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# Leadership for Excellence: A Case Study of Leadership Practices of School Superintendents Serving Four Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award Recipient School Districts

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Leadership for Excellence: A Case Study of Leadership Practices of School Superintendents  
Serving Four Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award Recipient School Districts

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS  
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

By

Klint Walter Willert

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

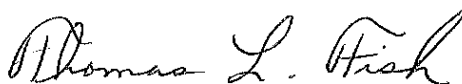
2012

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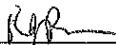
Leadership for Excellence: A Case Study of Leadership Practices of School Superintendents  
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We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality. We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

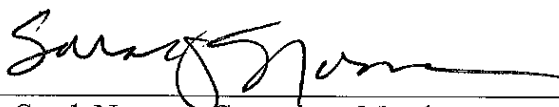
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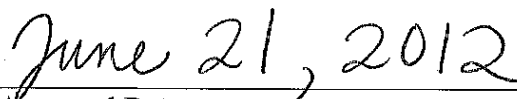
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Dr. Thomas Fish, Committee Chair

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Final Approval Date

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continuous improvement at any stage or any age in life. I am delighted and privileged to work alongside such a dedicated group of individuals in a community that values life-long learning.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page Number</u>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
LIST OF APPENDICES	vii
TABLE OF TABLES AND FIGURES	viii
ABSTRACT	ix
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
Statement of Problem	2
Significance of the Problem	3
Purpose of Study	5
Research Questions	6
Researcher Positionality	6
Definition of Terms	8
Overview of the Dissertation	9
<b>CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND RESEARCH</b>	<b>11</b>
Theories of Leadership	12
Trait Theories	12
Management Theories	13
Relationship Theories	14
Situational Theories	16
Contingency Theories	17
Total Quality Management	18
Quality Described	19
Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award	23
Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award in Education	25
Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award and Leadership	26
Total Quality Management and Leadership	26
Total Quality Management, Leadership, and Organizational Improvement	27
Leadership and Organizational Transformation	29
Organizational Improvement	31
Educational Leadership	34
Organizational Theory: Four Frames	35
The Structural Frame	36
The Human Resource Frame	37
The Political Frame	38
The Symbolic Frame	39
Frames and Data Analysis	40
Summary	40

<b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY</b>	42
Introduction	42
Rationale for Qualitative Research Design	42
Case Study Research Approach	44
Participant Selection	45
Chugach School District - Chugach, Alaska	46
Pearl River School District - Pearl River, New York	47
Community Consolidated School District #15 - Palatine, Illinois	48
Jenks Public School District - Jenks, Oklahoma	49
Study Participants	50
Superintendents	51
Informants	54
Method of Data Collections	56
Analysis and Synthesis of Qualitative Data	58
Ethical Considerations	60
Limitations of Study	60
Summary	62
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: DATA AND ANALYSIS</b>	64
Introduction	64
“And can we all do a little bit better?”:	
A Commitment to Continuous Improvement	65
“I take it personally!”: Personal Accountability	67
“‘In God we trust. All others bring data!’”: The Use of Data	74
“‘The way we do things now!’”: A Focus on Processes	88
“‘And can we all do a little bit better?’” ~ A Reprise	96
“‘We’re in this together!’”: Collaborative Leadership	98
“‘It’s a fundamental value of citizenship in our district.’”:	
Sharing Leadership	98
“‘It can’t just be the superintendent!’”: Empowering and Engaging Others	103
“‘We’re in this together!’” ~ A Reprise	108
The Leadership Practice – Effect Connection	109
Summary	111
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	113
Introduction	113
Summary	114
Recommendations for Further Study	119
Implications of Findings for Practitioners	122
<b>REFERENCES</b>	124

<b>APPENDICES</b>	137
Appendix A: Interest Letter	138
Appendix B: Letter of Invitation	141
Appendix C: Consent Form	143
Appendix D: Interview Protocol – Superintendent	145
Appendix E: Interview Protocol – Informant	147
Appendix F: Confidentiality Agreement	149



## TABLE OF TABLES AND FIGURES

<u>Table Name</u>	<u>Page Number</u>
Figure 1: Malcolm Baldrige Education Framework	25
Table 2: Collins' Five-Level Hierarchical View of Leadership	29
Table 3: Fullan's Four Levels of Moral Leadership for School Leaders	30
Table 4: MBNQA School District Recipients from 1999 to 2007	46
Table 5: District Goals by MBNQA Recipient School Districts	76
Table 6: Key Measures Reported by Four MBNQA Recipients	78
Chart 7: Chugach Student Achievement Chart 1995-1999	81
Chart 8: Pearl River Student Achievement Data 1997-2001	81
Chart 9: Jenks Student Satisfaction	82
Chart 10: CCSD#15 Ninth Grade Student Satisfaction 1998-2001	82
Chart 11: Pearl River Parent Satisfaction Data 1996-2001	82
Chart 12: Constituent Satisfaction Various Areas of Chugach School District	83
Figure 13: CCSD#15 PDSA School Improvement Plan Process Model	90
Figure 14: Pearl River A+ Approach to Classroom Success Utilizing PDSA Process	91
Figure 15: A Model of Leadership Practice-Effect Relationships	110

## ABSTRACT

This purpose of this study was to examine and understand the leadership practices of four individuals who were serving in the capacity of superintendent leading to or at the time of their respective districts receiving the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. The study explored how certain leadership practices transcended the four identified superintendents.

The qualitative case-study approach, including the use of site visits to each of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award recipient districts, document reviews, and in-depth interviews with four superintendents and four identified informants, resulted in discovering two leadership themes that were found in common among these award winning senior educational leaders. The first theme, a commitment to continuous improvement, had three supporting factors which included personal accountability by the superintendent, the use of data in the district to make decisions, and a process for improvement. The second overarching theme this research identified was the practice of collaborative leadership. Two supporting factors of this second theme included the superintendent's willingness to share leadership responsibilities and the superintendent's focus on empowering others in the school organization.

