J (personal communication)

The following quote highlights some of the connections between the push for online

learning and the impacts of the sequestration and austerity measures in the federal government.

The austere times that federal government is in at this point in time affects the ability to send people to training. For that reason, we're looking at the best way to provide LDS to them in ways in which they can take advantage. Travel has been cut in many agencies. And even if training dollars aren't cut, if travel is prohibited and yet required to get to training then, in effect training is cut…. And to be perfectly honest, I'm not positive that it couldn't be equally effective without it being residential. So, that's one of the things we'll be researching and benchmarking.
Interviewee I (personal communication)

Below, an interviewee discusses why FEI may have a difficult time competing with peer

or competitor organizations that offer online education:

…And FEI will have a hard time in this online competitive marketplace for at least two reasons. It lacks the expertise to design and push online learning (and the funds needed to do so). It also runs up against what its parent agency, OPM, will allow it to do with online learning. OPM is not Google or Coursera– and because it is part of a huge and cautious bureaucracy– the federal government– change will be slow when it needs to be fast.
Interviewee J (personal communication)

Though the creation and proliferation of online learning at FEI is supported by many people within the organization, it is important to note that some of FEI's distinguishing characteristics may make it more challenging or even undesirable for FEI to follow the lead of many of its peer and competitor organizations by offering online education.

One thing that is almost certain and that is that FEI is, and it's my understanding they have embarked on this, FEI is going to have to have, to some extent, a distance learning component. Now what that will look like I'm not sure. And the reason I'm waffling about it is because there are those of us who believe that there are some aspects of what FEI is certain it ought to do that needs to be done face to face. Have the people there. Now is there some part of FEI that could be done online? Probably so. So I wouldn't be surprised if it turns out that there's a variation developed where a participant spends a certain amount of time here in Charlottesville face to face and some part of it somewhere else. So I think technology is probably going to drive that and also the competition will kind of point FEI in that direction and the current Dean has indicated that that's going to happen.
Interviewee A (personal communication)

In addition to this discussion of online learning, interviewees discussed current and future plans of offering FEI's courses at locations other than Charlottesville. The following quotes demonstrate interviewees' perceptions of this activity. The first quote discusses a challenge of offering courses away from the FEI campus in Charlottesville.

And one of our biggest challenges was how to take that on the road, because when you're at the FEI campus you have all the resources. Take it to a hotel in San Diego and it's a greater challenge. But when the staff that is working for FEI, whether they are full-time or contractual personnel, understands our core values they are able to create an excellent learning environment.
Interviewee K (personal communication)

The following quote shares some of the history of the non-Charlottesville offerings.

We also started offering more courses outside of Charlottesville. The Institute had always offered a seminar or two in the DC area. We made a very concerted effort to start offering things outside of Charlottesville, not just in DC, but across the nation - and it was a resounding success. A number of the programs were in the global arena, and we developed a one-week program that included some of the best elements of the LDS program, which we took on the road to Seattle and San Diego. It too was a big success, mainly because it was a more affordable expense for federal executives on the West Coast. So our competitors were doing this, and we did it. Did we do it because of our competitors? Well, yes and no. It was kind of an evolution, and we did it in a big way. During my tenure the custom and topic specific courses expanded greatly with FEI offering over 100 programs per year with approximately one third being offered in Charlottesville, one third being offered in Washington, D.C. and the remaining one third being offered across the United States and internationally.

Interviewee K (personal communication)

In summary, the findings of RQ1 reveal that in many ways, FEI is still very connected to its founding and identifies itself with the ideals of its founding. This is shown by the many components of the current programming design and focus that are similar to concepts cited in the comments about the early years of FEI. Interviewees expressed keen knowledge of the founding principles of the institute, and described the uniqueness of FEI in similar terms throughout its history. However, an awareness of differences and evolutions also presented themselves in the data. Throughout the years, FEI expanded its flagship program LDS to focus on the development of an organization rather than an individual. At times, since the expansion of programming, this has created tension within FEI as the goals of the organization were challenged by expansion. Additionally, new challenges, such as the impact of technology on educational providers, were noted for their potential to impact the goals of FEI.

Findings for RQ2

The second research question in this study asks: How do FEI faculty and staff explain and describe the cultural norms of the organization that have shaped the goal of developing leaders for government service throughout the past 20 years?

Findings from RQ2 present data from document analysis and interviewees that discusses several broad topics including the founding of FEI and unique factors about FEI, as well as its cultural norms during its founding through to the present. Topics within this section of the findings include the history of FEI; ways that FEI is described, including the affection for FEI that interviewees described, FEI's reputation and prestige as the leading government leadership development center, and the pride in being a government organization serving fellow federal government colleagues. Interviewees also discussed the values that FEI stands for, which include adult learning and the Constitution.

RQ2: Affection for FEI

To address the cultural norms of FEI, attention was turned to the ways in which FEI was described. The data presented here provide insight into the ways that FEI is described, including how much it focused on peers and competitors, and the affinity that many people affiliated with the institute have felt for it.

A finding that was clearly communicated throughout the interviews was the affection that people affiliated with FEI have for the institution. The following quotes describe this affinity for FEI.

> …But there was a time, I'm told, before I got there, that the OPM Director had decided that FEI was going to be closed. And he had pretty much said so and that because of the concerted efforts of the FEI Alumni Association, which had some pretty influential people in it, they were able to get that stopped and turned around. So it would appear that at least once, maybe more, FEI has been at risk. Obviously there are those of us who think that FEI ought to continue, because there is no other organization like FEI. Interviewee A (personal communication)

When discussing the future of FEI, interviewees also demonstrated affinity for the organization by stating:

> So I don't know how this thing is going to turn out. I feel so strongly about FEI, such that I would do provided it wasn't illegal, immoral or fattening or unconscionable, I will do

pretty much anything to try and make sure the place both survives and does what its
purpose is.
Interviewee A (personal communication)

The following remarks highlight the connections that FEI employees and executives felt

for the organization.

I think you will find that FEI, the people who work at FEI, interestingly for whatever the
reasons, that they bond with FEI and for the most part, not all, and there are numbers of
reasons. One is because when the execs come they rarely find a place that is as
welcoming as FEI. And so they become– they open up and I think the people who teach
them then become to some degree, they go captive. In other words, the bonds are very
tight between FEI– between faculty and the students for the most part.
Interviewee B (personal communication)

RQ2: History of FEI

In addition to the affection that interviewees feel for FEI, a key component to the

understanding of the cultural norms of FEI is the exploration of the historical cultural norms of

the organization.

In almost every interview, when asked about the history and founding of FEI, the actions

and words of President Lyndon Johnson were invoked. Another common topic discussed was the

early focus on supergrades (GS16-18, now known as SES) and the early change to include

programming that might shift the focus to GS-15s. This thread was continued when several

interviewees commented on the lack of focus on SESs and on allowing GS14s to participate in

FEI programming. A third common thread was the length of the LDS program, which at its

creation was eight weeks, and throughout history has changed to seven weeks, five weeks, and to

the current length of four weeks.

The founding purpose of FEI was often described as strengthening executives for the

creation of a more effective government. This purpose highlights the interviewee's beliefs that

the best way to have a highly trained government was to have strong people who make up the

government leadership and workforce. Another key issue highlighted multiple times in interviews was that FEI's founding was visionary, and a courageous step for government officials to take.

RQ2: Values

In addition to seeking information on attitudes about FEI and the history of the institute, examining the values of FEI also informed the findings for RQ2.

The Summary section of the document titled "Why Do We Have to Do the Touchy-Feely Stuff[?]" conveys a component of FEI's programmatic values (Newell, n.d.). This document highlights the value of openness in expanding one's own leadership journey through FEI as well as the journey of one's classmates. It also discusses the trust and bonds that are formed through this process that leads to the building of social capital. This concept of social capital is described as "critical if the team is to become a learning organization- because without social capital, the team will be ineffective, retarding the learning of all of its members. People simply will not share information and generate new knowledge for each other if they do not care about and trust those in the team" (Newell, n.d., p.7). Throughout the document, FEI's cultural norms of openness, trust, and building of social capital are clearly conveyed.

Similarly, the document "Leadership and Learning at the Federal Executive Institute: *What We Believe*" (n.d.) also details FEI's values. The topics covered in the document present a picture of FEI's values at the time. Examples of topics include "The Demands of Leadership Change as One Rises to the Executive Level," "Government Leaders Must Also Be Global Leaders," and "Leadership Learning That Serves America." The document conveys the sense that being a leader is a complex and challenging task that requires leaders to have strong values and an understanding of the world around them.

During interviews, participants repeatedly mentioned several key values, which did not

vary greatly. Interviewees often mentioned the value of developing FEI executives to be leaders.

The following quote provides one example of this:

> I think that they were bordered or pretty much fixed on the self exploration part. And I also agree that the faculty at FEI was very explicit that one of the purposes was to help executives deal with fast change. And I think that continues to be important.
> Interviewee C (personal communication)

Interviewees also mentioned the importance of keeping the institution moving forward

and serving government executives. The following quote demonstrates this value.

> I think my real role though…was to protect the institution, to get more stature back in Washington…And to insist that we do a lot of business. And that wasn't hard.
> Interviewee C (personal communication)

The most commonly mentioned values were the importance of adult learning and the

focus on the Constitution. The following quotes provide insight into those values.

Values- Adult Learning

FEI has always focused on the theory of andragogy, which is the teaching of adult

learners. As such, there have been several key components of FEI's programs and teaching

methods that strongly reflected this focus. First, there have been few true lecture courses. FEI's

courses have focused on the use of discussion groups, group activities, and the instructor as a

moderator and facilitator rather than the holder and sharer of knowledge. Second, FEI included

programming that focused on work-life balance, healthy lifestyles, career pathing, and self-

reflection, among others. This approach to pedagogy also sends a strong signal that FEI values

the whole person and views executive education as the development of the whole person, not just

the transmission of select skills-based information.

The following quotes provide further examples of interviewees describing the focus on adult learning at FEI, specifically, on the notion of choice. The first quote highlights the value of choice in adult learning.

> [In describing the many choices in programming at FEI] And a big part of what drives that is the notion of choice. You know, we've always been big on adult learners having choices. That doesn't mean you couldn't still schedule the exact same program, people will still have choice, but nonetheless it's always driven that, so offering two plenaries at a time and offering four electives at a time. So you get to pick and customize it to your needs based on what you learned in week one. That's an interesting and distinctive feature.
> Interviewee F (personal communication)

The following quote shares the interactive and adaptive style of teaching and learning.

> …the emphasis was on adult learning, Malcolm Knowles was the original source of inspiration for a lot of the faculty that came here, the whole notion that adults don't learn through lectures. Learning has to be interactive. Fourth, and closely related to Knowles' concept of andragogy, was that everybody who comes here has different needs. And so that basically we had to customize the program to the people who were here. We might have some things that everybody did but it would make no sense to put senior executives through things that they had already experienced or learned. So that the whole choice model at FEI emerged from that understanding.
> Interviewee J (personal communication)

In addition to the notion of choice, in discussing adult learning theory, interviewees also discussed the need for a variety of classroom settings, in addition to traditional lectures, which support andragogy theory that adults learn best through a variety of classroom settings.

