

 THE RESEARCH AGENDA

Attracting and Retaining Transformative Leaders in Enrollment Management

By Lisa Emery and Rema Reynolds Vassar

It is predicted that hundreds of chief enrollment management officer (CEMO) positions may become available due to high turnover within the next few years, creating an opportunity for a new generation of leaders. In this causal comparative quantitative study, data was collected from 211 current CEMOs to understand the challenges and highlights of the role and provide recommendations for reshaping the role. Tenets from transformative leadership theory, feminist theories, and labor economics combined to form the theoretical underpinnings for this study. Structural equation modeling was used to examine the relationship between demographic and work-life factors on job satisfaction, morale, and intention to stay. The findings suggest that career support, recognition for competence, and favorable working conditions were significantly correlated with higher morale and intention to stay in their current position. Findings from this research can help institutions make the CEMO role more attractive to the next generation of diverse transformative leaders who will be responsible for solving complex problems in the changing, highly competitive landscape of higher education.

Higher education is in need of transformative leaders to guide their institutions through change and uncertainty with innovative recruiting, admissions, and student success policies. For many institutions, these policies are developed through their model of strategic enrollment management (SEM). Enrollment management involves a systematic approach to pursuing an institution's goals and outcomes (Hossler and Kalsbeek 2008). First intro-

duced in the late 1970s, SEM brings together the areas responsible for recruiting, funding, tracking, and retaining students. Collectively, these areas work toward common goals related to student enrollment, tuition assistance, and support to increase graduation rates. Leading this effort at the executive level is the chief enrollment management officer (CEMO), who works closely with the president, provost, trustees, and other

key constituents. The work of a CEMO is data-driven and involves long-range planning through the use of market research techniques and financial modeling (Hossler and Kalsbeek 2008).

The CEMO plays an influential role in fulfilling the mission of the institution. The majority of CEMOs have worked in administrative positions, such as director of admissions, director of financial aid, or registrar and typically do not come from the ranks of academia. It is a role with high prestige and a high salary (Bichsel and McChesney 2017), but the role is also characterized by heavy workloads, high stress, and often unreal expectations according to a 2018 survey by the executive recruiting firm Witt/Kiefer (Crutchfield 2018). A 2020 “Career Profile” survey of current CEMOs by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) found high turnover among this group. Almost 50 percent planned to make a career change in the next three years, and only 32 percent planned to move to another CEMO position. The “Career Profile Report” indicates that there are likely to be several hundred CEMO vacancies within the next three years. Given the challenges facing higher education in the next decade, the vitality of American higher education institutions will be dependent on a pipeline of talent ready to step into these important positions. There is a unique opportunity to bring in more women and minorities who have traditionally been underrepresented in higher education leadership positions.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the level of morale and job satisfaction among people serving in the chief enrollment management officer (CEMO) position. Using quantitative analysis, differences in morale and job satisfaction between men and women serving in the role was investigated. The results can be used by institutions and hiring agencies to create work environments that increase satisfaction and allow institutions to retain current CEMOs or attract new talent to open positions.

The study was conducted as feminist research in that it recognizes the traditional dominance of white, male leaders in higher education. It challenged the

status quo by generating knowledge that can be used to bring more women into the CEMO position. The theoretical framework for this research project used feminist theory, transformative leadership theory, and human capital theory as lenses to conceptualize the influence of women leaders in higher education. Two specific questions were explored with this study:

- **Q1:** Is there a difference in satisfaction, morale, and retention between men and women serving in the CEMO role?
- **Q2:** What factors are related to retention of CEMOs?
 - Is there a direct effect of demographic factors on retention?
 - Is there a direct effect of work-life factors on retention?

Theoretical Framework

With hundreds of vacancies predicted in the CEMO role over the coming years, and institutions struggling to fill their open positions, there is a unique opportunity to bring in a new cohort of leaders, particularly women and minorities. Significant impending changes in the demographics of the college-going population will require CEMOs with courage and a willingness to redefine admissions policies and student success initiatives to support nontraditional students and expand access to people who have traditionally been shut out of higher education. For that reason, the theoretical framework guiding this research combines feminist theory, transformative leadership theory, and human capital theory to produce a conceptualization of the type of leader needed in higher education administration to navigate the challenges of the next decade.

Feminist Theory

The second wave feminist movement that began in the 1960s played a pivotal role in encouraging more women to pursue a career outside of the home. Friedan’s (1963) *feminine mystique* challenged the idea that a woman’s role is to be a wife and mother, and having a career goes against their destined role in society. It sparked a movement for social equality, although mostly limited to upper- and middle-class white women (Grady 2018).

More women entered the workforce but still faced discrimination, as recounted in Kanter's study of "Industrial Supply Corporation" in the 1970s. It revealed the distinct differences in the careers of men versus the careers of women, where men primarily served as managers, and women were typists and secretaries (Kanter 1977). She found that the organizational structure forms a person's sense of themselves and of their possibilities.

Feminist theory can be expanded by applying a Black feminist lens to examine differential group treatment based on race, class, gender, sexuality, and citizenship status and include the broader perspective of women who have traditionally been oppressed. Collins (2000) defines a *matrix of domination* as an "overall social organization within which intersecting oppressions originate, develop, and are contained" (246). The matrix of domination has impacted schools, educational opportunities, and employment of Black women and "reveals the fallacy of assuming that gender affects all women in the same way race and class matter greatly" (Collins 2000, 247). The feminist movement helped many women make economic advancements and lift their families into the middle-class. Yet it has mainly served the interests of White women while "masses of women are as poor as ever" (hooks 2000, 61), leading hooks to call for an expansion of feminist work to include opposition to sexist, racist, heterosexist, and classist oppression. This study recognizes that feminist theory has traditionally advanced white women and seeks to be more inclusive by recognizing intersecting oppressions and being intentionally attentive to intersectionality.

Transformative Leadership Theory

Bringing in leaders who practice the tenets of transformative leadership theory will make a significant difference in the way that higher education will evolve over the next decade. Transformative leadership theory is a feminist leadership style that focuses on equity and access to education. Given the scope and influence of the CEMO role in admissions and retention policies, leaders practicing the tenets of transformative leadership theory will be needed to break down the existing knowledge framework of a traditional college student

and rebuild a new model that supports adult learners, first-generation students, refugees, and other types of nontraditional students as higher education institutions face impending demographic and socioeconomic changes in the next decade.

