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A Case Study of the Perceived Impact of the Organizational Change of One Leadership Team on a School District

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A CASE STUDY OF THE PERCEIVED IMPACT OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

OF ONE LEADERSHIP TEAM ON A SCHOOL DISTRICT

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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Title: A Case Study of the Perceived Impact of the Organizational Change of One Leadership
       Team on a School District

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The purpose of this case study was to examine the leadership team of one successful

school district to identify the characteristics, vision, and practice of the team. The study

examined specific situations that the members of the administrative team identified as significant

in their growth. Specifically, the study identified the perceptions and beliefs about the district

that were held by individuals within the administrative team itself as well as various teacher

leaders. The research focused on individuals who served as members of the district leadership

team and the impact they believed they had on the district.

The sample school district is a medium-sized school located in a third-class city in

southwestern Pennsylvania. This city covers fifty-one square miles and includes urban, rural,

and suburban settings. The sample leadership team consisted of former and current

administrators as well as former and current teacher leaders. The total sample was ten

individuals.

Interviews were conducted and data were analyzed using a coding procedure. Analysis of

this data showed that several characteristics were utilized by the Superintendent and the

leadership team which resulted in a transformational change and the perceived success of the

district. These characteristics included building relationships; shifting the vision of the district;

working collaboratively with administrators as well as teacher leaders; and emphasizing life-long

learning, growth, and passion.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

"In building learning organizations, there is no ultimate destination or end state, only a life long journey" (Senge, 2006, p. xviii).

"To change organizations for the better, you must give people the opportunity to change the ways they think and interact" (Senge et al., 1999, p. 33).

First and foremost, leadership is about adding value to people. To be a successful leader, one needs to make others better (Maxwell, 2014). Leadership is the one thing that can make or break an organization; it can enable the organization to grow and succeed or flounder and fail. Strong, effective leadership can influence every aspect of the organization from the vision to the execution of the organization's goals, and school district leadership is no different. In fact, because schools shape the future of children and, ultimately, the future of the world, school district leadership should be effective and should positively impact the organization as a whole.

Today, school districts face the challenge of meeting the demands of twenty-first century learning in the age of testing. Friedman (2007) explained that globalization and advancements in technology serve as a method for "leveling the playing field" (p. 7). It is now possible for individuals in developing countries like India to compete on a global scale with powerhouse countries like the U.S. It has become imperative that the educational system in our country and others begin to examine methods for preparing students for the future. President Bush's reform agenda, No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002) required school districts across the country to measure accountability through testing. States challenged their schools by developing assessments that could show achievement and growth in all students. Schools in Pennsylvania

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have been judged on testing results from the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) and, more recently, the Keystone assessment. National and state standards have since been developed to require schools to provide equitable educational opportunities for all students. In Pennsylvania, a teacher's yearly evaluation is now tied to test results. The Pennsylvania Department of Education passed Act 82 in 2012 as a means to support the professional development of educators in classrooms in order to improve student achievement of all of the children in Pennsylvania's public schools (PDE, 2018). Ultimately, educators must ask themselves, "What constitutes success for students?" "Do test scores alone signify success?" Or can success be measured in an educational system, not only by statistics but also by the impact of the culture as a whole?

The demands of a twenty-first century education compel schools to provide the highest quality learning opportunities to all students. Schools have the responsibility to prepare students not for the world in which we lived, but for a world that we can barely imagine (Senge, 2006). Friedman's "flat world" phenomenon shows that advancement in technology has allowed individuals to connect with others globally (Friedman, 2007). In addition, the on-going debate regarding school accountability and the best way to ensure that all schools are providing a rigorous and appropriate education to all adds even more pressure to schools. In order to meet all these demands, schools must change the way they educate children and look for ways in which they can create an environment that encourages global connectedness and results in life-long learners who will continue to grow with the demands of the future.

This type of systemic change must begin with the superintendent. The superintendent must be or must become a transformational leader, building a leadership team that can truly impact the district and make the changes that are necessary for promoting learning in the twenty-

first century. As the world becomes more interconnected, complex, and dynamic, work must become learning centered. Schools must discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in an organization (Senge, 2006). Senge calls this the "learning organization," explaining that learning organizations are possible simply because all individuals are learners at heart (Senge, 2006). Learning organizations grow naturally and change because of the desire of the members to become better at what they do and how they do it and, ultimately, the organization becomes better. Organizations change and by definition organizations are forever creating new systems, which in turn always demands leadership (Kotter, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

Schools are the perfect example of a learning organization. Their whole existence is based on learning and growing. A school leadership team that learns and grows can change a school, the district, and the whole educational community in a positive way. Successful school leadership teams are created by strong, transformational superintendents. What makes a successful school leadership team and how does the superintendent lead this team to create a positive, learning-centered school district which, in turn, helps to improve the achievement of all students. This is the central problem that this case study seeks to address.

Schools of today are expected to provide students with an education that will prepare them for a future we cannot see presently. With the advancement of technology and the age of accountability, schools must alter the way they function. In the past, the American educational system was in existence to prepare students for "morality and civic literacy" (Schelechty, 1990, p. 5). As we moved from a rural society to a largely industrial one and saw the influx of immigrants, our educational systems shifted as well. The industrial society needed "well educated elite and the masses trained for semiskilled or low-skilled jobs" (Schelechty, 1990, p.

5). Schools focused on sorting students into a future employment track. Now school reform requires a different set of expectations and a different type of leader. Schools must now prepare students for a future that focuses on information, knowledge, and collaboration. The work force looks vastly different than any other time in history, and it will continue to change as society's needs change.

In general, a leader is defined as "a person who is in a position to influence others to act and who has the moral, intellectual, and social skills required to take advantage of that position" (Schelechty, 1990, p. xix). An educational leader is one who takes advantage of that position and leads a school district forward. The changing role of schools requires a change in the definition of leader. Leaders of today must have the "moral, intellectual, and social skills required" but also must be visionary, flexible, and must be learners themselves. Top educational leaders must not only lead the districts in their charge, but must also understand the importance of learning and changing. They must know the importance of "leading" rather than "bossing."

Leadership in business has changed over the decades as well. Business leaders of the past have focused on "routinization, standardization and centralization" (Schelechty, 1990, p. xv). Now, businesses have restructured to meet the needs of the twenty-first century and schools must follow suit.

Purpose of the Study

This case study examined the administrative organization of one Pennsylvania school district in order to identify the characteristics of the administrative team and the perceived changes this team had on the growth of the district. In addition, the study will identify the perceptions and beliefs about the district which are held by individuals within the administrative team and the teacher leaders.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study examined the leadership team of a school district through the lens of two theoretical frameworks: Peter Senge's (2006) "five disciplines" and J. Richard Hackman's (2002) six "enabling conditions."

Senge's five disciplines evolved out of his strong belief that organizations are really learning organizations: places where the members continually expand their capacity to create successful results and where new ideas are forged and continuous learning occurs (Senge, 2006, Senge et al., 1999, 2000). He believes the five disciplines are a set of practices that will help build the learning organization and move it forward. The five disciplines are: 1) personal mastery; 2) mental models; 3) shared vision; 4) team learning; and 5) systems thinking. These disciplines are highly interconnected and have the ability to change an organization and change the way the people in it think and interact.

Hackman (2002) has developed "six conditions" that create a team-friendly work environment. Hackman believes that effective leadership can create the very best work teams to accomplish the highest results. His focus is the team-building portion of leadership and the conditions necessary to make those teams the most successful they can be. The six conditions are: 1) a real team; 2) a compelling purpose; 3) finding the right people; 4) expert team coaching; 5) a supportive organizational context; and 6) a solid team structure. These enabling conditions fall into two categories: three essential conditions and three enabling conditions.

The first three conditions, the essentials, create for the team a solid foundation for carrying out its work. A real team, compelling purpose, and finding the right people all focus on creating a strong team that works together to achieve a common purpose and has a shared objective. The enabling conditions are those that help propel the team forward. There is a set of

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rules or norms that dictate the work and each team member knows how to acquire the resources necessary to continue the work. The team is constantly supporting each other so the most productive outcome is possible.

Research Questions

This research study was guided by the following questions:

1. Which components of the two theoretical frameworks were addressed most often when talking to the administrative team?

2. What changes in attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions did the members of the administrative team perceive over the years 2004–2010?

3. How did the teacher leaders perceive the administrative team in terms of leadership?

Research Design

A qualitative case study was conducted in order to gain a better understanding of the contextual conditions of this particular school district. The case study allowed the researcher to uncover information and understand the nature of these conditions from various viewpoints. Creswell (2007) supports this idea of carefully examining a case in order to have a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon, such as leadership in this study.

Green Valley School District (a pseudonym) was selected by this researcher for this study because of its particular context; that is, Green Valley was identified as a successful school district based on its assessment scores and statistics. The Pennsylvania Department of Education recognized the district for six consecutive years (from 2004-2009) for achieving Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) by meeting the criteria of graduation rate, participation rate, student attendance, and student performance in both reading and mathematics in all assessed grades and subgroups. In addition, the district has been recognized for five consecutive years by the *Pittsburgh Business*

Times (2004-2010) for exceeding academic expectations considering economical background. The district was ranked third in 2005, second in 2006, and first in 2007, 2008, and 2009. When comparing student achievement as measured by the PSSA, the district was ranked 20th overall in western Pennsylvania and in the top 15% of all school districts in the state. The Standard and Poor's School Evaluation Service (2005) recognized the district for outpacing peers in math and reading for four consecutive years.

The data collection method included structured interviews with sample members of the administrative team and teacher leaders. Purposive sampling is a chosen group of individuals that is understood to be representative of the entire population (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). Purposive sampling was used to select members of the administrative team (former superintendent, former central office directors/coordinators, several current administrators, and several teacher leaders) to participate in this study. The sample size of ten individuals included a representative range of potential participants.

Limitations and Research Trustworthiness

There are limitations to this study which must be discussed. To begin with, the researcher may have experienced bias, as the participating school is the one in which the researcher is employed as a building administrator. However, being part of the administrative team does allow the researcher a large degree of "insider access" to the system. Relationships were already well established and the culture and climate of the district was well understood. However, being a member of the administrative team may also act as a hindrance. This researcher worked to ensure objectivity throughout the study. Another limitation was the possibility that fellow administrators may have found it uncomfortable to share negative experiences or information, and so may have withheld such information.

Although the study included only a few teachers, these individuals may have felt uncomfortable disclosing their true experiences for fear of discussing these details with a current administrator. In order for the researcher to minimize this issue, she agreed to not be a direct evaluator of any teacher in the study for at least two years from the interview date. Choosing a random sample of teachers from other buildings in the district allowed the researcher to remain out of the possible list of administrators that could observe the teacher leaders selected for the study.

As Gay et al. (2009) pointed out, the qualitative researcher must ensure validity and reliability just as other researchers do. Qualitative researchers must "establish the trustworthiness of their research" (Gay et al., 2009, p. 375). In order to address the limitations and ensure this "trustworthiness," several measures were put into place. First, the researcher ensured that nothing the participants reported was distorted, based on inferences, or taken out of context by conducting member checks throughout the research process. In addition, the researcher collected and presented detailed descriptive data that permitted "comparison of the given context to other contexts" (Gay et al., 2009, p. 376). The primary source of information for this study was structured interviews. Finally, the researcher utilized peer debriefing as a means of checking and testing insights gained during the study.

Reliability was ensured as the researcher examined the results of the interviews. The researcher constantly analyzed these data to ensure that these results were consistent over time (Gay et al., 2009).

Definition of Terms

Educational leadership: "the capacity to influence the future direction of the school or district" (Wolicki, 2011. p. 6).

Learning organization: an organization where people are continually growing their capacity to create results, where new ways of thinking are encouraged, where creative ideas are set free, and where people learn together continually (Senge, 2006).

Systems thinking: a way of thinking about the interrelationships that impact a system as a whole (Senge, Ross, Smith, Roberts, & Kleiner, 1994).

School culture: a set of expectations that evolve into the unwritten rules of an organization and have been created by the group of people who work together and to which group members conform (Gruenert, 2008).