These findings suggest that common practices of leadership exist among superintendents of Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award recipient school districts. Furthermore, analyzing these findings through the lens of Bolman and Deal's (2008) four frames suggests that educational leadership by senior leaders involves a blend of multiple frames, with no singular method for effectiveness. Thus, these superintendents, their leadership practices, and the multi-frame analysis of their common leadership practices may serve to represent successful leadership practices for other senior educational leaders considering pursuit of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

School superintendents are viewed as leaders of school systems. While the original reason for creating the school superintendency was to have a person supervise classroom instruction and curriculum (Kowalski, 2006), the role of the superintendent today is much more dynamic. At the core, the superintendent is often expected to provide leadership which simultaneously focuses on the overall direction of the entire school district while also attending to finer details of the daily operations of the district. Superintendents are called to implement reforms, work with school boards, and interface with the public (DiPaola & Stronge, 2003). In doing so, the superintendent is called to fulfill many different duties – community leader, district leader, organizational manager, supervisor, instructional leader, financial planner, and others – to fulfill the obligations of the superintendency (American Association of School Administrators, 2010). National legislative actions for improved results and accountability in public schools such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) and the Race to the Top Fund (2009) have raised the level of focus on the superintendent’s ability to increase student achievement and overall organizational improvement related to student achievement. The increased expectations have created a national climate of accountability that has changed the role of the superintendency along with the related leadership roles of the school superintendent (Glass, 2000). With the increased expectations for the superintendent to provide leadership in the school district, related to overall organizational performance, comes an opportunity to examine effective leadership practices of superintendents who have demonstrated success amidst the increased expectations.

The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) recognizes outstanding performance by businesses and organizations in the United States, including school districts. The Award recipients have been recognized as “role models” (National Institute of Standards

and Technology, 2010), providing examples of best practices for other organizations, businesses, and educational institutions. Therefore, school leaders and policy makers can look to practices of Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award recipients for insights and understanding of effective leadership practices for outstanding organizational performance and achievement. As a result, the focus of this dissertation is on the leadership practices of school superintendents from school districts that received the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. The introductory chapter to this case study includes a statement of the problem, the significance of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions guiding the overall study, the researcher's positionality, a definition of key terms, and an overview of the dissertation.

### **Statement of Problem**

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2003) note that leadership is vital to the effectiveness of today's public schools. Similarly, Waters and Marzano (2006) indicate a "statistically significant relationship between district leadership and student achievement" (p. 3). These observations suggest that leadership by school superintendents can have an impact in the performance of the school district.

Effective school superintendents have the capability to impact the performance in the school districts they lead. School districts are unlikely to improve performance results in the absences of superintendents who are involved in the district's instructional programs (Cuban, 1984). Carter and Klotz (1990) suggest that student achievement is higher in schools where the leaders have high expectations for student learning and teachers are held accountable for student learning. Bjork (1993) expands on the notion, sharing that improvements in education require the involvement of district leadership.

The challenge for today's superintendent is to exercise effective leadership practices that result in improved organizational results. The accountability movement, including programs such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, demands that school superintendents practice effective leadership that yields results. Yet, from my observations, the challenge of identifying actionable leadership practices by the school superintendent remains elusive. The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) identifies organizations that have demonstrated successful results related to overall organizational performance. The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award recipients serve as role models for other organizations to learn effective organizational practices. The MBNQA educational recipients provide a rich environment to examine the leadership practices of superintendents. Through an examination of leadership practices from multiple superintendents, I explored the leadership practices commonly applied by the four superintendents that were deemed to be helpful in the school organization's achievement of national recognition for exemplary performance and results.

### **Significance of the Problem**

“The passion that drives us as educators – disciplined with criteria for pursuing excellence – is what we owe our children, our communities, our economy, our future” (Conyers & Ewy, vii, 2004). Dr. John Conyers, former superintendent of Community Consolidated School District 15 in Palatine, Illinois, emphasized the importance of implementing and applying improvement criteria in educational institutions. Community Consolidated School District 15 in Palatine, Illinois, was the only school district in the United States in the 2003 calendar year to be awarded the MBNQA. Conyers' observation on the “criteria for pursuing excellence” and documented success as a school superintendent applying the Malcolm Baldrige criteria emphasizes the basis of this study. Specifically, Conyers' observations, coupled with my

personal pursuit to improve as a school superintendent, highlight the significance of studying this problem. While Conyers suggests that the application of the MBNQA criteria may support organizational excellence, little information exists on the leadership practices of school superintendents in guiding their respective school districts to a level of recognition as a model organization using the MBNQA or the effects of the leadership practices on the organization.

The organizations which have received the MBNQA provide examples of quality management principles in practice because of the primary areas of focus found in the criteria (Johnson, 1992). The MBNQA criteria offer insights into an organization's performance through multiple dimensions. In the educational sector of the MBNQA program, seven overall categories frame the criteria. These categories are leadership, strategic planning, student/stakeholder/market focus, measurement/analysis/knowledge management, faculty/staff focus, process management, and organizational performance results (National Institute of Standards and Technology, 2006). In the measurement criteria of organizational success for attainment of organizational excellence, leadership is the first category listed. Moreover, with the exception of the organizational results category, the leadership category has the greatest number of points available within the metrics structure of the criteria assessment. These two values accentuate the importance of the leadership category within the Baldrige criteria.

