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Observable Evidence and Partnership Possibilities for Governing Board Involvement in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: A Content Analysis

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Abstract
Researchers conducted a qualitative content analysis to investigate the observable involvement of 22 Governing Boards with Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts at colleges and universities. Using a merged theoretical framework of Rall et al.'s (Journal of Education Human Resources 38:139–164, 2020) Culturally Sustaining Governance and LePeau's (The Review of Higher Education 39:97–122, 2015) Cycle of Making Continuous Commitments to Diversity and Inclusion, the findings revealed that Boards act in similar ways to an electrical socket between internal and external stakeholders associated with DEI efforts. Boards receive information from stakeholders at points in time and episodically 'plug in' to DEI efforts such as endorsing policies or diversity plans. The study highlights the nature and potential of governance partnerships to advance DEI work. Implications encourage Boards to enhance their capacity to partner and support organizational change.

Keywords Administration · Diversity · Equity · Governance · Higher education

Introduction

Governing Boards (hereafter Boards), faculty, administrators, and students have important roles to play in cultivating colleges and universities that dutifully address multiple outcomes, the hallmark of shared governance (American Association of University Professors, 1966; Minor, 2006). Boards are responsible, by carrying out their fiduciary duties (Commodore et al., 2021), for safeguarding colleges and universities by helping them realize their mission and securing long-term financial sustainability (Bastedo, 2009b; Chait et al., 2005; McGuinness, 2016). While college and university mission statements regularly

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espouse themes of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) (Morphew & Hartley, 2006), how Boards position themselves to be involved in this aspect of an institution's mission remains relatively under-investigated. Bastedo's (2005, 2009a, b) series of studies on Massachusetts' system Board illustrated that a Board could be highly engaged with a wide array of policies within a context, what he then coined as an 'institutional entrepreneurship' approach to activist Boards. However, much has evolved in the DEI landscape since the early 2000s (Hurtado et al., 2012; Jayakumar et al., 2018; Museus, 2014; Renn, 2020). Researchers have yet to examine how Boards engage with these issues within the political and social environments heightened by the Trump administration.

Based on the findings of this study, to best summarize the dynamics between Boards and DEI work within and beyond institutions, we introduce the metaphor of Boards playing the role of *electrical sockets* in an institution's efforts to advance DEI work. The purpose of an electrical socket is to serve as a bridge between a power source and an appliance that has been fitted with the correct plug to work in its dedicated socket. When an electrical socket is operating effectively, it receives a plug and facilitates a connection between the appliance and an overarching power supply. Similarly, Boards can function like electrical sockets, meaning they have access to power and can facilitate the flow of resources, energizing a DEI initiative to fulfill its goals of creating cultural transformation to support all institutional stakeholders. The transference of power and resources from a Board coupled with insights, expertise, and day-to-day management from other DEI leaders operates as a form of organizational partnering that can facilitate the realization of desired outcomes and institutional transformation. However, for this metaphorical electrical "partnership" to work optimally and sustainably, the connecting points between the Board and other stakeholders must have a proper fit, free from interference between stakeholders or disruptions internal to the Board. Our findings show that this proper fitting is difficult to materialize. Therefore, DEI stakeholders seek and develop alternative ways to energize their work and merely acknowledge that Boards and their power exist but do not regularly "plug in".

Further, although Boards are agentic in many of their other fiduciary roles, the history and current demographic makeup (i.e., race, class, gender) of Boards renders them relatively less agentic in being effective in leading or strategically advising around complex DEI matters. The outcome of this dynamic is that a Board's potential in DEI work remains unmet, under-utilized, or disproportionately shouldered by certain trustees. In addition, the "alternative power sources" (e.g., student activism, curricular changes, DEI committees) that DEI stakeholders do seek to engage have institutional power that is structurally different from Boards and relatively finite in its ability to make transformational change around DEI issues at an institution without Boards being plugged in. As a result, we conclude that this dynamic is one plausible reason for why institutional DEI work remains episodic and siloed (Hurtado et al., 2012; Jayakumar et al., 2018; Museus, 2014; Renn, 2020), since the "energy" (i.e., institutional power) that is often tapped to promote DEI work does not substantively engage the power that emanates from the Board, nor do Boards substantively engage in DEI work.

To best situate the utility of the electrical socket metaphor, we first define key concepts relevant to this study. The literature review identifies relevant stakeholders in the DEI space that have shown the capacity to connect with Boards. However, more often than not, the literature points out that the stakeholders that make up the DEI ecosystem within and beyond institutions are fragmented from each other. As a result of this fragmentation, DEI efforts often fall short of generating lasting organizational change. Yet, given how Boards are positioned at the boundary of institutions and their fiduciary scope that spans all university functions, their potential as an electrical socket to synergize and sustain DEI efforts looms

large. To best accentuate and conceptualize this latent role of Boards, we combine and introduce two theories (LePeau, 2015; Rall et al., 2020) that help us depict both normative governance approaches to DEI and the potential that exists when partnerships between Boards and stakeholders are functioning optimally.

Key Terms

Given the far-reaching but ill-defined nature of Board activity, we briefly operationalize the DEI concepts for this study. By diversity, we refer to individual and collective efforts of:

> "working across and valuing differences in social identities including but not limited to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, ability, gender, religion, and sexual orientation. Diversity work also means recognizing that these differences are embedded in multiple structural inequities such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism" (LePeau et al., 2018, p. 126).

When referring to equity, we focus on achieving educational outcomes in ways that consider the various sociocultural elements that impede or propel student success on multiple levels (Rall et al., 2020). Finally, by inclusion, we mean efforts geared towards "creating welcoming campus environments for students, faculty, and staff from different backgrounds" (LePeau et al., 2018, p. 126).

Study Rationale: Sifting Through Different Perceptions of DEI–Governing Boards v. Everyone Else

Also harkening the need to study Board involvement in DEI efforts is the prevailing perception that Board members feel their institutions already embrace DEI. A recent survey by the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) (2020b) found that a majority of Trustees believed their institution (or system) is welcoming for diverse groups of students, specifically people of color (89%) and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer students (70%). Further, only about 5% of Trustees at public institutions and 4% of Trustees at private, nonprofit institutions noted an equity issue (i.e., "equal access to higher education") as a topic that "concerns" them the most "about the future of higher education in the US" (AGB, 2020b, p. 5).

Trustees' positive outlook and low concern for DEI issues stand in contrast to national studies that highlight students' experiences and present data replete with accounts of how students with minoritized identities continue to face challenges and obstacles at colleges and universities (Gopalan & Brady, 2020). This disconnect is especially troubling because student demographic trends in the US show the transformation of who has and will need access to and retention within institutions along dimensions of race, class, gender, and sexuality (Grawe, 2018; Renn, 2020). Furthermore, shifting state and federal demands placed on institutions relate broadly to student success, which often directly intersect with DEI concerns such as graduation rates by race, first-generation status, and income levels (Hillman et al., 2015).

Though Boards do not engage an institution's day-to-day operations, their decision-making processes and the policies constructed to implement those decisions can inform those operations (Bastedo, 2005, 2009a, b; Hartley, 2002; Hillman et al.,

2015; Kezar, 2006; Kezar & Eckel, 2004; McGuinness, 2016; Minor, 2006; Tierney & Rall, 2018). Consequently, understanding how Boards collaborate with other stakeholders of college and university's DEI efforts builds on a lineage of scholarship that centers robust partnerships as an effective approach to foster desirable organizational change that can address DEI concerns (Kezar et al., 2007; LePeau, 2015, 2018; LePeau et al., 2018, 2019; Stanley et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the DEI literature that focuses on structural approaches and stakeholders does not delve into the role of the Board in partnerships for DEI work (Hurtado et al., 2012; Jayakumar et al., 2018; Museus, 2014; Renn, 2020). Further, most literature on Boards does not delve into their role in DEI efforts (Rall et al., 2018, 2020).

Thus, we position our qualitative content analysis study to help explore what Boards are or are not doing to partner with internal and external stakeholders to advance institutional DEI efforts. The research questions that guided our study were:

- At colleges and universities that have been recognized for their DEI efforts, in what observable ways are the institutions' Governing Board involved?
- What is the nature of partnerships for Governing Boards' DEI work within colleges and universities?

The findings of this study aid in informing how Boards currently engage as actors in institutional DEI work and point to opportunities for them to advance this work within the scope of their fiduciary duty (Commodore et al., 2021) and shared governance (Minor, 2006).

Literature Review

DEI Partnerships: How Institutions Advance the Work

Scholars have generated a robust body of scholarship over the last 40 years, focusing on stakeholders other than Boards, who have worked to advance DEI efforts (Hurtado et al., 2012). Existing literature commonly discusses DEI stakeholders that include student activists, student affairs divisions and professionals, faculty, presidents, President's Council of Diversity (PCD), Bias Response Teams (BRTs), and Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs). We highlight this literature because it is critical to illuminate that institutional stakeholders have the capacity to partner with each other. By differentiating between structural and stakeholder approaches to DEI work, we identify the need to rely on theory to conceptually bridge and set up our study at the intersection of Boards, shared governance, and DEI. We differentiate structural from stakeholder approaches to DEI by revising Hannan and Freemen's (1984) conceptualization of organizational structure. They identify structures of an organization as hierarchical layers that vary in responsiveness to internal and external dynamics and focus on: (1) an organization's stated goals, which we operationalize as mission statements that include DEI concerns; (2) forms of authority, distinguished by different stakeholders; (3) core technologies, or what we describe as policies and programs; (4) and marketing strategy, or what we define as the different constituents of colleges and universities (i.e., students, staff, faculty, administrators, and localities).

Structural Approaches

Diversity plans provide an opportunity for colleges and universities to address DEI efforts in measurable and accountable ways across organizational subcultures (Iverson, 2007; Kezar, 2007; Kezar & Eckel, 2008; Stanley et al., 2019). Notably, the institutionalization of a diversity plan rests on connection to broader aims such as the institutions' mission (Hartley, 2002; LePeau, 2015), resource commitments (Kezar, 2007), and buy-in from cross-institutional actors and leadership (Kezar et al., 2007; LePeau et al., 2019). However, research highlights that particularly when it comes to strategic planning or responses to DEI crises, the plans must be supported and resourced in tangible ways by institutional leadership to be successful (Andrade & Lundberg, 2020; Iverson, 2007; Squire et al., 2019).