School climate: the experiences that people have in a school and the goals, values, interpersonal interactions, practices, processes, and structures that impact the sense of feeling in the organization. (National School Climate Center, 2017).

Superintendent: the person who oversees and directs the work of a school district.

Director/Coordinator of Elementary Education: the person who oversees, directs and coordinates all aspects of the elementary schools of a school district. This person reports directly to the Superintendent.

Director/Coordinator of Secondary Education: the person who oversees, directs, and coordinates all aspects of the secondary schools of a school district. This person reports directly to the superintendent.

Principal: The person who oversees and directs all aspects of an individual school building. The principal reports to the Director of Elementary/Secondary Education and the superintendent.

Coordinator of Student Services: The person who oversees and coordinates all aspects of student services, including special education services, gifted education services, and nursing. This person reports to the superintendent.

Potential to Advance Practice

There are many ways to create change in an organization. Some of these ways may create negative change if the development of the administrative team lacks the essential elements vital to positive organizational change. A team that can articulate the specific situations and activities that they believe fostered learning and promoted positive change in their organization may provide future teams with an effective "road map" for moving their organization or school district forward. An effective leadership team is one that can articulate its impact on the positive growth and, ultimately, the culture of the organization. This team can, in turn, share their techniques and ideas and help other organizations strengthen their leadership teams and create positive change in their environments.

Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the background of the problem and the need for the study. It defined several terms and described the research design of the study and the potential limitations. Chapter 2 will examine the literature and connect it to the theory outlined in Chapter 1.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to examine the leadership team of one school district to identify the characteristics, vision, and practice of the team and the perceived impact those characteristics had on the district. It examined the specific situations that the members of the administrative team identified as significant in their growth. In addition, the study identified the perceptions and beliefs about the district that were held by individuals within the administrative team itself as well as various teacher leaders.

The purpose of Chapter 2 is to provide a review of the literature to help frame the purpose of the study. The review of the literature examines the concepts of organizational change and leadership teams, types of leadership, the role of the professional learning community and leadership, and systems thinking. This review will provide the background to the case study.

Theoretical Frameworks

In order to examine more closely the relationship between leadership and change, it is necessary to view an educational leadership team through the lens of a theoretical framework. In this case, two frameworks were chosen for the study.

A successful and effective team can propel an organization forward. However, accomplishing this movement forward "requires a different kind of leadership-one based not on the model of a solo hero, but rather on the collaboration and teamwork of a senior leadership team. This requires identifying and *developing* leaders" (Higgins, Young, Weiner, & Wlodarczyk, 2010, p. 42).

This study will examine the leadership team of a school district through the lens of two theoretical frameworks: Peter Senge's (2006) "five disciplines" and J. Richard Hackman's (2002) six "enabling conditions." The following describes the five disciplines and six enabling conditions.

Senge (2006) explained that there are five disciplines or "component technologies" that distinguish traditional organizations from ones focused on learning and growing. He believes that each of these disciplines provide an important facet in building organizations that can learn and enhance their capacity to reach their highest goals. These component technologies are centered on how teams and the individuals in them learn and grow. These disciplines help successful organizations to continually expand their capacity and their productivity as they face rapid change. The five disciplines are: 1) systems thinking; 2) personal mastery; 3) mental models; 4) shared vision; and 5) team learning. All of these disciplines are "concerned with a shift of mind from seeing parts to seeing wholes, from seeing people as helpless reactors to seeing them as active participants in shaping their reality, from reacting to the present to creating the future" (Senge, 2006, p. 69). Briefly described, each of these disciplines is essential for an organization to truly grow. Systems thinking is basically the ability to see the whole picture and distinguish patterns. Systems thinking is the conceptual cornerstone of Senge's entire philosophy. Personal mastery is the spiritual cornerstone; it focuses on becoming the best person possible through a commitment to lifelong learning. The mental models discipline involves the realization that there are specific pictures ingrained in one's mind that influence how we see and understand the world. Building shared vision involves uncovering the shared "pictures" or ideas of the future. This shared vision allows members of an organization to excel because they want to, not because it was dictated to them. Team learning is the idea that the members develop the

ability to act in a collaborative and coordinated manner. This ability to act collaboratively as a team produces extraordinary results.

Hackman (2002) has developed "six conditions" that create a team-friendly work environment. Hackman believes that effective leadership can create the very best work teams to accomplish the highest results. His work centers on the concept of 'team' and building a strong leadership team. He has developed six conditions necessary for building the most successful team. The six conditions are: 1) a real team, 2) a compelling purpose, 3) finding the right people, 4) expert team coaching, 5) a supportive organizational context, and 6) a solid team structure. These conditions fall into two categories: three essential conditions and three enabling conditions.

The first three conditions, the essentials, create for the team a solid foundation for carrying out its work. A real team, compelling purpose, and finding the right people all focus on creating a strong team that works together to achieve a common purpose and has a shared objective. The enabling conditions are those that help propel the team forward. There is a set of rules or norms that dictate the work and each team member knows how to acquire the resources necessary to continue the work. The team is constantly supporting each other so the most productive outcome is possible.

Leadership Matters

Leadership has significant effects on student learning; only quality curriculum and teachers' instruction have a greater impact on learning (Leithwood & Rieht, 2003). At the center of most definitions of leadership is the idea that leadership follows two functions: providing direction and exercising influence. These functions include leaders collaborating with others to create a shared responsibility and sense of purpose and helping to create conditions where others

can be successful and effective. It's important to remember that leaders are not always the traditional person at the top. Leadership can be seen in many different roles, including various staff members (Leithwood & Rieht, 2003).

Does leadership make a difference in schools? Researchers at Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) conducted a study to address this question. Obviously, in schools, the most important and significant impact that leadership could have would be measured through student achievement. McREL studied the effect of leadership on student achievement and found that the correlation between effective school leadership and student achievement was significantly high. In fact, it is suggested that even a minor improvement in leadership abilities increases student achievement substantially (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty 2004 p. 49).

Marzano et al. (2004) noted two factors from the McREL study that may indicate whether leadership will have a positive or a negative effect on student achievement. One factor was the ability of the leader to focus on school and classroom improvement; the second factor was his/her ability to identify and utilize first and second order changes. First order changes as those that are built on the past or on existing models. Second order changes pull away from past experiences and require all the stakeholders to learn a new set of skills and values (Marzano et al., 2004).

Leithwood and Rieht (2003) looked at exceptional schools and examined the leadership of those schools. They stated that these large-scale, quantitative studies show that the effect of leadership on student achievement is educationally significant because when leaders focus on improving curriculum and instruction, support the acquisition of resources for schools, and promote vision and goals, student learning increases. Recent research regarding leadership revolves around the concept of leaders empowering others to implement the shared vision and

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change the culture of the school, rather than focusing on the traditional role of the school principal (Brooks, 2018; DuFour et al 2004; Kelley, 2005 Leithwood & Rieht, 2003; Senge et al., 2000).

But what is it about leadership that makes for a successful school? Brooks (2018) found that successful leaders build culture and transform schools. Building a positive school culture is a powerful determinant of school success because it sets the expectations and standards of a building or district. In addition to building culture, a collaborative leadership structure is also vital. Sharing the decision making and goal setting with teachers and other staff members allows not only buy-in, but a more meaningful plan.

Leadership does matter and does impact the success of a school or district. Successful leadership clearly focuses on collaboration and teaming with teachers to impact student achievement. Again, this collaboration and teaming requires changing the culture and involving everyone in the process of improving student achievement. "School leaders need to create a culture in which each professional feels an urgent responsibility to influence the achievement of all students" (Fiarman, 2017, p. 23).

Organizational Change and Leadership Teams

"To change organizations for the better, you must give people the opportunity to change the ways they think and interact" (Senge et al., 1999, p. 33). This quote embodies the positive attributes of organizational change. It also points out the complexities and challenges of change. Positive organizational change cannot happen simply because the person in the top position *orders* change. It cannot happen when this top administrator introduces new initiatives or goals designed to move the organization forward. Real change, "profound change" as Senge et al. (1999) describes, involves learning. It involves changing the way the people in the organization

think about or believe in what they do. The organization does not just move to new ways of doing something. It builds up the ability to change and work in a new way. The organization actually grows its own ability to learn and move forward.

It is in human nature to resist change. However, there appears to be steps that organizations can take to overcome the barriers to change and, in turn, establish new ways to lead. The most significant shift in terms of positive change in any organization is to move from this belief of "autocratic leadership" to more a team-oriented style. Moving toward a team centered leadership style allows for the most productive and long-term changes in an organization. Alvy and Robbins (2010) explained that educational leaders have the job of organizing the school or district to support collaborative work and to create the conditions that allow it to happen and be meaningful. Senge (2006) explained that a "fundamental shift of mind" for the members of an organization is the essential factor that allows them to expand their capacity to learn and impact the future of the organization:

> When you ask people about what it is like being part of a great team, what is most striking is the meaningfulness of the experience. People talk about being part of something larger than themselves, of being connected, of being generative. It becomes quite clear that, for many, their experiences as part of truly great teams stand out as singular periods of life lived to the fullest. Some spend the rest of their lives looking for ways to recapture that spirit. (p.13)

There are other aspects to this concept of "team" and the impact it can have on an organization. As stated earlier, moving an entire organization forward cannot be done by one person alone. The savvy top administrator understands that this is a process and involves teams of people and then, ultimately, the entire district. Mendels and Mitigang (2013) stated that a key

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factor in cultivating success in a district is shared leadership. They explained that leadership and authority cannot live in one single person but rather must be shared by many in the district. Hackman (2002) explained that a "top leader" creates effective teams who help to move the organization. He stated that a leader must identify these individuals and then find the best ways to align their interests with the leader's own. This alignment of interests is how constructive change can begin. Hackman (2002, p. ix) also stated that "anyone who succeeds in getting performance-enhancing conditions in place or helps strengthen them is exercising team leadership… It is not important who creates the conditions, how they go about it or what their personality characteristics are. What is important is that the conditions be put into place and stay there.'

Fullen (2002) agreed with the idea that change is most effectively accomplished through teams of people. Transforming the culture is fundamental in creating the most effective environment for learning and occurs best when teams share their knowledge and top administrators develop leaders at all levels. Fullen (2002) stated that having teachers help change the culture and lead the district in moving forward can result in deep, lasting growth and can have positive effects on student learning. Collins (2001) also emphasized the idea of developing leaders at all levels. Collins (2001) stated that the sustainability of change is maintained by many individuals and that an organization wishing to create deep change must encourage leadership throughout the organization. Collins (2001) believed that a savvy top administrator is willing to find leaders at all levels who share the vision of the organization and can help move it forward.

DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Karhanek (2004), also described the learning and growing process of an effective team. They say that building the capacity to learn together as a team can

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create the momentum required to continue improving and moving forward. This momentum

develops because truly collaborative teams learn from each other and motivate each other to

continuing growing. In addition, they also describe the nature of the team as having "a persistent

disquiet" with the status quo and a constant search for a better way. They believe that the goal of

the team is not just to learn a new system, but to put into place the conditions for on-going

learning. "It is an environment in which innovation and experimentation are not viewed as tasks

to be accomplished; rather they become ways of conducting day-to-day business *–forever"*

(DuFour et al., 2004, p. 5).

Change is not something that can occur overnight. It is a process and it is time

consuming. Kotter (2007) explained that the most essential lesson to be learned is that the change

process goes through a series of phases that usually require a notable length of time. He has

developed an eight-step change model to help individuals and organizations embrace change and

find success with it. These steps seem to present a highly effective roadmap for change. The

eight steps include: 1) creating urgency (develop this urgent need for change within the

organization); 2) form a powerful coalition (convince people that change is necessary and find

effective leaders to help); 3) create a vision for change (this helps everyone understand why

change is necessary); 4) communicate the vision (not just during special meetings but as often as

possible); 5) remove obstacles (put structures in place to encourage change and constantly check

for barriers); 6) create short-term wins (motivating with successes); 7) build on the change (don't

declare victory too early-build on successes to create more successes); and 8) anchor the changes

in corporate culture (make the changes part of the "core" of the organization). Kotter (2007)

asserts that all successful change goes through all eight steps or stages in the sequence presented.

