

AN EXPLORATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
LEADERSHIP STYLES AND SCHOOL CULTURE  
IN A SMALL RURAL SOUTHEAST MISSOURI SCHOOL DISTRICT

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A Dissertation  
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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

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by  
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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

AN EXPLORATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
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IN A SMALL RURAL SOUTHEAST MISSOURI SCHOOL DISTRICT

presented by Kimberley Blissett a candidate for the degree doctor of education,  
and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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## Dedication

I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST  
WHICH STRENGTHENETH ME (Phil.4:13)

This scripture has been my saving grace throughout my arduous educational journey. I am so grateful to God for placing big dreams in my heart and for giving me the ability to accomplish those dreams. Everything that I have, everything that I do, and everything that I am, is because of God's never-ending grace and mercy. God has brought me to this point, and I know that he has even greater things in store for me as long as I continue to keep him first in my life.

I would like to thank my husband, Michael. To say that you are my **ROCK** is a complete understatement. There are no words to express how much I love you. No matter what new challenge I take on, you are right there with me: praying, encouraging, pushing, comforting, and celebrating. You have financially, spiritually and emotionally supported me through three degrees. Thank you for making sacrifices so that I could pursue my dreams. You are my best friend and the love of my life. Thank you for blessing me with the wonderful life that we live.

Mikaela and Matthew, you hold the keys to my heart. I love you and thank God daily that he blessed me to have you as my children. There is nothing that I wouldn't do for you. Everything that I do is with you in mind. When I feel like giving up, it's your corny jokes (Matthew), your crazy laugh (Mikaela) and the bond that we share that keeps me going. You don't know how much it means to me to hear you say that you, as my children, are proud of me,

To my sisters, Debbie, Cassandra and Danielle... THANK YOU! You believe in me no matter what. If I call, you are ALWAYS there to cheer me on. I couldn't have made it this far without you. To my mother, you are living proof that if you trust in God, he will see you through. You are a strong, woman of God and I love you. To my father, I love you.

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An Exploration of the Relationship between Leadership Styles and School Culture in a  
Small Rural Southeast Missouri School District

**Chapter I**

Student work proudly displayed on the walls in the hallway, brightly colored banners, bulletin boards denoting student achievement, decorated classrooms, principals and teachers greeting students by name, vision and mission statement prominently displayed, students actively engaged in classroom discussions, this depiction is often indicative of schools who understand the importance of creating a culture that nurtures the physical, social, and academic aspects of school (Spiro, 2013). Culture, as defined by Barth (2002), is the customs, mind-set, principles, beliefs, actions and standards that are embedded within organizations.

A close look at the inner workings of successful schools finds that a culture of trust has been established between the staff and building principal (Northouse, 2010). According to Roth (2011), followers who feel supported and empowered by the principal tend to embrace and build upon the vision of the leader. Principals who have nurtured a positive school culture have built a great rapport with all stakeholders (teachers, students, parents and community members). Leaders in this setting are characteristically active participants in the day-to-day operations, as well as, student learning.

Government standards are increasing the roles and responsibilities of school principals (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012). Today, school principals must wear many hats. Gone are the days when principals focused solely on rule enforcement and school operations. Today, a principal must serve as visionary, instructional and curriculum leader (Glatthorn & Jailall, 2009), professional development

director, and motivator. Creating and implementing goals, monitoring student achievement and creating a positive school culture are also important duties of building principals (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012).

Studies cite a positive school culture as a key element in student academic achievement (Price, 2012; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012; Sahin, 2011). A positive school culture can be defined as an atmosphere of trust, cooperation, collaboration, encouragement and support (Price, 2012; Sahin, 2011). Price (2012) suggests that school principals set the tone of the school culture. Principals can positively or negatively impact the culture of a school. In order to cultivate a positive school environment, leaders must model values and show respect for traditions present within the culture of the school (Sahin, 2011). The revelation that both high and low performing districts view the building principal and their leadership style as a determining factor in the success, or lack thereof, in a school district is the basis of this study.

Government legislation dictates measures that districts must focus on to create environments that are conducive to high student academic achievement. On December 10, 2015, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law. The law replaced the controversial 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The Every Student Succeeds Act is designed to ensure that all students are prepared for college and careers. The ideology of the Every Child Succeeds Act is that all children deserve and should receive a quality education, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, or level of ability (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012).

ESSA requirements state that every student should be guaranteed a quality education (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012). Some features of the law include:

- Disadvantaged and high need students are ensured equitable education.
- States must develop assessments that will accurately assess student progress.
- All students will receive a quality education to prepare them for college and careers.
- Access to preschool
- “Maintains an expectation that there will be accountability and action to effect positive change in our lowest performing schools, where groups of students are not making progress, and where graduation rates are low over extended periods of time” (ESSA, 2017. p. 2).

Government mandates alone will not ensure a positive culture within a school district.

The mandates must be implemented and monitored by school leaders. The intended outcomes of ESSA are dependent upon the leadership within the organization. Northouse (2010) suggests that leaders within professional organizations possess the ability to influence groups or followers. The leader and the followers are directly associated with the culture of an organization (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Shahzad et al. (2012) defines culture as “gained knowledge, explanations, values, beliefs, communication and behaviors of a large group of people, at the same time and same place” (p. 976). Gruenert (2015) implies that leaders should develop a vision for change. The cultural effectiveness of the organization is dependent upon the effectiveness of the leader.

**Problem Statement**

The Every Student Succeeds Act has school districts across the nation seeking innovative ways in which to improve the learning of all students in order to meet government standards specified in the Act. Districts are beginning to evaluate every aspect of the educational process. More focus is being placed on the role of the building principal (Singh & Al-Fadhli, 2011). More than ever, district leaders need to ensure that principals possess many qualities such as morality, extensive knowledge of curriculum and instruction, strong interpersonal skills, and the ability to make sound decisions (Murphy, 2002). Social judgment skills are another characteristic of effective leaders. Social judgment, as defined by Northouse (2010) is the leader's ability to understand followers.

Stringent guidelines, standards and measures are in place to ensure that schools in Missouri are meeting the level of student performance required by the government (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017). With the implementation of ESSA, comes accountability measures for educators throughout the United States. There is evidence that suggests that the leadership styles of principals determine the type of culture present in a school (Black, 2010; Pepper 2010). Leaders must objectively analyze their leadership abilities and school culture, support the traditions of the organization, acknowledge the successes of the stakeholders, while identifying and demonstrating foundational values to followers. Developing a mission and compelling followers to embrace a common purpose falls on the school administrator (Peterson & Deal, 1998). Pepper (2010) suggests that it is extremely important for building leaders to

focus their efforts on creating an environment that promotes high standards for academic achievement.

Schools that focus strictly on curriculum and test results are missing a vital piece of the puzzle. In addition to analyzing the curriculum, it is imperative that school districts also analyze the culture of the school. Research has proven that there is correlation between school culture and student achievement (Macneil, Prater, & Busch, 2009). Students and teachers who are content with the inner workings of a school district are inspired to perform on a higher level academically (Macneil, Prater, & Busch, 2009)

### **Purpose of the Study**

Research shows that there may be a correlation between leadership and school culture (Black, 2010; Pepper, 2010). The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the relationship between leadership and school culture in a small rural school district in Southeast Missouri. This case study seeks to examine the relationship of leadership and its impact on culture in a rural elementary, junior high and high school.

While there is extensive research on the independent topics, leadership styles and school culture, there appears to be gaps in the research regarding the relationship between leadership and school culture that are grounded in small rural districts. This study will help to inform leaders in small districts of the role they play in shaping school culture. This stage in the research, leadership will be defined as “A process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2010, p. 3). Culture will be defined as “gained knowledge, explanations, values, beliefs, communication and behaviors of large group of people, at the same time and same place” (Shahzad, Luqman, Khan, & Shabbir, 2012, p. 976)

### **Research Questions**

Three essential questions will guide the research.

1. As perceived by principals, what are the critical functions of effective leaders?
2. As perceived by teachers, what are the critical functions of effective leaders?
3. As perceived by leaders and teachers, what impact does the leader have on the culture of the school?

### **Conceptual Frameworks**

The study's conceptual frame combines both culture and leadership.

Theoretically, this study seeks to find the balance of leadership that creates a culture of trust, motivation, commitment, and a positive cultural environment (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). The authors Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2008) state that "School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions" (p.27). The ideology that leaders shape the culture of a school district will be the framework for this study.

According to Shafritz, Ott and Jang (2011), many theories have been formed to explain the behaviors of leaders and the people that make up the organizations for which they serve. School leaders shape culture in many ways. It is the role of the school leader to communicate core values, develop a mission, support and promote school traditions, set direction and employ influence to shape the school culture (Peterson & Deal, 1998; Leithwood, 2005). This study will focus on four prevailing leadership styles: transformational, transactional, authentic, and Laissez-faire. Each of these leadership styles can have either a positive or negative impact on the culture of the school.

The transformational educational leader is multifaceted. Leithwood (as cited in Hallinger, 2003), suggests that transformational leaders provide support, share goals, provide a vision for the school, sets high expectations, and provides academic stimulation. The transactional leader, as it pertains to education, has the power to offer exchanges of benefits to accomplish the district's goals. The exchanging of benefits does not provide for commitment from the leader or the stakeholders (Bush, 2007). Authentic educational leaders influence the attitudes and the culture of the school by modeling and promoting personal values, respect, trust, self-awareness, and social/personal transparency (Feng, 2016). Laissez-faire leaders take a non-participative approach. The avoidance of educational decision making is a key factor in Laissez-faire leaders. (Antonakis, 2001). Followers of Laissez-faire leaders are often less productive, disorganized, frustrated, unmotivated and confused about tasks and purpose (Barbuto, 2005). This lack of leadership can be detrimental to the culture of a school district

The educational leadership style can have a positive or negative impact on the culture of the school. Educational leaders must constantly reflect on their leadership practices to determine effectiveness. It is imperative that leaders recognize and properly utilize their influence to create a positive and productive school culture.

### **Design and Methods**

This research will utilize a qualitative case study approach to explore the phenomena of leadership and school culture. The population will consist of school leaders and teachers in a Southeast Missouri rural school district. Participants from the elementary, junior high and high school will be used for the purposes of this qualitative case study. The researcher will randomly select teachers from a variety of grade levels



and subject matter to participate in the case study. The building principals will be asked to participate. The same participants will be utilized in each aspect of the research process to obtain consistent results.

Interviews will be conducted with the building teachers to determine their perceived views of the school culture. Building principals will be interviewed using open-ended interview questions to determine their perceptions of effective leadership and what elements constitute a healthy school culture. The interview questions will be created by the researcher utilizing information attained from previous studies on the topic.