Furthermore, the emphasis by the MBNQA criteria on leadership illuminates the importance of leadership practices by the senior leader to influence the performance results of the organization. Leaders play a key role in creating cultural change in successful quality implementation (Gallear & Ghobadian, 2004). Multiple studies (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1997; Beer, 2003; Hung, 2004) have complemented this point and emphasized that effective leadership is essential for high performing teams and organizations. For senior leaders to be considered

“effective,” the leaders must focus on recognizing the performance of quality instruction, provide organizational focus, redefine the strategic planning process as a continuous process of leadership decisions related to student achievement, and finally, build accountability systems that do more than just evaluate test scores (Reeves, 2004). Conducting an analytical process of discovery and interpretation of the leadership practices found among four public school district superintendents who have received the MBNQA provided an opportunity to discover the common leadership practices among these identified superintendents. Furthermore, the analytical process provides insights into the effects of the superintendent’s leadership in these nationally recognized organizations.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to understand and describe the common leadership practices of the four identified school superintendents from the perspective of the school superintendent. An additional purpose was to understand the effects of the leadership practices by the school superintendents in these four districts that have attained the MBNQA.

This study involved uncovering common leadership practices among the four superintendents of MBNQA recipient school districts. The study examined insights from the superintendents, identified informants, and conducted extensive document reviews such as the MBNQA’s 50 page, narrative application. The purpose of this study focused on identifying, analyzing, and understanding the common leadership practices, including insights regarding the impact of these practices. Through the study, the four identified school superintendents shared insights revealing common leadership practices and common effects associated with their leadership.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was fulfilled utilizing a case-study design guided by specific research questions. The research questions focused the research process on the objective to identify the leadership practices of the four superintendents and the effects of the leadership practiced by the four superintendents. The larger aims of this study were to distill from the identified leadership practices the leadership practices in common among the four superintendents of MBNQA recipient school districts.

Two specific research questions guided the study. First, from the perspective of the school superintendents, what common leadership practices among the four identified school superintendents were fundamental in the successful application of the Baldrige criteria, resulting in the attainment of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award in education? Additionally, how have the leadership practices applied by the school superintendents of these four districts that have attained the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award affected the organization?

### **Researcher Positionality**

Even as a teenager, I was enthralled with leadership practices. My first taste of leadership occurred through the University of Minnesota 4-H program as a member of the Verdi Go-Getters 4-H club in Southwestern Minnesota. As a youth 4-H leader, I was called to provide leadership to my fellow 4-H Club members. The idea of being a leader and doing what leaders do was both exhilarating and frightening. I had never felt such a sense of responsibility and service at the same time. Through that initial experience with leadership, I developed what, at times, feels like an insatiable curiosity to discover and learn as much as possible about being an effective leader and capturing the leadership practices of effective leaders. My desires to learn



more about educational leadership specifically has emerged from my experiences as a teacher leader, an elementary school principal, and now as a school superintendent.

While conducting this study, I was employed as a school superintendent. As a superintendent of schools, I was able to bring my practitioner's perspective to the research. Furthermore, as a practicing school superintendent, I have a contextual understanding of the school environment and the role of a central office administrator in that environment.

During the research, I understood that, while my perspectives of the superintendency could serve as an asset, there could be some inherent liabilities. To limit these liabilities, including the potential for bias in the process, I continually engaged in self-reflection through ongoing conversations with my dissertation advisor and adhered to a carefully designed research and analysis process. The research design and process ensured that inherent procedural safeguards guided the validation of the data, the interpretation of the data, and the findings as a result of the data triangulation.

Overall, even today as a school superintendent in a larger regional center school district in Minnesota, I often reflect on my first experiences as a youth leader for the Verdi Go-Getters 4-H Club. That experience inspired me to constantly hone my skills to better serve any organization I have been called to lead, including my current school district. In my quest to learn about leadership approaches and models, I discovered the Malcolm Baldrige criteria (National Institute of Standards and Technology, 2006). After examining the criteria, I found possibilities for improving educational institutions through a focus on leadership practices and the application of effective practices in the school environment. I wondered how leadership practices might support the utilization of the Baldrige criteria as a continuous improvement model to enhance an organization's performance. This inquiry, along with the pursuit to improve my understanding

of leadership practices and the impacts these practices have on organizations, led me to the topic of this dissertation.

### **Definitions of Terms**

Several key terms are applied through the course of the research process.

**Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA)** – The MBNQA is the United States’ national quality award modeled after Japan’s Deming Prize. The award is named for Malcolm Baldrige, the United States Secretary of Commerce from 1981 to 1987 (National Institute of Standards and Technology, 2009).

**Culture** – The “culture” of a system is the “...shared processes: shared ways of thinking, feeling, reacting; shared meanings and identities; shared socially constructed environments; common ways in which technologies are used; and commonly experienced events” among the organization’s participants (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004, p. 57). The culture provides the organization with an identity that is special and unique.

**Leadership** – “Leadership is defined as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2007, p. 3).

**Senior Leaders** – The term “senior leader” refers to the position of the school superintendent.

**Performance excellence** – “Performance excellence” references a successful application of the Baldrige Criteria resulting in attainment of the MBNQA.

**Recipients** – “Recipients” refers to the four school districts of the multi-site case study. These recipients are the four school districts that received the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award in Education from 1999 to 2007. These four districts are Chugach Public

Schools in Alaska, the Pearl River Schools in New York, the Community Consolidated School District 15 in Illinois, and the Jenks Public Schools in Oklahoma.

### **Overview of the Dissertation**

This chapter provided an overview of the context and background for this study, with a specific emphasis on examining the leadership practices and effects of the leadership by four superintendents of four MBNQA recipient school districts. In the context of this chapter, I described the ongoing call for improvement in education along with the basis for the ongoing efforts to improve primary and secondary schools.

The chapter communicated the purpose of the study and the specific research questions that guided the study. First, from the perspective of the school superintendents, what common leadership practices among the four identified school superintendents were fundamental in the successful application of the Baldrige criteria resulting in the attainment of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award in education? Second, how have the leadership practices applied by the school superintendents of these four districts that have attained the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award affected the organization?

Additionally, this chapter provided insights into the positionality of the researcher along with several assumptions made by the researcher during the study. The chapter concluded with an overview of the rationale and significance of the study along with the definitions of key terminology of the study.