Values- Constitution

Another of FEI's key values that emerged through interviews was through its focus on the Constitution. This theme was pervasive in documents that describe FEI and its values. A selection of these documents published throughout the time period examined is discussed below.

A 1997 document titled "Federal Executives and Managers: Critical Resources in Review 1995 and 1996" noted the importance OPM placed on training SES members. In explaining the

training of SES members, the focus on the Constitution and federal employees' roles in

defending the Constitution was described in detail ("Federal Executives and Managers", 1997).

> Senior Executives and high-performance GS15s come together at the Federal Executive
> Institute (FEI) for residential programs that help them develop broad corporate
> viewpoints, understand their Constitutional roles, and enhance essential skills. The role of
> FEI as the Federal Government's training and development center for Senior Executives
> was also identified as a core function in executive resources during the restructuring of
> OPM in 1994.

The document went on to describe the guiding theme and subthemes of the program,

which demonstrated the pervasive nature of the Constitution in guiding the programmatic focus

("Federal Executives and Managers", 1997):

> More than 1,200 Senior Executives and managers, of whom 15 percent were members of
> the SES, focused on critical issues in the *Leadership for a Democratic Society* program
> during 1995 and 1996. Throughout these programs, the theme was "A Constitutional
> Framework of Democratic Governance" and included modules in four basic areas:
> - Personal Leadership in Government
> - Policy in a Constitutional System
> - Transforming Public Organizations, and
> - Global Perspectives and Public Actions

The 2004 *Leadership for a Democratic Society* program guide described FEI's focus on

the Constitution this way: "FEI is also unique in using the U.S. Constitution as an overarching

theme and governing process to blend the diverse talents, needs, perspectives, and professional

goals of participants, their agencies, and the citizens they serve." (Leadership for a Democratic

Society, 2004, p. 2).

The current description of FEI and the *Leadership for a Democratic Society* on the OPM

website demonstrate the focus on the Constitution. A quoted passage of the description of the

Institute and the LDS program is presented below to demonstrate the focus on the Constitution as

well as other stated goals and outcomes of the program (Center for Leadership Development,

2014).

Overview
The Federal Executive Institute (FEI) uses the U.S. Constitution as the principal guide in helping you to understand the diverse goals of the government and the citizens you serve. FEI fosters executives who excel in a 21st-century world while remaining connected to the Constitutional principles forged in the 18th century. We invite you to join both worlds at FEI. The themes of FEI's Leadership for a Democratic Society (LDS) program reflect and enhance the Constitutional underpinning of Federal Government work and the common culture of senior Federal executives. At FEI, you will build your skills in personal leadership and gain insights into organizational theory, the policy framework in which Government leadership occurs, and the broad global trends and events that shape government agendas. Since 1968, FEI has been known for the personal attention it gives to every executive who attends its programs. FEI's approach builds a learning community where Federal executives and faculty are both teachers and participants. The LDS program is custom designed to fit your particular interests through individual feedback, small- and large-group sessions, one-on-one coaching from a faculty facilitator and assistance from program colleagues in a small Leadership Development Team.

When describing the cultural norms of the institute, the Constitution was frequently

mentioned in interviews. The following quotes demonstrate the focus on the Constitution. The

first quote highlights the importance of setting the context of the leadership development topics

explored.

> You know how intense the first 10 days are, in terms of self-exploration, but I also thought we needed to understand the context that we were working in… One of the first days of LDS, four hours is spent on the Constitution and what that means because you take an oath to uphold, the first day you go to work for the Federal Government. And I think that means something.
> Interviewee C (personal communication)

The following quote highlights that the Constitution has been a constant focus of FEI

programming throughout its history.

> I think the values back then had to do with the stewardship of the public's money, of clearly supporting the Constitution. I think that probably should be number one, then and now. There was a great value in the early days in the incredible importance of being a federal civil servant. It was not a time where people were bashed for working for the government, quite the opposite.
> Interviewee L (personal communication)

Interviewee D shares that the Constitution was a founding document of FEI, along with

several seminal leadership texts.

> So the FEI was founded on two documents, The Constitution and [a] book by John
> Gardener called Self Renewal. Those were the founding documents of FEI. It was also
> founded on a principle of andragogy as opposed to pedagogy, which is about adult
> learning, and Malcolm Knowles was the basis of that. The faculty was oriented to that
> and steeped in that when I was there.
> Interviewee D (personal communication)

Not only does FEI focus on the Constitution, but its identity is based on its roots as a part

of the federal government, and the fact that FEI faculty and staff are federal employees, are

crucial parts of its identity and value structure. This quote reflects that identity:

> …that it's public servants, we run FEI for public servants. I think that's always been a big
> part of the identity. We are you, we know you. And I think that's helped us in terms of
> credibility.
> Interviewee F (personal communication)

The findings to RQ2 addressed the cultural norms of the institution that guided its goals.

The findings centered on the importance of the history of FEI in shaping its organization, goals,

and values throughout its existence. Interviewees emphasized their great affection for the

organization and their pride in belonging to a government organization that served fellow federal

government colleagues. They were also proud of the key values that have helped define FEI, the

focus on adult learning and the Constitution.

Findings for RQ3

The third research question asks: How do FEI faculty and staff describe the ways that

competition from industry-leading providers of executive education and training affected the

management of FEI throughout the past 20 years?

Data collected to answer RQ3 included discussions of competition, and of decisions to

either continue on the same path or change based on the activities of competitor organizations.

Interviewees presented accounts of the ways in which FEI focused on competition during their tenures at FEI, as well as the ways in which FEI looked at competition, and any changes made based on competition or market trends.

Specific themes examined in this section include discussions of competitors including identification of specific competitors, discussions about the leadership development market or arena, reflections on the amount of time and consideration towards competitors and possible future activities at FEI based on competitors or trends in the field, the type and frequency of reviews to learn more about competitors' programming and initiatives, the types and focus of programming at FEI, and the reasons behind new programming.

These quotes represent the findings to this research question:

> It really is very insular. That's not a criticism.
> Interviewee C (personal communication)

> … I think there's talk about FEI and its competitors, but I'm honestly never sure that FEI has ever taken that seriously.
> Interviewee B (personal communication)

> FEI is nonchalant about peers and competitors.
> Interviewee F (personal communication)

RQ3: Describing If There Was a Focus on Competition

This section of the findings will discuss the way that interviewees talked about competitors. It addresses how FEI defined its peers and competitors, how much FEI focused on competitors over time, and any changes that were made based on the presence of competitors.

When asked if the term "competitor" or "peer" resonated with them, interviewees responded consistently that the term resonated. Several themes emerged within this finding and are presented in quotes below. The first is that that FEI discussed having peers and competitors, but interviewees did not feel that there were organizations that were direct competitors. In many

instances, it was stated that FEI thought about competitors and considered their actions, but not to the level that many other organizations have to think about competitors. This was attributed to many factors, though a frequently mentioned reason was that FEI had a strong reputation within the federal government and that there were many more high level civil servants than FEI could train. Thus, there was a perception that FEI would be able to fill its vacancies based on prestige within the government for executive training. The following quotes demonstrate several of these findings:

> I would say that there is ongoing discussion about FEI having peers and competitors… So to answer to your question if I had to say are there organizations that are real– that FEI competes with I would say no. I think FEI– and it doesn't mean that people don't go to other programs but I think because of the price, because how long FEI's been around, because the agencies pay for– the cycle of paying a year in advance, is that there may be some competition, I mean like CCL- Center for Creative Leadership, but I don't think that– well okay let me sit back for a minute. There are some other government programs that appear to be competing with FEI. Navy does a lot of programs. And it actually connects the programs at the Business school at UVA. But I don't think overall, it's not as if FEI is saying so and so is taking away our people and we need to address this immediately.
> Interviewee B (personal communication)

> Interviewee H noted that FEI has occupied a unique place in the government.

> I think that's a good description because FEI has its own niche because it is government and participants are strictly government. So it has its own little niche in that community but it certainly is competitive. It's competitive with CCL, competitive with the Darden School, it's competitive with Harvard, because organizations only have so much money and they decide where they send their execs. So they have to compete in order to survive.
> Interviewee H (personal communication)

A second theme that emerged was FEI's financial structure created incentives to look at peers and competitors, though as long as FEI was filling its programming there was not a heightened need to look at competitors. Because FEI has operated on a revolving fund, rather than direct appropriations, filling its programming has been a necessity to keep the institute running. Several interviewees reported that FEI has considered what other organizations are

doing, but only focused on this enough to ensure that its programming was full and its financial

obligations were met.

When asked about peers, Interviewee F stated:

We used the term 'peer' as opposed to competitor when we did the pricing study. So yeah and I think there are a couple of reasons for that and you're right. I mean, FEI, they're very– it's an interesting and a unique case study in terms of peers and competitors. Number one, because FEI is part of the government, which makes it very interesting, but it's not like an internal leadership development organization. So it's not like CIA's Leadership University or VA Learning University. That's different because FEI– well those, they have sort of peers I guess in the private sector. They don't have competitors. We have– FEI has competitors because of its financial structure. So it is competitive in the marketplace because it needs revenue from paid participants coming from agencies to exist just like Deloitte or Korn Ferry or a university executive education program. So, FEI is not given from OPM or from Congress, you know, "All right. Here's your - here's your 30 million. Go deliver leadership development." And so I think that heightened always our sense of - of entrepreneurship even more so than competition but being in that market because we needed to generate revenue. So it's a real weird hybrid as a federal organization.
Interviewee F (personal communication)

When asked how FEI identified its peers and competitors, the findings demonstrated that

the process was fairly organic and not systematic. Interviewees recalled times that individual

leaders drove programmatic considerations and a focus on specific competitors based on their

individual history and knowledge of specific competitors. In other instances, the use of manuals

or books on leadership development programs were mentioned as a way to determine what types

of programs were being taught, what institutions were teaching them, the focus of those

programs, and the tuition price.

Certain peer and competitor organizations were mentioned multiple times during

interviews. Organizations often cited include Harvard University, the Center for Creative

Leadership (CCL) and the Darden School of Business (at the University of Virginia).

In addressing whether FEI viewed other institutions as competitors, one interviewee

shared a response that differed greatly from all other interviewees' answers.

Interviewee E: We don't use the term "competitor." "Competitor" has a business connotation, it is not really fair for the government to look at…Are you familiar with the Federal Acquisition Regulations, the FARs?
Interviewer: No.
Interviewee E: Okay, well the FARs make it incumbent upon federal entities not to enter the marketplace in ways that would upset the balance of the economic situation in their industry. So, for us to look at people as competitors naturally does that. With such an approach we are viewing the market as a limited piece of the pie, in a situation where we've got to fight for our share of that piece of the pie. That is, in essence, in violation of what the federal acquisition regulations are trying to achieve in the 'free and open marketplace.'
The government is supposed to engage in the marketplace in ways that always make it fair and equitable. Therefore, the term 'competitor' is not one we really embrace… we look at potential partners in these things.
Interviewee E (personal communication)

It is clear that at FEI there has been an awareness of peers and competitors, and there are some ways in which this notion shaped programming. However several factors, including the prestige of FEI and the large numbers of government executives seeking training, limited the focus on competitors.