As a result of the variability in how goals are set and plans resourced, institutional DEI initiatives manifest in a spectrum of broad to targeted approaches. For instance, approaches to addressing representational diversity included the increased and focused recruitment of underrepresented groups across the institution (Hurtado et al., 2012). Addressing diversity from a more interactional approach included initiatives such as curriculum diversity requirements and structured co-curricular activities to encourage interactions across dimensions of difference (e.g., Jayakumar et al., 2018; Museus, 2014). Though diversity plans attempt to institutionalize and make a more long-term impact on DEI outcomes, there is little empirical evidence of the Board's contribution to these efforts.

Stakeholders

Institutional agents and the groups that coordinate their efforts are essential to constructing, executing, and implementing DEI initiatives at colleges and universities. Though the case can be made for various entities to be considered institutional DEI stakeholders, we will focus on the most research entities for the scope of this literature review. Student activists, student affairs divisions, faculty, presidents, PCDs, and CDOs have all been identified as fundamental institutional stakeholders in advancing DEI initiatives.

Student Activists Historically and contemporarily, student activists and grassroots leader have served as catalysts to institutional change regarding DEI (Morgan & Davis, 2019; Wheatle & Commodore, 2019). When institutional leaders fail to address student issues, specifically those of marginalized students, students are compelled to engage in activities to bring attention to their issues, becoming part of the web of institutional agents advancing campus DEI initiatives. However, concerns loom around the academic and intrapersonal toll these efforts take on student activists and the responsibility for other stakeholders to not burden students with improving their lived realities (Linder et al., 2019).

Academic and Student Affairs Like student activists, academic and student affairs administrative staff often facilitate change towards DEI goals (LePeau, 2018; Renn, 2020). Through tactics such as organizing extra-curricular intellectual opportunities, creating professional development, leveraging curricula and using classrooms as forums, working with and mentoring students, hiring like-minded social activists, garnering resources and support, using data to tell a story, joining and utilizing existing networks, and partnering with key external stakeholders these grassroots leaders increase a campus' capacity to advance in the area of

DEI (Kezar et al., 2011; Museus & Neville, 2012). One of the consistent diversity initiatives connected to academic affairs relates to curriculum diversity requirements (Bowman, 2010). Considering the role of faculty in developing and delivering curriculum, they prove quintessential actors in DEI work on a campus. However, extending diversity initiatives in scope from curriculum to other campus-wide initiatives a more intricate web of collaboration is necessary (Kezar et al., 2007; LePeau, 2015).

In short, having a robust network of institutional agents working towards improving DEI within an institution can aid in connecting minoritized students to the support networks and resources to facilitate their success (Hurtado et al., 2012; Jayakumar et al., 2018; Museus, 2014; Renn, 2020). However, the extant to which these efforts engender transformational change in structural ways, remains elusive.

Presidents and PCDs To harken more structural changes, research highlights that presidents play a role as institutional leaders with authoritative power and as vision-setters prioritizing DEI work, including facilitating partnerships across organizational cultures (Kezar et al., 2007; LePeau et al., 2019). Often sitting ex officio on Boards, the president's engagement in DEI work is especially relevant to our inquiry. Accordingly, an overwhelming majority of college presidents think it is very important or important to review policies that seek to eliminate gender (89%) and racial bias (95%) at their institution (American Council on Education, 2017). Similarly, 56% of college presidents view the prioritization of organizational racial climate as more important now than in 2013 (American Council on Education, 2017). This concern is often manifested in the establishment of President's Councils of Diversity (PCDs) and Bias Response Teams (BRTs). "Presidents use councils to enact networked movement toward meeting diversity and social justice agendas (LePeau et al., 2019, p. 124)." These PCDs and BRTs contribute to DEI work in their unique ways.

PCDs and BRTs are a committee of diversity stakeholders who come together to shape and implement a shared plan regarding the institution's future relative to diversity and a committee of institutional actors who address reported incidents of bias experienced by campus constituents, respectively (LePeau et al., 2016; Miller et al., 2018). LePeau et al. (2019) found that PCDs use strategies associated with mobilization and implementation that better position them toward institutionalizing DEI at their institutions. PCDs also provide the opportunity for academic affairs (AA) and student affairs (SA) divisions to partner to advance DEI initiatives (LePeau et al., 2019). In the last decade, presidents and CDOs have been instrumental in establishing PCDs as boundary-spanning councils that can synergize stakeholder expertise and experience in unique ways to realize DEI goals (LePeau et al., 2018, 2019). This line of inquiry serves as an example of the possibility of collaborative partnerships intended to foster organizational change.

Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) Furthermore, one of the most visible and widely researched DEI stakeholders is the Chief Diversity Officer (CDOs), a position that varies by institutional rank, support staff infrastructure, reporting processes, and funding (Leon, 2014; Stanley et al., 2019). The CDO is probably the institutional agent most visible and widely recognized to be involved in pushing forward an institution's DEI initiatives. As diversity grew as an espoused concern and value of institutions, the trend of hiring CDOs grew (Wilson, 2013). Though a member of the web of institutional agents, working closely with other administrative leaders in advancing DEI initiatives on campus, there can be a tendency to view the CDO as the sole authority on creating a campus that embraces diversity (Kezar, 2008; Wilson, 2013; Worthington et al., 2014). As the CDO position has grown as an insti-

tutional trend, how CDOs ascend to their role and the scope of their responsibilities differ across institutional contexts. Though the CDO is often tasked with the strategic planning and overall coordination of DEI initiatives, research is clear that their leadership must be supported and resourced to succeed (Stanley et al., 2019; Worthington et al., 2014).

The Role and Influence of Organizational Culture

The feature that connects structural and stakeholder DEI efforts hinges on the notion of organizational culture (Tierney, 1988). Culture is signaled through the way institutions articulate and communicate priorities to internal and external constituencies through mission statements, the budgeting processes, advocacy activities, and policymaking (Ayers, 2005; Hillman et al., 2015; Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Tierney, 1988). For instance, Morphew and Hartley (2006) found 'diversity' to be one of the most frequently included elements of mission statements. Though many institutions tout diversity, as salient to institutional identity, these proclamations do not always align with the cultural enactments of the institution.

One reason for the tension between espoused and enacted organizational culture around DEI is the lack of nuance and conflation between overlapping but distinct concepts (i.e., shared governance, campus climate, leadership organizational culture, DEI work, etc.). Unpacking this conflation starts to reveal why the intersection of governance and DEI work potentially lacks depth. In part, Boards are not always consistently and specifically located as institutional leaders or part of the shared governance apparatus. Nor are they located in campus climate and organizational culture concerns because of their absence from the everyday institutional experiences. However, we build on scholars that have attempted to discuss how culture impacts DEI work and, more specifically, the entities which operationalize DEI work. Guiffrida et al. (2011) highlight how institutional leanings towards collectivism versus individualism influence an institutional approach to DEI work. Though Guiffrida et al. (2011) focus on how students' individual cultural standpoints interact with the institution, the opportunity is present to expand upon this and understand how these cultural viewpoints impact the nature of institutional DEI partnerships.

Kezar (2011) goes a step further by discussing the role shared leadership can play in DEI work. Kezar (2011) posits that institutions that hold a non-collaborative culture often lead to frustration and departure of institutional agents committed to DEI work. This non-collaborative environment also nullifies the impact of the work due to the inability to collaborate with other like-minded agents. To shift this environment, Kezar et al, (2011) present the idea of shared leadership, wherein the coordinated grassroots efforts of faculty and staff leaders converge with top-down leadership efforts with persons holding more formal power. This form of shared leadership aids in creating an institutional culture where the support systems and structures formal leaders put in place can be taken advantage of by grassroots leadership (Kezar, 2011; Kezar et al., 2011). These institutional cultures are ones that best support the work of DEI partnerships. Likewise, for campuses attempting to shift to organizational cultures to be more conducive to DEI partnerships, this approach to shared leadership has the potential to shift environments (Kezar, 2011).

Understanding the intricacies of organizational culture and their relationship to creating institutions conducive to and that thrive in the areas of DEI work is essential. Literature speaks to the vital role that grassroots, committed efforts of faculty, staff, students, and CDOs play in accomplishing DEI work. However, research also highlights the important role those in formal institutional leadership positions play in collaborative efforts to

establish an institutional culture that normalizes a shared approached to DEI work. However, when attempting to understand how formal leaders do or do not engage in this way, the Board's normative role warrants further exploration.

The Role of the Board

To accentuate the absence of Board engagement with DEI issues in the empirical literature, we briefly summarize what the majority of scholarship about Boards over the last 30 years has documented. Historically, the foremost mission of colleges and universities, and by extension, the Board's primary task, was to serve the public good (Hartley, 2002; McGuinness, 2016; Morphew & Hartley, 2006). In more recent years, many Boards have focused their energies on responding to a competitive marketplace by attending to issues such as student enrollment and retention, expanding access, institutional effectiveness, fiscal solvency, as well as other operational issues such as adhering to regulatory policies and identifying new funding sources (AGB, 2020a; Bastedo, 2009a; Hillman et al., 2015; Morgan et al., 2020). Little empirical evidence examines whether Boards have tried to advance these seemingly non-DEI concerns through organizational partnerships. We concede that the normative posture towards the Board has been to consider them on the institutional periphery and in a primiarily resource dependency role (Slaughter et al., 2014).

In contrast to the plethora of reports that seek to guide Board practice on a wide range of issues from an anecdotal perspective (e.g., AGB, 2020a; Eckel & Trower, 2016), the empirical research has focused on a narrower set of topics disentangled from our concept of organizational partnering oriented towards DEI. For instance, some studies illuminate Trustees' dual affiliations and social networks as a way of highlighting the different financial and informational resources Trustees access and potentially leverage to support institutional outcomes such as knowledge production and entrepreneurial activities (Barringer et al., 2019; Pusser et al., 2006; Slaughter et al., 2014). Additionally, studies have highlighted the critical function of Boards in presidential selection (Commodore, 2018; Hartley, 2002) and their involvement in shared governance (Eckel, 2000; Kezar, 2006; Minor, 2006; Tierney & Rall, 2018).