Skipping a single step or moving too far ahead without the development of the previous steps

will create problems. Still, it is human nature to resist change. The key factor that Kotter (2007) views as absolutely essential to any kind of positive change in a twenty-first century organization is leadership, not only at the top but throughout the organization. In the case of a school district, that equates to the superintendent and the administrative team.

Traditionally, the superintendent is tasked with the role of seeing the vision through and providing all the answers to any encountered barrier. However, having a team that can help lead allows for the expectation that everyone in the organization is responsible for helping to carry through the vision. Senge et al. (2000) discussed the importance of developing a vision and having a top administrator who can influence and engage others. They said, "improving the numbers and providing safe learning spaces are legitimate goals, but they can't replace the power of a larger vision, personal and shared, as the driving force behind improving schools" (Senge et al. 2000, p. 22). Specifically, leaders are the people who are deeply committed to real change both in themselves and in the organization. They possess the ability to influence others through their natural capability and commitment. Senge et al., (2000) defined leadership as the ability of a group to shape its future and sustain the process of change. Clearly, sustaining change is difficult and truly successful educational leaders are those who can create dynamic teams who continually learn themselves and grow and help the district to grow and change in a positive direction.

Types of Leadership

Instructional Leadership

In business, the leader is the individual who manages the organization from the top down. This individual makes all the decisions and deals with all the conflict. Instructional leaders are the individuals in command in an educational setting. Instructional leaders set the goals, direct

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the work, and evaluate the progress within an educational setting; therefore, instructional leaders must consider educational or instructional goals in order to achieve as well. Both types of leadership, manager and instructional leader, are important for an effective educational administrator (Joyner-Wells, 2006; Kotter, 2007; Rudenstine, 2002). An effective instructional leader possesses all the characteristics and abilities of the manager as well as the vision of the instructional leader. Therefore, it is important for schools to build effective instructional teams (DuFour et al., 2004; Hackman, 2002; West, 2011). Building these teams requires starting with the instructional leader and including and encouraging teachers to take on more leadership roles. It is a challenge to balance all these qualities in one leader.

Sullivan and Glanz (2006) noted that leadership plays a prominent role in effective schooling. Effective administrators are held in high regard and institutions from all areas, including schools, corporations, and social agencies, expend a great deal of energy securing and retaining these leaders. However, effective leadership means different things to different people. Some people continue to believe in a traditional leadership model, often times referred to as "management," which is based on an obedient workforce that is predisposed to following orders from above. Still others believe in the one-great-person theory of leadership: hire the right person who will hit the ground running (Hackman, 2002). Certainly, one person, the superintendent in the case of education, can initiate bold and forward-thinking ideas and solutions. However, the concept of relying on one person to change or move the entire system ahead is, ultimately, ineffective and, at times, can be destructive. Sergiovanni (2007) explained that schools require a special type of leader because the professionals who make up the staff in a school do not respond positively to the idea of top-down leaders who are found in many other types of organizations. Kennedy; Deuel; Holmlund-Nelson; and Slavit (2011) stated, "in long-held conceptions of

leadership, a singular figure with charismatic and heroic qualities at the top of a hierarchy oversees the allocation of resources, builds a vision, and makes decisions on behalf of the faculty and staff. This notion of a leader has proven unsustainable because schools are too complex for one person to lead independently" (p. 22). A better and broader view of effective leadership involves including an entire learning community.

Transformational Leadership

The term that is now being used to describe the most effective leadership is no longer simply instructional leadership: the new term is transformational leadership. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) explained that the goal of transformational leadership is to move a system ahead by expanding the leadership to increase everyone's skills and motivation for the betterment of the organization as a whole. Transformational leadership requires that this organization or learning community have a strong "leadership coalition" to begin the movement in a new direction. Kotter (2007) wrote, "Major renewal programs often start with just one or two people. In cases of successful transformation efforts, the leadership coalition grows and grows over time" (p.98). Lesniewski (2003) explained that transformational leadership is critical to the success of the school superintendent and can impact the learning environment of the schools in his/her district.

It is important to note that transformational leaders are much different than transactional leaders. Transformational leaders see a future without boundaries for schools and education (Moore, 2004). Transactional leaders, on the other hand, see their purpose as "needing to control and regulate" the workings of the organization (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 73).

Ultimately, schools need to have administrators with a "transformational" style. Transformational leadership is a favored style in education because it is believed that higher than

average results are produced (Marzano et al., 2005). Transformational leadership, in effect, transforms the culture, structure, and organization as a whole, moving the organization forward and preparing its members to take on the challenges of the future. Marzano et al., (2005) stated that transformational leaders develop relationships with those they lead and this relationship allows for mutual growth and change in the organization and the members of it.

Marzano et al., (2005) saw transformational leadership in broad terms. He described two types of change that occur with effective, transformational leaders: first-order change and second-order change. First-order change includes those issues with expected solutions; the most logical next step in a situation. Second-order change involves much more effort. It deals with solutions that are far apart from the anticipated end to a situation. What separates first-order change from second-order change is the depth to which one must go to find ways to move the organization forward. The initial response to all problems is to view them as first-order change issues. It seems easier to approach problems from the perspective of our own experiences. Unfortunately, the solutions to our current problems in education require a second-order view (Marzano et al., 2005). They require educators and, more specifically, leaders, to view and solve these problems in new ways and approach them by moving outside the current way of thinking-- move "outside the box" to solve them. This new way of thinking requires a superintendent to, first, acknowledge that he/she does not have all the solutions, and, second, develop and utilize a strong school administrative team.

"Transformational leaders focus their efforts in four areas: attending to the needs of individual staff members; helping staff members rethink current problems in new ways; communicating high expectations; and becoming a model for behavior and character" (Marzano, et al., 2005, p. 14). Because transformational leadership moves the organization, or in this case,

school district, forward, change is an inevitable consequence. Strayer (2007) believed that there are three necessary characteristics in transformational leadership: charisma and inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. Charisma and inspiration are needed to build emotional bonds between participants. This emotional bond ensures sustained success. Intellectual stimulation fosters independent problem solving in the members of the organization, allowing the leader to be freed up to tackle higher level issues. The third characteristic, individual consideration, involves the development of relationships with each member in the organization, to enhance their feeling of value and contribution.

Sergiovanni (2007) described the underlying values typically present in transformational leadership. He believes that transformative leaders have a purpose to their leadership, which is powerful because the most important aspect of an individual's leadership is what he stands for and what he communicates to others. For Sergiovanni (2007), communication of these values is the point of leadership by purpose; it is the agreement that seals together the leader and the followers in a common cause. Sergiovanni (2007) also believed that transformative leaders practice the principle of power investment. Basically, power investment is the belief that one's power over others is not what moves an organization, but rather the power over accomplishments and the achievement of the organization's vision. Transformational leaders also know the difference between "power over" and "power to." They are more concerned with how the power of leadership can help others in the organization become more successful and achieve their goals. These types of leaders also have a different view of quality control. Rather than viewing quality control as monitoring, inspecting, checking, and controlling, they see quality control as embedded in the values of the individuals working in the organization and their sense of pride and commitment in what they do. Transformational leaders become upset when they see values

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in the organization violated. They become the gatekeepers of the values that embody the culture. Transformational leaders are moral actors; they are more concerned with the larger purpose or vision of the organization. Karbula (2009) agreed with this concept. He said that the fundamental values regarding honesty, integrity, openness, passion, and compassion for all members of the learning community should be in the forefront of a superintendent's mind.

The Role of the Professional Learning Community

Originally, the purpose of school was to educate the few who would go on to become social leaders and provide others with enough education to move into low-skilled jobs. Schlechty (1990) explained that the original intent of American education was to provide a basic education in order to positively impact society. But it soon evolved into sorting children into groups for future industrial employment. This type of educational model is no longer adequate for meeting the national education goals of today, which involve learning how to learn and compete in a global economy. In order to accomplish this type of learning, educators must move to a different model for schools and that model is more collaborative and effective--a professional learning community (Dufour & Eaker, 1998).

Sergiovanni (2007) noted that today most schools believe themselves to be authentic learning communities but, in fact, few really are. Becoming a community that is truly learner-centered requires significant changes in the school's culture and mission. What, then, defines a true professional learning community? How does a professional learning community differ from an ordinary school? Professional learning communities are focused on the learning in school rather than the teaching. The emphasis is on learning: what should all student learn; how will students and teachers know when the skill and knowledge is acquired; and what is the response when students experience difficulty with learning (DuFour et al., 2004). Sergiovanni (2007)

pointed out that learning communities focus on relationships. They create a solid structure around people supporting each other and building a set of shared values and ideas.

Dufour and Eaker (1998) challenge schools to "begin with the end in mind" (p. 25). They described the six characteristics of professional learning communities. First they start with a shared mission, vision and values. These are the guiding principles of the school. Second is collective inquiry. This is about questioning what the beliefs are and modifying them to make changes to the whole system. Third, collective teams focus on the willingness of everyone in the community to work together to make improvements. Fourth, action orientation and experimentation means turning the goal and aspirations into reality. Fifth, continuous improvement is about the constant search for a better way. Sixth, results orientation means that everything, including the previous five elements are gauged against results. This type of effort requires significant buy-in from teachers (Barlow, 2008). Kennedy et al., (2011) agreed. They stated that all adults in the learning community have the shared responsibility to ensure that all students succeed and are able to reach their full potential. This shared responsibility requires risk and constant dialogue about the status quo and a re-culturing of the school as a whole.

Schlechly (1990) described the end result as a restructuring of schools and he calls on educational leaders to learn and implement new ways of leading. He described the change in roles and responsibilities and sometimes, the leader becomes the follower. This idea of role switching can be considered radical in some schools. It requires a whole new way of structuring a school and it can sometimes upset the traditional structure of school. Sergiovanni (1992) explained the transformation that takes place in the leadership and followership of a learning community. He explained that leaders and followers are motivated and inspired by the same things-ideas, values, commitment. Following can look very much like leading in a professional

learning community. He says true leadership does not come simply by having the title of "Leader." It grows out of one's ability to be a successful follower. The best leaders were once followers.

Systems Thinking

Meadows (2008) explained that a system is a set of things that are interconnected in such a way that they start to behave in their own way. Systems thinking is simply a way to think about the structure and patterns in a system. Meadows (2008) provided the example of the digestive system. She explains that the digestive system includes parts like teeth, stomach, enzymes, intestines, etc. All these parts are interrelated through the processing and physical flow of the breakdown of food. The primary function of the system is to transform the food into basic nutrients on which the body can maintain a healthy status.

Meadows (2008) breaks down each essential part of a system and describes its importance to systems thinking. She says that the elements of a system are easiest to notice because they are highly visible things. She compares elements of a system to the trunk, roots, branches and leaves of a tree, all of which are highly visible. You have to look more closely to see the specialized cells and vessels. She goes on to explain that the interconnectedness of the entire system is harder to see. You don't notice that one part of the tree is signaling to another part to allow the pattern to continue. For example, the leaves signal to the roots to take in more water when they need it. The purpose of a system is more difficult to determine. In the tree example, the purpose of that system is not about how the leaves use a chemical and metabolic signal to interact with the roots. The purpose of the tree's system is to maintain the health of the tree.

Brynteson (2006) described systems and systems thinking in a similar way. He gives the example that systems thinking is like looking through a telescope with a wide-angel lens rather than a telephoto lens. It is really about seeing the connections between the parts rather than each part separately. Systems thinking involves understanding the patterns in each system and how they are interconnected to make the system work the way it does as a whole. Senge et al. (2000) also pointed out the connectedness of a system. They explained that systems thinking is the study of the structure and working of an entire system. In the larger sense, it is about looking differently at problems and goals-they are not isolated things, but rather part of a larger structure or system. Senge et al. (2000) goes further as he has applied it to his theoretical framework for examining and promoting organizational change.