Chapter Two provides a review of related literature for the study. The literature review includes an overview of germane leadership theories. In addition, through the literature review, I explore total quality management (TQM) and present insights related to the connections of leadership and TQM. I also provide an overview of the context of this study through an

overview of the MBNQA. Furthermore, chapter two details the framework I applied for data analysis to understand the leadership practices and effects of the four identified superintendents.

In Chapter Three, I outline the research methodology and research design for the study. In this chapter, I discuss the process of data collection along with the process utilized to categorize the data. Furthermore, in Chapter Three, I provide the philosophical grounding for the selection of the qualitative case study methodology that was applied to this study.

Throughout Chapter Four, I present the findings from the data collections. Along with reporting the key findings, I provide an analysis of the key research findings. The analysis presents findings related to the leadership practices of the identified school superintendents and the effects of their leadership in the school districts.

Chapter Five presents a discussion of the findings. Additionally, Chapter Five provides recommendations for further study, and finishes with several conclusions from the study.

In conclusion, examining the leadership practices and effects of school superintendents from four school districts that received the MBNQA is significant for practicing school superintendents and aspiring school superintendents. By understanding and making meaning of leadership practices and the related leadership effects of the school superintendents from nationally recognized school districts, current school superintendents and aspiring school superintendents alike are better able to reflect on their own leadership and consider the application of practices identified as meaningful and beneficial by these school superintendents. By studying the leadership practices and effects of the school superintendents from four Malcolm Baldrige Award recipient districts, this research contributes to the growing literature about an important element of the Baldrige Criteria in Education.

## CHAPTER TWO REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

The foundation and theoretical underpinnings framing this research study are grounded in the areas of leadership and continuous improvement. The review of relevant and related literature is categorized into five distinct sections. The first section begins with an overview of predominant leadership theories. These theories include trait theories, management theories, relationship theories, situational theories, and contingency theories. The second section explores total quality management theory and its relationship to the Malcolm Baldrige award criteria. The third section of literature focuses on the relationships of total quality management, leadership, and improvement theory. Since the study is examining leadership practices of school superintendents, the fourth section of the literature provides the context for the study by examining highlights of educational leadership. The final section of the literature review examines Bolman and Deal's (2008) four frame model. These four frames, the human resource frame, the political frame, the structural frame, and the symbolic frame, provide the theoretical lenses used to analyze the findings of the study. The review of literature concludes with an overall summary of the key elements of literature.

To begin the literature review, I sought to examine the literature related to leadership practices in organizations that obtained the MBNQA. However, when conducting a Google Scholar® search utilizing the terms “Malcolm Baldrige Quality Award” and “Educational Leadership,” the meta-search returned only nine results. Due to the limited literature specifically related to educational leadership and the MBNQA, this study first frames the examination of leadership practices in a macro-level view of the relevant theoretical approaches of leadership.

## **Theories of Leadership**

An abundance of literature attempts to define and analyze leadership (i.e., Bass, 1985; Bennis, 1993; Burns, 1978; Hersey & Blanchard, 1993). The literature confirms a wide range of varying approaches to leadership. This section reviews the predominant theoretical approaches to leadership which include trait theories, management theories, relationship theories, situational theories, and contingency theories.

### **Trait Theories**

The trait leadership theory suggests there are certain traits leaders may possess that contribute to their overall success (Bernard, 1926). This notion was expanded by Tead (1929) and Kilbourne (1935), as they, too, argued that the phenomenon of leadership occurred as a result of the defining traits of the leader. These traits included physical qualities, personal attributes, character qualities, and intellectual abilities.

One of the earliest trait theories to emerge was the “great man” theory. Emerging from a study of the background and heredity-based characteristics of great leaders, the “great man” theory defined leadership as a set of predisposed genetic abilities (Galton, 1869). Through a comprehensive study of 14 nations over a span of time that ranged from five to ten centuries, Woods (1913) similarly surmised that a nation is developed through the natural inheritance of leadership characteristics, allowing the individuals with the inheritance of leadership to lead others effectively. Accordingly, great leaders were defined through inherent genetic abilities which some had, and others did not.

Despite early recognition of this framework to define leadership, the trait approaches lost their luster as this definition proved to be “sterile” (Tannenbaum, Weschler, & Massarik, 1961, p. 22). However, the trait theory notion continues to emerge through ongoing efforts to better

understand leadership. One such observation noted that leadership styles (such as how much participation leaders encourage, how extroverted they are, how intense or low key they are) differ widely from leader to leader (Locke, 1991). Further, research (Hackman & Johnson, 1991) notes that “while not predictive of leadership effectiveness, certain traits may enhance the perceptions that someone has the ability to lead others” (p. 46).

### **Management Theories**

Among the most prevalent management theories are transactional leadership theory, path-goal theory of leadership, and leader-member exchange theory. While variations among these three management-based approaches exist, the premise of management leadership theories emphasizes the functional and social exchange between the leader’s actions and the success or failures of those being led.

Transactional leaders seek to pilot the organization by appealing to the self-interests of those within the organization. “Transactional leadership emphasizes the transaction or exchange that takes place among leaders, colleagues, and followers” (Bass, 1998, p. 4). The conceptual construction of transactional leadership recognizes that persons seek their individual, independent objectives. It involves a “bargaining between the individual interests of persons or groups in return for their cooperation in the leader’s agenda” (Starratt, 1995, p. 109). Within the framework of the transactional leadership approach, the relationship and interaction with the follower is of significant relevance. “Transactional theory makes followers central to leadership because they are significantly involved in the negotiations that account for the exchange/transaction” (Rost, 1991, p. 30).