Though explored more expansively in the corporate and nonprofit management literature (Johnson et al., 2013), a smaller amount of research takes up Board's demographic composition at colleges and universities (Barringer & Riffe, 2018; Rall & Orué, 2020). This research strand is relevant to DEI concerns because Boards continue to be made up of mostly wealthy white men. As the AGB (2020b) poll notes, just 30% of college and university Trustees identified as women. Likewise, only 17% of Trustees on public Boards and 11% of Trustees on private Boards identified as a person of color, when excluding minority-serving institutions from the totals.

Finally, Boards' internal operations are an essential consideration. However, only a handful of empirical studies provide insight into these dynamics (Bastedo, 2005, 2009a, b; Chait et al., 2005; Holland et al., 1989; Taylor et al., 1991). Another example related to Boards' operation is Trustee on-boarding, Trustee training, and Board self-assessment (AGB, 2020a; Bobowick & Schwartz, 2018). However, this body of work often cuts across the range of issues that Boards navigate and has not narrowed into specifics about how Boards engage DEI work or partner with other stakeholders (Eckel & Trower, 2016).

Only recently have a few scholars begun to explore the terrain of Boards and DEI issues. These studies take the approach of analyzing and recommending that Boards orient themselves to best support DEI efforts (Commodore et al., 2021; Rall & Orué, 2020; Rall et al.,

2018, 2020). Consequently, these studies lack a focus on how Boards navigate shared governance realities and work to partner with other stakeholders on these issues. Therefore, while we know a good deal about the work of Boards, their composition, and how they define their roles, we know little about their role in addressing specific and dynamic institutional priorities of colleges and universities, such as DEI issues. This constitutes a notable gap in the literature, which this study begins to fill by focusing on DEI partnerships and Boards. Although scholars sometimes nominally invoke Boards in DEI efforts, they are rarely framed as collaborators or partners. As scholars establish the task of achieving and working towards equity as a fiduciary duty (Commodore et al., 2021; Rall et al., 2020), understanding Boards' role in DEI issues proves a critical element to a fuller understanding of institutional commitments and processes in achieving equitable institutions. To locate Boards in a similar collaborative potential for their engagement in DEI work, we merge two theories, one from the vantage point of Boards and one from the vantage point of institutional stakeholders.

Theoretical Framework

Scholars suggest that organizational leaders need to make decisions with the requisite knowledge about the organizational culture to enact lasting DEI change (e.g., Museus & LePeau, 2020; Tierney, 1988). Therefore, a theoretical framework that pushes Boards to take responsibility for their role in DEI and acknowledges the organizational culture viewpoints they work in is needed. The proposition that guides the design of our framework is that Boards need to deepen their DEI capacity to optimally facilitate the interplay between internal and external constituents that disrupt inequitable policies and practices and seek to create conditions for minoritized student populations to thrive. Consequently, this study draws on a merged theoretical framework of Rall et al.'s (2020) Culturally Sustaining Governance (CSG) and LePeau's (2015) Cycle of Continuous Commitments to Diversity and Inclusion. Overarchingly, these theories highlight the potential of Boards partnering to create a pervasive campus culture where the organizing principle is based on equity. Put simply, suppose CSG, a mind-set and tool that empowers Trustees to prioritize knowledge, skills, and abilities that cultivate equity, is enacted by a Board. In this case, a defining feature of a Board engaging in CSG would be the extent to which the Board is participating in organizational partnerships that sustain and facilitate the transformation of the campus culture that centers equity.

The Board's Potential in DEI Work: Towards Culturally Sustaining Governance

Rall et al.'s (2020) framework is based on Boards embracing four culturally sustaining tenets: Equity Knowledge, Value of Equity, Motivation for Equity, and Sociopolitical Consciousness. Equity knowledge refers to the Board's understanding of the organizational differences between equality and equity, being informed by disaggregated data to understand equity gaps, and a longitudinal view of equity as an ever-evolving process rather than an achievable goal. Boards have the opportunity to use their equity knowledge to help architect plans and connect their knowledge of equity to institutional mission and the crafting of guiding documents (e.g., strategic plans). Value of equity relates to trustees and Boards valuing equity for equity's sake and prioritizing it over or infusing it within the competing interests that the Board engages (i.e., resource management, presidential evaluation, etc.).

Related, sociopolitical consciousness refers to the Board's understanding the implication of their (in)actions for minoritized stakeholders. This tenet speaks to the need for sustained training and development around persistent and emerging DEI issues (Rall et al., 2020). The way sociopolitical consciousness remains solely within the Board's collective domain is a point of divergence between LePeau's (2015) model and CSG (Rall et al., 2020). This divergence stems from how Boards wield considerable decision-making power, different from SA and AA's unique locus of control.

Finally, motivation for equity illuminates the "why" behind Board actions for equity. Rall et al. (2020) noted, "sometimes the motivation for equitable outcomes coincides with efforts to improve institutional rankings; other times it is a jarring awakening based on injustices at the institution that go viral, or it can simply be a response to one or two Board members championing a cause" (p. 148). Motivation is tied to both individual emphasis and collective consciousness.

Rall et al. (2020) suggested that when the Board is cultivating and enacting each tenet, the Board's propensity to be an initiator or catalyst of change is heightened. When only a couple or none of the tenets are being operationalized, there is an increased likelihood that the Board could serve as a barrier or inhibitor to equity work. Since CSG locates the Board as the ultimate decision-making authority, the framing around initiator/catalyst or barrier/inhibitor overlooks the *process* of how Boards should approach partnerships with internal and external stakeholders. We anticipate that if the Board is exhibiting dimensions of CSG (Rall et al., 2020), then that will lead to the Board engaging in LePeau's (2015) cycle in observable ways to address DEI issues.

The Potential of Pervasive Partnerships in DEI Work: Making Continuous Commitments to DEI

LePeau (2015) contextualized barriers to a partnership that are both seen and unseen in AA and SA's organizational cultures. LePeau argued that the normative separation between the two is related to "the premise that AA and SA are rewarded differently, that is, more often faculty are rewarded for working in isolation through individual scholarly pursuits for the tenure and promotion process while SA are rewarded for working collaboratively" (p. 99). This initial premise draws attention to the different organizational cultures within colleges and universities and is a salient issue concerning the unique organizational culture of Boards and other institutional stakeholders. Rall et al. (2020) argued, while drawing on principal-agent theory (Lane, 2006), that if the Board changes its principals and practice with equity at the center, the structures and strategies of a Board need to change as well. LePeau's (2015) model provides insight into *how* to disrupt and change the Board's engagement with stakeholders in order for the Board to meet the needs of an institution differently.

In response to forces that perpetuate intra-organizational separation, LePeau qualitatively examined exemplar institutions endeavoring to bridge SA and AA separation to advance DEI goals. LePeau's (2015) findings revealed three types of partnership pathways between AA and SA departments at the participating institutions, complementary, coordinated, and pervasive. Complementary partnerships connoted "they [SA] do things and we [AA] do things," coordinated explains increased collaboration between the entities and the navigation of power and naming contradictions or inequities in the culture of the environment (p. 113). Pervasive partnerships blurred the lines the most between SA and AA to where the institution's operating culture was transformed and the ability to address DEI issues enhanced. This insight was

based on the depth of collaboration among the groups and how they navigated a recurring cycle of making commitments to advance towards tangible DEI outcomes instead of isolated goal setting and accomplishments. We now turn to the utility and limits of applying each of these pathways to the potential of Boards partnering with other stakeholders.

LePeau (2015) suggested that issues of exclusion (e.g., a hate crime or a dearth of faculty of color) brewing are "precipitating factors" to inciting the critical influences in the cycle and building DEI partnerships (p. 108). It is unclear whether Boards are equally aware of exclusion issues. Per the AGB (2020b) Index, Boards often report the organizational climate as fine for minoritized students. However, other research has shown that DEI related issues quickly engulf an institution and become the concern of institutional leadership (Andrade & Lundberg, 2020; Squire et al., 2019). This component of the model highlights the potential for Boards to be involved and partner with other stakeholders if there is clarity around the DEI factors that precede their coupling.

Once an exclusion issue arises, SA and AA looked to institutional documents around mission and vision to provide cues on how to respond. Boards are primarily responsible for enhancing and promoting the institution's mission (Hartley, 2002; McGuinness, 2016). However, there is no clear insight into how this gets operationalized into normative Board practices. Nevertheless, this factor highlights stakeholders' propensity to engage guiding documents when looking to respond to DEI concerns and collaborate.

Another noteworthy influence on partnerships was the role of positional leaders and social gadflies. In terms of gadflies, these are individuals who are capable of driving DEI transformation and partnerships because they hold positional power (or not) but are persistent in calling out inequities, respected by campus constituents, and advance DEI work (LePeau, 2018). LePeau (2015) also found that outside groups (e.g., membership associations) committed to DEI collaborated as catalysts for SA and AA partnerships.

Theoretical Integration

Taken together, LePeau's (2015) model points to the need to intentionally explore how institutional subcultures (whether it be academic affairs, student affairs, or Board culture) related to the prospect of realizing an organizationally pervasive commitment to DEI (Rall et al., 2020) facilitated by the development of collaborations across subcultures. However, as the literature review and recent survey highlights, it would be unfounded to assume that Boards are even open to cultural transformation towards equity. LePeau's (2015) cycle's primary crux is that while it does not suggest all stakeholders are willing participants in the partnership, some hyper-involved individuals and engaged leadership can move the needle. Therefore, it is necessary to both understand current Board norms and imagine how a DEI focused Board might operate to bring about institutional transformation (Hurtado et al., 2012; Jayakumar et al., 2018; Museus, 2014; Renn, 2020)—thereby starting the process of redefining shared governance dynamics and the understood role of the Board's fiduciary duty (Commodore et al, 2021).