Senge (1990) summarized by saying that systems thinking gives people the most effective way to understand the world around them. It is the framework for seeing interconnectedness and patterns of change rather than just a snapshot of an individual thing. Schools, like other organizations, are sets of systems: the classroom; the school; the district as a whole are all interconnected. When an issue arises in one system, it surely affects other systems. When the desire occurs to change a set of systems and move forward in a new direction, it is most effective for the leaders to understand this connectedness of systems and use the knowledge to help others in the school community see the bigger picture of change

Chapter Summary

This review of literature provided an overview of the concepts of organizational change and leadership teams, the theoretical framework that helped guide this study, how leadership matters, two types of leadership-instructional leadership and transformational leadership-a

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description of the professional learning community, and the explanation of systems thinking.

Each of these concepts informed the study and the analysis of the data.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Initiating change in a school district or moving a learning community forward is a daunting task for an administrative team. Administrative teams are responsible for management of the district as well as instructional leadership of the professional staff. Marzano et al. (2005) explained that leading a school requires a complex set of skills. Administrators in schools need to balance management with instructional leadership. However, Marzano et al. (2005) continued by stating, "this conclusion creates a logical problem because it would be rare to find a single individual who has the capacity or will to master such a complex array of skills" (p. 99). Fortunately, the solution to this problem exists if schools shift their administrative focus from one individual to a team of individuals. As the definition of school leadership evolves, the best option seems to be to build a strong, effective administrative team that can move the school district forward.

Purpose

The purpose of this case study was to examine the leadership team of one successful school district to identify the characteristics, conditions, vision, and practice of the team and the perceived impact those characteristics had on the district. The researcher examined the specific situations that the members of the administrative team identified as significant in their growth. In addition, perceptions and beliefs about the district, held by individuals within the administrative team and various teacher leaders, were explored.

Yin (2018) explained that case study research is best used to gain an understanding of a circumstance that involves important contextual conditions. This methodology allows the

researcher to uncover information about a phenomenon and understand the nature of the phenomenon from various viewpoints. Creswell (2007) supported this idea of carefully examining a case in order to have a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon, such as leadership in this study.

Context

For the purposes of this research study, a pseudonym was used when referencing the school district: throughout this document, it will be referred to as Green Valley School District.

Green Valley School District was selected by this researcher as the case for this research study because of its particular context; that is Green Valley has been identified as a highly successful school district. The district demonstrated success in performance data, statistics, and cultural change over a significant time period, specifically from 2004 to 2010. During this time frame, the district was highly ranked for exceeding expectations considering economical background (Pittsburgh Business Times, 2004-2010). In addition, the district was recognized for outpacing peers in math and reading for four consecutive years within the same time frame (Pittsburgh Business Times, 2004-2010). These success markers led the researcher to believe that there were certain components and characteristics inherent in the administrative team that were worth examining more closely and highlighting more specifically.

Sample

Purposive sampling was employed to select individual participants to interview for the study. Participants chosen from the administrative team represented the various levels of leadership in the district, including principals, central office leaders, and the superintendent during that period of time. Ten teacher leaders were selected from a group who participated in the Western Pennsylvania Educational Leadership Initiative (ELI) sponsored by the University

of Pittsburgh, during the study years (2004-2010). Convenience sampling was also used to select the teacher leaders; volunteers who were available were interviewed for this study.

Even though purposive sampling was used, it is important to note that a qualitative researcher's intent "is to describe a particular context in depth, not to generalize to a context or population" (Gay et al., 2009, p. 135). Results from this case study were not intended to be generalized to a larger population but rather to provide a deeper understanding of the particular administrative team in order to inform further study.

The researcher followed specific procedures to ensure a sense of trust with the participants. First, the researcher gained permission to interview the participants by contacting the current superintendent and verifying that the interviews would be conducted off site on personal time. After permission from the superintendent was granted, IRB approval was obtained. Next, the researcher selected the participants, as described above, and initial contact was made by sending each a description of the study and consent form. All ten individuals agreed to participate. The researcher collected all consent forms to keep as a record. Follow-up contact was made to arrange meeting dates and times. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used throughout the research study for each of the participants.

Data Collection

Interview Method

Creswell (2007) pointed out that interviews allow participants to discuss their experiences freely without the constraint of the researcher's perspective or past research findings. Interviews also allow researchers to explore participants' perceptions. For this study, the researcher used the interview method to collect data regarding participants' perceptions from the time period relevant to the study, which included the years 2004-2010.

The researcher conducted semi-structured, open-ended interviews with participants in either small groups or individually, depending on what was convenient for the participants. Interviews were conducted at a neutral site that was comfortable to both the participants and researcher. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. All interviews were audio taped with the knowledge and permission of each participant. All participants received a copy of the purpose of the study prior to the interview and were asked if they had any questions regarding this purpose before the interview was conducted.

The interview questions (see Table 1) were used as a guide and were developed using Senge's (1990) Five Disciplines and Hackman's (2002) Six Conditions. They were open-ended and designed to allow each interviewee to give reflective and meaningful information. Follow-up and probing questions were asked for clarification. The same interview questions were used with all participants regardless of position (administrator or teacher leader).

Table 1

Discipline/Enabling Condition and Interview Questions

Discipline/Enabling Condition	Interview Questions
Personal Mastery (Senge, 1990)	How has your own personal educational vision matched the district's vision (during the time period 2004-2010) and has it changed over the course of your work within the leadership team? How?
Shared Vision (Senge, 1990) Compelling Purpose (Hackman, 2002)	How did the district's vision develop and how did it actualize across the learning community?
A Real Team (Hackman, 2002) Right People (Hackman, 2002)	Who were the members of the leadership team (during the time period 2004-2010) and how did the team add members?
Mental Models (Senge, 1990)	What attitudes, beliefs, and/or assumptions about education did you bring to the leadership team and the district? Have these changed over time? How?
Team Learning (Senge, 1990) Expert Team Coaching (Hackman, 2002)	How did the members of the leadership team support each other's growth as educators and leaders? How did the growth of the leadership team impact the entire school district/community?
Supportive Organizational Context (Hackman, 2002) Solid Team Structure (Hackman, 2002)	Did members of the leadership team feel supported? What evidence supports this? Did members feel that they have full access to resources and support from other members? Did members feel comfortable working within the team? Did members feel a sense of responsibility for the overall success of the district? How was that displayed?
Systems Thinking (Senge, 1990)	How did members of the leadership team feel about the growth and direction of the school district? What did members of the team believe had the most impact on the district as a whole? What was the process for addressing problems or areas of concern within the school district and working through an appropriate solution?

Throughout interview process, the researcher protected the privacy of each participant and the school district by changing names to ensure anonymity. Table 2 provides demographic information regarding the individuals who participated in the interviews.

Table 2

Participant Demographic Information

Position	Years of experience in the district	Gender
Former Superintendent (retired)	42	Male
Former Director of Secondary Education (retired)	30	Male
Former Director of Curriculum	16	Female
Current Principal	16	Male
Coordinator of Student Services (former M.S. Principal)	23	Male
High School Principal	26	Male
Coordinator of Technology and Transportation	21	Male
Elementary School Teacher	16	Female
Elementary School Teacher	21	Female
Middle/High School Teacher	21	Male

Research Trustworthiness

One validation strategy that the researcher of this study employed was "prolonged engagement" (Creswell, 2007). This consists of the researcher learning the culture and building trust with the participants. Working with the participants day in and day out allowed for a deeper understanding of the environment and adds to the validity of the work (Creswell, 2007). This particular strategy was easy for the researcher to apply because this study was conducted in the

researcher's place of employment. Understanding of the culture and rapport with the participants was already established.

Another strategy the researcher employed was "peer review or debriefing." This is an external check of the research process by a peer debriefer. This individual asks questions about methods and interpretations and provides the researcher with the opportunity for catharsis through discussion, much in the same spirit as interrater reliability in quantitative research (Creswell, 2007). The researcher enlisted the help of an administrator from a neighboring school district to act as "expert" and examine the research questions and techniques of data collection. This provided the researcher with invaluable feedback with regard to the depth of the questions and the ability of the questions to encourage the most meaningful responses. The researcher also utilized member checking to ensure that each participant confirmed that the information was recorded accurately.

Pilot Procedures

Gay et al. (2009) explained that a pilot study is important because it provides information and suggestions for improvement. In addition, Berg (2009) pointed out that piloting, "pretesting" is important because the researcher must gather information and feedback regarding the content or subject matter of the interview questions. This researcher enlisted the help of three colleagues from a neighboring district to provide feedback on the questions. Berg (2009) recommends five questions for assessing the interview instrument:

1) has the researcher included all of the questions necessary to test the research hypothesis? 2) do the questions elicit the types of responses that were anticipated? 3) is the language meaningful to the respondents? 4) are there other problems with the questions? 5) does the interview guide help to motivate respondents to participate in the study?"(p.119)

The researcher conducted pilot interviews in order to examine and modify the interview questions and procedures, as well as to determine how the interview content would be analyzed. The researcher asked two principals and one teacher from another nearby district to participate in the pilot interviews. The pilot participants read through each question and answered as if they were asked the questions. Additionally, the pilot participants provided written feedback about each question. The researcher read through each pilot participant's responses and made adaptations to a few questions. One adaptation that was made was to focus questions on the experience of each participant. For example, when asking the questions involving growth and support (see Table 1), each participant was asked to reflect on his or her own situation. Teacher leaders focused their answers on their own growth during the study timeframe and administrators focused their answers on their own growth and their perception of the team growth. Another adaptation was made to the question regarding Team Learning (see Table 1). The feedback provided from the pilot participants indicated that asking the administrative team how they supported each other's growth and if they felt supported was repetitive and could be possibly condensed into one question. The researcher decided to retain the first question, "How did the members of the leadership team support each other's growth as educators and leaders?" and adapt the second question, "Did members of the leadership team feel supported?" to ascertain the level of support from the district superintendent.

Data Analysis

Gay et al. (2009) explained that when analyzing data in qualitative research, one should summarize the data in an accurate and reliable manner. They continued by pointing out that qualitative data analysis is not postponed until all data are collected; analysis is on-going throughout the entire study. As the study continues, the researcher should attempt to narrow the focus and analyze discoveries throughout the process. Researchers in qualitative studies can

easily become overwhelmed with an enormous amount of data. In order to reduce this possibility, Gay et al. (2009) suggested that while the researcher is gathering data, he/she reviews everything, making note of specific details and asking oneself questions such as, 'What does this focus mean?' and 'What is this telling me?' The researcher did reflect back on each interview after its completion and made notes about clarifying questions for the next interview.

Creswell (2007) explained that it is essential to begin this process by staying organized. The large amount of raw data that is gathered though interviewing must be organized in a logical way; for example, keep transcripts of interviews separated and keep any notes taken during the interviews with the bound copies. In addition, it is essential to keep track of when each interview question was asked and if each interview was one-on-one or small group. Creswell (2007) also advocated reading through interview transcripts thoroughly to get a general sense or "feel" of the content and to note specific themes.

Once all the data is organized and has been read several times, Creswell (2007) explained the steps necessary for coding the data. First, the researcher must review the transcripts looking for broad commonalities throughout. The next step is to narrow these commonalities into various "themes" that will be coded throughout each transcript. Next, the researcher must reread through each interview and carefully mark various sections that pertain to the individual themes. Rereading can be time consuming but is necessary. Each theme is then assigned a code. After all the interviews are coded, the researcher must find a way to pull out the various sections marked under each code. Creswell (2007) suggested printing out a file or list of each code and the text passages that were assigned the codes. Keeping a list of codes is done to help organize the data and retrieve information easily. This researcher highlighted and marked with sticky notes the various coded sections.