Transformative leadership theory consists of eight tenets: the mandate to effect deep and equitable change; the need to deconstruct existing knowledge frameworks; the need to address inequitable distribution of power; a focus on both individual and collective good; a focus on emancipation, democracy, equity, and justice; a focus on interconnectedness and global awareness; balancing critique with promise; and a willingness to exhibit moral courage. Transformative CEMOs are needed to re-examine the inequities in the distribution of power within current practices to find ways to open up access to marginalized populations.

Human Capital Theory

The third prong of the theoretical framework is rooted in labor economics and its application to higher education administrative careers. Central to labor economics is the concept of human capital. Human capital is the set of skills, knowledge, and resources possessed by a worker that can be "rented out" to their employer (Ehrenberg and Smith 1997, 286). Within the frame of labor economics, human capital is the supply side, while the characteristics of the workplace and employer are the demand side. This research examines factors of supply side, such as gender, age, and salary, along with demand side factors, such as career support and recognition experienced by those currently serving in a CEMO role. Data analysis will determine if any of these key factors play a role in job satisfaction, morale, and intention to stay.

Job Satisfaction, Morale, and Intent to Leave

The challenges facing CEMOs in the next decade will require stable and transformative leadership skills. Institutions are dependent on their CEMO for setting goals and leading initiatives around enrollment and student success programs. Turnover at top positions leads to

disruption of effectiveness and efficiency (Bruns 2018). The process to replace a high-level administrator is a time-intensive and expensive process, often ranging from 90 percent to 200 percent of the exiting person's salary. The growing number of vacancies and specific requirements for the job makes the CEMO role one of the most difficult roles for an institution to fill, behind that of the president and chief financial officer. Retention of CEMOs by their institutions becomes critically important for the institutions seeking to be successful in student matriculation, retention, and graduations.

Previous research on higher education administrators has found links between job satisfaction and morale on a person's intent to leave. Rosser and Javinar (2003) conducted research on mid-level leaders, defined as academic or nonacademic support personnel including directors of student affairs, housing, admissions, registrar, counseling, and financial aid. Their framework measures the direct effects of demographics and work life issues and indirect effects of satisfaction and morale on intention to stay in the position.

Rosser and Javinar's model found that morale and job satisfaction had significant direct effects on a mid-level administrator's intention to leave, with morale having a slightly larger effect (-0.24) than job satisfaction (-0.14). They also found that salary had a direct effect on intention to leave (-0.18). Years of experience, salary, and discrimination all had significant negative effects on morale. Recognition, department relations, and working conditions had a positive significant effect on morale. Recognition, department relations, working conditions, career support, and external relations were all factors with a positive significant effect on job satisfaction. Satisfaction had a positive significant effect on morale but morale did not have a significant effect on satisfaction.

This research leverages Rosser and Javinar's framework by measuring job satisfaction and morale among those currently serving in a CEMO role with special attention to differences within gender. The results of this study's model are compared with the results of Rosser and Javinar's model to determine which factors are the same for both groups and which are different.

Method

This causal comparative quantitative study used a survey to collect data from current CEMOs. The survey collected demographic data, including gender, age, years of service, type of institution, and leadership style. This was followed by questions related to work-life issues (*i.e.*, career support, recognition, discrimination, working conditions, and compliance). Finally, a short series of questions measured morale, satisfaction, and intent to leave. Figure 1 (on page 31) shows the conceptual model for the survey.

Data analysis included t-tests and ANOVAs to look for differences based on gender and job responsibilities. Structural equation modeling was used to find correlations among the demographic factors, work-life issues, morale, and satisfaction on intention to stay.

Research Design

A survey of 50 questions was developed to capture demographic and work-life characteristics, along with measurements of job satisfaction, morale, and intention to stay. Much of the survey was adapted from an instrument used by Rosser and Javinar (2003) in their work on job satisfaction, morale, and intention to stay for mid-level managers in higher education administration. The survey questions were modified to make them applicable to an executive-level position. A set of questions were added to measure qualities linked to transformative leadership theory, a feminist leadership style that focuses on equity and access to education. These questions originated from an instrument created by Shields (2017). A Transformative Leadership score was created from these questions and used as one of the independent demographic variables. The survey also included a set of fifteen questions categorized as roles and responsibilities. The questions aimed to collect information about the respondent's type of institution and ability to meet enrollment and other institutional goals.

The target population for the survey was the 1,622 people with the classification of "director of enrollment management" (code #84) in the Higher Education Directory at a two-year or four-year institution in the United States as of February 2021. All 1,622 peo-

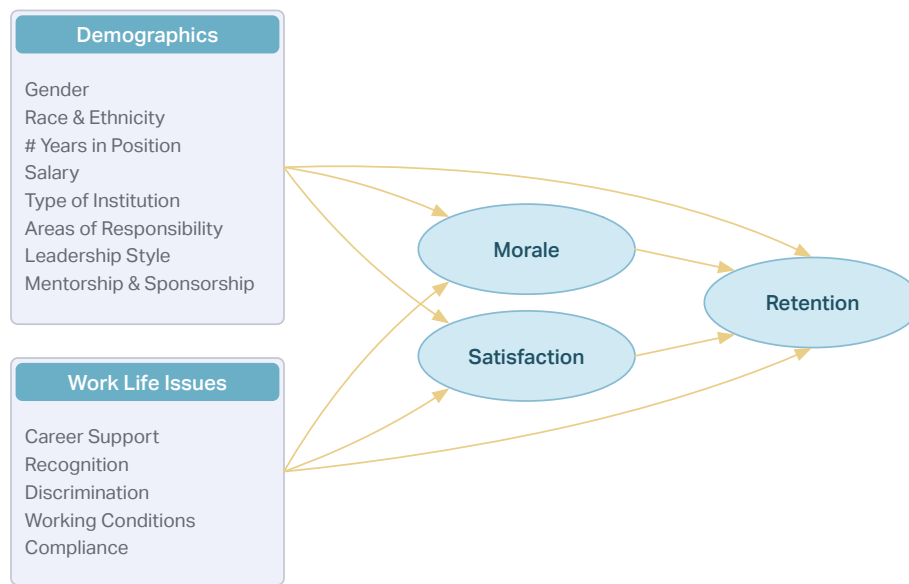


FIGURE 1 ➤ Conceptual Model for the Survey

ple were emailed an invitation to complete the survey, which was open for several weeks between February and March 2021. A total of 211 completed surveys were received, which falls within the acceptable guidelines for a large sample size for structural equation modeling (Kline 2005).