### **Assumptions**

There are three assumptions associated with this qualitative case study. The first assumption is that all participants involved in this research would be completely honest and forthcoming with information requested of them by the researcher. Another assumption that directs this study is that the interview questions utilized will give accurate depictions of leadership styles and school culture. The final assumption is that participants would participate in each portion of the data collection.

### **Limitations**

The researcher has chosen to study one rural school district in Southeast Missouri. The participants consisted of elementary, junior high and high school teachers and administrators only. This study will be limited by its application to a broader population due to the limited location.

### Definitions of Key Terms

Bolman and Deal (2008) define leadership as “a subtle process of mutual influence fusing thought, feeling, and action. It produces cooperative effort in the service of purposes embraced by both leader and led” (p. 345).

**Educational or Instructional Leadership** is “the integration of the tasks of direct assistance to teachers, group development, curriculum development, and action research” (Blase & Blase, 2000E p. 130). Educational leaders are instructional managers who handle student discipline as well as provide a shared vision to all stakeholders. Educational leaders provide scaffolding and supervise teacher performance. The main goal of the educational leader is to create environments that are conducive to student achievement (Roekel, 2008).

The four types of leadership styles examined in this study are transformational, transactional, authentic and laissez-faire. Bass, (as cited in Stewart, 2006) defines the **Transformational leader** as one who makes every attempt to find out the follower’s objectives. The transformational leader desires to appease the needs of the organization as well as its followers and seeks to involve the follower in the beliefs and operations of the organization.

**Transactional leaders** are “Leaders who lead primarily by using social exchanges for transactions” (Robins, 2007, p. 475). **Authentic leaders** are “those who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others...aware of the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and of high moral character (Greenier & Whitehead, 2016, p. 80). **Laissez-Faire leadership** is often defined as “non-leadership” (Sarros & Santora, 2001, p.389).

Northouse (2010), describes the Laissez-Faire approach as “hands-off, let-things-ride” (p.182) leadership. Laissez-faire leader neglect decision making responsibilities (Luthans, 2005). **School culture**, as defined by Loukas (2007), is a multi-faceted concept that includes physical, social, and academic aspects of the school environment.

### **Significance of the Study**

The Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA) has set forth stringent standards that must be met in order for a school district to make adequate yearly progress (AYP). School leadership plays a major role in a district’s ability to meet the standards set forth by the Act. Both effective and ineffective leadership can have an impact on the health or culture of an organization. As previously mentioned in the purpose statement, this study seeks to explore the relationship between leadership and school culture. The researcher wishes to provide the district in the case study with information pertaining to the style of leadership present within the district as well as the perceptions of the teachers regarding said leadership. In addition, the researcher seeks to provide the school district with insight as to the perceptions of administrators and teachers regarding the school culture.

### **Summary**

The role of the building principal has evolved, and leaders now play an active role in the education of students. The Every Student Succeeds Act (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012) initiated higher accountability standards for school leaders. Leaders must use any means possible to ensure that all students are learning. This includes creating, and nurturing a positive school culture that is favorable to high student academic achievement.

Due to increased accountability measures of school leaders by the Every Student Succeeds legislation, it is imperative that districts thoroughly evaluate the leadership skills of their principals. The intent of this study is to examine leadership styles and perceptions of the school culture present within the rural district studied in Southeast Missouri.

## **Chapter II**

### **Review of Literature**

Leadership is an essential part of this research. The purpose of this study is to determine the critical functions of effective leadership that are needed to support a healthy school culture. This chapter investigates both current and historical findings of literature that define effective leadership traits. This review will explore four types of leadership styles: Transformational, Authentic, Transactional and Laissez-Fair. In addition, the chapter will investigate school culture as it pertains to leaders and educators.

Culture is critical to the success of a school district. Culture has a direct impact on student achievement. The culture of a school is often determined by the educational leader. Educational leaders indirectly impact student achievement by a transformation of the culture. It is imperative that a school leader create a culture of trust, empowerment, motivation, and vision to reach the goals of the organization (Macneil, Prater, & Busch, 2009).

### **Leadership Defined**

Education is a field that is continuously developing. Effective leadership is vital to successfully meeting the standards set forth by state and federal governments. There is a great deal of pressure directed towards educators to prove and maintain a progressive level of student achievement. Pressure to meet government standards can tempt educators to cheat or find ways to manipulate the system as was the case in the Atlanta Public School System (Saultz, Murphy, & Aronson, 2016).

The Atlanta Public School System cheating scandal was widely publicized in 2015 when 11 of the district's educators and administrators were prosecuted and

convicted of altering students' standardized assessments. A total of 178 teachers and administrators were investigated for cheating scandal. Many of the educators interviewed, stated they were both directly and indirectly told that the students' test scores had a direct correlation to their contract renewals. This pressure in part, prompted the widespread cheating in the Atlanta Public School System (Saultz, Murphy, & Aronson, 2016).

The constant promotion of morality and values by the educational leader can derail such behavior. Leaders must uphold and practice values such as integrity, honesty, and ethical behavior at all times (Atkinson & Pilgreen, 2011). Leaders must show respect to followers and treat them as humans and not as expendable resources. Leaders can gain the respect of followers by being active listeners and proactive in assessing the needs of the followers (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Leadership is multi-faceted. Northouse (2010) describes leadership as "A process whereby individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (p. 3). Northouse further explains that leadership is a multi-dimensional intricate process that involves leaders using their influence to evoke change in their subordinates. Chaudhry & Javed (2012) define leadership as one's aptitude for creating a vision and guiding subordinates to achieve the vision. Leadership also entails an individual's ability to bring subordinates together to achieve a common goal for the good of the group. (Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994).

Because this study examines leadership in the school setting, it is important to turn to research supporting educational practice of school leaders. Research strongly suggests that a school leader plays a major role in the success of a school district (Korkmaz, 2007; Halawah, 2005). Educational leaders must wear many hats. In 1970,

the U.S. Senate Committee reported that school leaders play the most important role in a school district. The report stated that school leaders are responsible for student learning, sculpting school culture, developing and promoting professionalism, cultivating teacher and staff morale, and community relations (U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity, 1970; Savory, 2014).

There has been much debate on traits that successful leaders possess. Research has shown that effective leaders possess intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity and sociability (Northouse, 2010; Schneider & Burton, 2005; Kim, 2007).

Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins (2008), argue that successful school leaders are: willing to learn from subordinates, unbiased, flexible, positive, tenacious and resilient.

### **Transformational Leadership.**

The idea that transformational leadership is a process, suggests that great leaders develop skills in phases (Northouse, 2010). Transformational leadership theory focuses on more than just the abstract needs of the organization. Transformational leaders analyze and satisfy the needs of the people within the organizations with the intended objective of fostering goal-oriented workers (Northouse, 2010).

Leaders who are transformational in their approach have great influence on those who are followers. Transformational leaders form a connection with their followers through motivational methods, individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation (Bass, 1997; Northouse, 2010). Transformational leaders possess a natural ability to motivate followers to reach their maximum potential. The leaders do so by upholding moral standards, values and by promoting ethics within the organization (Northouse, 2010; Yukl, 1989). The most important aspect of transformational leadership is that

people are treated as assets to the organization, and not merely as workers (Bass, 1997; Northouse, 2010; Yukl, 1989).

Transformational leaders realize that the success of the organization partially depends on the relationship developed between leaders and followers. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory states that the basic needs of people must be met before they will be motivated to focus on secondary needs such as the visions and goals of an organization (Huitt, 2007). Transformational leaders build upon this premise by recognizing the need to motivate, stimulate and consider their followers (Atkinson & Pilgreen, 2011). Meeting the basic needs of the followers can be a pre-determinate of organizational growth, success and longevity (Shafritz, Ott, & Jang, 2011).

One important factor of the transformational leader is their ability to intellectually stimulate their followers. Transformational leaders provide the support needed to help followers become effective problem solvers. They give followers autonomy to come up with innovative ways in which to solve problems. This level of autonomy instills confidence, as well as, initiative in the followers (Bass, 1997; Northouse, 2010).

The framework for the transformational leadership theory suggests that a leader's effectiveness is not based upon tasks or situations, but upon the relationships formed between leader and follower. Transformational leaders are important to the success of a school in that they establish and promote the culture of a school through their leadership. These leaders create an atmosphere that allows leaders, as well as followers to adapt to given situations (Avolio, Kahai, & Sosik, 1997; Northouse, 2010). Northouse (2010) states that "transformational leadership fits the needs of today's work groups who want to be inspired and empowered to succeed in times of uncertainty" (p. 171).



Organizations are in a constant state of evolution. Transformational leaders within an organization comprehend the importance of assisting followers during this process of development (Yukl, 1989). They provide much needed scaffolding for its followers in the form of encouragement, support and professional development. The support given by transformational leaders incites confidence in the follower. This, allows them to reach their maximum potential, which in turn thrusts the organization forward (Avci, 2015; Northouse, 2010).

The transformational change agent focuses on the building of relationships with followers. It is the cultivation of the leader-follower bond that takes the organization to new heights. These leaders forgo their personal interests for the good of the group (Northouse, 2010). The leader is not overly concerned with personal images. The transformational leadership theory operates on the premise that effective change can be facilitated by the formation of bonds between leaders and followers. The ultimate goal of transformational leadership is to have both leaders and followers working together harmoniously to achieve the goals of the organization (Avci, 2015; Northouse, 2010).

### **Authentic Leaders.**

The word authentic, as defined by Webster's Dictionary (1999), means "real; genuine; worthy of acceptance; not an imitation" (p. 65). Scholars have defined authentic leadership in many ways. Avolio and Gardner (as cited in Greenier & Whitehead, 2016), give a concrete definition of authentic leadership. The authors define authentic leaders as:

Those who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others' values/moral perspectives,

knowledge, and strengths; aware of the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and of high moral character (p. 80).

Northouse (2010), states that authentic leadership is not easily defined. The author argues that in order to fully understand authentic leadership, one must view the theory from three perspectives: intrapersonal, developmental and interpersonal. The intrapersonal perspective of authentic leadership emphasizes the characteristics, actions and attitudes of the leader. The authenticity of their leadership abilities is shaped by life experiences. Northouse (2010), states that there are specific characteristics associated with the intrapersonal perspective. Authentic leaders are genuine in their approach. Leaders view situations from a unique angle. Leaders who are authentic allow their beliefs to drive their actions.

The developmental perspective of authentic leadership as described by Northouse (2010), is the process of developing authenticity within a leader over a period of time. Life experiences aid in developing authenticity. Cameron, Dutton and Quinn (2003) further explain that there are four elements that authentic leaders develop in this phase: “self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency (p. 207).

Datta (2015) argues that self-awareness involves leaders showing insight into their strengths and weaknesses. Self-awareness is an important aspect of the authentic leader because knowing one’s strengths and weaknesses directly impacts how a leader relates to their followers (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003).