RQ3: Reflections on the Ways that Competitors Affected the Management of FEI

The information below provides a description of interviewees' perspectives on competitors, competitors' programming, and FEI's response. These findings provide insights into the ways that competition from peers and competitors affected the management of FEI throughout the past 20 years.

The following quote describes the relationship between FEI's "word of mouth" marketing and the need to promote new programs. It presents the view that FEI has succeeded because it has been well known within the government for its strong programming. Without this strong programming, FEI may have been insulated from competition.

It made our attention to that innovation, tradition, balance and trying out new things and keeping it really engaging and that high touch piece because our marketing is word of mouth. It was all about when people went back they said, 'it was awesome, you need to go.' Once people start saying, 'ah, it was okay', that's the end of FEI because it doesn't

have other parts of marketing and promotion and branding to kind of pick up the slack for that so that very much, in many ways [it's] sort of in the background … because we need people to go back and really speak highly of it.
Interviewee F (personal communication)

When reflecting on FEI and the ways that competition affected the management of the organization, a theme that arose was the notion that things have been different in recent years than earlier in FEI's history. Interviewees described a recent change in priorities and organization of the institution, which has resulted in reduced enrollments in FEI's courses as well as feelings of confusion and unhappiness among faculty and staff members.

Another theme was the notion that over the years, there was not much of a focus on competition. The following quotes demonstrate the lack of a strong focus on competitors throughout FEI's history. These quotes present several of the reasons that FEI didn't focus highly on competitors, including the lack of time, the feeling that FEI wasn't competing because it was less expensive than other options, that its placement within the government made it easier for government executives to attend, and, that full classes signaled success.

The following quote provides a general reflection on FEI's focus on competitors.

FEI is nonchalant about peers and competitors.
Interviewee A (personal communication)

The following quote notes that FEI did not have a strong focus on competitors because its lower tuition prices contributed to its strong enrollment numbers.

I didn't experience any continual pressure from the competitive arena to use your words. It was never in a conversation… we never felt that we were competing, because there was sort of mindset that this is a good bargain, that we are easy to contract with, we are part of the government– why would significant amount of people go elsewhere?…it wasn't part of our marketing or business model that we have to be concerned about it.
Interviewee G (personal communication)

Interviewee H highlights that changes in the higher education arena necessitated changes in FEI's lack of focus on competitors.

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Well first of all let me say, I don't think that they've ever focused on [the competition] as much as they should have. Because I think for so many years they were comfortable with their piece of the pie. But I think they began shifting a little bit in the 90s to recognizing that they had competitors, and recognizing that the limited supply of resources they are going to have to compete with, and not only just money, but knowledge and particularly with looking at the changes, the rapid changes in the world of higher education.
Interviewee H (personal communication)

A third theme that emerged when reflecting on FEI and the ways that competition affected the management of the organization was the wish that there had been a greater focus on competitors during this time.

Indeed, frequently we had very long waiting lists so little pressure to focus on, certainly our competitors in terms of market share. Had we been even more enlightened, I think more people on the faculty would have insisted that we take a closer look at our peer and competitor institutes because we could learn from them, because we can't rest on our laurels.
Interviewee L (personal communication)

These three themes- that recent perceptions of FEI have changed, that there was historically not a strong focus on competitors, and the wish that FEI had focused more on competitors- provide insight into the ways that competitors affected the management of FEI.

RQ3: Types of reviews

Another set of findings relates to the ways that competition impacted the management of FEI and the type of reviews conducted. The information provided below relates to a description of the types of self-assessment and reviews of its competitors that FEI conducted throughout the 20 years covered by this study. This is presented as a component of the data that provides insights in the ways that competition from peers and competitors affected the management of FEI throughout the past 20 years.

In May 2006, faculty members were asked, "Where do you look to learn about current events, original research, and practical innovations?" ("Where Do We Get Our Information?", 2006). The responses to this request for information included business periodicals, such as the

Harvard Business Review and Leader to Leader as well as popular newspapers. However, few faculty members responded to this request, and those that did provided only a few examples of sources. As such, it is difficult to ascertain what sources faculty members were actually using to learn new information and better understand the field.

In July 2006, FEI compiled a document titled "Federal Executive Institute: 10 Year Vision & Strategy," which detailed the goals for the next 10 years. This document identified trends that would shape the future of the institute and the institute's goal of being "nothing less than one of the recognized, elite centers of public sector executive development in the world - headquartered in Charlottesville but with a global outreach and presence." The trends identified in the report were:

> "1. Demographics and the increasing need for executive education.
>   Multigenerational workforce
>   Boomers as "boomerangs"
>   Generation X recruitment and retention
> 2. Increasing Demands on Public Sector Leaders
> 3. Increasing Demands on FEI Faculty, Staff, and Technology
> 4. Strategic Partnerships
> 5. Evolution of E-Learning & Distance Learning
>   FEI does executive education NOT training
>   E-Learning & Distance Learning are not necessarily cheaper alternatives
>   Self-study has significant limitations
>   Viewing education/content as a commodity
> 6. New Emphasis on Research and Publication
> 7. New Program Evaluation Regime"

This document provides insights into one of the significant reviews of competitors that occurred in FEI's history. It was written during a time of increased focus on competitors and was one of several reviews that were conducted in 2006. It was also forward looking, as it recognized that there were changes on the horizon.

Notes from a Faculty Retreat in October 2006 also provide insight into some of the ways that FEI was identifying itself, how it was planning to grow, and how it understood its market

(FEI Faculty Retreat notes- 10.10.06, 2006). Faculty members focused on the concept of being an elite center for leadership development. The report acknowledged that FEI was recognized as an elite center within many circles, including many foreign governments, Federal Executive Boards and other government officials, LDS graduates, and the faculty. However, for future considerations, there were other groups suggested that FEI faculty may want to be recognized by. These groups included competitors, such as Harvard, Brookings, and the Center for Creative Leadership; political leaders; federal, state, and local government personnel; colleagues at OPM (especially the leadership); colleagues at FEI; the media, particularly public sector news organizations such as The Washington Post, Government Leader, and Government Exec; and the public.

Connecting to earlier findings that FEI did not feel the need to examine competitors because it was on strong financial footing, findings in this document revealed two measures that FEI used to rank itself as an elite institute: full participant bookings for LDS in 2007 and a waiting list for a new program offered in San Diego. However, interviewees also reported that enrollment slipped in subsequent years.

Following a faculty retreat in 2006, a survey was given to FEI Faculty members asking the question "Where should we direct our energies?" The survey results show that faculty members indicated the need to develop a focus on more in-depth (rather than introductory) leadership lessons; build strong alliances with corporations, NGOs (non-governmental organizations), publications, and universities; develop stronger relationships with OPM; promote global initiatives; and create stronger strategic planning initiatives to guide the institute ("Faculty Survey Results 05.25.07").

As a result, an FEI strategic planning session in 2008 included a focus on marketing, building relationships with other organizations and agencies, a push for more global initiatives, and organizational changes that would facilitate these goals.

For the fiscal year 2010, FEI created a new organizational arrangement within OPM, called the Executive Line of Business, and created a strategic plan for the new unit. The executive summary of the plan, along with the outline of the subsequent components of the plan and two sections of the plan that are directly related to this study- Market Trends and Competitors ("Executive Line of Business Strategic Plan FY10", 2009) were examined. The plan detailed the need for updated marketing analyses related to the aging workforce and the increase in numbers and strengths of competitors.

When asked about the types of reviews used at FEI to focus on competitors' activities and how FEI determined its peers and competitors, interviewees responded that in many cases, information was based on knowledge brought to FEI by faculty members' previous affiliations. They also noted that research literature was reviewed, site visits to other leadership development sites were conducted to learn more about peers' goals and offerings, in-depth benchmarking of competitors' program design was implemented, and online searches of competitors' programming were conducted. These reviews were not described as routine, rather they were generally described as occasional attempts to better understand the market.

Another example of the ways in which competition affected the management of FEI was an initiative focused on competitors that took place during the 1990s. Working in a group, several FEI employees identified several leadership development programs to visit to gather more information about best practices. During these visits, FEI employees asked questions and toured the campuses to learn more about the programs. One of the goals of this project was to

benchmark FEI against these institutions. Following the mid-1990s benchmarking of other

organizations, one interviewee reported not recalling if FEI made significant changes. In

describing this initiative, the interviewee recalled:

> But, we did go to those institutions to benchmark ourselves against them. And then
> returned and discussed what changes if any we should consider. Now, I don't think we
> made any significant changes. I believe that's about the time though that we decided there
> should be an emphasis on the global aspect. Now, those two may not be connected, I'm
> not sure. But I do know that we did reach out to other organizations that had leadership
> development training programs and benchmarked ourselves against them. Interviewee A
> (personal communication)

When asked if any decisions made were directly because of a competitor, respondents

overwhelmingly said no.

> Interviewer: So you talked a little bit about The Kennedy School, but were there any
> other institutions, whether within the government or outside of the government, directly
> impacting the decisions you were making and the choices you were making?
>
> Interviewee C: I don't think so. FEI has been pretty much distinct and self-contained.
> There clearly is, as you say and in some of the things you've sent me there is a market
> here. But in my experience, FEI was never desperately trying to cling to the market share,
> it was really easy to increase market share. And we were quite happy to do what agencies
> thought they needed.
> Interviewee C (personal communication)

Several interviewees also mentioned that informal reviews of competitors were

conducted over the years. The following quotes provide insight into the rational for those

reviews. The first quote highlights the value that FEI faculty placed on innovation, rather than

competitors.

> … it was that I wanted to make sure, no matter what my role was in FEI, that we were
> finding that right sweet spot between tradition and innovation. For again, for our own
> sake and for our participants' sake. So I did not give a lot of—I wasn't losing sleep over
> competitors and peers.
> Interviewee F (personal communication)

The following quote notes that while FEI may have had reasons to feel content without conducting reviews, it was necessary to ensure that the institute was keeping up with others in the field.

> And why we are doing it, because it is the right thing to do, this is the best practice and this is what the best of the best can do. And we want to bring it to our customers. It was almost a mindset by people who were metaphorically speaking on the other side of the table, that "well we don't need to do that because where else would government execs go?" You know if you adopt that mindset, why change anything? You know, these are captive audiences. Well yes, they are, but that doesn't give you license not to keep up. So that is where we were coming from. Never mind that yes, we were easy to contract with and were competitive in price and all that and they loved the FEI experience and a lot of people wanted to go to Charlottesville, it is great, pretty and all that stuff. All that's fine, we had a lot going on. We've got a lot of reasons why people want to come here, but let's not use that as an excuse to not to keep up. It doesn't add up to us.
> Interviewee G (personal communication)

In addition to informal reviews, several interviewees also shared that there were no major reviews of competitors conducted during their time at FEI. The first quote discloses that Interviewee B felt FEI never took competitors seriously.