Descriptive Statistics

Demographic Characteristics

Comparing the sample of 211 participants to the full population of CEMOs indicates that the sample is representative of CEMOs as a whole, based on the gender, race and ethnicity, and type of institution. Of the 1,622 CEMOs identified in the Higher Education Directory's database, 51 percent are men, and 49 percent are women. Among the 211 respondents, 53 percent were men, and 47 percent were women. For type of institution, 77 percent of the Higher Education Directory's population work at four-year institutions, while 23 percent work at other types of institutions (such as two-year institutions or graduate-only institutions). Within this sample, 80 percent of respondents indicated that they work at a four-year institution, and 20 percent work at other

types of institutions. The Higher Education Directory's list did not include race and ethnicity, so an estimate of the population was done by using data from CUPA-HR for all higher education administrative leaders. This includes top executives, division heads, and deans. Table 1 (on page 32) displays the detailed results for the comparison between the sample and population. The percentages of respondents within the categories of gender, race and ethnicity, and type of institution are very close to the population, allowing for high confidence that the sample is representative of all CEMOs.

The median age of the participants was between 45 and 49 years, and 40 percent of the participants are between the age of 45 and 54 years old ($n=85$). The respondents have spent an average of five years in their current position, an average of nine years at their current institution, and an average of 23 years working in higher education. For salaries, 69 of the participants reported earning between \$150,000 and \$199,000 (33%), and 52 participants reported earning \$200,000 and above (24.5%). Most CEMOs who responded to the survey have earned a graduate degree, with about half earning a master's degree, and 80 have earned a Ph.D. (37%). During their careers, 122 respondents reported having

TABLE 1 ► Comparison of Sample and Population Characteristics

Variable	Category	Sample		Population	
		n	%	n	%
Gender	Women	99	47	795	49
	Men	112	53	827	51
Race/Ethnicity	White/Caucasian	176	83		77
	Black or African American	11	5		7
	Hispanic	11	5		3
	Asian/Pacific Islander	6	3		2
	Other Race/Ethnicity	7	4		1
Type of Institution	4-Year	168	80	1,255	77
	Other	43	20	367	23
Total		211	100	1,622	100

both a mentor and sponsor at some point (58%), while 50 had only a mentor (24%); 12 had only a sponsor (5%); and 27 had neither a mentor nor a sponsor (13%).

Leadership Style

Another demographic characteristic that was used in the statistical analyses was the participant's leadership score. Participants responded to seven questions asking about their leadership beliefs. Each question contained two statements, and participants were asked to select the response that best reflected their opinion about leadership beliefs, dispositions, and actions. For example, one of the questions was, "A good leader strives to..." with the options of "ensure that the organization runs efficiently" or "ensure an equitable experience for everyone within the organization." The leadership questions used in this instrument were selected from a questionnaire developed by Carolyn Shields (2020) to identify how much a respondent's beliefs and practices align to principles of transformative leadership. This allowed for the creation of a leadership score percent value between zero and one, with scores closer to one indicating more propensity for transformative leadership. The mean score among all respondents was 0.581, with women ($M=0.614$) having a significantly higher score than men ($M=0.52$) with $t_{(209)}=-2.609$, $p=0.01$. Significant differences were also found based on the type of institution. CEMOs at public institutions ($M=0.602$) had signifi-

cantly higher propensities toward transformative leadership than CEMOs at private or proprietary institutions ($M=0.554$) with $t_{(209)}=-2.027$, $p<0.05$.

Institutional Goals

A 2018 survey by the executive recruiting firm Witt/Kiefer found that many CEMOs face heavy workloads, high stress, and often unreal expectations (Crutchfield 2018). To understand more about respondents' individual experiences, they were asked four questions about their ability to manage the goals and expectations set by their institution's leaders. On a five-point scale ranging from *very difficult* (1) to *very easy* (5), nearly 80 percent reported that it is *somewhat difficult* or *difficult* to enroll enough students, and 67 percent reported that it is *somewhat difficult* or *difficult* to enroll the right type of students in a typical year. The right type of students refers to the specific enrollment goals that an institution may have for racial diversity, geographical diversity, ability to pay, etc. Finally, respondents were asked about their institution's enrollment goals on a five-point scale ranging from *never* (1) to *always* (5). When asked if their institution's enrollment goals make their job manageable, about 65 percent indicated that their job is manageable about half the time or most of the time. When asked if their enrollment goals can be accomplished with the resources available to them, about 40 percent responded never or sometimes, while about 58 percent

TABLE 2 ► Summary Measures for Work-Life Variables

Scale Variable	Items (n)	α	M	SD	Min	Max
Career Support	7	0.78	3.86	0.62	2.29	5.00
Recognition	9	0.87	4.09	0.68	1.67	5.00
Discrimination	9	0.83	1.88	0.68	1.00	3.67
Working Conditions	6	0.66	3.94	0.58	2.33	5.00
Compliance	5	0.69	3.53	0.67	1.00	5.00

indicated about half of the time or most of the time. The combination of all four responses to the goals created a goals subscale variable that tested with high reliability using Cronbach's alpha (0.702). The mean goals subscale score is 2.59 with standard deviation of 0.73.

Work-Life Variables

Five scale variables were created to measure the respondent's attitudes about their work environment: career support, recognition, discrimination, working condition, and compliance. The five categories aligned the same questions used by Rosser and Javinar in their 2003 study to each work-life category. The means, standard deviations, ranges, and α values for each subscale variable are listed in Table 2.