Authentic Leaders internalizing moral perspective involves the leader making decisions and behaving based on morality (Greenier & Whitehead, 2016; Avolio &

Gardner 2005). Authors Avolio & Gardner (2005), believe that the moral perspective plays a major role in authentic leadership. The authors describe the moral perspective as “an ethical and transparent decision-making process whereby authentic leaders develop and draw upon reserves of moral capacity, efficacy, courage, and resiliency to address ethical issues and achieve authentic and sustained moral actions” (p. 324).

Authentic leaders employ balanced-processing behaviors when making decisions. Balanced-processing, as defined by Northouse (2010), is a behavior whereby leaders objectively govern their decisions. The authentic leader takes into consideration the opinions of others and attempts to offer an unbiased decision (Northouse 2010; Greenier & Whitehead, 2016).

It is important for authentic leaders to display relational transparency. Relational transparency entails the leader openly stating their motives, opinions, and feelings to their followers. The leader is keenly aware of how they come across to followers. The leader strives to keep an open line of communication with their followers in order to gain and maintain their trust.

The third perspective of authentic leadership is interpersonal. The interpersonal perspective states that the relationship between leaders and followers help to shape the leader’s responses or reactions to situations. It is vital that the followers believe in the values associated with the leader (Northouse, 2010; Cameron, Dutton & Quinn, 2003).

Authentic leaders are true to themselves, as well as true to others, (Clapp-Smith, Vogelgesang, & Avery, 2009). Luthans and Avolio (as cited in Lies, Morgeson & Nahrgang, 2005), make the argument that authentic leaders possess confidence, morality, hopefulness and resiliency. The expression of authenticity by these leaders reveals itself

in the form of trust and buy-in to the leader's vision. This trust and buy-in has a positive effect on follower performance (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008). Authentic leaders play a vital role in the success of schools. Bhindi (as cited in Riley), believes that "only by creating a caring, concerned and compassionate environment in our schools can school leaders provide the ignition and compression for quality teaching and learning and the necessary stretch for improvement and innovation" (p. 5).

### **Transactional Leadership.**

Transactional Leadership can be defined as a system of social transactions between the leader and subordinates (Chadry & Javed, 2012; Northouse, 2010). Kuhnert and Lewis (2012) define Transactional Leadership as "the exchange of valued outcomes." The transactional leader's role is to manage an organization by supervising the performance and compliance of a group through punishment and reward (Sudha, Shahnawaz & Farhat, 2016; Vera & Crossan, 2004; Bass, 1997; Rodrigues, 2015). Transactional leaders have three main functions: goal setting, providing constructive feedback and generating agreements with subordinates (Vera & Crossan, 2004; Avolio, Kahai & Sosik, 1997).

Transactional leaders do not deviate from existing organizational system. It is the job of the leader to reinforce the structure of the organization, as well as preserve the organizational culture (Vera & Crossan, 2004). Transactional leaders do not seek to change the organizational rules or culture. Instead, these leaders seek to maintain the status quo by reinforcing the rules, routines, and practices set forth by the organization (Korkmaz, 2007).

The relationship between leader and teacher is solely based on the exchange of resources. Bush (2007) states that the successful management of a school necessitates collaboration between the school leader and the teachers. The problem with transactional leadership in an educational setting is that “it does not engage staff beyond the immediate gains arising from the transaction” (Bush, 2007, p. 398). This style of leadership can limit intrinsic motivation, thus resulting in less than stellar performances of teachers.

There are three components to transactional leadership: contingent reward, management-by-exception and laissez-faire behavior. According to Avci (2015), transactional leaders use the premise of a rewards system to encourage subordinates to meet or exceed established organizational goals. This method is also known as the contingent reward (Chaudhry & Javed, 2012; Vera & Crossan, 2004; Rodrigues, 2015). Northouse (2010) states that the contingent reward aspect of transactional leadership “is an exchange process between leaders and followers in which effort by followers is exchanged for specified rewards” (p. 181). Sarros and Santora (2001), argue that the contingent reward aspect of transactional leadership is effective because subordinates often respond well to being rewarded for their work. In contrast, subordinates also respond to punishment for not meeting established goals.

Management-by-exception is another segment of transactional leadership. There are both active and passive qualities to management-by-exception (Bass, 1997; Northouse, 2010). Management-by-exception (active) entails the leader closely examining the practices of the follower. The leader actively looks for indications that the follower is in compliance with the pre-determined rules. The leader sets follower goals, provides effective and timely feedback and issues rewards. The active leader also

intervenes if the follower is out of compliance. The passive leader only intervenes if policy violations occur, follower performance is subpar or if there are major problems (Avci, 2015; Chaudhry & Javed, 2012; Northouse 2010; Sarros & Santora, 2001).

### **Laissez-Faire Leadership.**

Laissez-faire style is often referred to as “non-leadership” (Sarros & Santora, 2001, p.389). Northouse (2010), describes the Laissez-Faire approach as “hands-off, let-things-ride” (p.182). Leaders who practice this approach simply do not lead. Laissez-faire leadership is void of accountability and dependability. Laissez-faire leaders deflect decision making to the followers. These leaders are uninvolved in the day-to-day operations of the organization. They do not form a connection with the followers. This form of leadership is detrimental to the workings of the organization (Bass 1997; Chaudry & Javed, 2012; Sarros & Santora, 2001; Sudha, Shahnzawaz & Farat, 2016). The faculty is left without support or direction. Lack of school leadership plays a significant role in teacher job satisfaction and retention, which in turn can hinder student achievement.

### **Culture**

There has been a great deal of research in regard to the culture of an organization. Research has provided many definitions of culture. Gruenert (2008) defines culture as a set of beliefs and “common expectations” (p.57) that a group of people have developed over time which is passed on to current and incoming stakeholders. Gruenert further explains that culture is made up of understood rules and regulations to which the organization expects followers to conform.

Schein (as cited in Bolman & Deal, 2008) offers a concise definition of culture. Schein states that culture is “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.” (p. 269). Culture can further be described as the shared history, experiences and thought processes of a group. Schein states that subcultures can exist within the organization. These subcultures can be independent of the organizational values and can produce conflict.

Culture, as defined by Barth (2002), is “the way we do things around here” (p. 6). Barth further explains that culture is “a complex pattern of norms, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, values, ceremonies, traditions, and myths that are deeply ingrained in the very core of the organization. It’s the historically transmitted pattern of meaning that wields astonishing power in shaping what people think and how they act” (p.6). Culture exists in some form in every organization (Peterson K. D., 2002). Organizations can have either a positive or negative culture. The type of culture can impact the organizations success and ability to improve or restructure.

Gaziel (1997), states that “school culture can be used to describe the character of a school as it reflects deep patterns of values, beliefs, and traditions that have been formed over the years” (p. 311). This analysis is in line with the definitions previously described by Barth and Schein. Culture shapes the day-to-day activities of an organization. The theory of culture explains “the complex forces that work beneath the surface...” (p.311). Gaziel explains that the level of commitment of followers to the organizational values helps to determine the success of the organization.

For the purpose of this research, culture will be defined for school settings. “School culture is the set of norms, values and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols and stories that make up the ‘persona’ of the school. These unwritten expectations build up over time as teachers, administrators, parents, and students work together, solve problems, deal with challenges and, at times, cope with failures” (Peterson K. D., 2002 p. 1). Kent further explains that schools use ceremonies for many reasons. Ceremonies in schools are used to acknowledge achievements of the organization as a whole and the individual stakeholders. Ceremonies are also utilized to conclude the transfer of administrative power.

Symbols within an educational setting often represent the shared values of the school. Peterson states that “symbols are an outward sign of inward values” (Peterson K. D., 2002 p.1). Stories are used to pass along the history, values, and meanings associated with the organization. Peterson (2002), believes that ceremonies, stories, and symbols help to strengthen the culture of the organization.

Culture can be broken down into three functioning levels: artifacts, values and underlying assumptions (Schein, 1990). Artifacts are visible within an educational setting. Artifacts can include building design, codes of conduct, acceptable styles of clothing, mission statements, “smell and feel of the place” (p.111), and sentiments associated with the organization. According to Schein (1990), values represented in organizational culture are the beliefs, customs, and agreements of the people who make up the organization. Assumptions can best be described as the conduct, opinions, emotions, and thinking of the group (Schein, 1990).



### **Leadership and Culture**

School principals play an important role in establishing school culture (Macneil, Prater, & Busch, 2009). Theorists agree that it is of great importance that a principal must understand the culture of the school in which they work (Deal & Peterson, 1990; Fullan, 2001). Research shows that principals bear the responsibility of creating a positive environment that in turn produces good working relationships and promotes student academic success (Cross & Rice, 2000; Fullan, 2002b). Schein (as cited in Deal & Peterson, 1990) argues, “the only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture and that the unique talent of leaders is their ability to work with culture” (p.13). Principals who understand and nurture positive school culture often experience academic and career success (Macneil, Prater, & Busch, 2009). Peterson & Deal (1990) suggest that there are three pertinent questions that a leader must seek to answer in order to effectively evaluate and begin to develop a positive school culture: 1) What is the current state of the culture? 2) What can be done to strengthen the existing culture if it is good? and 3) What needs to be done to change or redirect the culture of the school? Once the culture has been analyzed, principals must demonstrate through leadership, the beliefs and values of the school by their actions (Furst and Denig as cited in Savory, 2014).

While the research supports the theory that leaders help shape the culture of the district, it is important to note that teachers also play a role in shaping the culture of a school. Leaders influence the enthusiasm, job satisfaction and commitment of staff members (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). It is the role of the leader to gain staff acceptance of mission, goals and vision of the school district (Leithwood, Harris, &

Hopkins, 2008). Positive and effective academic settings are achieved when teachers buy in to the culture that has been established by school leaders (Roby, 2011). It is imperative that leaders develop relationships centered on trust to foster a positive school culture (Roby, 2011).

Research strongly supports the argument that leaders, as well as teachers, play a major role in the type of culture present in a school district. Leadership and culture go hand-in-hand in developing an academic environment conducive to student learning (Roby, 2011). The proposed research explores how leaders in a small rural school district construct and support an effective culture. The following chapter outlines procedures for this study.

### **Chapter III**

#### **Methodology**

Chapter Three provides details of the methods used for research as well as information regarding the rationale for utilizing qualitative research. Further, it provides justification for utilizing the qualitative case-study model of research. The researcher discusses methods of data collection, interview protocol, and procedures used for conducting participant interviews.

It is believed that the data obtained through interviews with school leaders and teachers provided a clear connection between a leaders' style (transformational, transactional, authentic, or Laissez-faire) and school culture. This qualitative case-study was guided by three essential questions.

1. As perceived by principals, what are the critical functions of effective leaders?
2. As perceived by teachers, what are the critical functions of effective leaders?
3. As perceived by leaders and teachers, what impact does the leader have on the culture of the school?