> …I think there's talk about FEI and its competitors, but I'm honestly never sure that FEI has ever taken that seriously.
> Interviewee B (personal communication)

In the following quote, Interviewee K highlights that some information on competitors was known by faculty members and that additional information was gleaned during the contract process.

> Interviewer: Can you tell me how you determined who these peers were?
> Interviewee K: I guess we just kind of knew. We knew from our experience - the faculty, management staff, and by talking to leaders in the federal government. It's pretty easy to see who is offering leadership development services to government executives. Another way we would find out who our peers/competitors were was when we were not successful in being chosen through the request for proposal process. When an agency would select another leadership development provider, we would inquire who had been selected. While we didn't like not being selected, we learned a great deal about our customers and competitors.
> Interviewee K (personal communication)

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The organizational record indicates formalized reviews were conducted numerous times during the past 20 years. These occurred during select times in the 1990s and in the early 2000s. However, over the past decade, there has been an increased focus on competitors and as a result, additional formalized reviews were conducted.

RQ3: New programming

A key component to understanding the ways that competition from competitors affected the management of FEI throughout the past 20 years is by exploring the type of programming offered at FEI and the reasons for the implementation of that programming. The information provided below describes some of the programming at FEI, specifically as it relates to competitors or staying relevant in the field.

Circa 2003-2004, FEI examined the design of its flagship program. A document titled "The Design of the Leadership For a Democratic Society Program" describes some of the findings of this assessment. In suggesting changes, the paper grouped findings in the following sections, which illuminate the role that FEI saw itself playing in its market as well as changes in the field: The World Executives Face; What Help Executives Want and Need; Trends in the Field of Executive Education; How Executives Learn; The Unique Role that FEI Can Play; The "FEI Experience" Brand Identity; and Implications for the Future.

In January 2006, selected faculty members met in Denver to discuss a new initiative for a leadership transformation residential program. The notes from this meeting, from the document titled "Notes from Faculty Meeting in Denver, January 18, 2006" highlighted the faculty's acknowledgement that the leadership development field was changing and that FEI needed to adapt to remain a leader in the field (2006).

In 2007, FEI created the FEI Roadmap, which served as the document that would guide FEI forward ("The FEI Roadmap: 'How Do We Get From Good To Great?'"). This document explored the ways in which FEI's areas of excellence could be used to move the institute forward.

When interviewees were asked why FEI looked for new programming, there were a wide variety of answers. These answers reflected perceptions of the need to develop new ideas, the need to directly compete with others in the field, the interest in new and upcoming ideas in the field, and the search for individual power. These ideas are discussed below and describe the notion of transitioning from good to great, the frequency in which the idea was discussed, and the value placed on that type of activity.

One reason that interviewees gave for having sought new programming was the desire to know the newest trends in the field and to incorporate them into FEI's programming when appropriate. When discussing specific materials used to look for new programming, several resources were cited. First, books such as the Handbook for Teaching Leadership were mentioned as a way to benchmark other programs by examining programmatic offerings. More frequently mentioned resources were national journals, national and regional conferences, the use of listservs and newsletters as communication forums to stay connected in the field, friends and colleagues in the field, and feedback from FEI executives.

A line of thinking that helps to understand the quest for new programming is that at times, new programming was looked for in order to increase personal power. This power, in some conversations, was earned by providing the opportunity for FEI to bring in more money, while other times it was discussed in terms of power within the organization unrelated to money. As one example, Interviewee B noted that,

…it became more centered around individuals and their power. The power part was a really interesting part. Earlier on I think the biggest issue earlier on was that the continual change in directors and the lack of continuity in what could continue to go on and the continual up and down influence of OPM.
Interviewee B (personal communication)

Another perspective, while similar in terms of looking for new programming because it would bring in more money, was not centered on power. For some interviewees, the development of the Center for Executive Leadership in the mid-1990s was a logistical, not a financial, decision. As the LDS program ran 10 four-week programs each year, there were weeks at FEI where there were no executives on campus. Developing new short programs that could run during breaks in LDS, as well as concurrently, was seen as a way to maximize use of the FEI facilities, adjunct and faculty talent. When asked when the curriculum changes in response to competitors took place, one interviewee responded:

I would say I saw a small increase in the desire to see what our– how to keep up or stay ahead of our competitors and learn from our peers, but not a huge change. I think the change in this area that you're asking about came in the 2000s. There's been an enormous uptick in meeting or exceeding our competitor's capabilities in the last two, three years with declining enrollment, with problems with federal budgets everywhere, and I think to some extent before there were some issues in the 2000s.
Interviewee L (personal communication)

Summary of RQ3 Findings

In exploring the data for RQ3 which addressed ways that competition affected the management of FEI throughout the past 20 years, findings centered on a focus on competitors and reflections on this focus. Through documents and interviews, it appears that there were intermittent times when FEI focused on competitors but overall it was not a continuous or strong commitment. This changed, however, during the mid-2000s, when regular and focused attention was placed on competitors. Throughout the 20 years examined in this study, many of the reviews of competitors have been informal or not particularly systematic; these reviews include a reliance

on information that faculty brought when they began working at FEI and information gained through personal searches, or reviews conducted by a small number of people at FEI. The formal reviews also included site visits and systematic reviews of the field.

The reasons identified for conducting reviews include recognition of changing trends in the field, a determination that this was something of importance that organizations should do, and financial considerations.

Findings for RQ4

RQ4: What patterns of similarity and difference do FEI faculty and staff identify between industry-leading executive education/training competitors and FEI?

In examining this research question, the findings build upon the previous research question. Specific themes examined in the findings include discussion of specific competitors, the focus of programming at FEI, and how it compares to programs at other institutions.

RQ4: Examination of Competitors

Because FEI's general investigation into the programming and initiatives of competitors is explored in the findings for RQ3, this section will provide the findings of a specific instance of the examination of competitors.

In 2010, FEI faculty prepared a report on peer programs titled "Open Enrollment Executive Education: A Survey of Near-Peer and Related Programs." This report compiled information on similar programs, include pricing and programmatic information. It also contained results of a quick survey of LDS participants to capture their perspectives of FEI relative to its peers and competitors. The executive summary's findings of this report are summarized below.

The findings of this report provide insights into the ways that FEI Faculty and LDS participants viewed the leadership development arena in 2010. The report identified four types of executive education programs: programs affiliated with universities, such as those at Harvard University and Johns Hopkins University; independent programs that are not affiliated with a university or governmental agency, such as the Center for Creative Leadership or the Brookings Institute; programs offered through government agencies, such as the CIA University, HHS University, Candidate Development Programs, and the Defense Leadership and Management Program (DLAMP); and independent government programs, such as FEI and National Defense University (NDU). It is important to consider that these are the market divisions from the perspective of the government and government executives. That is, these four types of executive education providers were seen as the primary educational and training options for government executives. The findings of this report indicated that FEI was distinctive within its field, particularly with regard to tuition and programmatic focus. FEI's tuition of $17,500 for FY09 was considerably less than the average tuition of $37,000 for comparable month-long programs. Additionally, related to its programming, FEI's "grounded, holistic, values-based approach" was unique among its peers and competitors. A key differentiator when compared to all programs, and especially the non-governmental programs, was FEI's focus on public sector leadership with clear connections to the governmental service. This report, then, provided market insights to FEI during a time (the late 2000s and 2010s) when FEI began to focus more concentrated and systematic efforts on understanding its market and its competitors.

The report also represents one of the few times in FEI's history that this information was collected in such a manner. Throughout much of FEI's history, if the activities of peers and

competitors were even examined, they were done so on a much more ad hoc basis and the information was not usually written in a report or other official format.

RQ4: Comparisons to Other Programs

When examining patterns of similarity and difference between FEI and competitors, a topic that arose in multiple interviews was other programs in the federal government. The following quotes demonstrate some of the information shared regarding leadership development programs in other agencies within the federal government.

One interviewee suggested that there were few, if any, competitors within the federal government:

> Interviewer: Would you say that there are any peers or competitors within the federal government that FEI would either benchmark prices on or its program specifically?

> Interviewee C: No, I don't think so, not to my knowledge. Treasury has tried, they do have an executive institute. I don't think it's ever been residential and it's never been as long as four weeks.
> Interviewee C (personal communication)

Another interviewee noted that while there may be similar programs within individual agencies, there are no programs that are inter-agency, which is one of the unique features of FEI.

> There are similar programs within agencies. Very few of them have brought in other agencies. A few of them are collaborative among two or three agencies. None of the single agency programs are designed totally to prepare for the inter-agency experiences or include international government officials in their programs.
> Interviewee I (personal communication)

Presenting the view that there is opportunity for rapid growth within the federal government, this interviewee shared that new or growing programs within the federal government could represent competition for FEI.

> Yeah, internal for the federal government. The rapidly growing SES candidate development and the fact that all of them now have Chief Learning Officers says something… I just don't understand why this is so hard for people to see. It's not Harvard that's our competition. They do something entirely differently. They do a case-based kind

of thing. I'd say go to both, you know. They're different. CCL, CCL's Through the Looking Glass, a very intensive assessment, personal assessment process. Do that one. Interviewee D (personal communication)

The information gained from these interviewees on this topic provides valuable insights into the ways other governmental programs were viewed. While in some cases, it was perceived that there were no other strong government competitors, other interviewees highlighted the distinctive inter-agency nature of FEI, which is an unusual organization for a governmental training program. One interviewee also highlighted growing trends that may serve as stronger competitors for FEI in upcoming years: SES Candidate Development Programs and the evolution of Chief Learning Officers within agencies.

When discussing all competitors (both in the federal government and outside), interviewees presented a variety of answers about how various types of programs compare to FEI. Key differentiators highlighted in interviews were the four-week length of FEI's flagship LDS program and the pricing, specifically that FEI was considerably less expensive than other programs.

This quote highlights the finding that because FEI was a good bargain, it didn't need to overly concern itself with changing to compete with competitors:

> I didn't experience any continual pressure from the competitive arena to use your words. I was never in a conversation…we never felt that we were competing, because there was sort of mindset that this is a good bargain, that we are easy to contract with, we are part of the government- why would significant amounts of people go elsewhere? We all knew that occasionally we would hear of an exec went to the CCL. We knew of execs that went to the Kennedy program, even the Harvard program, but they go to all kind of programs. They go to the GW University right there in DC, who run great after hours things for continuing as an executive, so we knew there were numbers of people doing these things for a variety of reasons, but it wasn't part of our marketing or business model that we have to be concerned about it.
> Interviewee G (personal communication)

In discussing the process used to review other programs, another interviewee shared that

the length of the program and the pricing were characteristics that were compared. Additionally,

this quote highlights that some adaption to competitors took place, including the introduction of

shorter courses, global-themed courses, and courses in locations around the United States.