Results show that respondents generally felt supported and recognized for their competence. Details on the median for each item can be found in the Appendix (on page 42). Averages for their working conditions show that respondents are mostly satisfied with the benefits they receive and the resources available to them from their institutions. The respondents also consistently agreed that federal, state, and other mandates and procedures do not impact their effectiveness, although a t -test shows that there are significant differences based on the type of institution. The 93 respondents from public institutions ($M=3.76$) were more likely to feel hampered by compliance issues than the 118 respondents from private institutions ($M=3.23$) with $t_{(209)}=-6.206, p < 0.001$.

Scores for items related to discrimination are reversed, with low values indicating that the respondents disagree that they have experienced various types of discrimination, while high scores are in agreement that they have experienced discrimination. Thirty-three

(16%) of the respondents averaged a score of one for discrimination, indicating that they strongly disagree to experiencing any form of discrimination. Among this group of respondents, 20 (60%) of the respondents were men, and thirteen (40%) were women. Twenty-nine of the 33 respondents who experienced no discrimination identified as caucasian/white, while only four of the respondents from minoritized groups reported no discrimination. The t -tests showed significant differences in the discrimination scores when looking at gender and minoritized status. The 99 women ($M=2.04$) were more likely to report experiencing discrimination than the 112 men ($M=1.74$) with $t_{(185.6)}=3.175, p < 0.01$. Similarly, the 35 minorities ($M=2.13$) were more likely to report experiencing discrimination than the 176 caucasian/white respondents ($M=1.82$) with $t_{(42.3)}=-2.045, p < 0.05$.

Satisfaction, Morale, and Intention to Stay

Satisfaction, morale, and intention to stay are the three dependent variables used in the research questions. The satisfaction scale was comprised of seven Likert-scale items related to the respondent's feelings about their CEMO position. The morale scale consisted of eight Likert-scale items asking about the respondent's feelings about their work environment. The instrument concluded with three questions asking the respondent to estimate how long they planned to remain in their current position, at their current institution (but in a different position) and how long they planned to remain in higher education. The results show that only 40 percent of current CEMOs planned to be in their current position for four or more years. Nearly 40 percent planned to leave within three years, and about 20 percent were unknown or undecided. These findings are similar to

TABLE 3 ► Pattern Matrix

Item	Factor	Value
Satisfaction		
I enjoy working in my position.	SAT2	0.582
I have input in deciding matters that affect my work.	SAT3	0.847
I have a great deal of freedom on the job.	SAT4	0.878
I have the trust and confidence of my colleagues.	SAT5	0.522
Morale		
I am loyal to the institution.	MOR1	0.636
My institution is a good place to work.	MOR2	0.850
I am committed to this institution.	MOR3	0.699
The institution values its employees.	MOR4	0.864
There is a sense of common purpose at my institution.	MOR5	0.700
This institution cares about its employees.	MOR6	0.788
This institution is fair to its employees.	MOR7	0.826
I am proud to work for this institution.	MOR8	0.900
Intention		
How long do you plan to stay at your current position?	INT	0.990
How long do you plan to stay at your current institution?	INT	0.763

Notes

- Extraction Method: Maximum Likelihood
- Rotation Method: Promax with Kaiser Normalization
- Rotation converged in 4 iterations

the results of the 2020 “AACRAO Career Profile” report, which found 50 percent of CEMOs planned to make a career move within three years; 22 percent planned to stay for four or more years; and 27 percent were undecided. When it comes to staying in higher education, about 75 percent planned to remain in a position within higher education for four or more years. This indicates that many of those who are planning to leave their current position want to stay in higher education and are likely anticipating either finding a CEMO role at another institution or moving to a different type of position.

Exploratory Factor Analysis

The observed items for satisfaction, morale, and intention to stay were used to create latent constructs for the proposed conceptual model. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed using SPSS version 27. The EFA used the maximum likelihood extraction method with Promax rotation. Three satisfaction items were dropped from the model, along with one intention item (Inten-

tion to Stay in Higher Education) due to low loadings. The final model, shown in Table 3, resulted in three factors explaining 63.8 percent of the variance.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted in AMOS, version 27 to further test the fit of the latent variables. The model fit was appropriate, with the following model fit indices: NC=1.89, RMSEA=0.065, CFI=0.967, and SRMR=0.0417. Figure 2 (on page 35) shows the final CFA model with standardized estimates.

Subscales for job satisfaction, morale, and intention to stay were created based on the items that loaded to each factor. Satisfaction and morale scores were based on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from *strongly agree* (5) to *strongly disagree* (1). The mean satisfaction subscale score was 4.38, and the mean morale score was 4.13. This shows that the overall satisfaction and morale was quite high, averaging between *agree* and *strongly agree* for most of the questions. The intention to stay items used a different scale based on four points. The intention to stay subscale had a mean score of 2.91, which translates

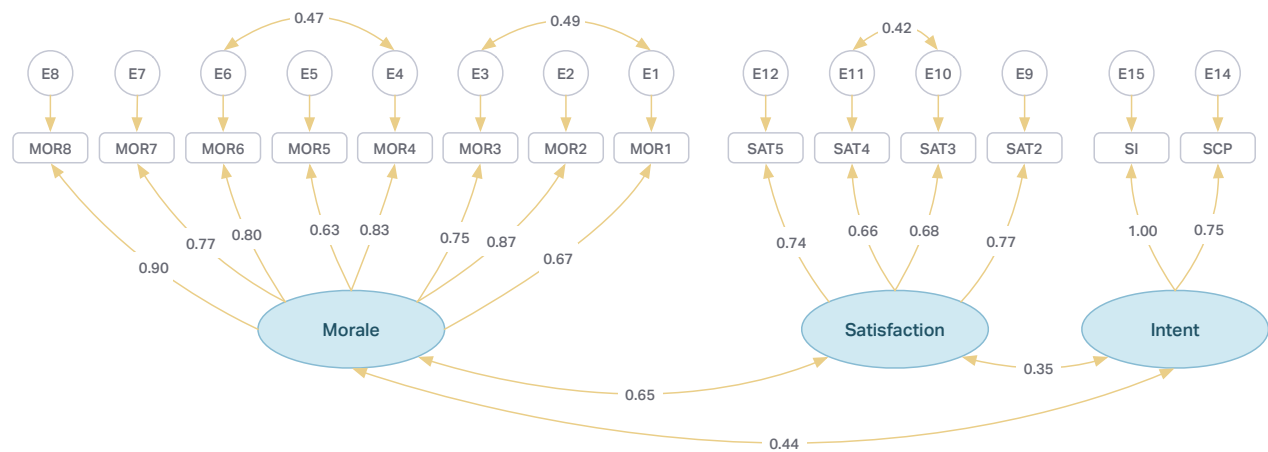


FIGURE 2 ► Final CFA Model with Standardized Estimates

SI: Intent to Stay at Institution; SCP: Intent to Stay in Current Position

to somewhere between one to three years but less than four years. Table 4 shows the mean, standard deviation, and Cronbach's alpha for the satisfaction, morale, and intention to stay variables.