Research Design

Methodology

Ruwhiu and Cone (2010) define pragmatism in organizational research as one that "within a given theoretical framework, conclusions are justified and confirmed by an appeal to *forward looking* and experiential empiricism. A position that looks to consequents rather than antecedents and it is through our participation that we construct meaning" (p. 112). As noted, we are equally interested in examining how Boards operate and want to be imaginative in a forward looking way towards what governance for equity could be. Inherent in this forward-looking posture of pragmatism is the need to understand Boards and the organizational milieu generated by stakeholders they engage with around DEI work. Therefore, in designing a study that addresses the research question, it was imperative to frame our study in an approach that was epistemologically flexible in terms of having a balanced concern for describing what is and shedding light on what could be or the consequences of (in) action—which is consistent with the pragmatic epistemology tradition (Ruwhiu & Cone, 2010). We acknowledge there are multiple interpretations of data and foreground the need to emphasize issues of power given the traditional nature of the Boards' roles (Ruwhiu & Cone, 2010).

To ensure coherence between our pragmatic epistemological stance and our specific research approach, we selected qualitative content analysis (QCA) as the method for this study because we wanted a mechanism for "systematically describing the meaning of qualitative data" (Schreier, 2014, p. 2). Qualitative content analysis is distinctive from other forms of qualitative analysis (e.g., qualitative media analysis (Altheide & Schneider, 2012) because it reduces data to key ideas focused on description, is systematic in terms of process, and flexible in its applicability to engaging different forms of qualitative data sources (Schreier, 2014). Also noteworthy is that QCA is an especially compatible method with our two-pronged theoretical framework because QCA is oriented as an approach to analysis that is "ontologically and epistemologically 'naive'" (Schreier, 2014, p. 15). This means we could leverage QCA's focus on systematically describing data while also foregrounding our theoretical proposition.

In particular, Schreier (2014) suggests that QCA "typically combines varying portions of concept-driven and data-driven categories within any one coding frame. At the same time, a part of the categories should always be data-driven…" (p. 3). Accordingly, LePeau's framework, focused on partnerships to transform organizations, provided initial concepts to orient our analysis towards a pragmatic understanding of partnerships between subcultures within institutions and organizational change processes. At the same time, Rall et al. (2020) shaped our pragmatic paradigm and enabled us to remain open to more emergent categories that surfaced as we engaged the QCA process. We now turn to additional QCA considerations and detail how the research design unfolded to lead to our findings.

Researchers' Positionality

Within the pragmatic paradigm and consistent with QCA's concern for a systematic approach to analysis, it is crucial to articulate the collective positionality of the researchers (Milner, 2007). Our research team is compositionally diverse with regard to race, age, and gender. Collectively, we acknowledge through our varying research and professional

experiences that Boards are bastions of power due to hegemonic whiteness embodied within the history and current systems that form the constitutive parts of colleges and universities (Ray, 2019). Thus, we situate our interest in research that disrupts whiteness as the prevailing organizational logic that reifies inequitable outcomes for students with minoritized identities (Ray, 2019). While all higher education faculty, we also hold varying experiences as practitioners in academic affairs and student affairs. These experiences, paired with two of the researchers' experiences advising Boards, positioned us to more intimately understand the nuanced ways Boards do and do not connect with an institution's students, staff, and administration and contributed to how we asked each other questions about our interpretations.

Sampling, Data Collection, and Analysis

Operationally, QCA is based on eight systematic steps: (1) Deciding on a research question, (2) selecting material, (3) building a coding frame, (4) segmentation, (5) trial coding, (6) evaluating and modifying the coding frame, (7) main analysis, and (8) presenting and interpreting the findings (Schreier, 2014, p. 6–7). Accordingly, we first outlined the research questions guiding this study.

Sampling

In addressing the second criteria of QCA, we first describe the sampling procedure for the 22 colleges and universities in the project. We leveraged three complementary sampling strategies (Patton, 2015) that informed our selection criteria to highlight a robust perspective on Boards and their connection to DEI work). Following operational construct sampling (Patton, 2015, p. 269), we started with the 11 PCD institutions from LePeau et al. (2019). The presence of a PCD serves as evidence that the institution, to an extent, has begun the process of centering DEI efforts in the organizational practices of the institution by virtue of the president's involvement and elevation of these councils in the organizational structure. Therefore, the construct of interest we leveraged was the connection between the role of the president on both their institution's Governing Board and the PCD. Our underlying proposition is that these institutions have the potential for increased information and action flows because of the dual role of the president (LePeau et al, 2019). Another strength of following LePeau 2019 was the inherent maximum variation (Patton, 2015, p. 267) in the sample tied to institutional characteristics including: Carnegie classification, geographic location, size. Finally, we selected 11 additional institutions based on matched comparison sampling (Patton, 2015, p. 267) with the original 11 institutions. That meant that the new institutions shared corresponding maximum variation characteristics with the original characteristics of an original institution. To help guide our selection of the new 11, we cross-referenced comparable institutions based on the Carnegie Classification of the original institutions. We then cross-checked those institutions with a review of institutions that had received a diversity award during the project's timespan. Institutions that matched characteristics and had received an award were added to the project.

We focused on diversity awards as the purposeful criterion because this recognition is given to these institutions from national organizations to acknowledge institutional DEI efforts (i.e., INSIGHT into Diversity Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) award, Ashoka Changemaker, AGB Board Leadership Award). Our guiding sentiment around the awards was our collective sense that potentially Boards at these colleges and

universities might be more involved in DEI efforts and partnerships because of the effort and resources it takes to gain recognition for DEI work at the institutional level and the prospect of publishing and documenting their DEI initiatives (LePeau et al., 2019). At the same time, we note the tension that a culture that promotes stakeholders to seek recognition regardless of substantive DEI work and change at their institutions can be a pitfall.

In totality, our choice to blend these sampling strategies provided us with a robust sample to understand whether Boards are involved in DEI efforts (see Table 1 for a summarized list of the institutions and the supplementary online table for additional details on the sample institutions).

Following step two from Schreier, we selected material. We designated a timeframe for collecting content, 2015–2019, because contextual factors such as the 2016 election, Black Lives Matter protests, and incidents at the University of Missouri, Columbia "Mizzou" which may have heightened Boards' attention to DEI (Morgan & Davis, 2019) and we wanted to understand the trajectory of DEI efforts. We followed a few steps in the data collection process. First, three researchers completed a demographic questionnaire about the composition of the 22 Boards at each institution. We collected the following information: the formal title of the Board, the size of the Board, type of Board, frequency of meetings of the Board, the process for Board member selection, and notes/relevant information. We then collected the following documents: publicly

Table 1 Institutional characteristics

Name	Basic classification
Arizona State University (ASU)	Doctoral Universities: very high research activity
Brigham Young University (BYU)	Doctoral Universities: high research activity
California State University, San Marcos[a] (CSUSM)	Master's Colleges & Universities: larger programs
Cornell University (CU)	Doctoral Universities: very high research activity
Davenport University (DU)	Master's Colleges & Universities: larger programs
DePaul University (DPU)	Doctoral Universities: high research activity
Elon University (EU)	Doctoral/Professional Universities
Metropolitan State University of Denver[a] (MSUD)	Master's Colleges & Universities: larger programs
Johns Hopkins University (JHU)	Doctoral Universities: very high research activity
Marquette University (MU)	Doctoral Universities: high research activity
Middlebury College (MC)	Baccalaureate Colleges: arts & sciences focus
Nebraska Wesleyan University (NWU)	Master's Colleges & Universities: medium programs
Northeastern University (NU)	Doctoral Universities: very high research activity
Oklahoma State University (OSU)	Doctoral Universities: very high research activity
Portland State University (PSU)	Doctoral Universities: high research activity
Rollins College (RC)	Master's Colleges & Universities: larger programs
Saint Lawrence University (SLU)	Baccalaureate Colleges: arts & sciences focus
State University of New York, Oneonta (SUNYO)	Master's Colleges & Universities: medium programs
University of Evansville (UE)	Master's Colleges & Universities: small programs
University of San Diego (USD)	Doctoral Universities: high research activity
University of Southern Maine (USM)	Master's Colleges & Universities: larger programs
University of Toledo (UT)	Doctoral Universities: high research activity

[a]Signifies a federally recognized minority-serving institution

available Board minutes, diversity statements, mission statements, newspaper or press releases in the timeframe where the Board was named in relation to diversity or equity issues, Board meeting agendas, policy manuals for the Board, resolutions from the Board if available, and chair reports if Boards had committees. Our data collection and analysis took place from July 2019 to July 2020.

Next, we moved to steps three through five from Schreier (2014), building the coding frame, segmentation, and trial coding. As Schreier (2014) explained, QCA often combines both concept-driven and data-driven categories within one coding frame. Graneheim et al. (2017) referred to this approach as an abductive strategy for combining deductive and inductive coding. We drew on LePeau's (2015) work in a deductive or concept-driven way by focusing on the three pathways of partnership for our coding scheme. The way institutional leaders enact each dimension of the pathways relates to a particular partnership described in the theoretical framework for this study (LePeau, 2015). Thus, our first step in the coding process related to outlining evidence of the eight dimensions in these data: (a) the nature of the cultural divide between AA and SA, (b) discussions of goals for student learning about diversity, (c) approach to committees, (d) implementation of programs and projects, (e) individuals in hybrid AA/SA roles, (f) organization support for partnerships, (g) relational support, and (h) blurring AA/SA programs (LePeau, 2015).

Data were coded independently for 11 institutions using this coding scheme (see supplementary online Appendix A for representative examples of the types of data and our coding frame from two institutions). We came together and noticed that our evidence and codes fell into three dimensions—discussion of goals for student learning about diversity, approach to committees, and implementation of programs and projects. We then took a data-driven or inductive strategy to investigate the sub-categories and meanings underneath these categories. We reviewed our codes and memos in Dedoose, an online qualitative software management tool, noting that our codes often included the following actions: approving minutes, supporting policies, recognizing stakeholders, and endorsing diversity plans. Thus, we segmented codes within the implementation of programs and projects, discussion for diversity, and approach to committees to use the new codes as a form of trial coding. We independently progressed through the sample of 22 institutions and collectively reviewed our codes.