A second management theory of leadership is the path-goal management approach, which recognizes that “leaders, to be effective, engage in behaviors that complement subordinates’

environments and abilities in a manner that compensates for deficiencies and is instrumental to subordinate satisfaction and individual work unit performance” (House, 1996, p. 324). “This view of the path-goal theory of leadership effectiveness, as developed by Robert House, specifies what the leader must do to achieve high productivity and morale in a given situation” (DuBrin, 1998, p. 138). The premise of the path-goal approach is grounded in the belief that “followers are more motivated to be productive when they believe that successful task completion will provide a path to a valuable goal” (Hackman & Johnson, 1991, p. 51). Ultimately, the path-goal approach has two interconnected elements: the nature of the followers and the nature of the task (House, 1996).

### **Relationship Theories**

Originally called the vertical-dyad linkage based on Graen’s (1976) research into exchanges between leaders and followers, the leader-member exchange theory is an example of a relationship theory of leadership. This theory posits that leaders develop different relationships with different subordinates, known as vertical linkages (Liden & Graen, 1980). The concepts of the leader-member exchange approach can be likened to club membership, defining who is in, and, subsequently, who is out. In particular, “the leader-member exchange theory highlights the very essence of human relationships, and more specifically the fact that we do not treat everyone the same way” (Haberfeld, 2006, p. 36). As a result, the interactions of leadership rely upon the dynamic exchanges and patterns of exchanges that occur through the interactions between the leader and the follower.

Transformational leadership is another relevant relationship theory of leadership. The theory of transformational leadership is expressed as motivating others to do more than they originally intended and often even more than they thought possible (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978).



This approach to leadership emphasizes "... 'transforming' and 'transcending' leadership – from 'transactional' leadership, in which leaders exchange money, power, status, and 'perks' for the actions they want their followers to take" (Badaracco & Ellsworth, 1989, p. 67).

Through multiple leadership studies (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Bycio, Hackett, & Allen, 1995; Covey, 1992; Howell & Avolio, 1993), key components of transformational leadership have been identified. These include creativity, interaction, empowerment, motivation, and passion. Additionally, this leadership framework "changes people's operative attitudes, values, and beliefs from self-centered to higher, altruistic beliefs, attitudes, and values" (Starratt, 1995, p. 110).

Through transformational leadership, the leader "... looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower" (Burns, 1978, p. 4). The elements of transformational leadership differ from the transactional approaches to leadership by appealing to the greater needs of the organizational members rather than simply maintaining a quid pro quo relationship between leaders and followers.

In addition to transformational leadership, the servant leadership theory, a concept first introduced by Greenleaf (1977), emerges as yet another relationship theory. The servant leadership framework places the leader as a servant in the relationship to the needs of the follower and the organization and emphasizes that "the servant-leader is servant first ... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first" (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 13). Servant leadership is characterized by "the harmonizing of the ideals of serving and leading" (Eble, 1978, p. 4), which is defined by ten key elements of a servant-leader that have been identified within this theoretical framework. These key elements include listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people

within the organization, and building community (Greenleaf, 1991). While this leadership approach has not received the same degree of attention as transformational leadership, "... students and businesspeople often find this a compelling characterization of leadership" (Ciulla, 1998, p. 17).

### **Situational Theories**

The notion that leadership actions were based upon the behaviors of individuals in a specific situations started to emerge in the middle of the twentieth century. According to Murphy (1941), leadership was a function of the occasion where each situation called for a specific action by the leader. This recognition has served as the foundation for situational leadership theory. Situational theory differs from other approaches to leadership in that the primary focus of the situational approach to leadership is grounded in observed behaviors specific to a given set of circumstances (Hersey & Blanchard, 1993). Situational leaders adapt their leadership style to several variables such as the maturity of an individual or group including the ability of the individual or group to set high but attainable goals, the willingness and ability of the individual or group to take responsibility for the task, and the education or experience of an individual or a group the leader is attempting to lead or influence. The effective situational leader recognizes that his or her approach to lead others lies not only with the maturity of the person or group that is being influenced, but it also depends on the task, the job, or the function that needs to be accomplished. Based upon the maturity level of the follower or group, the leader applies a particular leadership behavior or style such as telling, selling, participating, and delegating. Specifically, the situational leadership approach considers the relationships among these variables in order to find causal relationships that will lead to predictability of behavior

(Hackman & Johnson, 1991). Through situational leadership theory, “the maturity level of the follower dictates the leadership behavior” (p. 54).

### **Contingency Theories**

The contingency model of leadership emphasizes that “the performance of interacting groups and organizations is contingent upon the favorableness of the leadership situation as well as upon the executive’s leadership style” (Fiedler, 1967, p. 261). In contingency theories of leadership, “traditional leadership theorists commonly claimed that leadership theories have to be situationally contingent: that different leadership principles have to apply in different situations” (Locke, 1991, p. 10). According to this theory, leadership depends upon a number of variables such as leadership style, the qualities of followers, and the situation in which leadership occurs. Fiedler’s contingency theory is one of the most recognized theories in this context (Northouse, 2004). Fiedler’s model suggests that the style of leadership is dependent upon the quality of relationship shared between the leader and the follower in relation to the task. By examining three elements – relationships, tasks, and position – Fiedler generalized which “style” of leadership was best in a given organizational context.

Similarly, the leader-role theory is another type of contingency leadership theory. Influenced primarily by Homans’ (1950) research on leadership roles, the leader-role theory implies that groups of people and organizational structures organize through the positions and situations such as social interactions of group members. Homans (1950) noted that “...activities, interactions, evaluations, norms, and controls...” (p. 12) characterize the basis for this theoretical framework. The exchanges among these variables define the group interactions, operational norms, and key activities.

While leadership practices serve as a fundamental basis of this study, the framework defining the context of this study is the educational environment focused on quality and continuous improvement. The next section examines the framework in which the leadership practices and leadership effects are examined. These include total quality management (TQM) and continuous improvement, along with the context of educational leadership.