Research Question One

The first research question breaks out the three latent variables (job satisfaction, morale, and intention to stay) to examine any differences by gender. The difference in job satisfaction scores between men ($M=4.35$) and women ($M=4.40$) is not significantly different with $t_{(209)}=0.622$, $p=0.267$. For morale, the scores were also not significantly different between men ($M=4.10$) and women ($M=4.16$) with $t_{(209)}=0.608$, $p=0.544$.

The last variable tested for research question one was intention to stay. Women responded to both items

with a higher response than average, indicating that they were more likely to stay more than three years in their current position and current institution. However, results showed that the differences are not significant, with $t_{(209)}=0.349$, $p=0.727$.

Research Question Two

The initial structural equation model included seven demographic variables: gender, race, years in position, salary, institution type, leadership score percentile, and mentorship. The structural equation model also included six work-life variables: career support, recognition, discrimination, working conditions, compliance, and goals. Several iterations were performed to drop variables that did not correlate or covary at a significance level of at least $p < 0.05$. All the demographic

TABLE 4 ► Latent Variable Subscale Scores

Latent Variable	Items (n)	M	SD	α
Satisfaction	4	4.38	0.60	0.830
Morale	8	4.13	0.68	0.926
Intention to Stay	2	2.91	0.96	0.859

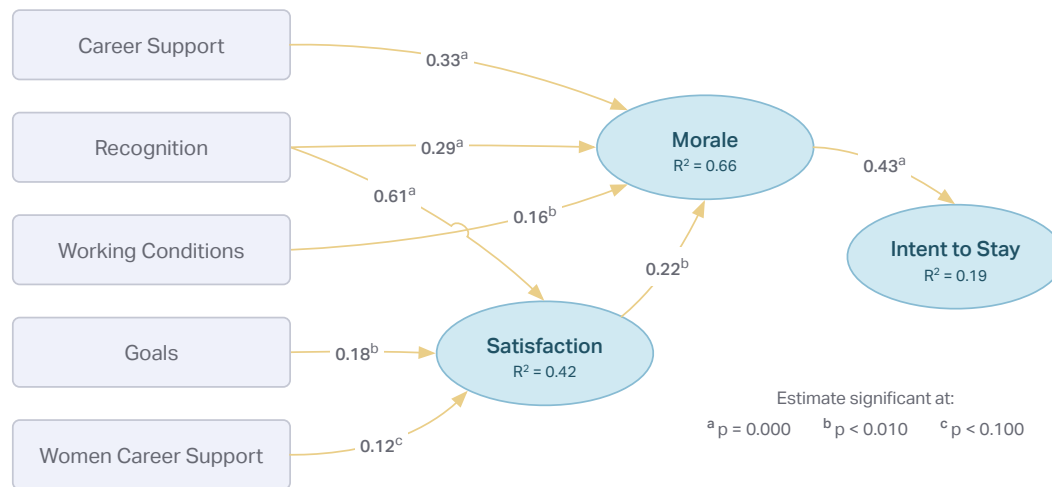


FIGURE 3 ► Final Structural Equation Model

variables fell out of the model, along with two of the work-life variables (discrimination and compliance). Interactions with the gender variable were conducted to determine if there were any factors significant for women CEMOs.

The final model had four work-life variables with significant effects. Career support, recognition, and working conditions had a significant direct effect on morale, while recognition and goals had a direct effect on satisfaction. The only significant interaction was women and career support, which had a direct effect on satisfaction. Satisfaction had a significant, direct effect on morale, but morale did not have an effect on satisfaction. Only morale had a direct effect on intention to stay. The final model with all significant paths can be found in Figure 3. The model fit indices indicate an excellent fit, with all values within acceptable parameters. The $NC=1.499$, $RMSEA=0.049$, $CFI=0.932$, and $SRMR=0.0929$.

Discussion of Findings

The outcome of this research can be summarized into four key findings that tell the story of CEMOs currently working at U.S. institutions. Overall, CEMOs have a high level of satisfaction and morale, with average scores of

4.38 and 4.13 out of 5.0, respectively. This means that the average CEMO agrees or strongly agrees to statements related to satisfaction and morale. However, the use of structural equation modeling revealed more insight into what factors impact satisfaction, morale, and intention to stay. Those insights led to the four key findings outlined below.

Key Finding #1

The most prominent finding from the structural equation modeling is that morale has the biggest impact on intention to stay. This differs from the previous study by Rosser and Javinar (2003) that found both morale and satisfaction have direct impacts on intention to stay among mid-level administrators in higher education. While often used interchangeably, for the purposes of this study, the construct of morale is related to the respondent's feelings about their institution, while the construct of satisfaction is related to the respondent's feelings about their particular job (Benge and Hickey 1984; Bowles, *et al.* 2009; Evans 1997). The items related to the morale construct measured loyalty and commitment to the institution, as well as feeling valued, treated fairly, and feeling proud. In contrast, items measuring

the satisfaction construct included questions about satisfaction with work responsibilities, freedom to make decisions, and trust and confidence of colleagues. One explanation may be that as an executive-level position, the average CEMO has high satisfaction because most CEMOs are empowered to make decisions and have earned more freedom and trust by the nature of the role. The finding may also indicate that if the institution is not a good fit, and therefore morale is low, CEMOs will leave to find a different institution. Among those stating that they plan to leave within the next three years, several commented on the fiscal policy of their institution, such as this white woman who stated, *“It has been dissatisfying that sometimes we are too fiscally conservative with our salaries and benefits...small investments in salaries and benefits go a long way in showing our workforce that we value them.”* Another white woman indicated, *“It has not always been easy to work at my institution, as we are asking people to do more with less”* while a white woman planning to leave within the next year said *“budgetary cuts and elimination of positions were not done in an effective manner hurting morale campus wide.”* It is interesting to note that salary of CEMOs was not a significant factor impacting morale or satisfaction, yet some CEMOs feel that decisions around the budget and particularly the impact on their staff can impact their morale and the morale of others.