#### **Rationale for Qualitative Case Study Research**

A qualitative design approach was used for this case study. Creswell (2009), described qualitative research as “a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p.4). Creswell further explained that qualitative research is a process that involves several elements. A researcher using this design method focuses on questions and procedures, interviewing a sample population in their own setting, deriving themes from data collection, and data interpretation (Creswell, 2009). The qualitative method has several characteristics that provide validity to this topic of research: natural settings, participant perspectives,

researcher as data gathering instrument, firsthand engagement, subjectivity, inductive data analysis and reflexivity (Hatch, 2002).

Qualitative research seeks to view the participants in their natural settings, thus producing realistic occurrences (Creswell, 2009; Hatch, 2002). The perspective of the participants is the focus of the qualitative study. Erikson (as cited in Hatch, 2002) argued that there are two main questions being asked by researchers in a qualitative study: What is going on and how do the occurrences affect the participants?

Hatch (2002), stated that using the researcher as the data gathering instrument incorporates the necessary skills of the human ability to logically analyze the meaning behind participant actions. In this case study, the researcher used interviews as a source of data collection. The interview process was appropriate because it allowed for open-ended responses from participants; thus, giving a deeper understanding of the thought processes and actions of the sample population. The primary goal of the interview process was to allow the participants to reflect and elaborate on their personal involvements in relation to the study (Seidman, 2013).

Firsthand engagement required the researcher to spend ample time speaking with participants in their natural setting. It was imperative that the researcher spend time in the field to capture the true sentiments of the participants. This process provided validity to the data collection process (Hatch, 2002).

It was imperative in a qualitative study that the researcher take necessary measures to ensure the protection of the research participants (Creswell, 2009). Four teachers from each building were randomly selected to participate in the study. This constituted approximately 20 percent of the teacher population in each building. Each of

the teachers in the district were be assigned a number. The numbers were randomly drawn by the researcher. The participants drawn were contacted to determine their willingness to participate in the study. The participants were assured that their participation in the study had no impact on their employment. The participants were assured that no names, titles, or positions will be described in the study. Pseudonyms will be used when writing the findings. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, the researcher stored digital data on a password protected personal computer with no identifying information. Information was only accessible by the researcher and the advisor. The transcriptions were kept in a locked file cabinet in a locked office only accessible by the researcher. No identifying information was listed on the transcripts. Interviews were conducted in a neutral location chosen by the participant. All ethical practices and procedures were followed. Prior to the study, participants were informed of the following:

1. The purpose of the research
2. Participant selection process
3. Risks of participating in the research
4. Confidentiality
5. Ability to withdraw from the study
6. Contact information of the researcher (Creswell, 2009).

While objectivity is the goal when analyzing data, it is important to realize that researchers, at some point, interject subjectivity throughout the process. Hatch (2002) suggested that this is somewhat necessary to understand the thoughts and actions of the

participants. It is important to note that all analyses should be “grounded in empirical evidence” (p. 9).

The inductive data analysis method involved the researcher collecting a massive amount of information, then processing the information. The researcher looked for developing themes and patterns within the data. Bogdan and Bilken (as cited in Hatch, 2002) adequately describe inductive data analysis as “constructing a picture that takes shape as you collect and examine the parts” (p.10).

Reflexivity is an important piece of this qualitative case study. It was very important for the researcher to avoid inserting personal bias into the study. It was the goal of the researcher to thoroughly explore the experiences of the participants while remaining as objective as possible.

### **Data Collection**

Interviews are part of the qualitative research data collection. Hatch (2002), described interviews as conversations between researchers and participants that seek to gain insight about their experiences. Researchers using interviews as a method of data collection gain a deeper understanding of how participants organize and view their worlds. An interview protocol was developed (Appendix I) and pilot interviews were made to evaluate consistency and reliability that the questions will provide representative research data.

The nature of this study was to explore the relationship between leadership and school culture. To gain information regarding the relationship between leaders and school culture, the researcher utilized a semi-structured interviewing format as related to

the research questions. Interviews were the only method of data collection utilized for this case study.

Prior to beginning the study, the researcher obtained approval of the University of Missouri-Columbia and the Independent Review Board (IRB). The researcher received approval from the district's superintendent and the board of education to perform the study of the school district.

The researcher chose participants for the case study by employing the maximum variation samples as described by Hatch, (2002). This method of selection "includes individuals with different perspectives on the same phenomenon" (p. 98). The district superintendent, building principals (elementary, junior high/high school), and teachers from both buildings were interviewed.

The researcher utilized a semi-structured interview process to obtain data. Each participant was interviewed separately at a place and time of their choosing. To ensure accuracy of the data collected, the interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants (Hatch, 2002). Information from the interviews were collected with the use of a digital recording device. The recordings did not contain any identifying information and were transcribed by a secure online transcription service.

The protocol was used as a starting point and some follow-up questions were asked to gain a deeper understanding of the answers given. The participants were encouraged to elaborate and to give any information they deemed relevant to the study. The interviews were of varying lengths due to the willingness of the participants to share information. The interviews provided valuable information and insight into the perceptions of teachers and leaders regarding the culture of the district, the role of the

leader, and the characteristics portrayed by the leader that could have an effect of the culture of the school. Upon completion of the semi-structured interviews, the recorded data was transcribed. The transcriptions were analyzed to determine emerging themes and patterns regarding the style of leadership, culture of each building and the impact of the leader on the school culture as perceived by the principals and classroom teachers.

The data was then reviewed and coded to determine themes. Using these themes, the researcher was able to draw conclusions regarding the relationship between leaders and culture, as well as the characteristics of the leaders as perceived by teachers and leaders in a small rural school district.

### **Setting**

A small, rural school district in Southeast Missouri was chosen as the subject for this case study. For the purpose of this study, the district will be called The Wexler School District. The school district is comprised of four small townships with a population of approximately 1,957 residents. Poverty within the Wexler District is 28.1% which exceeds the state average of 15.6% (Census Reporter, 2017). Due to the above average poverty rate, 100% of the students in the district receive free lunch. Wexler schools qualify to receive the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). This federal program allows the district to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students within the district regardless of income (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017). In addition, the entire school district receives Title 1 funding due to the high level of poverty. Title 1 is another government program which provides financial assistance to schools with higher than average numbers of families with low incomes. The purpose of the program is to ensure that the academic needs of children in



low income districts are met. There are approximately 330 students in grades Pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade. The Wexler School District is unique because of its size. The elementary has one classroom per grade level. The junior high and high school share teachers. Special teachers such as art, physical education and music are shared throughout the district.

The district employs one superintendent, elementary principal, junior high/high school principal, and a special education director (Kindergarten through twelfth grade). The elementary building (Pre-K-6<sup>th</sup> grade) is comprised of 13 classroom teachers, two special education teachers, one guidance counselor, two Title 1 teachers (reading and math) and one librarian who services grades pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade. The junior high and high school share teachers. There are 16 classroom teachers, two special education teachers, and one guidance counselor. The teacher to student ratio within the district is eleven to one. State averages for Missouri teacher to student ratio is seventeen to one. Teachers within the district have an average of 11.7 years of experience. This is below the state average of 12.3 years of experience. The percentage of teachers in the district with advanced degrees is 35.3% which falls far below the state average of 58.7% (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017).

### **Interview and Protocol Procedures**

With permission of the principals, the researcher sent letters to the teachers randomly selected by the researcher requesting their participation in the case study. There were no teachers who declined to participate. The interviews took place after school hours at a time and location that was convenient for the teachers. The researcher and the teacher were the only people present during the interview process. As previously

mentioned, the interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. The participants were assured that the information used for the case study would remain confidential.

After the transcriptions were transcribed, a copy was given to each participant to review for accuracy. The participants were given the opportunity to make corrections as needed. Once the participants approved the final transcription, the researcher coded and analyzed the data to determine themes regarding the study.

### **Summary**

This study was designed to explore the connection between educational leadership styles and school culture. As previously stated, research supports the theory that leaders play an integral role in the shaping of school culture. In order to attain an in-depth analysis of the school district, a qualitative approach in the form of a case study was employed. Eight teachers and two building leaders from the small rural Southeast Missouri school district were selected to participate in the study. The research also utilized primary source document reviews to aid in determining the impact of the leadership style of the principal on the school culture. The triangulation of principals, teachers and primary source document reviews were effective in determining the connection between educational leadership and the culture of the school district.

## CHAPTER IV

### Findings

The purpose of this case study was to explore the relationship between school leadership and culture. This chapter presents the results of the study obtained from ten in-depth interviews. Four teachers and one building principal were interviewed from each building. The chapter is organized into the following sections: introduction, description of the school district, leadership styles designated, description of school culture, and the leaders impact on the school culture.

School leadership is multifaceted in that it requires leaders to create a vision and to provide guidance to the followers to achieve the vision (Chadhry & Javed, 2012). In addition, leaders are responsible for student achievement, curriculum, staff professionalism and morale, community relations, and for cultivating the culture of a school district. For these reasons, it is important to clearly understand the role leadership style plays in shaping the culture of a school.

Culture exists in some form within every organization. Peterson (2002), defined school culture as the set of norms, values, beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols and stories that make up the persona of the school. This study determined the culture of a school district from the perspective of the principal and classroom teachers. Research suggested that principals played a crucial role in the cultivation of the school culture by the way in which they led. Cross & Rice (2000) argued that principals bear the responsibility of creating a positive environment. Schein (as cited in Deal & Peterson, 1990) believed that the most important responsibility of leaders was to create and manage

culture. Leaders who nurtured and understood the culture of their school often experienced academic and career success (Macneil, Prater, & Busch, 2009).

Effective school leaders understand that their success lies within their ability to cultivate the culture of the school. They must nurture faculty, student and community relationships. Leaders must create and exude trustworthiness. The long-standing traditions and beliefs of school must be revered by the principal. Teacher job satisfaction is often tied to the culture of the school. Principals must focus on creating good working relationships within the organization. Creating a positive culture aids in the production of good working relationships (Cross & Rice, 2000).

This study focuses on transformational, authentic, transactional and laissez-faire leadership. The transformational leader “helps school principals’ to frame their attitudes to move their schools forward” (Balyer, 2012, p. 581). Authentic leadership “...is leadership that is ethically sound, and consciously reflective practices in educational administration. This leadership is knowledge-based, values informed, and skillfully executed” (Begley, 2003, p. 1). Transactional school leadership focuses on the school leader acknowledging behaviors of followers and seeking to control them by utilizing a system of rewards and consequences (Robbins, 2007). Laissez-faire school leaders essentially simply lack leadership. They do not state their vision or give direction for achieving goals (Akan, 2013).