> We definitely kept an eye out on length and pricing. And one of the questions in your list, was what changes did we make as a result of the competitors. First of all, our Leadership for Democratic Society has always been the flagship program and I wanted to do an evaluation of what we were providing at that point - the pros and cons - what's going well - what's not going well. Historically, the LDS program has always been sold out with a waiting list, which is wonderful. Having such a successful LDS program also provided extra revenue that we could use to experiment with new and innovative course offerings. In an effort to expand, we looked at what our competitors were offering. A number of our competitors were offering shorter courses in the same areas, whether it was leadership development generically or leadership development in government services. The names of the courses sound similar, and you have to delve into the curriculum to really see the differences. So we began offering shorter programs to be competitive and to serve more executives. We also started offering more courses outside of Charlottesville. The Institute had always offered a seminar or two in the DC area. We made a very concerted effort to start offering things outside of Charlottesville, not just in DC, but across the nation– and it was a resounding success. A number of the programs were in the global arena, and we developed a one-week program that included some of the best elements of the LDS program which we took on the road to Seattle and San Diego. It too was a big success, mainly because it was a more affordable expense for federal executives on the West Coast. So our competitors were doing this, and we did it. Did we do it because of our competitors? Well, yes and no. It was kind of an evolution, and we did it in a big way.
> Interviewee K (personal communication)

The following quote differentiates FEI from non-governmental programs and describes

them as complementary programs to FEI.

> Well, Harvard has made some really I think smart moves in penetrating the federal market, right? And so they're building an alumni base very much like FEI has an alumni base. They don't run as many programs as we run and we run I think nine to ten programs a year and Harvard maybe runs two or three. So the scale of it is that way. I think Harvard offers an excellent learning opportunity. It's just different than the FEI learning or used to be, the used to be FEI program, stipulate that, right. CCL, I recommend a lot of people go to CCL for the fairly intensive personal assessment part. If they found that part of the LDS program, you know, useful and insightful then I think CCL has a lot of, a lot of good stuff. We use CCL products in the work that we do consulting with agencies. There's a group called Lominger which grew out of CCL and is

now owned by Korn Ferry International that has a competency based product that uses sorting cards and that's really tactile and it's really great for building success profiles for different levels of the organization and so we use that stuff with our agencies, with agencies that we work with. But I don't see those as in a sense direct competitor of FEI. Interviewee D (personal communication)

In exploring the findings for RQ4 that addressed patterns of similarity and differences between industry-leading executive education and training providers and FEI, several key themes repeatedly emerged. First, clear groupings of providers can be determined: programs that were affiliated with universities, independent programs that were not affiliated with a university or governmental agency, programs offered through government agencies, and independent government programs. Additionally, two key metrics that FEI routinely uses when comparing itself to other providers are the length of programs offered as well as the tuition. FEI often identified itself as unique within the field based on these two factors.

Findings for RQ5

RQ5: Has pressure from the Office of Personnel Management induced FEI to adapt over the past 20 years? If so, in what ways?

This question was asked to investigate several possible themes such as: what is the working relationship between FEI and OPM in terms of the pressure that OPM places on FEI? Does FEI feel pressure to offer certain types of programming? Does FEI feel pressure to create programs for certain populations? Does FEI feel that it is free to create programming at it sees fit, or does it take strong direction from OPM?

To address these types of questions, several themes from the interview data were examined. These themes, current and future plans and direction from OPM, were examined to investigate specific information shared relating to the relationship between OPM and FEI and the pressure or guidance that FEI feels from its parent organization, OPM. As FEI is responsible to

OPM, it is important to explore the pressure and direction that FEI receives from OPM. Data analyzed for this research question include questions about the type of direction that OPM provided, specifically related to the focus and programming at FEI; the frequency of this direction or pressure; and how this pressure and direction has changed over time.

RQ5: Current and Future Plans

To provide insight into possible pressure from OPM, several current and future plans of FEI are discussed below.

One of the major sources of direction from OPM to FEI revolves around the Executive Core Competencies and SES candidate development programs. One interviewee stated that OPM prides itself on remaining relevant within the federal leadership development arena because the agency is the keeper of the SES candidate development programs. However, in recent years, individual agencies have developed and refined their programs, which may pose a challenge to OPM's stronghold on this type of executive development. As such, OPM's relevance or influence within the federal government at large, relating to the development of SES candidates, may diminish in upcoming years.

Some interviewees mentioned things that they have heard, though not through official channels, that OPM is looking for FEI to change and keep up with certain demands and changes in both the field and the federal government. Within the context of this conversation, the changes needed were not delineated. However, changes anticipated or needed more generally were discussed in interviews, but not those directly related to pressure from OPM. These include topics such as the incorporation of distance learning, non-residential components of FEI, and new programmatic topics (both within current courses and new courses).

The future direction of FEI was a topic of great interest for many interview participants. While in some interviews this related to the notion of the perceived loss of its soul, which was a common interview refrain, in other conversations the future of FEI was discussed with respect to new initiatives and technological advances. Related to the incorporation of technological advancements into programs and the influence of OPM, one interviewee wondered if OPM is equipped to handle some of the technological innovations that are being discussed.

> And FEI will have a hard time in this online competitive marketplace for at least two reasons. It lacks the expertise to design and push online learning (and the funds needed to do so). It also runs up against what its parent agency, OPM, will allow it to do with online learning. OPM is not Google or Coursera– and because it is part of a huge and cautious bureaucracy – the federal government– change will be slow when it needs to be fast.
> Interviewee J (personal communication)

This quote above was taken from a conversation in which the interviewee was supportive of OPM and the relationship between OPM and FEI. However, it highlights that creating a successful online program is not as simple as creating a digital version of an existing in-person program. Research on digital learning and online programs supports the idea that learning objectives and course content often need to be adjusted in order to provide a beneficial and successful online program. Additionally, while some private organizations and institutions are able to quickly design and approve the necessary structure for online programs, the federal government may be not able to move as quickly as some other organizations. This statement of fact was mentioned to caution against the development of a plan in which distance or online learning could be created within OPM as fast as it can in other organizations or institutions. This is not to say that it should not be attempted, but that if this is the plan, a realistic plan should be developed.

RQ5: Direction from OPM

Another key theme when examining the pressure from OPM was the importance of specific direction given by OPM. The following findings address this issue.

The "FY 1993 Organizational Workplan" outlines the goals that FEI needed to accomplish in 1993. This work plan was included in a document titled "OPM Office Merit Systems Oversight Effectiveness" (n.d.). In this plan, each of the four goals directs how FEI will accomplish specific goals from OPM. The goals, to strengthen Federal Human Resources Development (HRD) Programs, to improve OPM's HRD Services Delivery, to manage and improve OPM's HRD facilities, and to represent OPM and the Federal HRD function, demonstrate that in 1993, some consideration was given to the organization and programmatic offerings of FEI by OPM. This document detailed specific measures of progress, including the targeted implementation dates and quality measures. This document presents a similar level of organizational planning that was reported by interviewees during this time period.

The FY 1993 SES Performance Plan document for Dee Henderson, Director of FEI, demonstrates some of the priorities of OPM for FEI's leader. This document was included in a document titled "OPM Office Merit Systems Oversight Effectiveness" (n.d.). Topics included in this performance plan include program delivery, faculty, curriculum, new programs, facility issues, program monitoring and evaluation, and affirmative action and equal employment opportunity. Similarly to the "FY 1993 Organizational Workplan," this document specified target implementation dates and quality measures for each topic.

A 1997 document titled "Federal executives and managers: critical resources in review 1995 and 1996" discusses the importance to OPM of training SES members (1997). In describing SES member training from 1995 and 1996, programmatic changes at FEI are noted. This document detailed the success of the inter-agency LDS program along with the new

programmatic offerings through the Center for Executive Leadership (CEL), which was created

in 1996. Specifically related to SES members, this document finds that:

> These CEL activities offer Senior Executives and managers opportunities to develop
> skills throughout their careers while providing resources for agencies working to improve
> their organizational effectiveness. They offer mastery of skills and techniques that will
> improve performance and agency success. In addition, they build a corporate culture
> among Senior Executives and managers by encouraging work across career, political and
> inter-agency boundaries.

Relating to OPM's focus on the SES, "Draft Framework for Improving The Senior

Executive Service: A Status Report- December 1998" signals the importance of the SES to

OPM. This document is relevant to this study as it demonstrates one of OPM's focuses that

impacted FEI: training SES members. This document was included in a document titled "OPM

Office Merit Systems Oversight Effectiveness" (n.d.).

In addition to these documents, data from interviews examines the pressure from OPM

and specific direction given by OPM. Interviewees reported that there were times when OPI

focused strongly on FEI, while at other times FEI felt like it was buried within a bureaucracy and

was not a strong focus of the agency.

Throughout its history, FEI's placement in the OPM organizational chart has varied. At

some times in its history, the FEI Director reported directly to the head of OPM, while during

other periods there were multiple layers between FEI's leadership and the head of OPM. The

location of FEI within the organization chart, when examined on its own, is not a marker of the

influence or guidance of OPM. For example, interviewees shared that during years when FEI

reported either directly to the OPM Director or were only a few layers removed from this level,

FEI was very well thought of in the agency and did not encounter significant interference in

program design. This lack of interference was also reported during times when FEI was

significantly buried in the organizational chart. As such, the location of FEI relative to the OPM

Director is not necessarily a direct indicator of the influence or guidance by OPM. The following

quotes demonstrate this point, as articulated by the interviewees:

> I know some people have felt that the head of the FEI should only report to the director,
> and to me, that isn't as important as to what the parent organization (OPM) thinks the
> mission of the Institute should be. Whether there is a person in between or not, is just not
> consequential in my opinion.
> Interviewee K (personal communication)

In the following quote, the interviewee discusses the issue of marketing as it relates to the

relationship with OPM.

> You would think with this $30 million operation that is in a competitive marketplace,
> there would be someone in charge of marketing that and there never was. We relied on
> the very intermittent attention of headquarters and I will say that's another thing I wanted
> to add is certainly recently, maybe even in the past 10 years, there's a big disconnect
> between how OPM understands FEI and LDS in particular and the reality of it. There's a
> real misperception about that tradition, innovation thing. I think that there are too many
> people at OPM who look at FEI and think 'they're just doing the same thing that they've
> been doing since 1968, nothing has changed.' Which couldn't be further from the truth,
> but that divide I think has actually kind of hurt the branding piece and the marketing
> piece.
> Interviewee F (personal communication)

Several interviewees reported that they did not feel significant programming pressure

from OPM during their tenure at FEI. Interviewees discussed issues such as the non-political

nature of FEI and OPM's role as administrative, rather than content experts, as reasons that FEI

did not feel strong programming pressure from OPM. Overall, interviewees shared that they did

not feel strong pressure related to the curriculum for a majority of FEI's history.