This process of conducting trial coding led us to step number six from Schreier (2014) of evaluating and modifying the coding frame. We acknowledged that we did not see evidence to support robust partnerships across the eight dimensions from LePeau (2015). However, we were tracking evidence of Board observable involvement in DEI efforts but mainly in a few dimensions. We considered those dimensions in relation to what LePeau (2015) calls precipitating influences to partnerships outlined in the theoretical framework. We saw connections between "leadership architecting," "taking cues from the mission," and motivations for culturally sustaining governance from Rall et al. (2020) in our codes. This constant comparative process led us to step seven, the main analysis (Schreier, 2014). We asked questions of these data and looked for relationships between the emergent codes. During this process, we recognized that Boards are involved with actions associated with DEI programs and policies. Some of those programs and policies are internal to the institution and others are external. We continued our analysis of these data until we came to our central theme, Boards as electrical sockets to DEI efforts. We illustrate step eight from Schreier, presenting and interpreting the findings, in subsequent sections of this paper.

Trustworthiness

Consistent with the qualitative tradition (Bauer, 2000; Patton, 2015), we focused on enhancing the trustworthiness of our study. One consideration is rich rigor which is concerned with the extent to which there are "sufficient, abundant, appropriate, and complex forms of data" (Tracy, 2010, p. 840). In this respect, we note that while we engaged multiple forms of observable evidence as data sources, we did not have access to the Board's executive sessions or interview Board members for their perspectives on the research question. This means our findings should be explored as appropriate and complex but also as an insufficient rendering of Boards and their equity work. Additionally, our positionalities alert us to certain realities in the literature that may differ from that of the Boards or other stakeholders. Therefore, we took several measures to support the credibility of the findings. We supported construct validity by starting with the theoretical framework (LePeau, 2015; Rall et al., 2020). Bauer (2000) noted, "The validity of a content analysis must be judged not against a 'true reading' of the text, but in terms of its grounding in the materials and its congruence with the theory of the researcher, and in light of his or her research purpose" (p. 4). We supported the idea of coverage by sampling 22 institutions and reviewing various content sources across different institutional characteristics (Graneheim et al., 2017). We also enlisted the third researcher as the inquiry auditor to track our coding and analysis trail from one step to the next and serve as peer debriefer to ask questions about our interpretations to support the findings' credibility. We returned to the data to ensure our renderings were supported. The third author then asked us questions about the main analysis to better understand the relationships between our findings.

Limitations

Studies focused on analyzing institutional documents imperfectly represent complexities of campus climate, diversity and equity-related work, and organizational issues (LePeau et al., 2018). Similarly, whether private or public, Boards may limit what they publish on websites for fear of litigation or structural issues. Some Boards restricted access to minutes but included more information about the diversity and equity-minded initiatives through committee work from the President's Council for Diversity or similarly-oriented institution-wide committees. Additionally, System Boards in this study adhere to strict formats for their reports and agendas and the notetaker might extract some of the conversations from the minutes.

Findings

Governing Boards as Electrical Sockets to DEI Efforts

We organize the findings around how colleges and universities' external and internal stakeholders presented DEI policies and program information to the Board. Additionally, we highlight how the Board responded to show the variation in Board engagement with DEI issues. As noted, we use the metaphor of Boards as an electrical socket that connects to internal and external stakeholders to facilitate partnerships for DEI efforts (See Fig. 1).

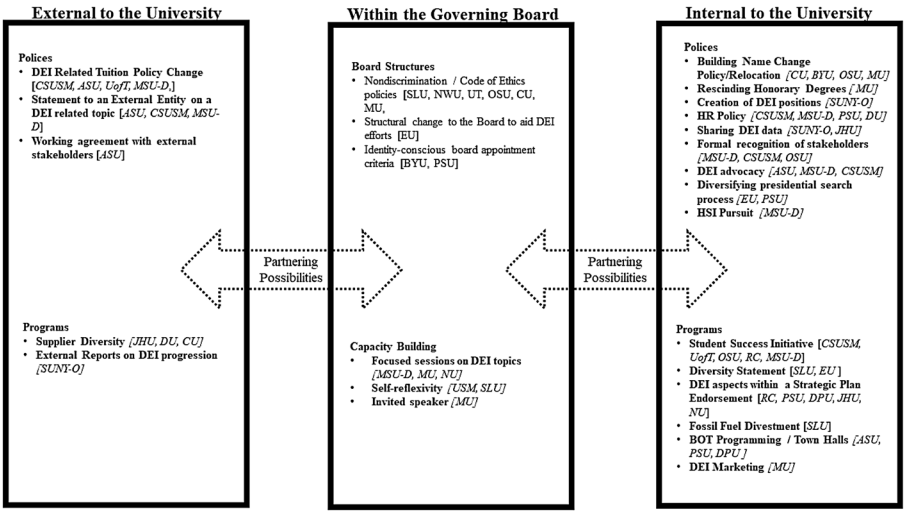

Fig. 1 The 'Electrical Socket': Governing Boards and Observable Evidence of DEI Work. The dotted arrows demonstrate the transmission of information, between the Board and varying stakeholders. These dotted arrows function to demonstrate the potentialities for the Boards to formulate DEI partnerships (i.e., partnering possibilities). College and University abbreviations can be found in Table 1

Our main finding in relation to our research questions is the episodic nature of Boards' observable involvement around DEI issues (i.e., not consistently plugged-in to DEI work). Board involvement ranged from formally approving and endorsing DEI policies and programs from internal and external stakeholders to merely acknowledging DEI information shared with no follow-up. Specifically, whether the stakeholders the Board interacted with around DEI issues were external (e.g., federal government agencies or state policymakers) or internal to the institution (e.g., student activists, presidents, CDOs, or senior-level administrators) created specific types of Board observable involvement in DEI issues.

On some occasions, Boards have opportunities to partner with external and internal stakeholders to facilitate a partnership to maximize the institution's DEI initiatives. However, in what we describe as *partnering possibilities*, often, the coupling opportunity after an initial burst of focused engagement around DEI did not materialize into an observable or meaningful and sustained collaboration as conceptualized by our theoretical framework. The remainder of the findings present evocative and illustrative examples of Boards' observable involvement in DEI work, as a contrast.

Governing Boards Formally Approving and Endorsing DEI Policies

External

The federal government or state government's decisions influence DEI policy-oriented actions by Boards. Boards tend toward the following actions in response to external policies that intersect with DEI issues: endorsing, approving, supporting, or creating system or institutional activities. However, these actions are most often reactive as opposed to

proactive. For instance, in September 2017, the Trump administration announced ending the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. DACA is consequential to many undocumented immigrants, who are largely racially and ethnically minoritized within colleges and universities, because it defers deportation processes and allows recipients to become eligible for financial aid that enables access to a college education (i.e., 'DACA-mented' students). In response, the Boards of Cal State San Marcos, Arizona State University, and Metro State Denver, all public Boards, tracked the issue across multiple meetings and crafted their stance and approaches to the evolving DACA policy.

For example, in November 2017, the Cal State Board approved a formal resolution that included expressions of support such as "The Board of Trustees expressly recognizes and commends the contributions of our Dreamer students, alumni and employees" and "The Board of Trustees' calls for support of the provision of timely, long-term protections that provide clarity and certainty for the Dreamer community." Finally, in January 2018, the Chair took time to compassionately highlight how DACA-mented students continue to be in a precarious situation and that they might be living in fear that their parents or family members might be deported. The Chair drew on a personal example of almost losing a family member to humanize the possibility of family separation and encourage all institutions in the Cal State system, including Cal State San Marcos, to maintain policies to protect DACA-mented students.

At Arizona State, the Board wrote a statement that they would continue to support DACA-mented students even if the federal government makes a different decision. They wrote a collective statement that they shared with Arizona legislators in this regard. This statement included, "We respectfully ask your administration to work with the Congress to design and provide an accommodation for these students within your overall approach to immigration enforcement and reform." While these examples relate to Boards making policy decisions about perspectives from the federal government, we also observed policy-oriented action in response to state legislators.

The State University of New York (SUNY) Regents approved a policy mandating the establishment of Chief Diversity Officers at all the system institutions. At a February 2016 meeting, Arizona State's Regents approved a revision to its tribal consultation policy that purported to:

> reflect the commitment of the Board and universities to communicate early, regularly, and in good faith with individual tribal governments regarding proposed research, initiatives, agreements, and policies that may have foreseeable implications for tribes and individuals as members of a tribe (Board of Regents Minutes, p. 252)

The process of acknowledging the need to revisit and then approving a policy demonstrated all tenets of CSG. It showed the Board working alongside local tribes and institutional stakeholders to update policy to reflect better the respectful and optimal working relationships between the parties. The Regents established clear parameters for how various stakeholders should engage in DEI work, an example of "leadership architecting" with local tribes (LePeau, 2015). They sought to revise the policy in alignment with the espoused mission and values of Arizona State, especially around assuming "fundamental responsibility for the economic, social, cultural and overall health of the communities it serves" (Office of the President, 2019).

Finally, private colleges and universities are not immune to being responsive to federal and state dynamics. For example, Cornell University lists hiring a full-time advisor for DACA and undocumented students as an achievement on their list of institutional diversity and inclusion initiatives. However, it is unclear whether and to what

extent the Cornell Board was involved in the process of cultivating the initiatives. Accordingly, we note that for some of the private institutions in our sample, there may be Board stakeholders within the institution addressing DEI issues. However, no externally observable evidence exists of Board involvement. This dynamic constitutes an example of a partnering possibility where the Board could have worked to synergize ongoing efforts with internal stakeholders.

Internal

Within an institution, Boards receive information from internal stakeholders (e.g., presidents, CDOs, students) that also manifest in engagement with institutional policies. Boards in our study often supported policies to maintain or enhance institutional functions that addressed DEI issues. For instance, at institutions like the University of Southern Maine, St. Lawrence University, and Metropolitan State University Denver, the changing demographics and the state's economic outlook, as described by administrators presenting to the Board, influenced the Board's conversations about diversity and equity. For example, in their Winter 2019 Board of Campus report, St. Lawrence's Board noted:

> on Friday morning, we convened for a two-hour discussion about Gen Z, the students who attend St. Lawrence and will enroll over the next decade. Vice President for Admissions and Financial Aid Florence Hines shared the presentation she prepared for our campus Employee Development Day, and Vice President for Communications Paul Redfern joined for a discussion of the intersection of Gen Z attributes and St. Lawrence's research on brand identity.