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between leadership styles and school culture in a small rural school district. Chapter four presented the themes and data that emerged from exploring the relationship between leaders and school culture. The themes were derived by analyzing recorded interviews of the principals and

teachers. The interviews allowed the researcher to gain valuable insights from the participants for this case study. This qualitative case study was conducted to answer the essential question: What is the relationship between the leadership styles of principals and school culture? The study was guided by the following questions:

1. As perceived by principals, what are the critical functions of effective leaders?
2. As perceived by teachers, what are the critical functions of effective leaders?
3. As perceived by leaders and teachers, what impact does the leader have on the culture of the school?

### **Description of the School District**

This case study focused on a small rural school in Missouri rich in tradition and culture. The school enrolls approximately 370 students from pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade. The sample population of this study consisted of 21 elementary teachers, 20 junior high/high school teachers, one elementary principal and one junior high/high school principal. The teachers include regular education teachers, special education teachers, title teachers, counselors and classroom aides. Four teachers from each building were randomly selected to participate in this study. There is only one principal in each building. They were both asked to participate in this study. Pseudonyms were used for each participant in this study.

Table I

## Teacher and Principal Profile

<b>WEXLER SCHOOL DISTRICT</b>	
<b>PARTICIPANTS</b>	
<u>Staff Member</u>	<u>Position</u>
Tiffany	Elementary Principal
Sally	Elementary Teacher
Jane	Elementary Teacher
Khloe	Elementary Teacher
Laura	Elementary Teacher
William	Junior High/High School Principal
Martha	Junior High/High School Teacher
Adam	Junior High/High School Teacher
Regina	Junior High/High School Teacher
Lisa	Junior High/High School Teacher

The mission/vision of the school district reads: *The mission of the district is to empower students to achieve academic excellence, be independent lifelong learners, and tolerant, contributing members of a global community. Our vision is to become a student-centered learning community that provides a safe, nurturing environment, encourages collaboration, upholds high expectations, and expects positive behavior.*

The school district follows the Professional Learning Communities model (PLC) which encompasses the following three big ideas (Dufour, 2004):

1. Ensuring that students learn
2. A culture of collaboration
3. A focus on results

### **Leadership Style**

#### **Elementary Principal**

The elementary principal (Tiffany) has 16 years of experience in education. Seven of those years has been spent as an administrator. She has been employed by her current district for the entirety of her educational career.

Tiffany believes that there are many critical functions and skills necessary to be an effective leader. First and foremost, the principal believes that as a leader she must have an attitude of servitude. She must lead by example by being willing to work alongside the staff to accomplish tasks. The administrator believes that effective leaders provide guidance to the follower while allowing them the ability to choose their path. In her opinion, a leader must have a vision and a plan of action to implement the vision. Being a good communicator as well as a good listener are necessary skills according to the building principal.

The principal indicates that it is critical for leaders to focus on developing relationships with stake holders to gain their trust and respect. She believes that the key to being an effective leader is to genuinely care about all stakeholders. Tiffany acknowledged that she does this by getting to know her staff, students and their families on a personal level. Making a concerted a concerted effort to show her staff and students that they are valued and appreciated is one of the ways she builds relationships. Tiffany's assertion was confirmed by the classroom teachers

which will be described later in the findings. Tiffany's beliefs are supported by Northouse (2010) who believes the framework of the transformation leadership theory is that a leader's effectiveness is not based upon tasks or situations, but on the relationships formed between leader and follower.

With her students, Tiffany feels that fostering relationships with the students is key to a positive culture. "Even in a school this small, kids are still impressed that I know every kid's name." She has created a positive referral system that allows students to visit her office for good reasons, not just the negative. She stands at the front door and greets students every morning. She gives high fives in the hallways, talks to them and makes sure "they know I'm not the mean principal stereotype." Her office is a safe haven for those having a bad day or just needing to talk. She tries to learn something personal about each of her students.

When asked to describe the attributes of a good leader, Jane (an elementary teacher) exclaimed "I think a good leader should be fair and passionate about their school and improving things at their school. I think they should be a good listener, and supportive and a good communicator." Laura (an elementary teacher) acknowledged that a good leader is "honest and open and being able to communicate well with others, get your point across, organized." Sally pointed out that a good leader "it's very important to be an understanding person, someone who's able to put themselves in other people's shoes and to understand what they go through day to day." In summary, the staff members describe an effective leader as one who is relationship driven. They must be



honest and trustworthy. The participants stated that effective leaders must possess excellent communication, organization and time management skills. They further described effective principals as those who are passionate, supportive, fair and understanding.

When asked to describe their building leader, the following themes emerged: the principal is caring, supportive, honest and trustworthy, concerned about relationships, positive, passionate, fun, approachable and a hard worker. Each of the elementary participants stated that their principal is caring and supportive. Khloe (an elementary teacher) asserted “our principal is very flexible. She is willing to help you no matter what. She is willing to give you constructive criticism but on a level that doesn’t make you feel belittled. She is willing to help you grow and mature in the classroom, which has made me into a better teacher.” She is always available to listen as well as offer advice to the teachers, students and parents. According to Sally (an elementary teacher), “She’s been where we’re at so has experience in doing what we do every day. So when she gives advice or has to guide us, she knows what she’s talking about. She’s done it. She’s been there and she was successful so you can trust that whatever she’s telling you is the right thing.” Paula commented that it is common practice for the principal to inquire about their needs, both professionally and personally. She has immersed herself in the community and has gained the trust and respect of all stakeholders. Sally added:

She’s a familiar face and a familiar person to the students and to the parents and everybody else that’s in the community. She does extra things

that aren't necessarily what she had to do as part of her job so that she can still be a part of that community and they know that she's involved and that she cares.

Each of the participants suggested that one of the strengths of the principal was her positive attitude. She comes in daily with a smile on her face and finds the good in any given situation. She gives positive feedback by acknowledging accomplishments with emails, hand-written notes, announcements and one-on-one conversations. She makes the school a fun place to work. She is conscious of staff morale and does whatever is necessary to boost the morale when needed.

The participants wholeheartedly believe that the principal is passionate about her job and that she is a hard worker. She has a vision and effectively communicates the plan to accomplish the set goals. As leader, she leads by example. She works alongside the staff members to deal with situations, meet deadlines and accomplish daily tasks. As confirmed by Paula, the principal is "actively involved with us when we go on field trips, she goes when we have celebrations at the school. She's very involved." Sally reaffirms the principal's willingness to work with the staff. "She is always willing to take the biggest part and chunk of the work..."

Research suggests that transformational leaders analyze and satisfy the needs of the people within the organization with the intended objective of fostering goal oriented workers (Northouse, 2010). These leaders tend to form a connection with their follower through motivational methods and individualized consideration (Bass, 1997). Transformational leaders know that developing

relationships between leaders and followers is essential to the success of an organization. These leaders provide scaffolding and autonomy to their followers. Sally states "...she goes above and beyond to help in any way that she can."

The elementary principal possesses many of the characteristics of a transformational leader. As previously discussed, she empowers her followers to accomplish the established goals by providing them the necessary supports a staff member was quoted as saying "She is willing to help you mature and grow in the classroom which has made me into a better teacher." (Khloe). She acknowledges the accomplishments of her followers which gives them confidence. Khloe boasted "she's very good in giving positive feedback...I have two or three notes on my board where she's just came in my classroom and wrote notes down saying good job or I'm proud of or something like that." As a leader, she has formed connection with all stakeholders. She has a vested interest in the school. Avci (2015), states that the ultimate goal of transformational leadership is to have both leaders and followers working together harmoniously to achieve organizational goals. The participants each spoke of the leader's willingness to work with them and to complete tasks that are outside her realm of responsibility. Sally spoke of the principal's willingness to "take the biggest part and chunk of the work, things that maybe we feel like we don't have time to do."

While the elementary principal possesses many authentic leadership qualities, she also displays characteristics associated with transformational leaders. Bhindi (as cited in Riley) believed that authentic leaders are concerned with creating an environment that is both caring and compassionate. Authenticity emerges through shared life experiences. An example of shared life experiences was given by Sally.

She has experience in doing what we do every day, so when she gives advice or has to guide us she knows what she's talking about. She's done it. She's been there and she was successful, so you can trust that whatever she's telling you is the right thing.

Self-awareness is an important aspect of authentic leaders. When the elementary principal was asked to think of areas in which she could improve, she stated the following:

Sometimes I think I'm too laid back and that as long as people are doing a good job in the classroom, that our kids are succeeding, and that our parents are happy, that there are some things that I let slide and that maybe I need to be a little more of a stickler on some of those tiny details.

(Tiffany).

While research suggested that valuing personal relationships was an effective leadership practice, this researcher learned that it can also prove to be a hindrance in some areas of leadership. When the participants were asked to state an area in which the principal could improve, 100% of the participants stated that the principal's personal relationship with the students and families sometimes caused the principal to make inconsistent discipline decisions.

I feel like some students may get more benefit of the doubt, certain students may get more chance than others. Maybe that goes by who their parents are, or maybe what's going on at home. But I feel like she has a big heart so she can see past certain issues because of what maybe they're going through at home. (Jane).

I think that maybe the biggest problem is she has been in this area for so long and so now she's even dealing with children that are children of people that she had in class and she's just been here so long and she even lives in the community and been part of the community and so she doesn't want parents upset with her...I think it has to do with relationships. I really do. I think it has to do with the relationships with the parents and fear of the parents that are coming in that they could cause a lot of ruckus. (Khloe).

According to research, authentic and transformational leadership have some commonalities. Authentic and transformational leaders seek to keep an open line of communication with their followers. Both leadership styles value the opinions of their followers. It was noted during the interviews that the participants considered the principal to be a good communicator. Research also argues that authentic and transformational leaders set clear expectations and often seeks the ideas and opinions of the staff and implements them into a shared vision (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Balyer, 2012). Authentic leaders are very self aware and place significant value on developing relationships (Datta, 2015). Authentic leaders openly state their motives, opinions and feelings to their followers. These leaders are keenly aware of how they come across to followers. The leader strives to keep an open line of communication with their followers in order to gain and maintain their trust. The characteristics associated with authentic leaders are parallel to the characteristics displayed by the elementary principal. Based on the literature presented, the researcher has determined that Tiffany is primarily an

authentic leader with some transformational qualities that are consistent with both authentic and transformational leaders as described above.

### **School Culture and the Leader's Impact on Culture**

Gaziel (1997) defines school culture as “the character of a school as it reflects deep patterns of values, beliefs, and traditions that have been formed over the years” (p.311). Gaziel further explains that there are “complex forces that work beneath the surface” (p.311) to determine the type of culture present within an organization.

Research shows that the success, or lack thereof, of an organization can be related to the role the school leader plays in the establishment of the school culture (Cross & Rice, 2000). According to Fullan, (2002b), it is the responsibility of the principal to foster good working relationships, promote student academic success, and create a positive working environment.