In this quote, the interviewee shared that FEI's leadership has historically protected the

institute from significant pressure from OPM:

> In my experience for most of my time there, from a faculty and staff perspective, I don't
> think there was a lot of that. FEI had a lot of independence and I think that largely due to
> very effective directors who knew how to manage upward that relationship… That it was
> their job to be a buffer and to tell OPM what OPM needed to hear and really give the
> faculty and the dean and all that a free hand to deliver the programs. We've always been

helped by the fact that FEI is very, very, very non-partisan and it has jealously protected that…
Interviewee F (personal communication)

The following three interviewees shared the viewpoint that the curriculum was not

heavily influenced by OPM. The first interviewee notes that OPM's leaders are not

programmatic experts in leadership development.

> As far as the curriculum is concerned, I don't think they influenced what the curriculum was. I think the influence would be minimal. And I think it's because the expertise of the leadership at OPM. What OPM was doing was sending their people, and they still do, send their people through the program, but as far as being experts in training and development, they were not at the stairway. They were more of the administrative, I mean, the vehicle that the director has to answer to and the administrative, the reporting and that sort of thing. And I think that is still the way it is.
> Interviewee H (personal communication)

The following quote details only one example of OPM's impact on curriculum.

> In my time here, OPM didn't have a significant impact on the substance of what was taught and for the most part didn't seek to have a significant impact. There was one brief foray in which they tried to, during the start the first of the George W. Bush administration, 2001. They tried to have more of an impact here. The faculty basically ignored them and got away with it. But for the most part, directors of OPM did not try to do that and had recognized that, you have a pretty professional group of people down here. So their interest tended to be more about what are they hearing from the agencies about FEI, if they are hearing good stuff, they leave us alone; if they're not hearing good stuff, then they say, what's the matter with your curriculum? They don't generally say well we want you to stop this and start that, but you need to fix something because we are getting bad feedback.
> Interviewee J (personal communication)

Interviewee K shares a general conclusion that there was little curricular influence from

OPM.

> For the most part, the OPM headquarters left the management and direction of FEI to us.
> Interviewee K (personal communication)

These quotes show that interviewees did not feel strong pressure related to the curriculum

for a majority of FEI's history.

Other interviewees shared that OPM has pushed for certain types of programming. One

of the strongest ways that OPM guides programmatic decisions at FEI is through the Executive

Core Competencies, which are government wide competencies for promotion. The following

quote supports this finding:

> FEI has and always will, I believe, focus to a great extent on the Constitution... and it will always focus on the Constitution, and I believe it will always focus on the adult learning theory and I believe it will always focus on [it] probably because OPM headquarters dictated it– dictates it. I think it will always focus on what they call the five executive core qualifications.
> Interviewee A (personal communication)

Another strand of this discussion is the imperative that FEI creates programming that is in

demand and what executives want, which is connected to FEI's establishment as a revolving

fund organization. The following quote discusses this theme:

> What we put into our programs is up to us. Yet we are under pressure to provide services that people want. In fact we're set up that way. We get no money from OPM – we get no appropriated funds whatsoever. We're on a 'revolving fund.' We have to 'market our wares' and ensure that we provide something useful to those client agencies we serve. If we don't then we should 'go away.'
> Interviewee E (personal communication)

The following quote highlights the support that FEI has received over the years and that

the influence of OPM in suggesting programmatic themes is not necessarily a bad thing and can

be viewed as a result of the favorable view of FEI within the agency and the view that FEI is the

most capable organization to handle important tasks.

> When I was there, it was a wonderful period. OPM headquarters was very supportive, and it was just a good time. FEI has been viewed over most of its history as one of the jewels in OPM's crown. There have been some low periods such as the 1980's when OPM Director Devine tried to abolish FEI. There have been other times that the headquarters and FEI had an antagonistic relationship, and that's a shame. I wasn't around, so I can't explain it. There were times when the headquarters sent in certain directors to clean house, and do away with the existing faculty. That's not to say there haven't been times when FEI didn't need improvement. Over a 45-year period any organization is going to have certain cycles, but back to the specific time that I was there, it was great. The Director asked the Institute to take on new national-level initiatives.

When OPM started a new Senior Executive Service candidate development program, they wanted FEI to be the provider of development services.
Interviewee K (personal communication)

Related directly to the guidance by OPM on programmatic issues, several interviewees noted the increased influence by OPM in recent years. This increased oversight aligns with the years of turmoil and discord within FEI. The first quote highlights the changing position of FEI on the organizational chart, though FEI is still heavily impacted by OPM leadership.

And then through various reasons, FEI then dropped in its sense of value via OPM. And it's now down seven levels or something, but it's very affected by OPM.
Interviewee B (personal communication)

The following quote suggests that recent discord at FEI may have lead to changes.

It has changed a little bit more recently and I think maybe in response to perceptions about what was going on at FEI and, you know, internal organizational type things and the biggest OPM influence lately frankly has been more on contracting. Not on content.
Interviewee F (personal communication)

Interviewee H notes that while the influence has varied throughout FEI's history, FEI is currently strongly influenced by OPM.

Interviewer: And is that something that's kind of ebbed and flowed over time? The amount of influence that OPM has even in the administrative side?
Interviewee H: Yes. And actually it's increased over the last few years.
Interviewee H (personal communication)

The following chart shows the current organizational chart of OPM. In this chart, FEI reports to the Human Resources Solutions department, which reports to the Director of OPM ("Our People & Organization", 2013).

Figure 2

Current FEI Location within OPM

Note: From *Our people & organization.* (2013). U.S. Office of Personnel Management.

In exploring the findings for RQ5 that address the pressure from OPM to adapt or offer specific programming, several key themes were examined, including the ebb and flow of pressure from OPM as well as specific topics in which OPM exerted influence over FEI's programming. Overall, based on findings from documents as well as interviews, it is clear that the pressure that OPM exerts on FEI has varied in intensity throughout the 20 years in this study. When stronger pressure from OPM is felt, documents and interviews indicated that is often related to organizational and structural issues, rather than specific programming initiatives. Documents and interviews revealed that within the past decade, FEI has felt increased pressure from OPM, both in organizational and structural issues as well as programming initiatives, including training for specific development programs.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Organizational theory both reflects and guides our understanding of organizations. Understanding their operations, growth, stagnation, and adaptation is key to our understanding of organizations and their place in society.

Recently, there have been significant external and internal pressures that have shaped the current state of higher education. These pressures include the demands to be more market driven, the commercialization of higher education, and the focus on revenue generation (Bowl & Hughes, 2014; Geiger, 2004; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). A major pressure on higher education institutions is the need to be aware of and react to changes in the market. Examples of this include accountability measures in which institutions must complete scans of the market as well as implicit or explicit pressures to offer similar programming and compete with well-established and well-funded institutions. As a result of this pressure, institutions are often looking to peer institutions, as they need to be aware of, and react to, the changing market.

A related pressure on the arena is what has been described as the commercialization of higher education (Kirp, 2004; Weisbrod, Ballou, & Ashe, 2010). Scholars have argued that modern higher education organizations are now run more like businesses than traditional higher education institutions (Astin & Antonio, 2012; Jaquette, 2013; Yuan & Powell, 2013). As a result of this perception, educational institutions are often criticized for academic drift and being more focused on running the business of the institution rather than concentrating on learning and other intangible aspects of education (Morphew & Husiman, 2002).

A third significant source of pressure is demands for revenue generation. Often connected to the view of higher education institutions as business-focused organizations, the stress on revenue generation is a guiding factor in the arena today (Weisbrod, Ballou, & Ashe, 2010).

Institutions are often judged and critiqued based on their ability to generate revenue and are perceived as focusing on revenue generation over other priorities. The demand to generate revenue is also connected to diminishing state financial support provided to publically funded institutions (Altbach, Gumport, & Berdahl, 2011; Heller, 2011; Lane & Johnstone, 2013; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2009; Stevens & Kirst 2015).

Though these pressures have had an impact on many areas of higher education, one specific component of higher education that is affected by these pressures is leadership training. The leadership development field has changed significantly in recent years. These changes include the growing number of organizations offering this type of learning, the development of open-enrollment courses, and the notion of competition for students through program offerings that are in strong demand.

The pressures within the leadership development market offer insight into the theories of institutional isomorphism, which find that the tendency of organizations is to become homogenous over time as they adapt to resemble the perceived leader in an organizational field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Through the perspective of institutional isomorphism, this research was designed to explore whether this theory can be applied to non-profit organizations, and specifically government organizations. Is there something special about these types of organizations that would cause them to respond differently than institutional isomorphism would suggest?

This research presented data from the Federal Executive Institute. FEI is a government-located leadership development training center in Charlottesville, Virginia. As a part of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, FEI provides leadership development training to top federal civil servants with grades GS-15 and SES. This research explored the degree to which FEI,

identified as an outlier in its market due to its location in the government and its serving solely government executives, has adapted to resemble leaders in its organizational field, identified as within-agency governmental programs, university based programs, and independent leadership development programs.

The findings from interviews and document analysis suggest that FEI has benchmarked its activities and success against those of its peers. However, being a government institution in a training arena in which the majority of its peers are not government institutions, FEI operates under a different set of assumptions, regulations, and market conditions than its peers. Given that FEI was set up as a public provider and given the continual pressure from the competitive arena, it is worth considering whether FEI's different status, culture, context and structure from other comparable institutions have impacted its adaption over time.

Results of this research do not demonstrate that FEI focused on adapting to competitive peers, though some aspects of FEI's actions throughout its history are guided by and highly influenced by its peers and competitors. This analysis is supported by the findings that while FEI has made changes, these were not as dramatic as the overall changes in the field. FEI has remained an outlier and unique in its field, rather than fully adapting to resemble leading institutions, through its organization, student cohort, courses offered, or focus of the institution. This finding is further explored and detailed in the following sections.

Summary of Findings and Discussion

"Obviously there are those of us who think that FEI ought to continue, because there is no other organization like FEI."
Interviewee A (personal communication)

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings related to research questions 1-5:

1. Has FEI altered its goal of developing leaders for government service throughout the past 20 years? If so, in what ways?

2. How do FEI faculty and staff describe the cultural norms of the organization that have shaped the goal of developing leaders for government service throughout the past 20 years?

3. How do FEI faculty and staff describe the ways that competition from industry-leading providers of executive education and training affected the management of FEI throughout the past 20 years?

4. What patterns of similarity and difference do FEI faculty and staff identify between industry-leading executive education and training competitors and FEI?

5. Has pressure from the Office of Personnel Management induced FEI to adapt over the past 20 years? If so, in what ways?

Throughout this research, several themes emerged. First, there is a clear understanding on the part of those interviewed of the history of FEI, including details of the founding, key players in the founding of the institute, and an understanding that FEI played, and continues to play, a key and unique role in the development of federal executives. Another significant theme that emerged is the affection for FEI felt by its faculty, staff and alumni. This affection has been challenged and has waned throughout the past decade for some participants in this study, but for other participants their affection is still strong.