It was common to review Board members asking what consultants might need to be brought to the Boards to discuss how to plan for the changing demographics of student populations. These conversations were primarily enrollment management driven instead of conversations about improving students' experience with minoritized identities and bolstering access to diversify the student population.

In addition, we noted some formal Board approvals of tuition policies regarding the status of veterans and "non-resident aliens" from the Boards of Cal State and Metropolitan State University Denver. Perhaps the best example of a DEI driven policy formally endorsed by a Board was Cal State's Graduation 2025 initiative that purported to address retention and success inequities in the Cal State system. However, beyond one extended presentation from an administrator overseeing the initiative and sporadic mentions of the initiatives during our timeframe of interest, there was no evidence of Board involvement in the policy's implementation or follow-through.

Hence, from our sample of colleges and universities, multiple stakeholders make presentations to the Boards about DEI policies at their meetings. Sometimes documents such as news briefs or slides from stakeholders who presented information provided context and differing information than what was available solely in the Board minutes. Consequently, it was not easy to ascertain how Boards discussed or defended particular actions concerning the information presented. This was also complicated by private institutions either only providing summarized reports or no minutes at all and the prevalence of public Boards to go into executive session to discuss a range of issues.

Governing Boards Supporting and Recognizing DEI Programs and Stakeholders

Many Boards' actions demonstrated externally observable evidence of Board involvement in the initiatives yet did not establish that the Board was intentionally addressing any components of the CSG framework. It was also unclear if the Board's partnering was to enhance the pervasiveness of the DEI work. These Board actions were coded as performative.

External

Another DEI related fiduciary responsibility that Boards discussed involved supplier diversity. It was common for Boards to highlight or espouse a desire for the institution's involvement with diverse and socially responsible suppliers of products and services. For instance, John Hopkins University's diversity plan, which was endorsed by its Board, states, "Hopkins Local includes a set of specific, measurable commitments to increase our local hiring, purchasing, and contracting, expanding the opportunities available to Baltimore residents and its minority- and women-owned businesses." Davenport and Cornell both initiated supplier diversity programs. In Boards supporting these programs, they demonstrate a partnering possibility to support local business owners (see Fig. 1). Davenport, in particular, outlines their supplier diversity program as falling into four categories: Minority-owned Business Enterprise (MBE), Women-owned Business enterprise (WBE), Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE), and Veteran-owned Business (VOB). Board members at Davenport situate this process as an opportunity to sustain local communities and organizations. We did not see evidence to support additional transferable ways the Board related to local communities and organizations. However, this emphasis on supplier diversity offered an avenue for a deeper connection. Simultaneously, students at some of the institutions in the sample raised concerns when the institution invests money in fossil fuel companies and call on Boards to divest resources (e.g., Middlebury College, St. Lawrence University, and Northeastern University). Although not traditionally considered a DEI issue, matters of climate change disproportionately affect minoritized and low-income communities.

Besides supplier diversity, we saw observable evidence to support how the Board aims to connect with external entities who may offer recognition and support for the institution's DEI efforts. The Board at Rollins endorsed the institution paying for the Ashoka changemaker designation. We incorporated institutions that have been externally recognized for their DEI initiatives from Ashoka and HEED. We saw how Boards in this study supported allocating funds to facilitate receipt of these awards (see Fig. 1).

Internal

The predominant means by which Boards engaged in DEI work in the study involved approving, adopting, and reviewing diversity plans. This occurred at ten of the twenty-two institutions in the study: St. Lawrence University, Toledo, BYU, Rollins, DePaul, SUNY-Oneonta, Portland State, Cal State San Macros, John Hopkins, and Middlebury. Regarding diversity plans, stakeholders such as CDOs or a representative from a task force at the institutions typically present the plans to the Board. We observed variation in how DEI are

conceptualized and operationalized within the institutions' guiding documents like mission and vision statements and diversity plans (see supplementary Table for our review).

Similarly, the Boards role in enacting the plans or contributing to the objectives varied across the ten institutions. We reviewed minutes, reports, articles, and watched meetings of Boards who approved or reviewed the plan without questioning the content, asking questions of the person who presented the information, or debating the information with each other. For instance, At Middlebury in October 2017, the Board passed a resolution in support of the new strategic framework, praising "the deep and sustained work" of the last 18 months that gave voice to the hundreds of faculty, staff, students, and alumni who contributed to the collaborative project known as Envisioning Middlebury." Middlebury's framework references intercultural competency and full participation in diverse communities as tactics to address broader DEI goals. Interestingly, in a newspaper article about the Middlebury's Board annual conference, there is a summary that highlights a speaker that was invited to present to the Board and an update from the dean of faculty that noted,

> Diversity and inclusion has been a focus for the College Board of Overseers since last year. It emerged as a priority during conversations last year about innovation and change in higher education—diversity and inclusion emerged, in those discussions, as a priority that was seen as central to the College's mission.

While an optimistic interpretation of this time spent focused on DEI might be that it helped build the Board's capacity to be engaged in the framework's design, there is no evidence in the subsequent written records of this connection. Hence, spending time at the annual conference (or retreat) focused on DEI issues potentially stays within the confines of the Boards' internal activities rather than translating into an observable partnership for DEI. In terms of Board development and unclear follow-through, similar dynamics are at play when the President from Southern Maine suggests that the trustees take an implicit bias test and participate in the university reading program alongside the rest of the institutional community.

At Toledo, the lead architect of their diversity plan, the CDO Dr. Willie McKether, makes sporadic appearances across the five years of data review. We note this because when the Toledo CDO was present, the Board engaged salient DEI issues, such as acknowledging the reorganization to support the CDO position and later passing the diversity plan. Thus, the absence of the CDO in other meetings raises questions around internal Board norms of who has access to the Board and how often. In particular, if those deemed responsible for constructing and implementing diversity plans are potentially not present when discussions about DEI come up, it potentially reifies the DEI work's episodic nature because of the missing expertise.

We also observed information on the internal work of the Board. For instance, it was mentioned in Northeastern University's strategic planning document process that the Board, "engaged in extended discussions of the future of higher education with the senior leadership team" and approved the plan in September 2016. The plan articulates a clear focus on "A Diverse and Inclusive Community". However, the vague summary of the Board's involvement in the process makes it challenging to decipher whether they robustly contributed to the plan's DEI aspects. Another example comes from Middlebury College's annual conference for Trustees in January 2016. The topic was diversity and inclusion and the student newspaper quotes the Dean of Faculty stating that diversity and inclusion, were "absolutely a priority for the Trustees, and they are very supportive of the work that has been happening on campus, while also understanding that there is much work yet to be done". Trustees learned from an outside expert on DEI at the conference, which illuminates

important efforts for Trustees to build their knowledge of equity and their sociopolitical consciousness.

Additionally, at St. Lawrence University, the president explicitly named the Board's role to promote a more equitable institutional environment. He shared, "I am confident too, that the Board of Trustees and the Alumni Executive Council will also develop routines that measure or audit the culture, climate, and progress of its work and membership to reflect our institutional values". In this regard, the president names the Board as needing to establish their work with attention to equity aligned with the CSG framework's equity knowledge dimension.

Finally, one substantive example of the Board initially engaging internal stakeholders but not following through to partner and address concerns comes from Portland State University. Unlike other universities, their students actively brought concerns to the Board related to a range of DEI issues. For instance, during the open comment session of the December 2015 Board meeting, two students:

> expressed hope that the University will prioritize funding for the creation and operation of cultural centers. They also made the following requests: (1) that the University reopen the conversation around campus safety; (2) that faculty respect and honor the diversity of student identities, specifically in regards to gender pronouns, different learning styles, and diverse cultural and spiritual practices; (3) that there be additional student-centered task forces for the campus' various communities of color; (4) an increase in faculty training for healthier language concerning students who have disabilities; and (5) that students should not need to choose between grades and cultural traditions.

As the CSG framework highlights, open meetings that engage institutional stakeholders have the prospect of building the Board's collective and individual sociopolitical consciousness by availing Trustees to new DEI ideas and stoking the motivation for equity by increasing the opportunity to build a sense of connection and solidarity with other experiences not represented on the Board. However, in the same public comment session, we see some of the tensions of recognizing stakeholders as another student laments, "the Open Comment period is one of the only chances students have to interact with the Board. [Student] said that the Board is not doing a good job of representing students".

At the following Board meeting in March 2016, the Board Chair emphasized, "the Board wants to hear from students, faculty and staff, wants to understand their perspectives, and wants to hear about their experiences—both good and bad". The Chair goes on to state that although "not obligated", they reserve 30 min at each Board meeting for open comments and had also been meeting in small groups with students throughout the term. A student led the open comments session of the same March 2016 meeting explaining, "that tape covering the mouths of numerous students in the audience is intended to symbolize the way in which the students feel that the Board has silenced them. [The student] shared [their] expectation that pictures on social media and in the news will show a group of students who have been silenced". During the closing portion of the meeting, a Trustee suggested hosting a "special Board meeting with students".

That suggestion materialized with a meeting notice posted seven days before the special meeting was to take place. The notice detailed that students that wished to participate had to sign-up in advance and described the meeting as "an opportunity for students to share information or raise concerns with the Board, as well as an opportunity for members of the Board and the administration to ask questions and share perspectives and information." At the two-hour special meeting, in May of 2016, the minutes report that the Board heard

from student panels focused on different topics of interest, including "student experiences and diversity." The general sentiment of that panel was that students "expressed their support for greater inclusion and diversity on campus." The two hours ended without time to cover two additional panels and the minute's note, "another opportunity will be scheduled to hear from the students who signed up for these topics."

Following the meeting, the subsequent special meeting notice posted specifically to hear from students came almost a year later, in April 2017. Despite the notice and instructions on participating, we did not find any evidence of another special meeting to hear from students between 2017 and 2019. Again, in the previous example from Portland State, we observed some partnering possibilities for the Board to formulate a deeper connection with institutional agents (see Fig. 1). However, these examples were minimal and relate to the need for Boards to engage with DEI more deeply.