After the researcher worked through the process of blocking and identifying themes, it was time to present the findings. Presenting the findings requires choosing the tools that best represent what the data is presenting, for example, tables or matrices may be used to represent the data. In addition, Creswell (2007) recommended using a "narrative discussion" to further detail the findings in the tables. Narrative discussion summarizes the findings from the data analysis. In addition, it is not only essential to report the themes and interconnections, but it is equally important to raise questions, challenge assumptions and reflect on how the participants were impacted during the study. It is important to include quotes, metaphors, and analogies offered by the participants. Creswell (2007) also recommended writing in sharp detail and specifying the contradictions in experiences of the participants. The idea is to "tell a story" of the experiences that the participants had during the research time period. All of the described suggestions provided by Creswell were employed in the data analysis for this study, and will be described in Chapter 4.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 provides the purpose for using the case study method of qualitative research design. Case study methodology was used because the purpose of the study was to develop a deeper understanding of how the administrative team provided leadership to the district and to describe the perceptions of this leadership. Interview questions were identified through the pilot procedures and the planned process of data analysis was described. Interview transcripts were organized and analyzed and coding was used to identify themes that were revealed. Chapter 4 uses the organized data from chapter 3 to examine the perceptions of teacher leaders and the characteristics of the leadership team as a whole.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to examine the leadership team of one school district to identify the characteristics, vision, and practices of the team and the perceived impact those characteristics had on the district. It examined the specific situations that the members of the administrative team identified as significant in their growth. In addition, the study identified the perceptions and beliefs about the district that were held by individuals within the administrative team itself as well as various teacher leaders. The following research questions guided the study:

1. Which components of the two theoretical frameworks are addressed most often when talking to the administrative team?

2. What changes in attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions did the members of the administrative team perceive over the years 2004-2010?

3. How did the teacher leaders perceive the administrative team in terms of leadership?

These research questions act as the overarching guide to analyzing the information brought out in each interview. This chapter presents the data from the interviews using the research questions to guide and the theoretical framework to assist in the analysis.

Data Analysis

Gay et al. (2009) explained that when analyzing data in qualitative research, one should summarize the data in an accurate and reliable manner. They continued by pointing out that qualitative data analysis is not postponed until all data are collected; analysis is on-going throughout the entire study. The researcher of this study analyzed each interview immediately following the session by listening to the recording and noting any obvious "themes" that may

have been present. As the study continues, the researcher should attempt to narrow the focus and analyze discoveries about the process. This researcher accomplished that by making adjustments to each interview. As the interviews progressed, the researcher became more confident about conducting them and more careful about the process. For example, after the first interview, the researcher chose locations for the interviews that were quieter in order to limit the noise distraction both during the interview and when listening to the recording. In addition, the researcher became more adept at providing ample wait time for an interview participant to speak. Giving the participants ample time to answer each question allowed for more thoughtful responses.

Researchers in qualitative studies can easily become overwhelmed with an enormous amount of data. In order to reduce this possibility, Gay et al. (2009) suggested that while the researcher is gathering data, he/she reviews everything, making note of specific details and asking oneself questions such as, "What does this focus mean?" and "What is this telling me?" This researcher did reflect back on each interview after its completion and made notes about clarifying questions for the next interview. Notes were kept in a folder along with an extra copy of research questions and they were referenced prior to the beginning of each subsequent interview.

Creswell (2007) explained that it is essential to begin the research process in an organized manner. The large amount of raw data that is gathered through interviewing must be organized in a logical way; for example, transcripts of interviews were bound and kept separate and any notes taken during the interview session were kept with the transcript of that particular participant. Participants' real names and pseudonyms were noted for each interview in order to ensure

accuracy when quoting subjects. In addition, the interviewer noted when each interview question was asked and whether each interview was one-on-one or small group.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with members of the administrative team and teacher leaders who worked in the district during the years 2004-2010. The interviews included administrators and teachers who are still currently employed in the district as well as some who have moved to different districts or retired. The following table provides a description of participants.

Table 3

Description of Participants

Name (pseudonym)	Position	Age	Years in the district	History
Cole Smith	Central Office Administrator	47	21	Cole started in the district as the Director of Technology and remained in that position until 2012. That year, the new Superintendent added to his title making him Coordinator of Technology and Transportation and Community Relations
Trent Mason	Central Office Administrator Previously a building Principal	48	23	Trent started as a teacher in the district and then became an assistant principal, principal, and is currently Coordinator of Student Services

Keith Bridge	Building Principal	45	16	Keith started in the district as an assistant principal at both the middle and high school level. He is currently the principal of an elementary building in the district.
Don Zilt	Building Principal	54	26	Don started as a high school teacher then moved into the assistant principal position, then principal at the high school.
Tracey West	Central Office Administrator Previously a building Principal	48	16	Tracey came to the district as the middle school principal and then moved into the position of director of curriculum. She has since taken a job as superintendent in a neighboring district
Tony Simon	Central Office Administrator (Retired)	67	30	Tony began as a high school math teacher then moved into the position of assistant principal at the middle school and then assistant principal at the high school, then principal at the high school and finally director of secondary education
Mindy James	Teacher leader	39	16	Mindy started as an elementary teacher then moved into the position of elementary gifted teacher. She has also been a teacher leader and member of the district teacher leadership team.

Dana Hill	Teacher leader	46	22	Dana also started as an elementary teacher then moved into a title 1 (math support) teacher and then back into an elementary classroom position. She has also been a member of the teacher leadership team.
Brandon Swan	Teacher leader	45	21	Brandon started as a teacher in the middle school and remains there. He has also been a member of the district's teacher leadership team.
Ty Young	Former Superintendent (Retired)	69	42	Ty has held many positions in the district from teacher to coach to principal to director to Superintendent where he remained for 15 years.

Creswell (2007) advocated reading through interview transcripts thoroughly to get a general sense or "feel" of the content and to note any specific themes one notices. After all the interviews were completed, the researcher reviewed the transcripts looking for broad commonalities throughout. Next, the researcher narrowed these commonalities into various "themes" that were used for coding throughout each transcript. Codes may develop naturally as the researcher reviews the data or codes may be a priori (pre-existing) codes from the theoretical framework. Creswell (2007) explained that using a priori codes is acceptable, the only drawback being that the researcher must be careful to be open to any other codes that may emerge during analysis. As the interviews were analyzed, five general codes emerged. They were vision, beliefs, growth, support, and systems thinking. Three of these codes, vision, beliefs, and systems thinking, were a priori codes found in the frameworks explained earlier. The codes of growth and

support, however, emerged independently of the frameworks. The researcher marked content in each interview under one of the five codes then marked each code with a tab so each could be located easily. "Counting the frequency of codes" and "relating the codes to a framework from literature" are two other strategies used by the researcher to analyze the data from the interviews (Creswell, 2007). The researcher was able to count the frequency of each code in order to address the first research question. All the codes were matched with a section of the theoretical framework to help answer the final two research questions. The codes are described in Table 4.

Table 4

Table of Codes; Discipline/Condition; and Interview Questions

Codes	Discipline or Enabling Condition	Interview Question
Vison	Personal Mastery (Senge, 2006)	How has your own personal educational vision matched the district's vision (during the time period 2004-2010) and has it changed over the course of your work within the leadership team? How?
Vision	Shared Vision (Senge, 2006) Compelling Purpose (Hackman, 2002)	How did the district's vision develop and how did it actualize across the learning community?
Beliefs	A Real Team (Hackman, 2002) Right People (Hackman, 2002)	Who were the members of the administrative team (during the time period 2004-2010) and how did the team add members?

Beliefs	Mental Models (Senge, 2006)	What attitudes and beliefs about education did you bring to the administrative team and the district?
Growth	Team Learning (Senge, 2006) Expert Team Coaching (Hackman, 2002)	How did the members of the administrative team support each other's growth as educators and leaders? How did the growth of the administrative team impact the entire school district/community?
Support	Supportive Organizational Context (Hackman, 2002) Solid Team Structure (Hackman, 2002)	Did members of the administrative team feel supported? What evidence supports this? Did members feel that they have full access to resources and support from other members? Did members feel comfortable working within the team? Did members feel a sense of responsibility for the overall success of the district? How was that displayed?
Systems Thinking	Systems Thinking (Senge, 2006)	How did members of the administrative team feel about the growth and direction of the school district? What did members of the team believe had the most impact on the district as a whole? What was the process for addressing problems or areas of concern within the school district and working through an appropriate solution?

Research Question 1

Which components of the two theoretical frameworks are addressed most often when talking to the administrative team?

The two codes that appeared most frequently throughout the interviews were vision (85) and beliefs (160) (see Table 5). Vision and beliefs correlate with Senge's first three disciplines and Hackman's first three enabling conditions. Those are personal mastery, shared vision, mental models (Senge, 2006); and compelling purpose, a real team, right people (Hackman, 2002)

Table 5

Number of Times Codes Appear in Transcripts

Code	Number of times code appears in transcript
Vision	85
Beliefs	160
Growth	67
Support	34
Systems Thinking	26

Vison has traditionally been known to be the guiding factor in the success of an organization. However, when the vision is something developed by the administrative team without buy-in from the teachers, the teachers in the district rarely reference it or use it to help guide leaning. Vision is connected to the theoretical framework through 'personal mastery,' "shared vision," and "compelling purpose." Personal mastery is the phrase Senge (1990) used to describe the concept of personal growth and learning; however, this goes beyond simply acquiring skills and becoming a life-long learner. Personal mastery embodies the idea of

"creative tension" (Senge, 1990). Creative tension is the point between where one is and where one wants to be. It is the motivation to continue growing and learning and becoming better tomorrow than one is today.

Shared vision is the idea of caring about the future among those in an organization; it is what binds individuals in the commitment and connection of a common important undertaking. A shared vision is essential to an effective leadership team. The team must be focused on the same ideals and have the same image of what will make the organization successful. Possessing a compelling purpose is Hackman's idea of the shared vision, with a twist. He believes that the purpose of an effective team is set by the top leader who develops a challenging direction and invites the others to join. Hackman (2002) believed having a compelling direction or purpose energizes the entire team and orients their attention to move the organization forward. Green Valley emulated the idea of having a compelling purpose. Superintendent Young focused on a compelling purpose or vision ("effort creates ability") and challenged the team to share this vision with him and expand their own learning and the learning of others in order to accomplish positive change in the district.

> You have to create a vision that inspires people. If you create that vision that inspires others, they'll go with it. Leaders are people who take people where they won't go on their own. I want people who are willing to grow, try different things, willing to take risks that had a strong belief in kids. They had to have that commitment and compassion. And passion. (Ty Young, Former Green Valley School District Superintendent)

When Ty Young first became the superintendent of the Green Valley School District in 1997, he repeatedly recited a phrase that he had read. The phrase originated from the research work of Lauren Resnick, director of the Institute of Learning at the University of Pittsburgh. The

phrase, "effort creates ability," became the catalyst for change in the culture throughout the Green Valley School District.

Young strongly believed in the phrase "effort creates ability." As noted in the interviews, Young related the phrase to his own experiences in sports. He believed that if one really tried and worked hard, one improved, thus effort did create the ability. Young used the example of his experience playing football at Pennsylvania State University. He said, "When I went to Penn State, I wasn't one of the top players. I wasn't very big. But I worked harder and by my senior year, I was a starter. And that was just from the effort I put in." Young believed that "effort creates ability" could be the guiding vision for the entire district. He explained that this was not limited to the effort expected of students, but also included the effort put forth by the teachers, administrators, and support staff. In essence, Young asked everyone to put forth their best effort to increase student achievement.

Young needed more than just a catchy phrase; he needed buy-in from the key stakeholders in the district; the teachers and the administrative team. In order to develop this phrase into a real vision, Young explained that he talked about it with administrators and teacher leaders. Discussions about what the phrase meant and what it looked like in a school, in a classroom, in a lesson took place almost daily. The vision of "effort creates ability" grew as a process over time; with increased discussion came increased understanding and buy-in from everyone in the learning community.