A third key theme is FEI's awareness that to some degree, it has competitors. Each interviewee acknowledged the concept of FEI's peers and competitors, could identify competing institutions, and understood FEI to be in competition with other providers. However, within this understanding, there was variation in the amount of attention that participants felt that FEI paid

towards competitors. A clear distinction can be seen between earlier years at FEI in which

participants described either a sporadic or a small focus on competitors and a recent, more

intense and focused push to understand and react to competitors. That is, in the early years, there

was not an extremely strong focus on competitors, the actions of competitors, or on viewing FEI

as part of a market. When discussing these early years of FEI, interviewees could recall who they

determined their competitors to be, and that that there were a few concerted efforts to gather

information on competitors and the market. However, in general, they responded that FEI was

not actively looking to its competitors or considering its role in the market. During these years

(the 1990s), FEI was very sound financially, often had waiting lists for its flagship program,

Leadership for a Democratic Society. It also created the Center for Executive Leadership, which

quickly grew and became a strong source of enrollments and brand expansion for FEI. While

there was consideration of competitors and the market during the creation and expansion of CEL,

there was also a sense at FEI that things were going well. So while it was important to know

what competitors were doing, and what trends in the field were, according to those interviewed,

this was not something that consumed FEI. It was during this time that interviewees noted

differentiation between the adjunct faculty and administration at the institute, as the adjunct

faculty very much needed to stay up on current trends in the field to stay relevant (to both FEI

and other institutions), because adjuncts often work with multiple institutions and clients. Some

adjunct faculty members mentioned the work that they personally did to understand the field, and

that this work supported and strengthened their work at FEI. It was not often reported that FEI

had sustained or concentrated efforts to understand the actions of its competitors. Efforts of this

kind were often described as intermittent, though beneficial, depending on the choices of the

leadership.

During the early 2000s, FEI's strong enrollments continued, though changes emerged in some of its programming. During this time, interviewees and documents demonstrated a finding similar to those of the 1990s: intermittently, efforts were taken to understand the actions of competitors, but it was not described as a frequent or strong focus of the institute.

However, during the period from 2000 through 2013, according to interviews and document analysis, FEI changed. During this time, there were periods of leadership, and leadership decisions, that were questioned and FEI's path began to shift. While some interviewees described this shift in a negative light, others highlighted the need for FEI to adapt and continue to grow as an institution and saw the shift as a positive and strong step for FEI. Reflecting on this time, some participants noted a loss of direction at FEI. This sense of lost direction was often described as if the institute had a soul, a rhythm, and a community, and that these things were lost in recent years. Some participants have chosen to distance themselves from the institution in recent years. While a negative, disheartened, or skeptical perception of FEI in recent years was shared by many interview participants, not all participants shared this view. Several participants reported the increased opportunities that FEI is providing to participants through new programming and updates to current programming, and they described FEI as a growing and adapting institution. Thus, in light of the data collected here, it can be said that the process of looking to competitors and the market has strongly increased at FEI in recent years.

The finding that during certain times FEI did not strongly focus on competitors does not imply that the institute should have been focusing on competitors. It is a statement of fact, describing what was happening during specific times in FEI's history. Some interview participants, however, shared their views that FEI should have focused more during specific time

periods. While this information is captured in the findings and discussion, the goal of this research was to document how FEI viewed its competitors and its role in its market.

History of FEI

When describing FEI's founding and initial values, each of the interviewees mentioned one of the following: that FEI was created by President Lyndon B. Johnson, educating or training leaders, and the notion that FEI was something innovative and new.

In almost every interview, when asked about the history and founding of FEI, the actions and words of President Lyndon Johnson were discussed. It is clear that the founding of FEI, which includes the logistics of its founding as well as the culture and values of the Institute during its early years, are well and similarly understood by most people who interact with FEI. This is also true of FEI documents, as documents published throughout FEI's history repeatedly mention the reasons why FEI was founded and the details of its founding.

Another common topic discussed was the early focus on supergrades (GS16-18, now known as SES) and the early change to include programming and shift the focus to GS-15s. This thread was continued when several interviewees commented on the lack of focus on SESs over time and the decision to allow GS14s to participate in FEI programming. A third common thread was the length of the LDS program, which at its creation was eight weeks, and over time has changed to seven weeks, five weeks, and to the current length of four weeks.

The purpose of FEI at its founding is often described as training strong executives for the purpose of a better government. This purpose highlights the prevailing thought that the best way to have a strong government was to have strong people who make up the government leadership and workforce. Several interviewees noted, though, that changing attitudes about government

service and leadership may drive federal executives to obtain credentialing through non-governmental sources.

Another key point highlighted multiple times in documents and interviews is that FEI was a visionary concept and its establishment a courageous step by the federal government.

FEI's Values- Adult Learning and Constitution

A key piece to understanding and describing FEI is its values. Two values were repeatedly mentioned in the data: the values of adult learning and the focus on the Constitution.

Values- Adult Learning

FEI has focused on the theory of andragogy, which is the teaching of adult learners. As such, there are several key components of FEI's programs and teaching methods that have strongly reflected this focus. First, the curriculum has included few, true lecture courses. FEI's courses have focused more on the use of discussion groups, group activities, and the instructor as a moderator and facilitator rather than the holder and sharer of knowledge. Second, FEI has included programming that focuses on work-life balance, healthy lifestyles, career pathing, and self-reflection. The inclusion of these components sent a strong signal that FEI values the whole person and views executive education as the development of the whole person, not just the transmission of select skills-based information.

Values- Constitution

In addition to the values of andragogy, FEI's programming has focused on the Constitution. FEI has been very dedicated to its mission as a leadership development center for federal government executives. This feature, which has been a uniquely identifiable feature of FEI when compared to its peers and competitors, has served as a guide for FEI. It is also something that was commonly and quickly mentioned when interviewees were asked about

FEI's values during interviews and in documents, such as course syllabi, articles describing FEI, and the OPM website.

Not only has FEI focused on the Constitution, but its identity as a part of the federal government, and that FEI faculty and staff are federal employees, have been crucial parts of its identify and value structure.

Affinity for FEI

A key sentiment uncovered in the data is the affinity that so many people have felt, and continue to feel, for FEI. In addition to this sentiment appearing in data examined in this research, this affinity contributed greatly to the research process. There was enormous support for this research from the interviewees such as aid in locating documents, help in developing a list of potential interview participants, and assistance in scheduling interviews. The affinity for FEI was present in many ways throughout this research project, and the information that was shared during interviews reflected the lessons learned throughout the research process.

"There is no other organization like FEI." This statement profoundly and concisely shares the way that many people have felt about FEI. To these people, FEI has been a special place, an organization with a soul, and an organization that has served a special role in the government. This is a key theme of this research. The affection for FEI and the vision of the Institute as an organization with a soul was often mentioned, sometimes when interviewees commented on recent changes in FEI's structure, programming, and culture. The following quotes are representative of the interviewees' affinity for FEI.

> So I don't know how this thing is going to turn out. I feel so strongly about FEI such that I would do provided it wasn't illegal, immoral or fattening or unconscionable, I will do pretty much anything to try and make sure the place both survives and does what its purpose is.
> Interviewee A (personal communication)

I think you will find that FEI, the people who work at FEI, interestingly, for whatever the reasons, that they bond with FEI… There are numbers of reasons. One is because when the execs come they really find a welcoming place. And so they become– they open up and I think the people who teach them then become to some degree, they go captive. In other words, the bonds are very tight between FEI– between faculty and the students for the most part.
Interviewee B (personal communication)

FEI's relationship with OPM and how it has impacted its role in its market

As FEI is part of the Office of Personnel Management, its relationship with its parent

organization is an important dynamic to explore. Like other initiatives and relationships, the

influence that OPM has on FEI, in terms of its programming and focus on competitors, has

varied throughout the years studied. Overall, participants indicated that OPM does not strongly

pressure FEI regarding programming. While there are a few examples of pressure or demands,

for the most part, the relationship between FEI and OPM has been focused on the logistical

issues of running an organization. This trend, however, has changed in the past few years, as

OPM has become more involved in programming and hiring decisions.

How does FEI determine who its competitors are?

The majority of interviewees understood the terms "competitor" and "peer". When asked,

interviewees could name organizations in the field that fit these terms. FEI has identified its

peers and competitors over time through the use of manuals and handbooks, formal and informal

reviews, and with knowledge brought to FEI by new personnel. The efforts of adjunct faculty to

stay current in the field and personal explorations from faculty and administration to learn more

about competitors were also cited as factors shaping FEI's awareness of competitors.

How much FEI has focused on competitors?

It really is very insular. That's not a criticism.
Interviewee C (personal communication)

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This quote presents a key finding of this research. While there have been times when FEI looked to competitors, overall, that has not been a driving factor for FEI. Interviewees, in most cases, found that FEI did not focus on the activities of peer institutions. Documents showed that there were times when effort was made to determine and examine peers. However, these documents often indicated that the focus was informal and did not demonstrate a high degree of urgency. While the competitors were known, there did not seem to be a strong push to actively compete with these institutions. Intermittently, reviews were conducted to examine competitors' programming and initiatives, and at times, this was a focus for FEI. However, throughout much of the time period covered by this research, there was not a strong, continual focus on competitors. This finding differs somewhat from the data provided on contemporary actions at FEI.

Interview participants reported that during the 1990s, only sporadic efforts were made to better understand peers and competitors. Strategies used included drawing upon the faculty and administrator's personal knowledge of peers and competitors, reviews of competitors' printed program guides, and site visits. These efforts were often described as intermittent. While during that time FEI could identify its peers and competitors and took action to better understand their programming, it was not described as a major point of focus for the institute. Instead, it was described as something that was interesting, but not essential. FEI was doing well financially, there were many more federal executives than FEI could serve. Thus, other institutions were used to benchmark trends, to learn more about the field, and to form partnerships rather than identified as competitors who were seeking the same pool of potential participants.

During the 1990s, working in a group, several FEI employees identified leadership development programs to visit to gather more information. During these site visits, FEI

employees asked questions and toured the campuses to learn more about the programs. One of the goals of this project was to compare FEI to these institutions. During the early 2000s, a thorough review was conducted for the purposes of better understanding programs and to develop partnerships with institutions.

In between the examples mentioned above, and continuing throughout the first decade of the century, intermittent efforts were made to better understand peer organizations. While interview participants and documents describe intermittent events, more thorough and systematic efforts did not begin until quite recently.

In 2010, FEI faculty compiled information for a report on peer programs titled "Open Enrollment Executive Education: A Survey of Near-Peer and Related Programs." This report compiled information on similar programs, included pricing and program information, as well as a quick survey of LDS participants to capture their opinions of FEI relative to its peers and competitor programs. The findings of this report, which are presented in Chapter 4, confirm that there were then four types of executive education organizations or options for federal executives (University Affiliated Programs (i.e. HBS; Kennedy School; Hopkins); Non-University/Non-Governmental Programs (i.e. CCL; Brookings); In-House Agency Programs (i.e. CIA University; HHS University; CDP programs; DLAMP); and Independent Government Programs (i.e. FEI, NDU).

The findings also indicated that executive education programs that were a month long were not common. Generally, they were shorter and not frequently offered at other institutions (often two times a year compared to FEI's 10 times a year). In addition, few programs were focused on a holistic, values-based approach or focused on the specific needs of public sector leaders.