According to the elementary principal, her leadership style and her ability to lead absolutely impacts the culture of her building. Tiffany proclaimed “I set the tone every day by the mood I come into school with... whatever I'm feeling the teachers feel. Whatever the teachers feel, the students feel, and if I want a good, positive attitude, I have to again set that example.” Tiffany describes the culture of her building as positive, laid back, happy, hardworking, family oriented, academic driven, welcoming, and goal oriented. She proposed that essentially the culture is “we are here to learn, we are here to do our jobs, but we're also here to have fun and to take care of one another.” It is the opinion of the principal that the way in which she leads impacts teacher satisfaction and community support

Leadership, teacher satisfaction, and community support are the key elements to creating a positive school culture. The culture of the school is essentially defined by the relationships that have been forged by the principal (Cross & Rice, 2000). This school leader immersed herself in the traditions and culture of the community by attending community events. When asked about her community involvement, the principal responded,

Most of my community involvement comes from attending school activities, basketball games, baseball games, softball games, things like that. Living in the community, I see a lot of families attending church from time to time, when churches offer things for our school, making sure that I'm a part of that. Just being visible, shopping in the businesses that are in the community, that kind of thing such as church services and little league games."

The principal believes that by being visible, she has gained the trust and support of the community. This assertion is confirmed by her statement:

I think I have a good relationship with the parents...they don't see me as untouchable, that they see me as, Oh well I'll just send her a message on Facebook or I'll just call her if I can. They see me as a resource for them and that I'm no different than anybody else. Most of them accept me very well and I have a good working relationship with them and a lot of them have turned into friendships over the last 16 years.

The culture is further defined by the family like atmosphere of the school. Tiffany believes that celebrating and supporting each other personal accomplishments and life events helps the staff to form a close bond.

The administrator has effectively communicated her mission, goals and school vision. By doing so, she has buy-in from the staff, students and community. Thus, she has created a culture that focuses on attaining high academic standards. Her passion, values, servant attitude, and authenticity have created a culture of trust and collaboration.

Tiffany cites several ways in which she helps to develop a culture of inclusion. She consistently seeks the input from stakeholders. She states that she welcomes suggestions. The staff has been instructed to “make parents feel welcome when they come in”. Parent nights and other school events are hosted monthly. Parents are kept informed through the use of social media, home notes, and phone calls. This sense of inclusion has helped to create the culture of trust.

The staff participants described the school culture as positive, friendly, family oriented, empowering, fun, and supportive. They remarked that education, people, and personal relationships are valued. Many of the participants elaborated that the reason they choose to stay at the school is because of the positive culture. Paula describes the culture as “a very close-knit community. We generally care about what happens to each other in the building and outside of the building.” Jane claimed, “I feel like overall we’re a very positive, friendly school. I feel like everybody’s here to help each other. You want to come to school. Most days you’re excited to come to school, you feel like it’s a safe and fun place to be and that you’re coming to be with friends.”



The participants suggested that the positive school culture can be attributed to the principal. The principal gets along well with the teachers. She is professional, yet fun. She is very approachable and works hard to create a supportive environment for the staff and students. According to Jane (teacher), the building leader is willing to go out of her way to make sure that they (staff) feel comfortable. She questioned whether or not other principals would put forth the same amount of effort. Jane concedes that her principal sets the example for the rest of the staff to follow.

When asked what they as teachers valued most at the school, every participant implied they valued the relationships that have formed. The participants spoke of the family like atmosphere and the fact that everyone genuinely cared about one another. Many of the participants agreed that their closeness crossed over to develop relationships with one another outside of school. Most of the teachers at the school are tenured and live a distance away from the school district. The staff members affirmed that the school culture played a major role in their decision to return each year. Jane, a teacher, stated “we’re just all in it together for everybody.” Laura described the reason she chooses to stay below:

We just feel like family here...as much as it’d be easier to go somewhere else and get more pay or closer to home, I don’t want to leave. Being here and seeing the kids, seeing the faculty and just how everybody interacts with one another, and it’s just a caring environment. (Laura).

The participants were asked if they felt the principal impacted the culture. There was a resounding yes from all participants. The participants noted that the principal impacts the culture by consistently portraying a positive outlook. Her support of the staff

empowers them to become better teachers. She has encouraged daily collaboration and the sharing of ideas. Her authenticity positively impacts the culture by making the staff and students feel appreciated. It also creates a culture of trust. They cited that she also impacted the culture by having a solid vision and a plan to accomplish the vision. Laura views having a vision and a plan as being instrumental in the development of the school culture.

She has a plan and she knows what she wants in the years to come. It's not just a plan right now, but she has that goal that she sets, and she tries to meet all the goals that she does have for it. If its teachers or if its students or just a personal goal, school goal.

In summary, the culture of this elementary school is positive. The leader, as well as the staff members, feel that the leader does have an impact on the school culture. In this particular school, the participants feel that the leader has positively impacted the school culture. Many of them cited her leadership style and abilities as the reason they choose to remain in the district. They also attributed the success of the district to the principal's ability to effectively communicate her vision, develop a plan and provide the necessary supports (be it social, emotional or physical) to achieve the goals.

### **Leadership Style**

#### **Junior High/High School Principal**

William, the junior high/high school principal, has 24 years of educational experience. He has spent the past 12 years as an administrator with various districts. He has been employed by the current district for three years.

William pointed out that there are many characteristics and skill levels necessary to be an effective leader. William advised that effective leaders must see themselves as managers. He explained, “my main priorities as a leader is one of management, more so than anything. I manage buildings, people, resources, funds. It’s more of a management type deal.” As manager of the school, an effective leader must practice integrity, be thick-skinned, policy driven and respectful. Leaders must possess problem solving skills and be willing to help in any area that is needed.

As a leader, you do whatever you have to do. If that means sweeping the floor, mopping. If that means getting your hands dirty...that’s what management is. You do what you’ve got to do to make the building function...that’s where the true leadership comes in. Because it’s easier for other people to see you do it, and then when you ask them to do it, it’s easier for them to comply. (William)

According to William, firmness, fairness and consistency is the key to a successful principalship. The leader further explained that administrators must be able to delegate responsibility, be a good listener and have excellent people skills. In his opinion, a successful leader creates a vision and effectively communicates a plan of action to accomplish the vision. Above all, states William, a good leader realizes that he is not in it to make friends. One must remember that nothing is personal, it’s just business. William feels that his main job is to run a business, and to do so successfully.

According to William, one of the responsibilities of a leader is to empower followers to become leaders so that the load is shared by more than one person. William explained that some people don’t realize their leadership potential until placed in a

leadership role. He feels that it is his job as the leader to push people to become greater. The principal stated “good leaders create good leaders. Great leaders create great leaders. I think that comes from extending yourself and allowing other people to have the power you have, and trying on that hat.”

When asked about staff relationships, William proposed that he maintains professional relationships with the majority of the staff members. He also said that there are several here “that I have a professional relationship that is more akin to something social.” With this group they discuss their children, sports and outside activities. He does not promote outside relationships with members of his staff. Although William keeps his working relationships professional, he feels that he cannot effectively lead his staff if he has not nurtured those professional relationships.

William feels that it is very important for the teachers to know his responsibilities as manager and how it affects them as a staff. He does so by making himself available to the staff and having an open-door policy. According to William, communication is the key to running a business successfully. William states that “the more you communicate, the more people tend to understand. That’s what you want. You want them to understand.” According to the principal, having real, truthful conversations is vital to the growth and success of an organization. This creates an atmosphere of trust between leaders and the staff. The principal feels that it is critical to communicate his thought processes, expectations, vision and goals. It is important to keep the staff informed.

William disclosed that he would like to strengthen his communication abilities with the staff. He suggested that it is hard keeping everyone informed of what is going on daily in the building. William advised that as an administrator, there are things that

you are unable to share with the staff. This can be perceived as being aloof. According to the principal, most of his communications are through email and some face-to-face contact. William feels that the older teachers prefer the face-to-face communication over email. It is hard to do this type of communication because so many things go on in a day that they need to be made aware of. The principal stated that he sometimes unintentionally overlooks staff members. He asserted, that by sending emails allows him to communicate the same information to everyone. The down side of emails is that the tone of the email can be misinterpreted. Different people interpret the emails in different manners. William acknowledged that:

I don't like to send emails because you can take the tone differently. Just talking with them, sitting down finding 10 or 15 minutes where I can talk with them. That's crucial because that's the way you get your point across. I think a lot of people, especially my older staff, would rather me talk to them rather than to email or to text them. It's like the younger crowd, "okay, yeah I read your email." The older crowd, "I never got it." Well you got it, you just didn't read it. They'd rather me talk to them face to face. I like that approach.

The junior high/high school participants were asked to describe the characteristics of an effective leader. The emerging themes were that effective leaders are firm, fair and consistent in their daily practices. They believed that effective leaders should have and communicate clear expectations. In their opinion, leaders should set ambitious standards and should hold all stakeholders accountable for meeting those standards. They believe that effective leaders should be good listeners and solicit and respect the opinions and

ideas of others. Regarding relationships, the teachers said that leaders should work to foster good working relationships with stakeholders and to treat them equally.

When asked to describe their building leader, the participants answered that he is the manager, “captain of the ship”, and a “by the book principal”. 100% of the participants stated that he runs the school like a business. He is policy driven and strictly enforces his, as well as, the district policy. There are no gray areas when it comes to policy.

The participants affirmed that the business mentality of their principal is welcomed when it comes to making decisions. They admitted that they like the fact that personal feelings do not come into play when decisions are made. His motto is, “don’t take it personally, it’s just business”. For some, this has made it easier to take and apply the constructive criticism given by the principal.

According to the participants, the business attitude is fine for decision making, but it does not go over so well when dealing with relationships. Adam (a jr. high/high school teacher) confessed

...I believe that my principal keeps a professional relationship with our faculty. He does not mix business with personal relationships. In some ways it’s good, in some ways not...the bad side of not having a personal relationship is that there is a feeling of not really ever knowing where you stand with that person. There’s almost a disconnect at times, and from what I’ve heard from other staff members, it leads to distrust.

The participants agreed that they do not know their leader on a personal level and would like to know more about him. They feel that their relationship with the principal is

strictly business. Regina (a jr. high/high school teacher) was quoted as saying “I feel I still don’t know him on a deeper level like I might know other people in the building...I don’t know much about his life...There’s not much I know about his background.” Lisa (a jr. high/high school teacher) described her relationship with the principal as professional and leaves her wanting to know him better. Martha (a jr. high/high school teacher) agreed, “I wouldn’t say that we are friends, but I feel like I can go to him and talk to him about things, and know that it’s not going to leak out to anybody else or anything like that. So overall, I’d say that my personal relationship is good.”