Discussion & Theory Building

Our findings reveal that the manifestation of robust partnerships between the Board and other stakeholders is rare across our sample of colleges and universities that have been recognized for their DEI work. Further, if a Board was exhibiting aspects of the CSG model (Rall et al., 2020) and there was any evidence of Boards engaging in DEI work, Boards seemed to be more active in the preceding factors, an earlier stage of LePeau's (2015) cycle of organizational partnerships, rather than in a position of ongoing partnering. In sum, this means that Boards take an additive approach to DEI. Evidence from this study illuminates that Boards may endorse policies, support initiatives, and validate the work of stakeholders already present and active in DEI. Yet, we know this type of action is not enough for transformational change because deep-rooted inequities persist in campus environments. In order to enact sustained organizational change for DEI, Boards need to embrace new approaches that include partnering with internal and external stakeholders while expanding their understanding of their fiduciary roles to explicitly center the pursuit of educational equity (Commodore et al., 2021; Rall et al., 2020). If institutional leaders need to allocate resources differently and create policies and practices reflective of the cultures and backgrounds of minoritized populations to actually center a culture for DEI (Hurtado et al., 2012; LePeau, 2015; Museus, 2014; Renn, 2020), our findings suggest that so too must Board leaders and individual trustees.

Based on our merged theoretical framework and pragmatic epistemology, we focus on the numerous partnering possibilities in contextualizing findings relative to existing literature. In particular, we advance Kezar's (2006) elements of high-performing boards which did not foreground a particular emphasis on DEI concerns. The electrical socket metaphor enables us to simultaneously capture the seen Board DEI actions while converting the absence of data into an imagining of "what if" informed by our theoretical framework (i.e., what if Boards collaborated with other stakeholders (e.g., presidents, student activists, student affairs professionals) around DEI policies and programs in sustained and substantive ways). We offer examples from our findings to emphasize this point.

Portland State students pushing the Board for almost 18 months to address inequities for students with minoritized identities in the organizational environment and engage in DEI work relates to dynamics that many institutions have navigated since 2016 (Morgan & Davis, 2019; Wheatle & Commodore, 2019). We see the Portland State Board engage in aspects of CSG, such as gathering diverse viewpoints (sociopolitical consciousness) and

setting aside time to focus on DEI topics (value of equity) (Rall et al., 2020). However, while the partnering possibility emerged, no observable follow-through of the Board to move beyond these initial gestures into partnerships that could change the institution's culture to reflect policies and practices to address student concerns occurred. The takeaway then is that contrary to our merged framework, Boards can exhibit tenets of CSG without engaging in robust partnerships (Rall et al., 2020), which means that the Boards DEI activity rarely moves into partnership territory and the culture and operating norms of the Board are reified, hence the notion of an electrical socket that has the potential to power appliances but does not necessarily do so without intentionality in bringing the plug and the socket together. This consideration also augments Kezar (2006) elements of that high-performing boards who engage in "external relations" that includes "joint goal setting" and sophisticated communication vehicles across layers of governance." Yet the lack of follow-through, especially on DEI issues, has implications for the enduring nature of many DEI challenges within institutions and suggests that initial activities (e.g., goal setting and communication) must be paired with follow through actions or policies that are not always codified in the literature.

Dimensions of Board Involvement in DEI Work

We interpret the evidence of Board involvement in DEI work with the literature into three cross-cutting characteristics. First, often the Board's involvement in DEI work was episodic and not sustained over time. Our study's 4-year time span set us up to capture dialogues or efforts that traversed multiple meetings or years. Frequently, a topic or report would come up and then there was rarely follow-up featured in future minutes or meetings. This is reminiscent of Baldrige's (1980) notion of the 'issue carousel,' which highlights that decisions are never "made" but "pinned down temporarily" (p. 125). However, the stakes of DEI work being episodic are that in the meantime, students with minoritized identities are negatively impacted by oppressive campus environments (Hurtado et al., 2012; Jayakumar et al., 2018; Kezar & Eckel, 2008; Leon, 2014; Museus, 2014; Renn, 2020; Stanley et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, the current internal structures of the Board (e.g., having broad student success subcommittees (AGB, 2020a) and operating norms (rarely asking questions when reports are provided) (Kezar, 2006; Minor, 2006), do not allow for sustaining conversations and actions. Further, as the recent AGB (2020b) poll shows, Trustees do not believe that DEI issues are a primary challenge and think they are spending a sufficient amount of time on the topic. Our findings corroborate these insights and underscore the difficulty in Boards being partners in DEI work if they are not set up to continue conversations or follow-through on actions, which coincides with Kezar (2006) assertion of high-performing Boards being engaged in robust educational opportunities. Ultimately the episodic nature of Board involvement in DEI issues points towards considerations of how the Boards as a whole build capacity (Bobowick & Schwartz, 2018; Chait et al., 2005; Rall et al., 2020) and who has a seat at the table to steer conversations or keep topics on the table (Bastedo, 2005; Eckel & Trower, 2016; LePeau, 2018; Rall & Orué, 2020).

The second dimension of Board involvement in DEI work relates to an ongoing tension regarding how institutional leaders should approach DEI work (Kezar, 2008; Kezar et al., 2007, 2011; LePeau et al., 2019). Within the findings, aspects of what the Boards did could be viewed as symbolic leadership (e.g., authoring and approving a statement on DACA). Symbolic leadership in DEI work is critical because it allows

the institutional community to understand the leaders' position, quelling fears related to ambiguity and informing subsequent actions (Yi et al, 2020; Adserias et al., 2017; Yang & Konrad, 2011). This is consistent with early work on Board effectiveness and leadership (Holland et al., 1989; Paltridge et al., 1973; Taylor et al., 1991) and loosely alluded to in Kezar's (2006) focus on leadership (e.g., "common vision and purpose") and structure (e.g., leading as a collective). However, more critically oriented studies suggest symbolic acts and symbolic leadership, in general, are solely performative acts that are meant to placate the community without manifesting material change for those harmed and reinforcing the idea of Boards as solely responsive to issues (Ahmed, 2012; Andrade & Lundberg, 2020; Squire et al., 2019).

Our findings, showing how Boards engage in symbolic leadership through the periodic endorsement of plans and the authoring of statements without following through on implementation or accountability, complicate this debate's subtext that relies on an ethos of 'symbolic = good and performative = bad.' We suggest that the *timing* of the Board's actions relative to the DEI issue matter and must be located relative to the Board's collective capacity and skill to carry out DEI work, introducing a temporal element into Kezar's (2006) elements of high-performing boards. Hence, given the likelihood for delayed timing of a Board's response because of the infrequent meetings of Boards and the constrained capacity of Boards to develop expertise around DEI issues, Boards' actions will most likely be perceived as performative. In terms of the time dimension, if the president or CDO has already made efforts to improve the organizational climate and is just reporting their work to the Board, then all the Board can do is applaud.

However, suppose the Board's actions manifest in a robust partnership to sustain the work. In that case, there is the possibility for the efforts to be seen as symbolic and value-add for broader institutional efforts around DEI. Metropolitan State University, Denver authoring a resolution on DACA is a positive symbolic act because it demonstrates the Board's posture and lets the institutional community understand where the Board stands. This action shows a CSG Board operating with equity knowledge.

What remains unclear is whether the statement led to a partnership with other stakeholders to address DACA-mented students' realities. We emphasize raising this caution is not to suggest that Metropolitan State University Denver did nothing or is doing nothing for students with DACA status. This example is to raise attention to the *follow-through of the Board* that took a positive step to make a statement. However, because there was no observable follow-up, the Board opens itself to critiques that the gesture was performative, such as applauding CDOs or receiving DEI reports with no questions. To point to our metaphor of Boards as electrical sockets, these gestures short circuit Board partnerships because it keeps the Board's actions and the stakeholders they engage with separated.

The Board's final observable dimension in DEI work is that only specific stakeholders routinely interact with the Board. In other words, only specific stakeholders "plug in" to the Board's potential. Similarly, Kezar (2006) notes, "board members need to be involved in more than a perfunctory way with the institution that they serve" (p. 994). While our analysis captured all types of stakeholders getting opportunities to meet with Boards, the most consistent people the Board interacted with around DEI topics were presidents, CDOs, and students. Access to positional authority within organizational contexts can be rooted in dynamics around power and capital (Museus & Neville, 2012; Ray, 2019). As our literature review made clear, Presidents, students, and CDOs all have different forms of power and social capital that inform the Board differently. In agreement with the presidential literature, presidents can use persuasion and their position as subject matter experts to encourage the Board to take actions (Commodore, 2018; Kezar et al., 2007), like the

president from the University of Southern Maine encouraging the Board to take an implicit bias test.

The CDO literature has highlighted the contested nature of the position and our study extends that into the Board room. CDOs were praised for their efforts or shared reports, but there was no evidence of substantive engagement with CDOs beyond receiving updates. This suggests that the social capital of the CDO being positioned as the steward of all things DEI and a member of the president's cabinet gets them an audience with the Board. Nevertheless, because there is no observable follow-through, the formal power of the CDO is lessened when it comes to the ability to synergize their activities with the power and influence of the Board (Leon, 2014; Stanley et al., 2019). This generates questions about how to augment Bastedo's (2005) notion of institutional entrepreneurs into the realm of DEI work more precisely.

Lastly, student activists' literature is rife with studies on DEI related demands (Morgan & Davis, 2019; Wheatle & Commodore, 2019) that students have made that are often addressed to presidents and Boards. The literature is mixed on whether student activists should be burdened with the role of implementing organizational change (Linder et al., 2019). Our study furthers these tensions from a shared governance (American Association of University Professors, 1966) standpoint as the students' efforts across our study are not consistently met with Board responses that substantively respond to student concerns (e.g., divestment from fossil fuels, improving campus climate, etc.).