Key Finding #2

The second key finding from this study suggests that recognition for competence is very important to CEMOs, as it had a significant impact on morale and satisfaction. The majority of CEMOs are over the age of 40 (84%) and are highly educated, with 94 percent having a master's degree or higher. They have worked an average of 23 years in higher education. The data suggests that CEMOs want to be acknowledged for their contributions and expertise and feel empowered to make decisions. This aligns to similar findings for professionals in student affairs roles (Anderson, Guido-DiBrito, and Morrell 2000; Johnsrud, Heck, and Rosser 2000; Rosser and Javinar 2003).

The recognition category included items about having positive relationships with the senior cabinet, au-

thority to make decisions, and trust and guidance from their boss. Several CEMOs commented on their relationships with their boss and other senior leaders. One younger white woman wrote that she feels recognized by *“small moments when the President has thanked me for taking on work that is beyond the enrollment scope and allowed for good conversations to happen within the cabinet.”* Other CEMOs mentioned that their senior leaders acknowledge their accomplishments publicly, such as this white woman who noted, *“My president does a good job sharing with the trustees, for example, some of the external recognition I have received through the media”* and this Black woman who commented that she received *“mentions in State of the Campus address”* that contributed to *“opportunities to lead very public projects.”* The findings suggest that institutional leadership, particularly at the president/chancellor level, can have an impact on both satisfaction and morale through deliberate actions to publicly recognize their CEMO.

Key Finding #3

The third key finding involves the interaction of gender on the structural equation model. Results show that career support has a significant impact on the experience of women CEMOs. The structural equation model suggests that career support has a significant positive direct effect on morale for both men and women, but it also has a significant positive direct effect on satisfaction only for women. Items related to career support include feeling that hiring practices and workload balance is fair; performance criteria are clear; and the institution provides support for professional development activities and career development. These findings suggest that despite achieving an executive-level position, women CEMOs may feel less confident in their skills, thus the need for additional professional development opportunities. According to one white woman, *“Funding is lacking for professional development and tools necessary to do the job, and to advance the unit”* while another white woman commented, *“The lack of financial resources has made it difficult to gain any professional development, which then makes it difficult to stay up to date on best practices.”* This finding suggests that some women CEMOs may be experiencing

imposter syndrome (Clance and Imes 1978; Sandberg 2013) and lack of confidence brought on by negative stereotypes of women leaders (Hill, *et al.* 2016; Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas, and Harrison 2008) where women's self-image is shaped by low societal expectations that define women as not being competent. Women also face microaggressions that challenge their competence. The recent report *Women in the Workplace 2021* (Burns, *et al.* 2021) found that 36 percent of senior leaders who are women reported being interrupted or spoken over more than others compared to only 15 percent of men in similar positions. Additionally, 34 percent of women leaders indicated their judgement was questioned in their area of expertise. Imposter syndrome and microaggressions are likely contributing to women feeling that they need more career support.

The other aspect of career support includes statements relating to fairness, including the statements *"the hiring practices in my unit are fair," "the workload distribution in my unit is fair,"* and *"the process for hiring external candidates is fair."* Previous research has compared the ethic of justice with the ethic of care and suggested that women leaders are more likely to display leadership traits consistent with the ethic of care (Gilligan 1993; Larrabee 1993; Shields 2017; Simola, Barling, and Turner 2010). The perception of "fair" differs when examined through the lens of ethic of care. One Hispanic woman commented, *"Workload within my unit is fair, but workload across the institution is not."* She explained further that there are other units within her institution that have more staff and fewer goals, *"yet people in [her] area are paid less and [they] have a smaller operating budget. It is hard to achieve targets when resources are so limited in [her] area."* The importance of career support on satisfaction and morale for some women is likely related to their feminist style of leadership.

Key Finding #4

The final finding for this research is the observation that no demographic factors were significantly related to morale or satisfaction. This finding contrasts with other previous research on mid-level managers that showed salary and years in the position were a signif-

icant factor (Chen, *et al.* 2006; Donaldson and Rosser 2007; Johnsrud, Heck, and Rosser 2000; Rosser and Javinar 2003). This is not surprising, however, because most CEMOs are highly paid with more years of experience than the mid-level managers in the previous research. It suggests that at the executive level, pay is less likely to impact satisfaction or morale.

This study also found no significant differences in morale, job satisfaction, and intention to stay based on gender or race and ethnicity. These findings support results found for mid-level managers (Donaldson and Rosser 2007; Rosser and Javinar 2003), chief student affairs officers (Holloway 2003), and college and university presidents (Bruns 2018). It shows that in general, careers in higher education administration appear to offer favorable conditions for women and minorities. However, this finding should be interpreted with caution, as there are still individual experiences that should be considered, such as this comment from a woman who identified as an underrepresented minority: *"My salary is about 12-15% below other executive leadership, and as much as 40% below the lowest paid white, male leader. This is a point of concern and frustration."* Others commented on experiences where they had to specifically make their position of authority known, due to assumptions based on their identities, such as this African American man who wrote, *"Unless you announce your position when on new committees or in public meetings, POC in these positions are usually mistaken for lower-level staff,"* and a white woman who shared that she has experiences *"when people assume [her] male counterparts are the authority figure or decision-maker, when [she] may be the higher-ranking leader in the meeting."* It is important to remember that only people currently serving in a CEMO role were invited to take the survey. This leaves open the possibility that gender or race and ethnicity could be a significant factor in attrition but was not accounted for because that group was not included in the survey population.