According to the staff, the principal needs to show a more personal side on occasion to the staff. The consensus was that they feel they could understand his decisions better if they knew more about him on a personal level. More of what drives him outside of business. The participants stated that his “moods” are inconsistent throughout the day. Some stated that at times they are afraid to approach him. They cited inconsistencies on how he deals with rewards and consequences for staff members. Martha admonished, “...if somebody’s gonna be in trouble for something, then everyone needs to be in trouble for it, or if somebody’s getting praised for something, then everybody who was involved needs to get praised for it.” Regina (a jr. high/high school teacher) stated:

He needs to work on consistency. If I definitely mess up and don’t do something and someone else is not doing the same thing, I should probably be reprimanded as well. I don’t want to be, but it should be the case. If I get rewarded for something that I did well, they should too.

There were varying views of the leader's personality. Martha insisted "he can be gruff, he can be loud, and he can be a grouch some days. But he is clear about the rules and he expects you to follow those, and he lets you know that everything is business, there's nothing personal, so I do like that about him." Regina replied that his personality can be "cold" at times. She pointed out that sometimes his coldness can sometimes make it uneasy to approach him. Lisa describes the principal's personality as charismatic. She describes him as the "captain of the ship". Adam proposed that their leader has a welcoming personality, but he can be distant at times.

While there are varying views on the leader's personality, there was a consensus regarding the effectiveness of his ability to lead. According to the participants, the principal is a strong leader. Although it is clear that he is in charge, he welcomes the ideas of others. He provides the vision, expectations and goals and solicits the input of both teachers and students on how to creatively accomplish the goals. He has created a team leadership mentality in the building. The leadership team meets once a month to discuss school issues. The team speaks for the building. They bring concerns, problems, and celebrations to the meetings. As a team, they come up with viable solutions and take the decisions back to the remainder of the staff. The leaders act as facilitator in these meetings, providing guidance when needed.

When asked to describe the strengths of their principal, the participants cited that the leader is strong-minded and unwavering when it comes to policy. Adam insisted "he does not play favorites when it comes to students and holds them all accountable equally." Three of the participants agreed that his strength lies in knowing what he wants to accomplish and has a plan to accomplish it. He "gets stuff done" according to Regina.



Another strength of the principal is the relationship that he has developed with the students. He is always in the hallways between classes. He is present during each lunch shift. He walks around talking to the students. He is at the front door greeting them every morning and when they leave in the afternoons. According to the interviewees, the principal always makes himself available to the students. They trust him and regularly go to his office just to talk or to say hi.

The leader has a business mentality regarding rewards and consequences. He sets clear expectations and goals for the staff and the students. The staff members stated that as long as you follow the rules and policies, you will remain in good standing with the principal. Regina elaborated by saying, “you do what’s expected, you’re good. But if you’re one that has multiple offenses or something, you’re probably going to run into issues. So, kind of cross your t’s and dot your I’s, make certain everything’s ready to go.”

Comparing the research to the responses of the leader and staff participants, the junior high/high school principal’s leadership style is transactional. Research defines transactional leaders as those who manage an organization by supervising the performance and compliance of a group through punishment and reward (Sudha, Shahnawaz & Farhat, 2016; Vera & Crossan, 2004; Bass, 1997). Transactional leaders adhere strictly to the organizational procedures. Transactional leaders focus on the exchange of resources, followers meeting expectations and being rewarded or receiving consequences. Another characteristic of the transactional leader is the professional relationship between leader and follower. The transactional leader bases his relationship on the exchanging of goods and services. William feels that his role as principal is to

change the mindset of the staff members to become more business oriented. He explained that the school is a business and that the goal is to work for the customer which are the students and the parents. He strives to get a good customer service satisfaction rating.

Transformational leaders have great influence over their followers. The goal of transformational leadership is to foster goal-oriented followers. These leaders give their followers autonomy to come up with creative problem-solving methods. This is evident in the principal's leadership team approach. The principal allowed the leaders the opportunity to come up with viable solutions to problems and concerns presented to the team by the leader and other staff members.

Hallinger (2003) described transformational leaders as those who provide support, share goals, provide a vision for the school, sets elevated expectations and provides academic stimulation. Each of the participants stated that their leader has a vision for the school and a plan to accomplish the vision. He sets high standards for all stakeholders which in turn produced academic stimulation. For the above reasons, the participants deemed the leader effective in his approaches. Based upon literature, the researcher deems William as a transactional leader who also displays some transformational qualities as described above.

### **School Culture and Leadership Impact**

When first asked to describe the culture of the school, the junior high/high school principal remarked that the culture is inviting. He maintained that the kids want to come to school and miss the environment when they are not present. He bragged that the culture is good because they have invested in the students. William further described the

culture as academic and policy driven and business-minded. He explained that people are valued as a resource. He earnestly believes that he has created a culture that produces a good product (kids). The principal described the education culture as a business transaction.

The leader explained that the culture is ever changing. He stated that if you change the mentality of the teachers, you can change the culture. The present culture is safe. Students are encouraged to ask questions and to challenge the direction of the school. The leader believes this type of culture creates students who are critical thinkers. It encourages them to present feedback in a respectful manner that may change the direction of the school for the better.

When first asked if he, as the building leader, has impacted the culture of the school he answered, "No ma'am. I don't feel that I have. I feel that my teachers have." The principal was asked to elaborate on his answer. He explained that he has given the teachers the necessary tools to make an impact on school. He further avows that he changed their mentality by encouraging them to look upon the school as a business.

The culture comes from me. Here's my expectations, but the teachers have to take it out and they have to sell it. I'm just the guy who came up with the vision. You've got to go sell it. Not only that, you've got to sell it to those kids and you've got to do it every day. That's what culture is.

You change the culture you change the outcome. (William)

The staff participants described the school culture as rich in tradition, family oriented, business minded, and positive. There has been a culture of trust developed between the staff members and the students, as well as, between staff members. The staff

further described the culture as compliant. The community is valued and immersed in the culture as much as the leader, staff and the students. The culture promotes personal relationships with the staff and students. Personal relationships are also prevalent between the leader and the students.

The teachers were asked if the principal impacts the culture of the school. Each participant emphatically stated that the leader has, and continues to impact the culture of the school. All of the participants were employed by the district prior to the hiring of the current leader. The culture prior to his arrival was one of low teacher and student morale. The teachers and students did not get along. The culture was that the teachers were in charge and they did what was best for them as educators without soliciting the opinions of the students. This created a culture of distrust between the school and the community.

According to the participants, under the leadership of William, the culture has drastically changed. They cited that the principal came in with a vision and a plan. He was very business-minded in his approach. He made his expectations clear to all stakeholders and didn't waver in his stance to uphold policy. The participants agreed that after the first year under his leadership, he gained buy-in from the staff, students and community members. The culture began to change. Students attendance improved, teachers were focused on the students as individuals. The community began to trust and support the school district.

The main focus of the district prior to the current leader was athletics. Under William's leadership, the culture has come to value education. The principal has set out to meet the needs of the students. According to the participants, he has changed the cultural focus to the student. All decisions are now based on what is best for the students.

There appears to be a culture-within-a-culture regarding relationships. The principal has created a culture of professionalism between leader and staff. The relational culture changes when it comes to staff relations and staff and student relations. The staff stated that the culture is very family oriented. When asked what they valued most about the school, Martha stated, “I like that everybody here is like a family. We most of the time get along, and sometimes we don’t, but everybody knows everybody’s business, and I kind of like that.” Lisa said that she values the people the most. She stated “...at the end of the day I think these people really have each other’s back. They really, really care about each other...It is a small school so there is a lot of love in this school.” Adam stated that he valued his students. He further explained that, “I have been blessed to forge long lasting relationships, which can only be described as familial.

In summary, the culture of the junior high/high school was two-fold. The culture can be described as a well-run business that is focused on meeting the needs of the consumer. It can also be described as a family that cares for and supports all stakeholders. The principal has definitely impacted the business culture and has aided in changing the hearts and mindset of the teachers towards the students. Both the leaders and the participants agree that the leadership style of the principal has positively impacted the culture of the school.

## CHAPTER V

### Summary and Conclusions

The focus of this chapter is to discuss the major findings revealed in this study. In addition, this chapter includes the summarization of the results obtained from the research. For organizational purposes, the chapter is divided into three main sections: summary, conclusions, and recommendations.

Fullen (2002b) believes that school leaders shoulder the responsibility for nurturing and shaping the culture of the school. Schein (as cited in Deal & Peterson, 1990) argued, “the only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture and that the unique talent of leaders is their ability to work with the culture” (p.13). The results of this study supported the arguments made by authors Fullen and Schein.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the relationship between leadership styles and school culture. This research examined the leadership styles of an elementary principal and a junior high/high school principal in small rural district in the bootheel. The study examined the styles of leadership from the perspective of the principal and the teachers. This case study also examined the culture of the district from the perspective of the principals and the teachers. Finally, the study intended to explore the impact of the leadership styles on the school culture.

The researcher used semi-structured interviews to collect the data for the qualitative case study. Four teachers from both the elementary and the junior high/high school were randomly selected by the researcher to participate in the study. The

principals from the elementary and the junior/high and high school were also asked to participate in the study. This study focused on three research questions:

1. As perceived by principals, what are the critical functions of effective leaders?
2. As perceived by teachers, what are the critical functions of effective leaders?
3. As perceived by leaders and teachers, what impact does the leader have on the culture of the school?

The outcomes of this case study confirmed that there is a direct relationship between leadership style, skill set and the culture of a school. The leaders, as well as the participants acknowledged that their building leaders directly impacted the culture of their school by their actions, attitudes, ability to lead, and the development of relationships with the staff, students and community. The qualitative data collected from this case study mimicked research previously discussed in the literature review.

### **Findings**

Research Question 1: As perceived by principals, what are the critical functions of effective leaders?

Based upon the participant responses in the interview, the elementary principal believes that leaders should have a servant mentality and be willing to lead by example. The participants believe that leaders should provide guidance to the followers. The elementary principal stated that it is important for leaders to have goals and plans of action for accomplishing the set goals. She cited good communication and listening skills as necessary skills for effective leaders. The elementary leader also stated that leaders must focus on nurturing relationships with stakeholders.

The junior high/high school principal believes that there are many critical functions of leadership necessary to be deemed effective. Seeing the district from a

business perspective is necessary for a leader to be effective. The principal believes that relationships with staff members should be kept professional. The results show that he believes that leaders need to be prepared to step in to do whatever is necessary for the organization to flow properly. Being firm, fair and consistent are all qualities of an effective leader according to the administrator. In addition, the leader stated that listening and communications skills are vital to a health organization. It is the opinion of the leader that having a vision and a plan to implement the vision are key factors in creating a good working environment.

The elementary and the junior high/high school principals have differing views on working relationships. The elementary principal and the staff place significant value on fostering both personal and professional relationships. They attribute the nurturing of these relationships to the family-like culture of their building.

The junior high principal places more emphasis on developing a business atmosphere. He believes that relationships should be kept professional. The staff members have opposing views on keeping the relationship between leader and followers strictly business. They desire to know more about their leader on a personal level.