Throughout the interviews, the Green Valley administrators and teacher leaders also discussed this idea of a shared vision with a compelling purpose, as well as personal learning and growth. The administrators and teachers described the importance of the vision, offering their perception of the impact of Superintendent Young's idea on their own personal visions and the

district. During his interview, Principal Don Zilt explained that his personal vision and the shared district vision "evolved over time." He said that when one first heard the phrase, "effort creates ability," one may not be sure what this simple phrase meant. He described that over time, however, teachers and administrators discussed it, reflected on it, and took the time to understand it and implement the concept. Zilt stated, "I would leave our Administrative meetings and my head would be spinning. I would have to process it all."

Central office administrator Trent Mason added, "The whole philosophy of 'effort creates ability' is about us letting kids know that if they work and rework, they're going to be able to get it." Former principal and central office administrator Tracey West explained that her personal vision "really developed over years and with all my experiences" and that she doesn't think she ever really thought about her "personal beliefs and expectations for all kids being able to achieve those really high levels" of success before working with Young. She added that it was really Superintendent Young's "vision and talking about 'effort creates ability'" that made her think about all students reaching their potential. According to West, Young's vision impacted her work as an educator. She said, "It wasn't just talk. It became the heart of what [Young] did and he connected it to what we did to the processes and procedures at the district." West gave the example of how the culture really evolved into protecting instructional time. Young wanted to maximize the time teachers had with students and didn't want that interrupted throughout the day. Administrator Cole Smith said that his personal vision was shaped by the concept that "it's really up to us educators to find the means and the methods so every child does reach their potential." Principal Don Zilt added that not everyone understood the phrase "effort creates ability" at first. He said, "I think we thought we [understood it]. The more time we spent with it,

the more it evolved. A lot of discussions administratively centered on what that means and what it looks like in a classroom."

Former central office administrator, Tony Simon, emphasized the point that "effort creates ability" helped to define the mission of the Green Valley School District and that the vision wasn't a "living room document" where "it was written and put in a drawer and only displayed on special occasions." He explained that the administrative team wanted the vision to be more of a "kitchen document where you have it out there and you're working with it every day and it's guiding what you do."

The teachers at Green Valley slowly began to believe and buy into the "effort creates ability" vision. Teacher leader, Mindy James, saw this vision of "effort creates ability" as "the harder you work the smarter you get." James used a rock analogy as an example; she stated that another teacher once explained his understanding of "effort creates ability" and the idea that teachers need to encourage effort. According to James, the teacher said, "If we have a kid and this big boulder and we ask him to move it across the room, he can't do it. He's going to fail. But if we give the student a chisel and have him break it into small pieces and take it over a few pieces at a time, he will eventually get the whole boulder on the other side of the room." This analogy captures the idea of "effort creates ability" and the responsibility that teachers felt, at the time, to do whatever it took to help students achieve success. Teacher Dana Hill said it was discussed all the time. She explained,

> Effort creates ability. It doesn't matter that we have low income kids. It doesn't matter
>
> that they go home and they don't have a mom to help them with their homework. We're
>
> not going to worry about homework. We're going to teach them while they're in school.
>
> It doesn't matter that they aren't motivated to learn mathematics. That is the teacher's job

to motivate them to learn mathematics. There were no excuses. (Teacher leader Dana

Hill)

Superintendent Young explained that he consistently talked about "effort creates ability" and he really wanted the administrative team to understand the vision and help teachers implement it every day. He encouraged administrators and teachers to challenge his thinking and ask questions and really consider how the district's vision can come to life every day in classrooms. Cole Smith emphasized that Young encouraged administrators and teachers around him, to be "thinkers about the vision and how effort impacts the classroom." Tony Simon added, "Teachers welcomed the opportunity to sit down in conversations with their peers and say, 'I don't necessarily agree with this concept but I want to talk about it.'" According to Simon, teachers grappled with the idea that a student's ability could increase based not only on his/her own effort but also based on the effort of those around the student. As Simon explained in his interview, teachers recognized that they played an even more vital role than they first thought.

In summary, "Vision" was one of the most frequently occurring codes in the interviews. "Beliefs" was the other code that emerged frequently during the analysis of the interviews; in fact, it was the most frequently occurring code with 160 references. Beliefs and how they changed will be discussed more completely below, in the section pertaining to Research Question 2. Although the codes of growth, support, and systems thinking were not the most frequently occurring codes, they are discussed in the final research question.

Research Question 2

What changes in attitudes, beliefs and assumptions did the members of the administrative team perceive over the years 2004—2010?

Once the vision "effort creates ability" became engrained in the district culture, beliefs about student potential and achievement changed as well. Beliefs are what set a vision in motion; they are the structure of a vision, mission, and culture of a school district. Examples of beliefs are often more obvious to bring out than examples of vision because beliefs can be described in the habits and manner of teaching.

In the theoretical framework, beliefs are included in Hackman's "a real team," and "right people" and Senge's (2006) "mental models." The phrase "mental models" refers to the way one sees the world and the people in it. It encompasses the generalizations or assumptions made about a situation or a person. Mental models include how one thinks about something. For example, is a situation impossible to manage or simply a challenge to overcome? It is important to understand belief systems because they impact how one behaves in a situation. Every person approaches a situation differently; and what one thinks or believes about that situation affects how they act.

Hackman's (2002) "real team" concept refers to the development of a collaborative group that consists of competent members who are motivated to work at the highest levels. A "real team" is created by finding the "right people." It means putting individuals in positions that bring out their strengths and focuses their knowledge in productive ways. Creating real teams is like laying a solid foundation for a building. A foundation that is solid and well-built will be able to hold the rest of the building with confidence. The combined definition of these three principles is a real, well-composed work team that has the right number and mix of members to work collaboratively together to achieve the common purpose of reflecting upon, continually clarifying, and improving the internal pictures of the world and seeing how they shape the actions and decisions of the team.

Throughout the interviews, participants articulated the various beliefs that they felt impacted the success of the district. For example, former central office administrator, Tony Simon, agreed explained that the administrative team was more than just supportive of each other; it was almost like a family. He said, "We could be open and honest with each other and it was okay to disagree. We were a team and everyone had a role." Administrator Trent Mason talked about how the students got the sense that the school was not going to give up on them. He stated that under the philosophy of "effort creates ability," the district put into place "the structure of retesting and relearning" and the belief that "failure is not an option." Mason further explained, "We let kids know that if they work and rework, they can get it. We're not going to give up on them. Not just academically but socially and emotionally as well."

One enactment of this particular belief in student achievement occurred at the high school. The administrators began to eliminate "prerequisites" for taking higher-level classes. Principal Zilt explained the elimination of prerequisites during his interview, "We don't tell a kid that they can't take a class. If they are up for the challenge and want to do it, they do it at the high school. They take that challenging class. We don't sort them and say, 'here's the bar for you.' And there was no wavering from that ever." Another action that exemplified this belief in student achievement was the elimination of class rank. Administrators who were interviewed for this study explained that they wanted to send the message that all students could achieve and that the district did not believe that one student was "better" than another based on a number. They all had the potential to be high achievers. The administrators discussed additional structures put in place to support "effort creates ability." For example, they eliminated sanctions (disciplinary measures), including grade penalties, to address attendance at the high school. Sanctions were eliminated because they were not aligned with the district vision. Trent Mason said students

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"should not receive a failing grade ("F") for missing more than five days in a nine week period."
He said addressing attendance should not impact instruction or grades.

Also in response to shifting beliefs about student achievement, the elementary
administrators created after-school tutoring "clubs," called Kids Express. Teachers were hired to
remain at school for an extra hour, two days per week to tutor students and strengthen skills. The
district paid for busing to take students home after these tutoring sessions so transportation
would not pose a barrier to student participation. Kids Express became a successful and well
received support program, and was emulated at the district's middle school. The middle school
began offering its own tutoring sessions before school, so as not to interfere with after-school
sports or clubs.

During her interview, teacher leader Mindy James discussed the concept of "second
chances." This was rooted in not punishing kids for not "getting it," or understanding new
concepts the first time they are introduced. According to James, teachers began to believe that
some students need more time with good instruction in order to understand new content. She
stated, "Are we grading them on how fast they get it, or if they actually got it? And when I grade
things I think about that. For example, if they misspell a word, I call them up and ask them if
they can spell it orally. If they can, clearly they know how to spell it they just may not be able to
write it."

Teacher leader Dana Hill elaborated on her developing beliefs about students in her
interview. Hill explained how Young's belief that we shouldn't hold it against children when
they don't have support at home changed how she thought about homework. She said,
"Superintendent Young would say things like, 'We're not going to hold a kid's education
hostage because they don't have a mom who goes over their homework. So, for example, Johnny

gets to learn fractions because he did his homework. But, Tommy doesn't have anybody to help him so he didn't get the extra practice. So, not only doesn't he get to have fractions reinforced, he also loses recess because his homework isn't done." This exact sentiment forced everyone to rethink the concept of homework. Young believed that homework should be eliminated entirely because you can never guarantee that students would or could do it and they shouldn't be "punished" for it. Dana Hill, though, explained that this was a difficult concept for teachers to accept and there was much discussion and debate about the subject of homework. At the very least, Young said that homework should be meaningful and opportunities should be given to students during the school day if they didn't have the support at home to complete it.

Principal Keith Bridge discussed Carol Dweck's (2006) concept of "growth mindset" as opposed to "fixed mindset," during his interview. This belief system was something Green Valley discussed several years before it became a well-known concept in educational circles. Young introduced the concept to district professionals through discussion, as well as research examples, early on. Bridge added that Young encouraged teachers and administrators to read about the growth mindset and to try to implement the concept in their classrooms. Bridge said, "[Dweck's (2006) concept of] growth mindset is very common sense but hard to implement because there are a lot of administrators/teachers who believe you only have the innate ability that you were born with. And it's something we had to read articles about and sort of get legs underneath us to try to change the mindset of students and families."

Research Question 3

How did the teacher leaders perceive the administrative team in terms of leadership?

In addition to creating a strong, relatable vision (effort creates ability), restructuring district initiatives based on beliefs, nurturing relationships, and putting together a passionate

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team, Superintendent Young also believed in lifelong learning and he believed in growing, and

supporting those around you. Principal Don Zilt talked about the reading and research that

Young did. He said, "He would pull in a lot of business literature [as well as education

literature]. I was always fascinated by that because he must have read 24 hours a day. He would

find things that weren't always in the educational field that supported a belief he had. That added

a very strong dimension when he brought in the business world too." Keith Bridge agreed,

"Young was a man of conviction. Whether through his studies or his readings, when he rolled

things out, he knew where he wanted to go. He had research to back it up." Young himself said

of his reading and research, "My philosophy is that every day I want to learn something new – at

least one thing. I would try to spend at least an hour a day in reading research. You better have

good solid evidence as to why you're doing what you're doing. You better have some research

on it."

These ideals came out through the growth and support of the administrative team. These

growth and support codes appeared less frequently in the interviews but were still mentioned.

Growth and support are addressed in the framework under "Team Learning/Expert Team

Coaching" (the code of growth) and "Supportive Organizational Context/Solid Team Structure"

(the code of support).

Growth and support were a central ideal in the Green Valley school district during the

2004-2010 time period. The administrative team's ability to support the growth of each other

was vital to the learning of the group as a whole. During her interview, Tracy West discussed the

administrative meetings. She said, "Superintendent Young was all about the administrative team

learning and growing. I remember him talking briefly during administrative [meetings] about

managerial things, but the majority of the meetings we were talking about what we could be

doing better to actualize that vision." In addition, West said that Young constantly promoted going to conferences and learning from other districts. These activities resulted in the team's ability to develop intelligence collectively. West also felt that Young took the time to build relationships. She said, "Superintendent Young made it important to spend time with us socially which allowed us to become more comfortable in knowing what he wanted and taking risks." Administrator Mason echoed this sentiment. "He invested in people," Mason said. "You felt valued, you felt empowered. I wouldn't be where I am today without his support."

This feeling of value, personal growth, and support trickled down from the administrators to the teachers. The teacher leaders felt very supported and felt that their professional growth and well-being were valued by the administrative team. During her interview, teacher leader, Dana Hill stated, "I felt like the administration cared about what we were doing. If we had a meeting, Superintendent Young would come into the meeting, sit down, listen, talk to us and contribute to the conversation."