Board Involvement in DEI Quadrants

Our charge in framing this study's contribution at the intersection of college and university governance and DEI efforts is twofold. Based on our theoretical framework, we maintain the need to position the potential of Boards as partners in DEI work and present dimensions of observable involvement that flow from our findings relative to considerations of

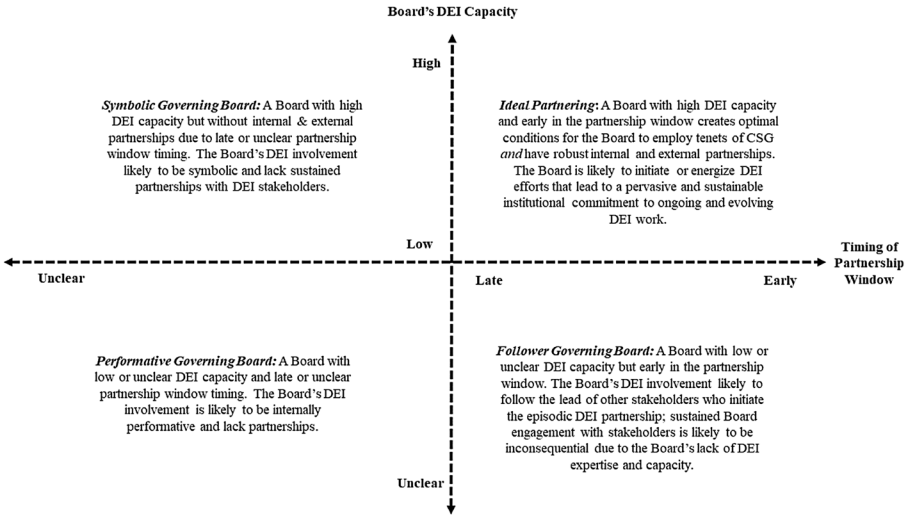

Fig. 2 A matrix of Governing Board's partnering for DEI

high-performing Boards that do not foreground DEI concerns (e.g., Kezar, 2006). Correspondingly, we devised a visual representation of our analysis, a quadrant matrix, which allows us to clarify how Board DEI involvement interact with the literature review and our theoretical framework (see Fig. 2). This typological advancement is necessary to sow opportunities for additional inquiries into Boards and DEI wok.

The Y-axis of the matrix reflects a Boards' DEI capacity, ranging from unclear to high. This axis was informed by CSG (Rall et al., 2020) and connects to our analysis of some Boards demonstrating actions consistent with CSG—meaning they have a high capacity to be engaged in DEI partnerships and ongoing work. Examples include Boards that took actions such as making statements or approving policies and programs that addressed DEI issues. In contrast, the San Diego Board has very little publicly available data about their Board's efforts (i.e., unclear Board capacity). A Board with low capacity would be marked by infrequent engagement with DEI concerns.

The X-axis represents the continuum of timing for a partnership window. Since CSG does not capture a process, but LePeau's (2015) model does, there is tension between the frameworks regarding the optimal time for a partnership between a Board and other stakeholders to occur.

To reflect this idea, we build on Chait et al.'s (2005) notion of the 'generative curve.' The generative curve suggests that there is an optimal time for Boards to be consequentially involved in an organization's critical work. Likewise, LePeau's (2015) precipitating influences suggest that there are optimal times for Boards to be involved in transitioning to DEI partnerships. Our findings corroborate that leadership architecting and taking cues from the mission are where the Boards may play a role in setting the parameters for essential partnerships. Thus, the X-axis ranges from the Board getting involved early in the partnership window to the partnership window being late or hard to discern. A Board, like Johns Hopkins, endorsing a supplier diversity plan before it is implemented, is an example of getting involved early in a partnership window. A Board unaware of DEI work at an institution would constitute lack of clarity and a Board marked by solely receiving reports would be late in the partnership window. By bisecting the axes and locating Board involvement with DEI work at the intersection of capacity and timing, we can illuminate four types of Board partnerships for DEI.

Quadrant 1, *Ideal Partnering*, shows the intent of merging CSG (Rall et al., 2020) and LePeau's (2015) cycle. In this quadrant, a CSG Board with internal and external partnerships highlights the confluence of the partnership window being early and the Board having high DEI capacity. Boards' opportunity to partner corresponds to precipitating influences into partnership pathways and is sustainable due to the Board valuing equity and having a consciousness around the ramifications of their (in)action. While Boards operating in this quadrant are primarily aspirational, when we see examples, the Board is either engaging in leadership architecting or taking cues from the mission to partner with other entities to advance DEI work. Our findings around partnering possibilities would be located here.

Quadrant 2, *Symbolic Governing Board*, identifies Boards that act unilaterally to advance DEI work. This underscores how Boards can be engaged in CSG efforts but not partnering with other entities in that endeavor. These actions are mostly symbolic and not transformative because they lack evidence of partnering to plan, implement, or sustain efforts emanating from the symbolic action. Because the window to engage in a partnership with another entity is either too late or the opportunity unclear, the Board acts after the fact (i.e., after an incident gains national attention) or in the absence of a better understanding of a timely collaboration. Symbolic Board action highlights how a Board can take in DEI information and do something with it that goes beyond the Board's internal functions.

However, this does not necessarily entail engaging in a partnership, so the actions may not be sustained.

Quadrant 3 displays the *Performative Governing Board*. In this quadrant, the dynamics of an isolated and detached Board are present because the partnership window's time is late or unclear and the Board's DEI capacity is low or unclear. These two realities suggest that the actions the Board takes, if any, are not observable by institutional stakeholders and stay within the Board's sphere. Thus, the DEI actions that the Board performs, if any, are considered performative because actions, such as applauding the work of others, are done without an effort to engage beyond the normative fiduciary functions of the Board.

The fourth quadrant is the *Follower Governing Board*. In this quadrant, the time for the partnership is early or optimal, but the Board's DEI capacity is low or unclear. The result is that stakeholders with more DEI knowledge or motivation have to determine if and when to partner with the Board. Without greater DEI capacity, the Board acts more as an endorser (hence follower) of other's actions rather than a co-equal partner in the development and implementation of a partnership for DEI work.

Implications for Board Practice & Future Research

We present four implications for policy and practice based on the findings from this study that best position Boards and stakeholders to be operating in the Ideal Partnerships quadrant. First, with respect to tensions inherent between performative and symbolic forms of leadership, Boards must clarify their positions related to DEI work specfically. However, this declaration needs to be supported by their actions. If Boards intend to strive for Ideal Partnerships, statements must be coupled with complementary actions. In other words, symbolic and process-centered gestures such as written statements of support or accepting reports should be coupled with institutional stakeholders' actions addressing policies and practices that influence constituents' experiences (e.g., creating ad-hoc committees; developing DEI accountability criteria). Boards need to not only be aware of but understand how the policies and practices they are endorsing maintain the status quo or potentially challenge inequitable institutional policies and practices.

The second implication of our findings is that Boards need to engage in capacity-building and educational opportunities (Kezar, 2006) if they strive to operate as a CSG Board (Rall et al., 2020) engaged in partnerships for institutional transformation (LePeau, 2015). Some Boards operated with equity knowledge (e.g., Portland State University inviting students to Board meetings) and political consciousness (e.g., Arizona State and support for DACA students) episodically but the rarely exhibited value of equity, motivation for equity and, sociopolitical consciousness in an observable and pervasive way. Rather than merely acknowledging cultures, CSG calls for efforts to sustain the rich histories and experiences that minoritized stakeholders bring to the institution (Paris, 2012). If the Board operates with CSG from the onset, they will be more likely to contribute to architecting plans for DEI initiatives and partnerships with institutional stakeholders. However, we acknowledge that Boards may need compulsory capacity-building in order to operate as a CSG Board. We identified a few Board retreats within the dataset. Instead of hiring external consultants to facilitate retreats, we suggest that Boards could benefit from partnering with researchers and engaging in participatory action research to transform their approaches to practice. Boards who work with DEI scholars and practitioners could work collaboratively to probe and understand the decision-making process of Boards engaging in CSG and Ideal

Partnerships. Another way this might be addressed is via the ways presidents and Board professionals curate materials for Board members that focus on enhancing the Board's ability to partner for equity.

Our third implication ties to the second. Author et al. (2020) identified that the democratization of strategic planning processes could contribute to an institutional culture where people perceive their voices matter. We identified Boards often acting as endorsers of institutional DEI strategic plans. However, we were unable to identify Boards as co-collaborators in strategic planning processes. We suggest augmenting ideas about leadership architecting from LePeau (2015) towards Board culture, where Board members architect *with* institutional leaders in designing DEI plans (Kezar et al., 2011). By understanding the complexities associated with institutional DEI issues, Boards will be more equipped to allocate resources that lead to sustained transformation and success (Chait et al., 2005).

Finally, Boards need to consider the role Board demographic composition plays in their ability to partner in DEI issues dynamically. Board members are often selected as people who are likely able to contribute to maximizing the institution's fiduciary responsibilities (Brown et al., 2020; Eckel & Trower, 2016). We rarely identified Board members with postsecondary education career experience, beyond their education. We did identify individual Board members who emphasized advocating and supporting DEI initiatives within their private or public sector positions. These individuals can play an instrumental role in taking advocacy roles within the Board and forging partnerships for DEI initiatives (Bastedo, 2005; Kezar & Eckel, 2008; LePeau, 2015, 2018). We also observed that Board members are predominantly white. If Boards are committed to DEI, then the composition of the Boards must continue to evolve to mirror demographic shifts to enable the benefits of a diverse Board (Eckel & Trower, 2016; Rall et al., 2018).

Conclusion

In this manuscript, we present the metaphor of Boards operating as an "electrical socket," ultimately facilitating a connection between internal and external stakeholders regarding DEI efforts. Though these "sockets" may be merely functional at some institutions, the potential for more sustained and transformative support for DEI initiatives exists (i.e., Ideal Partnering Boards). As college and university stakeholders begin to understand the value and benefit of DEI work, the necessity for all stakeholders' full participation becomes imperative. Likewise, the current college and university climate related to class, race, gender, sexuality, and other oppressed identities continues to ratchet up expectations of institutions and institutional leaders to engage in substantive and sustained action in the area of DEI. The power and positioning of Boards make them prime to be instrumental partners in said work. The disruption of normative Board fiduciary roles is needed because their work is not serving students with minoritized identities well (Commodore et al., 2021; Rall et al., 2020). Though Boards may be operating in one understanding of Board norms and practices, it does not have to be a place of permanence. More must be learned regarding how Boards can and do evolve as partners in DEI work and how they can strengthen their ties to DEI work. As more is learned regarding how Boards become better partners, or "sockets," in DEI work, the closer colleges and universities come to the goal of making equity a part of their institutional identiy.

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