In the analysis of the data from this research, some institutions were determined to be near-peer organizations of FEI. The organizations in this category are "those organizations whose content and approach most closely mirrors FEI/LDS and which likely have a solid brand awareness with and participation by [their] key Federal customers" ("Open Enrollment Executive Education: A Survey of Near-Peer and Related Programs", 2010).

The programs listed as near-peer organizations in this 2010 report included: Harvard University Kennedy School of Government, Center for Creative Leadership, and The Brookings Institution Executive Education. Other prominent executive education organizations listed were the Harvard Business School Executive Education program, the Stanford Graduate School of Business, the University of Pennsylvania/ Wharton School, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Sloan School of Business, the Columbia Business School, the Kellogg School of Management of Northwestern University, the University of Chicago Booth Business School, the University of Virginia Darden School of Business, and the Duke University Fuqua School of Business.

This report was valuable to FEI for many reasons. First, it was an effort by FEI to determine, in a more systematic fashion, who its competitors were by looking at institutions, specific programs, and program types. It also represents a time that FEI specifically and deliberately looked to its competitors to better understand the field. In part, this was because the number of peer organizations had increased, and has continued to increase since 2010.

In the past few years, FEI has heightened its focus on peers and competitors. Several interview participants mentioned systematic reviews of activities that are now conducted by FEI. These activities include program reviews of peer and competitor curricula. In addition, FEI also systematically reviews certificate programs geared towards federal executives. Specific

particulars examined include price, length of the program (number of total days and number of consecutive days), location, program content, and ways that required OPM competencies are addressed in those programs.

What actions has FEI taken based on competition?

Upon determining that FEI is able to identify its competitors, and that FEI has focused attention on its competitors, it is interesting to explore the changes that FEI has made that can be attributed to competitors and peers. Interview participants and documents described very few activities as directly resulting from an analysis of peers and competitors. While this may indicate that there were not many changes made at FEI because of peers and competitors and general trends in the market, it may also signal that often changes were made for a variety of reasons and it is difficult to resolutely say that a specific change was made because of a peer or competitor's action or because of changes in the field.

How will FEI relate to competitors in the near future?

There are a number of changes at FEI that were mentioned, or proposed, in interviews and documents. The changes include LDS offerings in locations other than Charlottesville, possible non-residential versions of LDS, and online offerings.

One of the major strategic directives from OPM to FEI revolved around the Executive Core Competencies and SES candidate development programs. One interviewee stated that OPM has prided itself on remaining relevant within the federal leadership development arena, because the agency is the keeper of the SES candidate development programs. However, in recent years, individual agencies have developed and refined their own programs, which may pose a challenge to OPM's hold on this type of executive development. As such, OPM's influence within the

federal government at large, relating to the development of SES candidates, may diminish in upcoming years.

Other interviewees mentioned they have heard, though not through official channels, that OPM was looking for FEI to adapt to keep up with demands for changes in the field and the federal government. Within the context of these conversations, specific changes were not delineated. However, potential changes were discussed in interviews, although not directly related to pressure from OPM. These included topics such as the incorporation of distance learning, non-residential components of FEI, and new program topics (both within current courses and for new courses).

The future direction of FEI was a topic of great interest to many interview participants. While in some interviews, this related to the notion of the perceived loss of its soul, which was a common interview refrain, in other conversations the future of FEI was discussed in relation to new initiatives and technological advances. Concerning incorporation of technological advancements into programs and the influence of OPM, several interviewees wondered if OPM was equipped to handle some of the technological innovations that were being discussed. Research on digital learning and online programs supports the idea that learning objectives and course content often need to be adjusted in order to provide beneficial and successful online programs (Yuan & Powell, 2013). Additionally, while some private organizations and institutions are able to quickly design and approve the necessary structure for online programs, the federal government may be not able to move as quickly as some other organizations. This fact was mentioned to caution against development of a plan in which distance or online learning could be constructed within OPM as fast as it can in other organizations or institutions.

Further Research

As there has not been a considerable amount of research conducted on FEI throughout its history, there are many stories to tell about this institution, its community, and the many federal government employees that have been impacted by its work. This research is one component of the history and future of FEI; hopefully, in the future, more research will be conducted on FEI to further record and analyze the history of this institution.

FEI is a unique institution that, in many ways, operates as an outlier, as some research on adaptation in higher education suggests is possible. Future research may address the implications of outlier organizations for models of organizational change and adaptation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of this research demonstrate that FEI is a unique organization that, when examined through the lens of this research, has not fully adapted to what might be predicted using institutional theory. Through my research, I have found that FEI is an organization that has changed at times throughout its history, though not always in the way in which the institutional isomorphism model would suggest. As such, I find that FEI remains an outlier unique in its field and has not adapted to follow leaders in its field as institutional isomorphism suggests it would. While the concept of peers and competitors of FEI resonated with interviewees and they understood the reasons for asking these questions, interviewees often reported that FEI did not often focus on competitors. Much of the research on institutional isomorphism suggests that institutions are looking to others and model their behaviors after the perceived leaders in the field; however, FEI, in many ways, demonstrated itself to be a unique institution that does not conform to the anticipated model.

Some of the characteristics that make FEI unique may contribute to it not fitting into the model of institutional isomorphism. These characteristics include that FEI was founded as a unique and innovative organization, its uniqueness within the federal system through its inter-agency programming, and its status as a federal government entity within the leadership development market. The characteristics that make FEI such an intriguing organization to study may also greatly contribute to its positioning as an outlier of the institutional isomorphism's suggested path.

Through my research, I found several intriguing phenomena and encounters that shaped both my research and my experience as a researcher. First, the interviewees in this research, as well as many others affiliated with FEI, had a considerable affinity for the organization. Although it is mentioned several times throughout the presentation of the research findings, it bears repeating that, often, those affiliated with FEI feel very strongly about the organization, its purpose, its impact on federal executives, and its future. I experienced little resistance or hesitation when I reached out to prospective interviewees. In fact, several interviewees shared with me how glad they were that more research was being conducted on this organization that they deeply care for. This enthusiasm carried over to the interviews, as many of my interviews went well over the allotted time, due often to participants' eagerness to share information and to make sure that I fully understood the issues and their responses. I conducted my interviews during a time of great change at FEI (in many ways unrelated to pressure to adapt to peer organizations), and as such, many of the interviewees had spent considerable time in recent years thinking about FEI, and were eager to share their thoughts with me and contribute to my research. Interviewees spoke about the institute with passion and loyalty, and treated the research

questions with thoughtfulness and consideration. The affinity felt for the organization was a key finding in my research, as well as a key takeaway in my experience as a researcher.

FEI is a unique institution that, in many ways, operates as an outlier, as some research on adaptation in higher education suggests is possible.

Finally, future research may address the implications of these findings for models of organizational change and adaptation.

In many ways, FEI's future direction is unclear. While many of its features will likely persist- its location in the government, its service to federal government executives, its focus on leadership development –the future of the culture of FEI is not clear. How long can an institution hold on to its uniqueness when faced with great challenges? Will central aspects of FEI change over time, such as its focus on the Constitution, the great affinity that FEI faculty, staff, and executives feel toward the institution, or the delivery of a four- week residential program? Only time will tell. To this point, FEI's grounding in the principles of its founding and its strong culture and employee pride have contributed to FEI's ability to persist as a unique organization that has survived threats and turbulent times and has contributed greatly to the lives of faculty and staff, the government executives who have attended programs there, and by extension, the government and country as a whole.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW REQUEST EMAIL

Email Template Requesting Participation in This Study

Dear [Interviewee Name]:

Hi, how are you? I am completing my dissertation in the Higher Education Department at the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia. I am writing to invite you to participate in my dissertation research to explore the degree to which FEI is adapting to resemble other executive education training organizations throughout the past 20 years.

I have identified a list of individuals who played prominent roles in shaping the development of FEI. While the primary years of my study are from 1993-2013, I have also identified individuals that greatly influenced FEI in the years prior to 1993. I would like to interview you to include your perspectives on the cultural norms of FEI as well as the ways that competition from other providers of executive education and training impacted FEI.

The interviews will be recorded digitally and interviewees will be provided with paper copies of the final transcripts. All interviewees retain the right to review and edit their interview transcript before the final version is included in my research.

I sincerely hope that you will consider participating in this effort to document a component of the history of FEI. Please feel free to contact me with any questions. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Amy Moynihan
Ph.D. Candidate, University of Virginia
757-373-3907
Arb4q@virginia.edu

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The following interview protocol will be used to guide the interviews with each of the FEI former Directors, Deans, faculty and staff members.

Background information:

1. When did you work at FEI?
2. What was your job title while you worked at FEI?
3. What experience did you have prior to working at FEI?

Purpose of FEI:

4. How would you describe the purpose of FEI when it was founded?
5. How would you describe the culture of FEI when it was founded?
6. How would you describe the values of FEI when it was founded?
7. How would you describe the purpose of FEI when you were employed there?
8. How would you describe the culture of FEI when you were employed there?
9. How would you describe the values of FEI when you were employed there?
10. Can you identify points at which this culture or values has changed throughout FEI's history?
11. In what ways have FEI participants changed over time?

Competition/Peers?

12. During your time at FEI, did FEI focus on the activities of peer or competitor leadership development training programs?
13. How were the peers or competitors determined?
14. Were there certain characteristics about these peers that determined their status as competitors or peers? (Such as other governmental training programs, Washington, D.C. – based universities, nationally leading universities, etc.)
15. What decisions did FEI make that were directly based on the activities of the determined competitors or peers?
16. How did FEI change during your time at FEI based on activity in the competitive arena?

Internal FEI:

17. As a member of the management/faculty/staff, what internal changes did you experience in FEI's organization?

18. Describe changes in FEI's organizational culture throughout your time at FEI.

19. Describe FEI's relationship with OPM.

20. How has the organization of FEI changed based on the current relationship with OPM?

21. What cultural factors changed over time based on this relationship?

APPENDIX C: NVIVO CODES

The following codes and subcodes were used to analyze data through the NVivo software program.

- Competition/ Competitor
  - o Harvard
  - o No Competitors
  - o Partnerships
- Current and Future Plans
  - o Distance learning, online learning
  - o Need to be more concerned now
  - o Non-residential
- Describing FEI
  - o Affection for FEI
  - o Best
  - o Government
- Direction from OPM
  - o No push from OPM
  - o Push for certain types of programming
- History of FEI
- Leadership Development Arena
- Reflections
  - o Did the best with what we knew and valued at the time
  - o Political maneuvering
  - o Things are different now
  - o Wasn't a big focus then
  - o Wish that we would have done more
- Type of Reviews
  - o Formal review
  - o Informal review
  - o No Review
- Types/ focus of programming
  - o Developing individual vs. developing organizations
  - o New programming
  - o Skill development vs. leadership
- Unique needs of this sector
- Values
  - o Adult learning
  - o Constitution
- Why did you look for or start new programming?
  - o Looked at the field but didn't start anything new
  - o Looking for new programming
  - o New way to interact with the field
  - o To bring in more money