Implications for Institutions

The findings from this study suggest that all the significant factors impacting morale, job satisfaction, and intention to stay are related to actions within the insti-

tution's control. The significance of the recognition and career support work-life factors indicates that CEMOs want to be acknowledged for their contributions and expertise as well as have access to professional development opportunities. This aligns with similar findings for professionals in student affairs roles (Anderson, Guido-DiBrito, and Morrell 2000; Johnsrud, Heck, and Rosser 2000; Rosser and Javinar 2003).

Previous research has found that turnover at the highest levels of leadership can create tension and instability for senior leaders (Gaval 2009; Kolomitz 2016). According to research from Higher Education Publications, Inc., between April 2018 and March 2021, there has been turnover of 50 percent of provosts (1,691 of 3,391) and 36 percent of presidents/chancellors (1,502 of 4,135). This turnover impacts CEMOs as they struggle to adjust to new leadership. According to a woman who identifies as an underrepresented minority: *"We have new leadership on campus and that makes responding difficult. Additionally, the pandemic has made developing relationships with new leaders difficult. I expect this will improve."* A white woman commented that a *"brand new president who is difficult to read, especially in remote work environment, leaves [her] a little more uncertain than [she's] used to being."* Presidents, provosts, and other top leaders who are stepping into new roles need to be aware of the uncertainty that their presence brings and ensure they forge connections with their CEMO to understand the strategic direction of the enrollment management organization before setting new directives around recruitment, retention, and graduation goals.

Within the area of career support, CEMOs commented on their appreciation for having time to devote to professional development opportunities. One white woman said, *"I am encouraged to attend conferences and participate in accreditation work, which is important to me"* while an underrepresented minority woman commented, *"I have significant support from my campus for professional development and my campus President (who I do not report to) has nominated me to a few national professional development opportunities to prepare the next generation of college presidents."* However, an issue expressed by many CEMOs is the terminal nature of the position. The next step

for many CEMOs would be president, which several indicated is not an appealing move. The same underrepresented minority woman wrote, *"I consider, for the time being that I have limited career development/promotion opportunities (by personal choice), as I feel I have a good work life balance right now and would not want to take on more to harm that balance,"* and a white man indicated there is *"no opportunity to be promoted because [he has] no desire to be a university President."* A white woman wrote about the alternatives to a promotion by indicating, *"There aren't opportunities at my institution for promotion. I could take on related responsibilities, but not as a promotion."* Senior leaders who oversee CEMOs should ensure they are encouraged to attend conferences and other professional development activities and work with them to understand their future career plans. For some CEMOs, this could be a promotion to a higher-level role, but for others it could mean expanding responsibilities for additional departments or taking leadership roles in national organizations.

A final implication for institutions is the significance of ability to meet goals on CEMO's job satisfaction. When asked what they like least about their job, many of the responses indicated lack of resources and the stress of meeting goals. One white woman wrote, *"It can be stressful to meet the goals each term, term over term, year over year."* This was echoed by another white woman who described the *"pressure to achieve progress in all facets, even when goals conflict"* and a white man who wrote *"the job is very stressful and our success in EM is often reduced to whether or not enrollment and revenue goals have been met."* A few CEMOs shared stories about their ability to collaborate with other leaders as the best part of their job, such as this Hispanic woman who said she has a *"seat at the table to help determine best plan for a univ [sic] sustainability model"* and a white woman who enjoys *"the opportunity to collaborate across campus. [She likes] the pressure to achieve results and [she likes] having to work across campus to get things done."* It is clear that most CEMOs are high-achieving individuals who work hard but often face unrealistic expectations. Institutional leaders should ensure that CEMOs are involved with setting goals and are provided the resources necessary to be successful.

Implications for Individuals

The results from this research suggest good news for those interested in a CEMO position. None of the demographic factors were significant factors in morale or job satisfaction. This suggests that individuals of varying gender, race, salary, years of experience, leadership style, and access mentors have had positive experiences serving in a CEMO position. Morale and job satisfaction are more likely to be related to the working conditions that exist at each institution. In particular, people seeking a CEMO position should look for an institution with collaborative leaders who set reasonable goals, provide adequate resources, support their CEMO through public recognition, and provide support for professional development activities. Younger professionals who are considering a CEMO role need to be aware of the limited opportunities for promotion. CEMOs who want to advance will often need to move to another institution, which can be a challenge for some who have ties to their campus, such as this white woman who wrote, *“I do not wish to relocate until my children leave for college. I have a strong relationship with my current president and I am committed to staying in my position while the president is at the institution.”* Another white woman wrote, *“I intend to stay because I am too young to retire, this is my hometown, and it is a good place to raise my family”* while a white man wrote that he intends to stay due to *“family ties here”* and *“loyalty to this school.”*

Individuals aspiring to a CEMO role should note the importance that sponsors can have on helping to secure a position. This research found that 64 percent of the CEMO respondents had a sponsor, and only 13 percent indicated that they never had a mentor or a sponsor. When asked what motivated them to take a CEMO role, one white woman said that she *“really fell into it. Never planned on being in the chief position but happy to have a mentor who made sure that [she] was ready to step into the role”* and a Black man indicated his *“mentor motivated”* him. Younger professionals should seek out opportunities for formal and informal mentoring programs, but also make connections with senior leaders within the same institution or through professional organizations,

since sponsorship is more likely to lead to a promotion than classical mentoring (Ibarra, Carter, and Silva 2010).

In summary, this research suggests several implications for both institutions and the individuals working in CEMO positions. Senior leaders within higher education institutions need to collaborate with their CEMO and demonstrate that they trust their CEMO by giving them a voice in important decisions and publicly acknowledging their accomplishments. High turnover rates among top-level positions in higher education creates stress for CEMOs as they adjust to new leaders. New presidents and other senior leaders need to prioritize the need to establish a trusting relationship with their CEMO and avoid making swift changes without first understanding the established strategic initiatives. CEMOs need to be given opportunities for professional development and encouraged to take on new responsibilities either within the institution or externally through professional organizations. Individuals interested in pursuing a CEMO role should carefully consider the culture of the institution, such as whether the CEMO role is included as part of the president’s cabinet, the resources available to support the institution’s enrollment management operations, and the commitment to providing professional development opportunities. Individuals in a CEMO role need to consider their long-term career goals, which may require relocating geographically to take on a different CEMO role or preparing for a higher-level role such as the president.