### **Total Quality Management (TQM)**

“TQM is a management process which any organization can implement through long-term planning, by using continuous quality improvement plans which gradually lead the organization towards the fulfillment of its vision” (Dahlgard, Kristensen, & Kanji, 1995, p. 445). This premise of total quality management likely originated with inventor and engineer Frederick Taylor in the late 1800s and early 1900s (Nelson, 1980). Taylor developed a system focused on standardizing the work of the laborer and controlling the environment to provide for maintenance of standards in production outputs (Kakar, 1970). However, in the 1920s, statisticians developed sophisticated methodologies of utilizing arithmetical controls and techniques to target the specific needs in the workflow process and explore solutions to the factors contributing to poor outputs (Shewhart, 1931). These results led other industrial leaders, such as W. Edwards Deming and Joseph Juran, to explore the applications of Walter Shewhart in the latter half of the twentieth century in order to improve the outputs in American industry.

W. Edwards Deming (1986) approached American industrial leaders in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century with the intent to implement the fundamentals of what is known as TQM by applying concepts of quality improvement. Industrial leaders in the United States did not readily accept these concepts. However, in Japan, which had been devastated by World War II, the industrial leaders readily accepted the principles of total quality. Not until the early 1980s did this become a

concern to United States government and business leaders when it became evident that Japanese firms and their superior quality products posed a significant threat to the economic foundation of business operations in the United States.

In the early 1980s, many leaders became alarmed over the emerging crisis in quality in America (Juran, 1988). The concerns related to quality raised the issue of “quality awareness” (Juran, 1988, p. 3) for many industrial leaders and created a fervor among the leaders in industrial-based organizations to improve and enhance the quality outputs of their organizations. W. Edwards Deming (1986) noted this need for quality production even earlier when he acknowledged shortly after World War II that “failure of management to plan for the future and to foresee problems has brought about waste of manpower, of materials, and of machine-time, all of which raise the manufacturer’s cost and price that the purchaser must pay” (p. ix). This notion offered by Deming emphasized that a need for quality production and management clearly exists throughout systems and organizations of all kinds to ensure goals are developed with foresight to minimize waste and maximize effectiveness.

### **Quality Described**

Before delving too far into the significant attributes of quality, it is appropriate to provide a working explanation of quality for this study. Through process, quality can serve as an element to maintain a competitive advantage in the world (Oakland, 2005). However, in application, quality can be defined as

a customer determination, not an engineer’s determination, not a marketing determination or a general management determination. It is based upon the customer’s actual experience with the product or service, measured against his or her requirements – stated or unstated, conscious or merely sensed, technically operational or entirely subjective –

and always representing a moving target in a competitive market. (Feigenbaum, 1983, p. 7)

As the Feigenbaum definition offers, TQM concentrates on the performance outcome goals and measures necessary to produce results that meet the needs and expectations of the customer.

Behind this definition are three thought leaders on the principles of quality identified in this section. Through their individual work and analysis on quality management principles, W. Edwards Deming (1986), Joseph Juran (1988), and Philip Crosby (1985) provided the theoretical foundation for the quality movement.

“The growing drive toward continuous quality improvement as we know it today can be traced directly back to the groundbreaking work of W. Edwards Deming in the 1950s” (Fairfield-Sonn, 2001, p. 7). Despite his influence on quality initiatives in America, Deming, after a cool reception by American business, industry, and government leaders, first implemented quality-based improvement efforts, not in the United States, but rather in Japan (Fairfield-Sonn, 2001; White, 1999). Ultimately, Deming “developed a philosophy of quality management that is rooted in an understanding of the power and pervasiveness of variation and how it affects the process, that delicate interaction of people, machines, materials, and the environment” (Gabor, 1990, p. 5). Deming’s exploration of interactions of people, machines, materials, and the environment culminated with the development of 14 points for management (Deming, 1986; Gabor, 1990). The 14 points espoused by Deming (1986) suggested that management and leaders needed to establish a focus on improvement and adopt a philosophy of constant improvement within the organization. Further, through the focus on improvement, organizations needed to reduce variation in the organization work and in the suppliers of organizational needs. Training, along with developing more leadership within the organization, was essential in

Deming's eyes to drive fear from the organization. Furthermore, Deming emphasized through his 14 points the need to remove barriers to success that exist within organizations and between organizational departments. Deming also advocated to remove slogans and production targets to support employee work quality. Through the 14 points, Deming offered that leadership needs to foster worker satisfaction, focus on ongoing self-improvement, and promote the ideology that transformation of the organization was a responsibility shared by everyone.

The 14 points detailed how increased productivity, quality, and satisfaction occurred as a result of interactions and behaviors of management, workers, organizational processes, and systems. Through the 14 points, the objective was to create a long-range aim for the organization and constantly improve within the organization through training, improved leadership, and the removal of barriers to quality. Ultimately, through the 14 points, quality was the responsibility of everyone in the organization. The 14 points "formed the basis for lessons for top management in Japan in 1950 and in subsequent years" (Deming, 1986, p. 23). These 14 points for quality improvement offered key ingredients for organizational leaders that include elements such as vision, improvement, training, focus, and transformation (Deming, 1986). "Deming's philosophy and the single-minded dedication with which he has pursued it have been instrumental in giving a much needed impetus to a process-oriented management movement that began to make some inroads into the United States during the 1980s" (Gabor, 1990, p. 12).

Another leader in the quality movement who made contributions second only to Deming in transforming the Japanese economy was Joseph Juran (Fairfield-Sonn, 2001). Juran (1988) noted that quality is captured both in a sense of performance to meet customer needs and the freedom from deficiencies and defects, to a point of perfection. He also emphasized that "quality is achieved through three managerial processes – planning, control, and improvement" (Juran,

1992, p. 14). Planning, in the Juran (1992) three-part process, is the activity of developing the product and the process to meet the customers' needs. Quality control is the process of evaluating performances, comparing outcomes to goals, and acting on the differences. Quality improvements involve the raising of the organizational performance to an unprecedented level, for "Juran's message was focused on getting the biggest return on investment for resources devoted to improving process" (Fairfield-Son, 2001, p. 15).