Research Question 2: As perceived by teachers, what are the critical functions of effective leaders?

The elementary teachers described an effective leader as one who is concerned about relationships with all stakeholders. They stated that being honest and trustworthy is a critical function of effective leaders. The teachers believe that having excellent communication, organizational and time management skills are vital to the success of a school leader. In their opinion, effective leaders should be passionate, supportive, fair and understanding. It was the opinion of this staff that their principal demonstrates each



of the characteristics previously stated. The participants maintained that their building leader is effective and instrumental in developing and nurturing the positive culture of the school. While they praise their administrator for fostering personal relationships, they cited instances in which those personal relationships caused a lapse in judgment when disciplining specific students, or when dealing with certain parents.

The emerging themes of effective leaders as described by the junior high/high school teachers were that leaders should be firm, fair and consistent. The teachers described an effective leader as one who clearly communicates their vision and expectations, sets goals and holds stakeholders accountable. The teachers believe that effective leaders should be good listeners and solicit the ideas and opinions of all stakeholders. They also believe that effective leaders should work to foster good working relationships. According to the teachers, they strongly believe that their principal effectively communicates his vision, goals and expectations. The recalled examples of utilizing the leadership team to solicit the ideas and opinions of the staff. The staff members admitted that they would like more of a personal relationship with the principal. They surmised that his relationships with the students were personal and that this played a role in the culture of the school.

Research Question 3: As perceived by leaders and teachers, what impact does the leader have on the culture of the school?

The elementary principal strongly believes that her style of leadership, as well as her ability to lead, impacts the culture of the school. She believes that she sets the tone for determining the culture of her building. The elementary principal believes that a positive school culture is based on creating teacher satisfaction, having community

support and by developing stakeholder relationships. She believes that she is the foundation for establishing a positive school culture.

The elementary teachers believe that the leader does impact the culture of the school. They believe that the attitude, support, and leadership style consistently displayed by the principal plays a major role in the shaping of the school culture. What the leader values is conveyed through her actions. Those actions help to define the culture of the school.

The junior high/high school principal believes that he impacts the culture of the school by the establishment of his vision and goals and his plan to accomplish those goals. He firmly believes that as a leader, it is his job to set high expectations, then give the stakeholders the necessary tools to achieve those expectations. He believes that he shapes the culture by changing the mindset of the stakeholders. The principal was quoted as saying, “the culture comes from me. Here’s my expectations, but the teachers have to take it out and they have to sell it. I’m just the guy who came up with the vision. You’ve got to go sell it. Not only that, you’ve got to sell it to those kids and you’ve got to do it every day. That’s what culture is. You change the culture you change the outcome.”

The junior high/high school teachers emphatically believe that the principal impacts the culture of the school. They spoke of their experiences being under more than one leader in previous years. According to the teachers, the culture drastically changed under the leadership of their current principal. They attributed the positive shift in the culture to their principal’s leadership skills. Under his leadership, a culture of trust, compliance and academic achievement has been fostered.

### **Implications**

The role of principal has drastically changed over the years due to increased accountability legislated by local and federal governments. The principal must be well versed in the areas of academics, finances, government legislation, community and staff relations and the social/emotional development of the students. The leader must now take on the role of manager. It is the job of the leader to cultivate an environment that is conducive to academic success, while focusing on the needs of all stakeholders. According to Peterson & Deal (1998), it is the role of the school leader to communicate core values, develop a mission, support and promote school traditions, set direction and employ influence to shape the school culture.

The results of this qualitative case study provide evidence that the principal's style of leadership impacts the culture of a school. The conceptual framework for this study combined culture and leadership. It was the intent of the study to find the balance of leadership that created a culture of trust, motivation, commitment and a positive cultural environment (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008).

The results of this study further show that leaders and their followers believe that there are critical functions necessary to effectively lead a school district. The findings indicate that a principal's self-described leadership style has both similarities and differences than the leadership style perceived by the teachers. There were commonalities of the critical functions of effective leaders as perceived by the leaders and the teachers.

This case study offers a deeper understanding of how leadership styles impact the culture of the school. Leaders who concentrate on creating a vision, developing and

nurturing relationships, valuing education and providing support will see a positive culture develop. It takes a concerted effort by the leader to develop and maintain a positive school culture.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The intent of this study was to explore the relationship between leadership and school culture. The goal of this study was to determine what leaders and teachers perceive are critical functions of effective leadership. The study also sought to determine the impact of said leadership on the culture of the school.

While the results of this case study show that there is a significant relationship between leadership styles and culture, there are limitations to the study. This study was conducted in a small, rural school district in Southeast Missouri. The participants consisted of elementary and junior high/high school principals and teachers. The study is limited to its application to a broader population due to the limited location. Based on the findings of this study, it would be beneficial to further explore the impact of leadership styles in larger schools. It would also be beneficial to get the perceptions of the students and parents on what critical functions are necessary to be an effective leader and their perceptions of how the leader impacts the culture of the school.

### **Conclusions**

With increased accountability from the local and federal governments, it is important that leaders focus on developing the skills necessary to positively impact the culture of the school. Leaders must continuously strive to educate themselves in the areas of academics, finances, relationships, and culture development in order to be an

effective leader. As previously stated, the findings of this study support the framework that the principal's style of leadership does impact the culture of a school.

Tiffany, the elementary principal, is an authentic leader. She focuses on the development of personal relationships with the staff, students and members of the community. She is very aware that her attitude and actions affect the culture of the school and makes a conscientious effort to be positive. Tiffany, as described by the teachers, is knowledgeable, trustworthy, supportive, and a team player. She consistently goes above and beyond normal administrative duties to ensure that the needs of her building are met. According to the teachers, Tiffany's efforts have helped to create a family oriented, fun, and positive school culture for staff and students. The teachers believe that Tiffany is an effective leader and that she impacts the culture of the school. While they applaud her attention to the development of personal relationships, the teachers feel that those relationships sometimes cloud her judgment when it comes to disciplining the students. This is the only area in which they stated she needs improvement.

William, the junior high/high school principal is a transactional leader. He is business minded and policy driven. William communicates his vision and expectations to the staff and students. He maintains professional relationships with the staff in order to accomplish his goals. Teachers stated that he is policy driven, which makes him fair and consistent. According to the teachers in his building, they have complete faith in his ability to lead and that he is effective in his leadership practices. When asked about areas in which the principal could improve, the teachers stated that he can sometimes be loud, and somewhat cold and gruff. They feel that having strictly professional relationships

with the administrator hinders their ability to understand one another. The staff would like him to place more emphasis on fostering personal relationships.

The consensus of the teachers is that during Williams tenure as principal, he has had a direct impact on the culture of the school. They stated that the culture has positively changed under his leadership. They cite that students come to school ready to learn. They appreciate the knowledge and vision that he has brought to the district.

The Wexler School District is unique because of its small size and community makeup. Small rural school districts must effectively operate with small budgets and a limited number of staff members who wear many hats. The districts often have an above average poverty rate, as is the case with the Wexler School District (Sperry & Hill, 2015). Sperry and Hill (2015) argue that small rural school districts are rich in community values and culture. They state that it is difficult for outsiders to come in and change things because they (the community) like doing things the way they've always been done.

The Wexler school district has an advantage over large, urban districts in that they have very small class sizes. As previously mentioned, the teacher to student ratio (11 to 1) is below the state average. While the class sizes are smaller, the students have limited course opportunities due to the decreased staff size.

The uniqueness of the school size, small budget, and limited staff has not hindered the spirit of the Wexler School District. The school leaders have managed to create an environment that is conducive to teacher job satisfaction and improved academics. The elementary and junior high/high school principals have managed to

garner the support of the small community. Though different in their style of leadership, both principals have directly impacted the culture of their buildings.

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**APPENDIX A****Informed Consent: Building Administrators and Teachers**

Title: AN EXPLORATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEADERSHIP STYLES AND SCHOOL CULTURE IN A SMALL RURAL SOUTHEAST MISSOURI SCHOOL DISTRICT

Researcher: Kimberley Blissett

**I. Purpose**

I am compiling research to complete my dissertation. I would like to invite you to participate in the study. The purpose of the research is to explore the connection between leadership styles and school culture in a small rural Southeast Missouri school district.

**II. Procedures**

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to submit to a recorded interview with the researcher at a neutral location. Your identity will remain confidential for the purposes of the study. The information gathered will be used for research purposes only.

**III. Risks**

I will make every effort to keep your information confidential by securing it on a password protected computer in a locked office.

**IV. Benefits**

The information obtained by the researcher will help to determine the type of leadership style present and how it impacts the culture of the school district.

Appendix A (continued)

### **Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:**

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Once you have decided to participate in the study, you have the option of withdrawing from the study at any time.

### **V. Confidentiality**

Your participation in this study will remain confidential. Every attempt will be made to keep your name and any other identifying information confidential.

### **VI. Contact Persons**

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You may contact the Campus Institutional Review Board if you have questions about your rights, concerns, complaints or comments as a research participant. You can contact the Campus Institutional Review Board directly by telephone or email to voice or solicit any concerns, questions, input or complaints about the research study. Email: [umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu](mailto:umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu). Phone: 573-882-9585.

### **VII: Copy of Consent Form**

You may save or print a copy of this consent form for your personal record



**APPENDIX B****Principal Interview Protocol**

1. How long have you been employed by the school District?
2. Talk to me about leadership. What are your priorities as a leader?
3. What are your accomplishments as a leader?
4. What areas would you like to strengthen?
5. Give me examples of how you build relationships with your staff?
6. Give me an example of how you foster relationships with your students?
7. How would you describe the culture of your school?
8. As the leader of this school, how do you help improve and/or change the culture of the school?
9. Is there anything that you would like to add regarding your leadership and/or the culture of the school?

**APPENDIX C****Interview Protocol for Teachers**

1. What skills/characteristics make a good leader?
2. Describe your building principal?
3. How do you perceive your relationship with the Principal?
4. Does the Principal foster relationships with the staff?
5. Describe the Principal's relationship with the students?
6. What are the leadership strengths of the Principal?
7. In what areas can the principal improve?
8. What do you value most at this school?
9. (I will define school culture) Describe the culture of the school?
10. Give examples of how the principal impacts the culture of the school.
11. Is there anything that you would like to add regarding the leadership and/or culture of the school?

## VITA

Kimberley Blissett was born in 1970 in Southeast Missouri. She is married and has two children. Kimberley began her career in education in November of 2005 as an elementary Special Education Teacher. She has also served as high school Guidance Counselor, district Testing Coordinator and district Curriculum Director. Kimberley is currently employed as a Middle School Principal.

Kimberley received a B.S. in Elementary Education from Southeast Missouri State University. She received a Masters in Administration from William Woods University. Kimberley received her Doctorate (EdD) in Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri-Columbia.