Teacher leader, Mindy James, agreed. She explained that, under Young's leadership, the administrative team "had high expectations of themselves and everyone around them." She added that everyone knew the expectations were high and that they would be held accountable, which motivated everyone in the system. James went on to explain that teachers knew what the district's vision and expectations were, because teachers helped define it. According to James, there were lots of committee meetings, providing ample opportunities to talk through what the vision looked like in the classroom. James stated, "We looked at the assessments we were using. What's working? How come these kids have good grades and these other kids don't? Let's make some changes. Let's change the assessments, let's change what we are doing. We had more say." She continued, "[our vision] was very, very clear. Very direct, hands-on, everybody was on

board and you could contribute your thoughts to things. You were going to leave a meeting knowing exactly what you needed to do and what you needed to prepare to bring back. Accountability." Teacher leader Dana Hill agreed; in her interview Hill said it was "the level of caring and accountability" that made the difference. She stated that "we met about everything. Constantly. Continual curriculum development and improvement." The administration's expectation was that there was always room to get better. Teacher leader Brandon Swan reiterated, "Young always said, 'If you're not going forward, you're going backwards. Even standing still is going backwards.'"

Another example of the perception of support from the administration was the induction program for new teachers. Each district in Pennsylvania is required to conduct an induction program for new hires. Green Valley's induction program consisted of a three-year process of learning about and integrating the culture and climate of the district into one's own beliefs. New teachers observed teacher leaders in the classrooms, shared reflections on teaching in their own classrooms, spent time reading and researching Lauren Resnick's "effort creates ability." Of course, induction also included work on lesson design, instructional technique, and using data to make decisions. However, the main focus of induction was to understand the district culture, continued professional development, and methods for reaching all students. Administrators ran the program and brought in teacher leaders from around the district to help mentor new teachers and help build the idea of "effort creates ability." Teacher leaders worked in each building in the district, and they shared their process of growing, learning, and sustaining the culture of the district. They provided examples of what "effort creates ability" looked like in the classroom, and how their own beliefs grew and changed. According to Dana Hill, teacher leaders were the carriers of the message and helped strengthen the culture.

The interviews, with the district's teacher leaders revealed that the administration, and Young specifically, wanted them to grow and learn. They explained that this was just part of the culture. Teacher leader, Mindy James described teacher meetings in the district during the years that Young was Superintendent. She said, "Back then, he wanted the teacher leaders to go back and talk to other teachers. We had teams of teachers at meetings and on committees talking and sharing." She added, that, "we could actually find professional development opportunities that were helpful that we could go to and we knew what we were trying to achieve and the school board would approve it." Teacher leader Dana Hill explained that administrators under Young ran professional development during planning times or half-days. She explained that they also consistently followed through professional development sessions Hill stated, "[our Elementary director] would come and teach us a strategy like double entry journals or how to do a jigsaw strategy with a reading piece. And then we had to try it and bring back our results. That was a way to hold people accountable." This accountability was one method for documenting how teachers were learning and growing. They learned something and had to try it and report on how it went. Both James and Hill felt that learning and growing happened all of the time, and was just part of the expectation of a teacher's job in Green Valley.

The idea of growth was a top priority of the administrative team as well. In their interviews, administrators explained that growth, in general, was just part of the district's culture. Many added that this growth was driven and supported by Superintendent Young. Principal Don Zilt said, "[Young] just always found things to make you think. The literature [he shared] helped form your beliefs but it also helped you share information with other staff members." He added, "I would leave those [administrative] meetings and my head would be spinning. I was always processing and would have a stack of 50 articles on my desk. And I might not read them all right

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then, but just having them to refer to was good." He added, "Those constant administrative discussions that carried into the building, I think, helped push that continued growth." Principal Keith Bridge commented on the growth that occurred at that time within the administrative team. He said, "I think that's what I appreciate having been in several districts before and coming [to Green Valley]. I think that Young framed, if you will, a lot of what I already thought and believed. But, really put some meat to the bones with the reading that he did and he kind of fed us and supported us with that."

Beginning in 2006, Young led the Green Valley district's participation in The Western Pennsylvania Educational Leadership Initiative (ELI). This initiative was led by two University of Pittsburgh professors. This initiative focused on the quality of leadership, shared vision, and excellent teaching. Various other school districts sent teams of administrators, to meet and collaborate together, to share ideas, and to plan for instructional improvement. This initiative was an important step for Green Valley administrators and teacher leaders to grow and strengthen their beliefs and practices; it took the district to a whole new level of understanding with regard to leadership. The expectation shifted from working hard to move Green Valley School District forward with beliefs to sharing with administrators and teacher leaders in other districts. Growth and continual learning was a top priority and became a pillar of the culture in the district.

Administrator Trent Mason explained that the administrative team "grew together" with the teacher leaders. He said, "We grew our capacity because of ELI--we grew capacity together. But we were not only sharing and hearing we're doing good things but we're giving ideas too." And this shift paid off in the successes of the students and the district community as a whole. The district now had a strong leadership team that included teacher leaders as well as building

level and central office administrators all focused on the very best practices for helping students achieve.

Superintendent Young built connections with people. He was honest, genuine, and cared about his teachers, administrators and students. His relationships with the people around him, built over his 42 years of service in the district as a teacher, coach, administrator, and as Superintendent, were the reason his beliefs permeated the culture of the district. Whether he was hiring teachers, administrators, aides, or custodians, he believed in the idea of "hire for attitude, train for skill." Find those individuals who are willing to grow, work hard, and become part of the district 'family,' those individuals who had the right 'attitude' then you can teach them what do in their job. Providing the training or professional development was the easiest part of hiring a new team member. The hard part was finding those "right people to put in the right seats."

Constant growth was essential to the Green Valley School District and to Ty Young in particular. According to study participants, Young not only encouraged administrators and teachers to take risks doing something new and innovative in their schools, he also believed that if you did not, you were not moving in the right direction. He provided significant opportunities for continued learning and growing through both outside initiatives as well as the research, discussions, and challenges he brought to his team personally. According to Young, continued growth and grappling with new and different ideas were the most effective ways to change a culture. Teachers and administrators were not always comfortable with the change or the ideas behind it; however, over time, as they considered how change could impact their students and themselves, they gradually became advocates of it. Change became embedded in what teachers and administrators did and what they believed; eventually they became the proponents of the

change. They became the district leaders who helped to move the faculty forward and change the culture as a whole.

Chapter Summary

A description of data analysis was provided at the beginning of this chapter. In addition, a report of the analysis of the interview data was provided. Findings were reported to answer the research questions that guided the study. Chapter 5 provides conclusions and recommendations in response to these research questions.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This study examined a particular school district leadership team during a time period of

sustained success and growth (2004-2010). Chapter 4 presented the findings from interviews

conducted using the research questions to guide and the theoretical framework to assist in the

analysis. This chapter will present a summary of the study and a discussion and interpretation of

the findings. It will also link the interpretation to the literature review. Limitations of the study

will be presented and then recommendations for further study.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to examine the leadership team of one school district

to identify the characteristics, vision, and practice of the team and the perceived impact those

characteristics had on the district. It examined the specific situations that the members of the

administrative team identified as significant in their growth. In addition, the study identified the

perceptions and beliefs about the district that were held by individuals within the administrative

team as well as various teacher leaders. The following research questions guided the study:

1. Which components of the two theoretical frameworks are addressed most often when

talking to the administrative team?

2. What changes in attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions did the members of the

administrative team perceive over the years 2004-2010?

3. How did the teacher leaders perceive the administrative team in terms of leadership?

After examining the research, conducting interviews, and analyzing the data, several characteristics emerged as the foundation for the successful change in the Green Valley School District. These characteristics are discussed further under the findings in this chapter

Discussion and Interpretation of Findings

Researching a successful leadership team and the characteristics that contributed to the growth and success of the district can be important for future educational leaders. Learning what worked and why it worked is the central theme of this study and are important questions regarding the nature leadership in general. This study examined the work of experts (e.g. Senge, Hackman, Kotter, Fullen, Marzano) and brought out the ideas of transformational leadership, developing a shared vision, collaborative teaming, and incorporating the concept of systems thinking. This study also found additional characteristics through the interviews of the members of a successful leadership team. Those characteristics were life-long learning, building relationships, and supporting the professional development of everyone in the system. These seven characteristics are the foundation to changing the culture and allowing the growth of an entire learning community, and ultimately led to the success of the district.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is the style most often referred to in the literature as the most effective type of leadership for a school district. It encompasses all areas of leadership (management, instruction, vision, support) and takes it further. Marzano et al. (2005) talked about how transformational leaders recreate the entire culture and shift the vision and practices of everyone in the organization. These leaders develop strong relationships with those they lead and foster growth and commitment to the organization. In addition, they encourage problem solving by thinking outside the normal parameters. They encourage leadership in everyone and

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see value to new ideas and new ways of working. Superintendent Young was a transformational leader. He encouraged risk-taking and developing new practices and new ideas. He worked first with the leadership team and then brought in teacher leaders and, ultimately, invited everyone in the district to embrace the new vision and structure. Along with the leadership team, he created a new culture—one of high expectations, rigorous work, and accountability. This, ultimately, led to success for the district and success for the students.

Shared Vision

Vision is connected to the theoretical framework through "personal mastery," "shared vision," (Senge, 2006) and "compelling purpose" (Hackman, 2002). Over the years, vison has been known to be the guiding factor in the success of an organization. Most schools and districts assign a committee to the task of creating a vision for the entire learning community. That team works to create and share the vision.   Both Senge (2006) and Hackman (2002) believed that vision is essential in leadership but they both stated that a shared vision or compelling direction developed by the team will motivate and energize the team and focus their goals in the same direction.

In Green Valley, both the administrators and the teacher leaders discussed the shared vision and how it created change in the district. "Effort creates ability" became the central theme for every administrative decision made during the years 2004-2010. Before school and after school tutoring sessions, the change in grading and evaluation of students, the discussions about and eventual implementation of the concept of second chances, all developed from the belief that the extra effort of the adults in the learning community can increase student success. Academic success, in turn, increased student self-esteem and belief in their own abilities.

The teacher leaders who were interviewed talked about "effort creates ability" as well. It was stressed that, at first, the teachers in the district were hesitant adopting the belief of "effort creates ability." They certainly felt that student effort, when put forth consistently, increased achievement. But they were not as clear about their own role. As discussions continued and teacher leaders worked more with administration, this belief became more widely accepted. Superintendent Young and the administrative team, along with the teacher leaders, talked extensively about how the concept of "effort creates ability" might look in the classroom. They also discussed the role that teachers, administrators, and support staff played in this vision. Teacher leaders and administrators, in turn, worked with staff to explicitly define what it meant to put forth extra effort for the success of students; and it soon became evident that the effort of the adults in the schools could positively affect student success. Young challenged both his leadership team and the teachers to expand their own learning and growth by embracing the concept of 'effort creates ability' and used it to accomplish positive change in the district. Superintendent Young provided opportunities to talk about the vision and direction of the district and he put himself in the middle of all the discussions. Young encouraged people to challenge him and the vision and he, in turn, challenged them to shift their understanding and traditional beliefs. "Effort creates ability" became part of the culture of the district. It became the understanding that this is the way things are done in this district. The vision of "effort creates ability" permeated all levels of the district and became, as Senge (2006) and Hackman (2002) pointed out, the collective vision and the momentum that propelled the district forward in its vision and its structures

Collaborative Teaming/Life-Long Learning/Supporting Professional Development

Collaborative teaming, Life-long learning, and supporting professional development are closely linked characteristics and are addressed in the framework under "Team Learning (Senge, 2006)/Expert Team Coaching (Hackman, 2002)" and "Supportive Organizational Context/Solid Team Structure" (Hackman, 2002). Senge (2006) talked about integrating learning into the work of the organization, rather than adding something on to the already full plates individuals were trying to balance. This "team learning" is about aligning the talents of the entire team to complement each other and to create the results the members desire. "Team leaning" is more than just cooperation. It is about collaboration and building the team's capacity to continue learning, growing, and working together.