In the eyes of a third quality expert, quality was the "conformance to requirements, not as goodness" (Crosby, 1985, p. 64). Specifically, "for Philip B. Crosby, the ultimate goal was not optimizing the total system or realizing the greatest return for investment, but rather zero defects" (Fairfield-Sonn, 2001, p. 18). The Crosby methodology for implementation of zero defects suggests that it is the job of management and leaders to help people achieve the zero-defect result (Macdonald & Piggott, 1990). Crosby (1979) believed that attaining zero defects occurred through his 14 steps of quality improvement. The focus centered on measurements, evaluation, improvement, employee development, recognition, goal setting, and a continual cycle of refocusing on the 14 steps to achieve zero defects in the organization. These steps were progressive in nature and commenced with a commitment from management and the development of improvement teams and culminated with personnel recognition, further teaming, and a continuation of the improvement processes and effort (Crosby, 1979).

The Crosby 14 step program suggested that management had to possess a top-level view of quality, that quality improvement required a team, and quality measures and indicators were necessary. Furthermore, Crosby's 14 steps offered that everyone in the organization understood the need for a quality system and that everyone in the system was aware of the impact of quality systems. Additionally, the goal of the organization should be zero defects in the production



outputs through zero defect days and through supervisor training. Goal setting, along with communications to remove errors and recognition to celebrate successes were fundamental components of the Crosby 14-step approach. Finally, Crosby's 14 steps offered that organizations should embrace quality councils and embrace the notion that the 14 steps were embedded in a process of continuous improvement, meaning the steps would occur over again and again.

This section offered a working definition of TQM. Additionally, whether it was in the 14 points of quality suggested by Deming, the three managerial processes offered by Juran, or the 14 steps of quality promoted by Crosby, this section explored the foundations of TQM. The next section provides an understanding of how these principles of quality transformed into a formalized award, known as the MBNQA, designed to recognize performance excellence in the United States.

### **Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award**

The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award(MBNQA), created by Public Law 100-107, was signed into law on August 20, 1987. The award was named for Malcolm Baldrige, the United States Secretary of Commerce from 1981 until his death from a horse-riding accident in 1987. Baldrige was a proponent of quality and advocated for quality management as a means to improve the prosperity and sustainability of American organizations and companies (National Institute of Standards and Technology, 2009). As a result of Baldrige's commitment and advocacy of the principles of quality management, the award that holds his name seeks to recognize organizations as models of excellence based on the foundations of TQM. The United States Commerce Department's National Institute of Standards and Technology manages the award, and the American Society for Quality administers the award.

Since 1988, the MBNQA is an award presented on an annual basis by the President of the United States or designee in conjunction with the United States Department of Commerce for attainment of quality improvement efforts (White, 1999). The Criteria for the Award has three important requirements that include organizational improvement, the sharing of best practices among United States organizations of all types, and a working tool for understanding and managing performance to guide planning and learning (Brown, 2001).

The award originally recognized manufacturing and small-business firms that met or exceeded the MBNQA criteria. However, in 1999, specific categories for education and health care were added. From 1988 to 2007, a total 1,233 applications have been submitted from manufacturing, service, small business, education, health care, and non-profit organizations. From the inception of the education category of the MBNQA in 1999 through 2007, a total of 549 educational applications from school districts and higher education institutions have been submitted. Of the 549 educational applications, only 4 school districts representing K-12 education have been awarded the MBNQA (National Institute of Standards and Technology, 2012).

The selection of MBNQA recipients occurs through a rigorous review process. The process begins with the applicant completing and submitting a 50 page narrative application for the award. An independent team of trained Board of Examiners, which looks for achievements and improvements within the organization based on the MBNQA criteria (Marton, 1999), evaluates the application documents and conducts comprehensive organizational reviews with site visits and further document reviews of organizations recognized for meeting or exceeding the criteria requirements. As noted in Figure 1, the criteria requirements, divided into seven categories, are interconnected and assess the areas of leadership, strategic planning, customer

and market focus, measurement and knowledge management, workforce focus, process management, and organizational results. The Examiners utilize the criteria matched to each of the seven categories to analyze and assess the organization. The Examiner team evaluates the information and determines whether the organization has demonstrated the quality principles espoused in the MBNQA criteria.

**Figure 1:** Malcolm Baldrige Criteria Framework



Note: Taken from the National Institute of Standards and Technology (2009).

Upon attainment of the MBNQA, the award recipients are recognized as “examples of organizations that have worked hard for years at improving quality and performance, and continue their maturity after winning the award” (Marton, 1999, p. 4). The MBNQA recipients serve as role models for improving quality and performance, underscoring the value of understanding the way that leadership is practiced and the impact of the leadership within the award-winning organizations.

### Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award in Education

Similar to what is depicted in Figure 1, the MBNQA education criteria are divided into seven categories: Leadership; Strategic Planning; Customer Focus; Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management; Workforce Focus; Operations Focus; and Results (NIST, 2010).

Ultimately, the utilization of the MBNQA in education provides “a systems perspective for understanding performance management. ... validated, leading-edge management practices against which an organization can measure itself” (NIST, 2010).

### **Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award and Leadership**

While Figure 1 suggests a link of leadership to several categories, additional research suggests some variation from Figure 1. A survey (Winn and Cameron, 1998) administered to 4,800 respondents at a large Midwestern university system featured questions about the relationships among the Baldrige categories. The researchers surmised that, in actual practice, the Leadership category has a broader interconnected influence than depicted in Figure 1. Ultimately, the Leadership category affects nearly all areas of the criteria including Process Management, Faculty and Staff Focus, Strategic Planning, and Knowledge Management. This research emphasized the importance of the role of senior leadership and the practices of leadership in the organization. The next section of this literature review provides a more thorough examination of the relationship between total quality management and leadership approaches.