Critique of the Study and Limitations

Clearly, any study that consists of a single survey will provide limited results in that it only presents a single snapshot in time. This is perhaps even more important to consider for this study, which took place in the winter of 2021, when most institutions were approaching one year of operations under the COVID-19 pandemic. Most institutions had transitioned to mostly remote classes, and travel bans led to the cancellation of traditional methods of student recruitment. Data from the National Student Clearinghouse showed that undergrad-

uate enrollment decreased by 4 percent for the fall 2020 semester, with freshmen enrollment declining by 16 percent overall and by 22 percent at community colleges (Sedmak 2020). At the time of the survey, many administrators were concerned about whether the declines would continue into the fall of 2021 and whether high school students would be prepared for the college environment given the disruption and transition to online learning (Field 2021). Many have also had to adjust their admissions application review process to accommodate high school students who were unable take standardized tests. When the survey was administered, many institutions were in the midst of determining long term policies for the use of standardized tests as part of the admissions process (Hoover 2021). Survey results, particularly answers to questions about the ability to meet goals and work-life questions may have been impacted by the high levels of stress and uncertainty that CEMOs had been under for the past year. It is also possible that some CEMOs may have been experiencing an improvement in work-life balance at the time they completed the survey, due to less travel and fewer events, allowing them to spend more time at home. Additional research should be conducted in a few years to capture the post-pandemic experiences of CEMOs.

It is also important to recognize that this project focused on people currently serving in the CEMO role. Additional research should be conducted on people who have recently left a CEMO position. According to the 2020 “AACRAO Career Profile Report” on chief enrollment management officers, 18 percent of respondents indicated they planned to retire as their next career move. Additional research should focus on the CEMOs who leave but do not retire. These people may have moved to another institution or taken a different type of position. Understanding their experience will be useful to determine if the same factors (career support, recognition, working conditions, and ability to meet goals) were significant in their morale, job satisfaction, and decision to leave. It may also help to understand if gender or race and ethnicity are factors for those who have left a CEMO position.

Final Remarks

This study was conducted to gain a better understanding of CEMOs and their experiences. It is clear from the comments that many CEMOs are passionate about helping students succeed and are willing to work in stressful conditions because they feel they are making a difference. When asked what motivated them to move into a CEMO position, responses included *“opportunity to influence mission,” “opportunity to work with great students and stakeholders,” “drive policy development and affect institution-wide change,”* and *“opportunity to help students pursue their dreams and set them up for success.”* As far as the best part of their job, CEMOs replied with *“helping students transcend to upper ward mobility,” “bringing more students to college who would otherwise not have the opportunity,”* and *“realizing that helping students enroll in college is a step in helping them achieve their goals.”* One white woman replied, *“Watching the life of the student. Recruiting a kid that didn’t think they were necessarily college material and then watching them succeed and walk across the stage to graduate a [sic] four or five years later.”*

High turnover among CEMOs means that there is a plethora of openings for the next generation of leaders who want to be at the forefront of crafting policies that will impact the future of higher education and social mobility. On average, current CEMOs have high job satisfaction and morale, regardless of race, gender, years of experience, and type of institution. Younger professionals seeking a CEMO role should look for a position that values collaboration and direct access to the highest levels of leadership, ideally as a direct report to the president or member of the president’s cabinet. This study shows promising results for women and minorities, who have traditionally been underrepresented in these roles. Hiring practices for those looking to fill CEMO roles need to be expanded to include a diverse set of candidates. Well-supported CEMOs of all genders, races, and ages can find satisfaction in a career that allows them to make deep and equitable change that will have a transforming effect on their communities and the greater society.

Appendix

TABLE 5 ► Mean Scores of Work-Life Items

Item Text	Mean	SD	Item Text	Mean	SD
Recognition for Competence	4.09	0.68	Discrimination	1.88	0.68
I am given recognition for my contributions	4.05	0.90	I have experienced racial/ethnic stereotyping at my institution	2.12	1.26
I am given recognition for my expertise	4.01	0.96	I have experienced racial/ethnic harassment at my institution	1.59	0.79
There is sufficient guidance from my boss	3.74	1.14	I have experienced racial/ethnic discrimination at my institution	1.66	0.88
I feel a high degree of trust from my boss	4.11	1.03	I have experienced gender stereotyping at my institution	2.62	1.34
I receive feedback on my performance	3.83	1.05	I have experienced sexual harassment at my institution	1.56	0.87
I have the authority to make decisions	4.33	0.79	I have experienced discrimination at my institution based upon my gender	1.93	1.13
I have a positive relationship with senior cabinet members	4.34	0.80	I have experienced stereotyping at my institution based on my age	2.17	1.23
There is strong leadership at my institution	3.93	1.09	I have experienced harassment based upon my age	1.56	0.81
I feel the pressure to perform	4.45	0.83	I have experienced discrimination based upon my age	1.71	0.98
Career Support Items	3.86	0.62	Compliance	3.53	0.67
I am given support for professional activities	4.22	0.84	Federal government mandates increase my workload	3.78	1.05
I have opportunities for career development	3.99	0.96	Compliance with state policies and procedures affects my workload	3.90	0.98
The hiring practices in my unit are fair	4.34	0.76	Bureaucratic red tape hampers my effectiveness	3.63	1.05
There are clear performance criteria outlined for my job	3.87	0.99	Program reviews increase my unit's effectiveness	3.23	0.96
The workload distribution in my unit is fair	3.53	0.97	Budget reviews increase my unit's effectiveness	3.10	0.98
I have the opportunity to be promoted at my institution	2.96	1.3			
The process for hiring external candidates is fair	4.13	0.84			
Working Conditions	3.94	0.58			
My unit receives adequate resources	3.27	1.16			
The reputation of my institution with the public is an asset to me	3.84	0.99			
I am satisfied with my salary	3.59	1.07			
My physical work environment is adequate	4.26	0.80			
My access to parking is adequate	4.51	0.70			
Benefits and retirement plans meet my expectations	4.15	0.92			

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