Hackman's (2002) "supportive organizational context" and "solid team structure" are basically about how leaders support their teams. Hackman (2002) talked about creating the foundation for support by understanding the needs of the team and helping them learn and grow. This support is also achieved by developing each member's understanding of the vision and direction in which the organization wishes to go. Leaders can assist with this learning by providing multiple and varied opportunities for professional education. Providing opportunities to strengthen a team's knowledge base strengthen involves "expert team coaching." "Expert team coaching means working with a team to analyze weak areas, providing feedback on how to manage the work better and building a sense of teamwork. This sense of teamwork is more than just building friendships. Teamwork is about making each member a strong asset to the group and empowering the group to move forward.

In Green Valley, these concepts of empowering administration and faculty through professional development and supporting their learning began in the administrative meetings.

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Administrative meetings in a school district are often dry and managerial in nature. But the meetings that former Superintendent Young led were designed to help develop the administrative team increase their level of understanding through the idea of "effort creates ability." A large amount of time during administrative meetings were dedicated to reviewing Resnick's (2018) research and discussing the practical applications of it. In Green Valley, the structure and purpose of administrative meetings changed from managerial to instructional. Administrators discussed and grappled with new ideas and the implementation of "effort creates ability." Committee meetings with teachers and teacher leaders, in turn, became more focused on new techniques and strategies for helping students become more successful. It became an expectation that when a meeting was called, learning something new occurred.

Interviewees viewed Superintendent Young as intelligent and dedicated to the profession. He touted the benefits of lifelong learning and encouraged his faculty to strive for the same. Young was a voracious reader; his personal philosophy was based on the importance of learning something new every day. He read items from various professional fields,--not just education. He built his belief system through research, compiling evidence he needed to continue growing. He believed in having strong evidence to support his beliefs; he understood the necessity of providing research to back up personal beliefs. Young also believed in being the role model of continuous learning and growing. By doing research, reading constantly, sharing ideas, and challenging thinking, he reset the school district's culture. He modeled life-long learning and professional development. This, in turn, encouraged his administrative team and teachers to learn and grow professionally. Professional growth became the norm in the district; taking risks and constantly moving forward became an integral part of the district's culture. It seemed clear that

in Green Valley, when the strong leader modeled life-long learning and growing, the team followed suit.

Senge (2006) explained that the traditional leader at the top of the organization holds the most power in terms of change. The top leader is the individual solely responsible for any growth or success of the organization. But the view of new leadership is more subtle and focuses more on creating a learning organization. Senge (2006) described the leader of a learning organization as being a "designer, a teacher, and a steward" (p. 321). Senge (2006) believed that a true leader designs, or redesigns, the organization rather than simply running it. The leader structures the organization around solid beliefs and vision. The true leader is also a teacher by nature. He is someone from whom others learn and grow. And, finally, a genuine leader acts as a steward. He is present to serve those whom he leads and to guide their learning and growth. The leader has the best interests of everyone at heart. Hackman (2002) supports this idea of the top leader "coaching" the team in terms of interaction within the team and how the effective leader works with his team to bring out the best in each member.

Again, the interviews highlighted the contributions Superintendent Young made to the growth and learning of the administrative team, teacher leaders, and faculty and staff as a whole. Participants discussed Superintendent Young's love of reading and sharing what he read with others. With the administrators he discussed articles and books he read. Teacher leaders talked about Young's personal involvement and his ability to sit and talk to the teachers which helped them feel valued. He involved himself in committee meetings with teachers to discuss new techniques, he altered administrative meetings to focus on learning, he involved teacher leaders and administrators in the ELI initiative to promote growing and sharing of ideas. Having Superintendent Young at the helm to promote his strong belief of life-long learning sent a clear
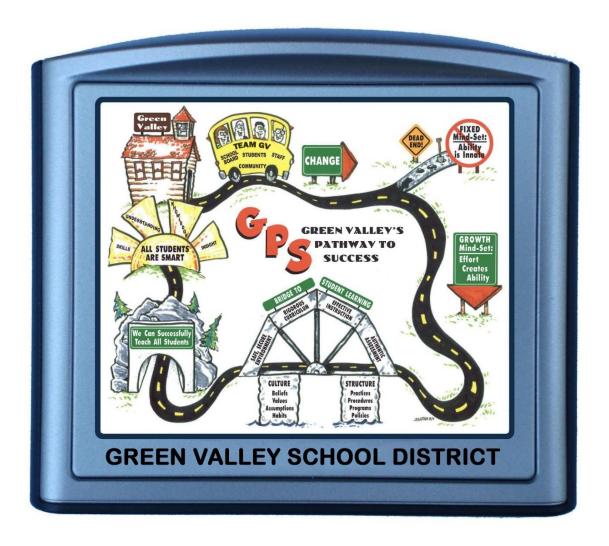
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message to everyone in the district that being a learning organization in which everyone learns, not just students, is a top priority at Green Valley.

Systems Thinking

Senge (2006) talked a lot about the idea of "systems thinking" and how altering one's thought process to include an understanding of how systems work is the most significant effect on an organization. Senge (2006) describes "systems thinking" as a "discipline for seeing the wholes (p. 68). He emphasizes the interconnectedness of a system and that when one steps back and views the entirety of a system, one can see how a single decision or change to a system can affect the whole organization. The ability of a top leader and his team to comprehend this concept makes all the difference in its ability to grow and guide the organization to success. In the case of a school district, the understanding of systems thinking can, ultimately, help the educators in the system foster success and achievement for students.

The most profound systemic change in the district was the development of a visual representation of the culture of the Green Valley School District. The Green Valley Pathway to Success (G.P.S.) was the best indicator of understanding systems thinking that the district produced. It was created two years prior to Superintendent Young's retirement. Superintendent Young borrowed the letters G.P.S. from the technical device that is used to help guide travelers to exact locations with getting lost along the way. He wanted to illustrate how the district's teachers, administrators, and support staff found their way to achieving the best education possible for students. The G.P.S. was the culmination of years of work and commitment by both teachers and administrators. All the reading, sharing, discussing, debating, learning, growing, and changing had finally become this visual representation of the vision and mission of the district. The G.P.S. included all of the beliefs and structural changes in the district and

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represents Senge's (2006) "systems thinking" at the highest level. Superintendent Young's

simple phrase, "effort creates ability" changed personal beliefs and practices and finally, had

impacted the district on a systemic level. The change was gradual and not always smooth or

easy; however, it had grown into a vision that guided the work and interactions of all faculty and

staff. This vision was the culture and structure by which everyone in the system worked.

Figure 1. Reprinted from "https://www.greenvalley.org," 2009 by GreenValley School
District, used with permission.

Building Relationships

Sergiovanni (2007) described the learning community as truly learner-centered. He said, an authentic learner-centered community is organized around relationships and ideas" (p. 97). These true learning communities have bonded the members together through social structures and a shared set of values and ideas. Sergiovanni (2007) is concerned with connections between the people in the community and cultivating those connections by sharing ideas, goals, and values. These shared values and ideas soon become shared practice—the techniques and instructional strategies that are used across the learning community. Shared practice, in turn, becomes action—the collaborative work of the teachers and administrators to help support student learning.

Superintendent Young built connections with people. He was honest, genuine, and cared about his teachers, administrators and students. This supportive attitude spread to the administrative team as well. Teachers perceived the team as caring and genuine. The teacher leaders felt as if they were a valued part of the team as well and spread this message to the rest of the staff. Teachers felt comfortable working with the administrative team and saw the members, including the teacher leaders, as a resource for guidance, support, and learning. They perceived the members as teammates and that they were working alongside colleagues rather than bosses.

Green Valley was chosen for this study by this researcher because of its identification as a successful school district based on its assessment scores and statistics. As stated in Chapter 1, the Pennsylvania Department of Education recognized the district for six consecutive years (from 2004-2009) for achieving Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) by meeting the criteria of graduation rate, participation rate, student attendance, and student performance in both reading and mathematics in all assessed grades and subgroups. In addition, the district had been recognized

for five consecutive years by the *Pittsburgh Business Times* (2008) for exceeding academic

expectations considering economical background. When comparing student achievement as

measured by the PSSA, the district was ranked 20th overall in western Pennsylvania and in the

top 15% of all school districts in the state. Additionally, the district was recognized by The

Standard and Poor's Evaluation Service (2005) for outpacing peers in math and reading for four

consecutive years. These markers of a successful school district show that the effort put into

changing the shared vision, culture, the teaming and life-long, professional learning beliefs as

well as the building of relationships and developing a deep understanding of systems thinking are

what made Green Valley successful and worthy of study.

Limitations

There are limitations to this study which must be discussed. The researcher may have

experienced bias, as the participating school was the one in which the researcher is currently

employed as a building administrator. However, being part of the administrative team does

allow the researcher a great deal of inside information regarding the district. Relationships were

already well established and the culture and climate of the district was well understood.

However, being a member of the administrative team may also act as a hindrance. Participants

knew the researcher and this could affect the responses they shared. Participants could have

found it uncomfortable to share negative experiences or information, and so may have felt it

necessary to withhold such information. This was overcome, somewhat, by conducting the

interviews in a comfortable, neutral place and by relying on the well-established relationships

between the researcher and the participants. The teacher leader participants, specifically, may

have felt uncomfortable disclosing their true experiences for fear of sharing these details with a

current administrator in the district. In order for the researcher to minimize this issue, she agreed

to not be a direct evaluator of any teacher in the study for at least two years from the interview date.   Additionally, the researcher chose a sample of teachers from other buildings in the district, not her own. Additionally, some participants were interviewed together in a small group which also added to the level of comfort when providing specific details.

Recommendations for Further Study

There are many ways to create change in an organization. Some methods may create negative change if the administrative team lacks the essential elements vital to positive organizational change. A team that can articulate the specific situations and activities that they believe fostered learning and promoted positive change in their organization may provide future teams with an effective 'road map' for moving their organization or school district forward. An effective leadership team is one that can articulate its impact on the positive growth and, ultimately, the culture of the organization. This team can, in turn, share their techniques and ideas and help other organizations strengthen their leadership teams and create positive change in their environments.

One aspect that could be studied further is the idea of sustained change. This study examined the change in one school district during a specific six-year time period. An additional study to examine the same district in the years since the study concluded may yield additional information regarding whether the changes were sustained. In addition, perceptions of the current administration could be compared to perceptions of the administration gathered from the current study.

This study was conducted in one specific successful school district. Replicating the study with another leadership team in another successful district may yield similar or different results. This is worth researching to see which characteristics are apparent in other successful districts. It

may also yield data showing a connection to the theoretical frameworks in other successful districts.

This study was also conducted with former and current administrators and teacher leaders relating their experiences with change and a successful administrative team. It may be beneficial to conduct a similar study in the same district interviewing teachers and students within the same timeframe to gain an understanding of their perceptions of the leadership team and the Superintendent. Data from that study may yield similar or very different results in terms of perception and experiences.

Summary

When one experiences a really great team in action, it is hard to forget and often times, hard to replicate. Individuals involved in positive team situations feel a certain connectedness that is difficult to find again. A great team often makes one feel as if he/she is part of something bigger than oneself. And one often wants to replicate that feeling with the next team or group with whom one works. Examining a successful leadership team and the conditions that contributed to the growth and success of the school district may serve as a point of learning about what makes leadership teams successful. This study presented the ideas of experts (e.g. Senge, Hackman, Kotter) and members of a successful leadership team. Analysis of interview data showed that the leadership team from Green Valley School District employed several strategies and concepts to fulfill the change in school culture. The team was led by a transformational leader in Superintendent Young. Young brought new ideas and initiatives to the table but in order to make lasting change, he built relationships, shifted the vision and mission of the district, worked collaboratively with administrators and teacher leaders to shift the belief system and the structures in place to match that vision, emphasized hard work, life-long

learning, growth, support, passion, and compassion. And never swayed from those ideals. He

assembled a strong, dedicated leadership team to help students achieve as well as help staff,

faculty and the whole community learn and grow made the district highly successful.

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