### **Total Quality Management and Leadership**

Three quality theorists (Crosby, 1979; Deming, 1986; Juran, 1992) developed a common perspective regarding the role of leadership and the importance of leadership in the application of quality in an organization. One role leaders fulfill in quality management includes changing and transforming the role of both the manager and the production supervisor from a managing role to a coaching role. This was fundamental to Deming (1986) and his points of quality as he argued, “the job of management is not supervision, but leadership” (p. 54).

Similarly, Crosby (1979) recognized that a function of the leader in quality-based efforts includes clearly and precisely stating the organizational objectives, gaining commitments of team members to those objectives, defining the overall methodology of measurement of the stated objectives, and then providing the organization with the motivation to accomplish the given tasks.

Juran (1992) likewise articulated that quality is afforded top priority only if the levels of upper management follow through with action plans that establish goals, determine the steps required to meet those goals, provide for necessary resources, measure the performance in the process, review progress of the plans, and revise the reward system for the members. While slight variations exist, each of these quality theorists articulates that key leadership activities exist to establish quality improvements in the organizational system. The “core principles of total quality management suggest that leaders in any organization, regardless of their hierarchical level of functioning, focus on customers and continuous improvement by continually involving people” (Lakshman, 2006, p. 42). The next section of the literature review seeks to provide a more thorough understanding of the relationships among total quality management, leadership, and organizational improvement.

### **Total Quality Management, Leadership, and Organizational Improvement**

The total quality framework emphasizes the importance of leadership in an organization (Deming, 1986). “Leadership, by Deming’s definition, involves transforming the role of both the manager and the production supervisor from that of cop to coach” (Gabor, 1990, p. 23). Deming’s view is a departure from traditional views of the leader as a manager. Rather, Deming’s view of leadership in quality organizations would appear to transcend organizational roles and exchanges by creating a greater focus on higher intrinsic needs and organizational

results. This notion of moving beyond rules and structures is emphasized by Wheatley (1992) as she suggests, “What leaders are called upon to do in a chaotic world is to shape their organizations through concepts, not through elaborate rules or structures” (p. 133).

The dynamic process of leadership for individuals, including educational leaders seeking to guide organizational improvements, encourages leaders to consider their personal role within the organization. Senge (1990) expanded on this personal role within the organization to guide improvement when he writes:

Leaders who are designers, stewards, and teachers come to see their core task very simply . . . [as] the *creative tension* of personal mastery. This tension is generated by holding a vision and concurrently telling the truth about current reality to that vision. . . . Leaders generate and manage this creative tension—not just in themselves, but in an entire organization. . . . This is their basic job. This is why they exist. (p. 357)

This observation underscores the impetus for practices by leaders in organizations and institutions to manage tensions between the direction of the organization in relationship to the current reality of performance results in the organization. For organizations and institutions to successfully adapt and improve, it is evident that the practices of leadership “build on man’s need for meaning, [and it must be] leadership that creates institutional purpose” (Peters & Waterman, 1982, p. 82). Without this sense of institutional purpose, expectations, and accountability structures, system-wide improvement will fail or be slow to take hold (Rust & Freidus, 2001). Understanding these dynamics of system-wide improvement in the context of leadership serves as the basis for the next section in this literature review examining the relationships between leadership and organizational transformation.

## Leadership and Organizational Transformation

Leadership is important in the transformation of organizations focused on overall systemic improvement. The principles of the total quality management (TQM) model help focus organizations on ongoing continuous improvement through “a management attitude and process that recognizes that, however we improve, our competitors will continue to improve and our customers will expect more from us” (Hsu & Shen, 2005, p. 359). For leaders, in the context of ongoing improvement and organizational quality, the central focus remains on exceeding customer expectations, adding value, and meeting performance objectives (Maguad, 2003; Shrivastava, Mohanty, & Lakhe, 2006). These elements require leaders to develop a focus on effectiveness, being completely resolved to do whatever it takes to make the organization great, no matter how significant or challenging the decisions (Collins, 2001). To further articulate the role of the leader in organizational transformation, Table 2 provides the five-level hierarchical view of leadership as developed by Collins:

**Table 2:** Collins’ Five-Level Hierarchical View of Leadership

Level 5	Executive (Builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will).
Level 4	Effective leader (Catalyzes commitment to and vigorous pursuit of a clear and compelling goal, stimulating higher performance standards).
Level 3	Competent manager (Organizes people and resources toward the effective and efficient pursuit of predetermined objectives).
Level 2	Contributing team member (Contributes individual capabilities to the achievement of group objectives and works effectively with others in a group setting).
Level 1	Highly capable individual (Makes productive contributions through talent, knowledge, skills, and good work habits).

Note: Taken from Collins, J. (2001). *Good to Great*.

This five-level hierarchy emphasizes that effective leadership creates improved results in performance throughout the organization that the leader is charged with guiding.

Worth consideration as well are the moral aspects of educational leadership because there is a moral imperative to the work of leaders in education (Fullan, 2003). In Table 3, the aspects of moral leadership have been distilled into four levels for school leaders:

**Table 3:** Fullan’s Four Levels of Moral Leadership for School Leaders

Level 4	Making a difference in society
Level 3	Making a difference beyond the school
Level 2	Making a difference in the school
Level 1	Making a difference to individuals

Note: Taken from Fullan, M. (2003). *The moral imperative of school leadership*.

Through the four levels of moral leadership, Fullan notes that the Level 4 leader has a sense of moral purpose and maintains a sense of social responsibility to others and the environment.

Level 4 schools “act with the intention of making a positive difference in their own schools as well as improving the environment in other district schools” (Fullan, 2002).

The broader purpose of an effective leader is to build greatness beyond self for society and the community, often requiring organizational transformation (Collins, 2001; Fullan, 2003). To that end, Mukherjee (1995) notes that the “quality of performance of an educational organization affects the whole society and can be achieved only through harmonized efforts by all those involved in all their activities” (p. 573).

Additionally, effective leaders focused on building continuous improvement capacity do so by concentrating efforts on organizational productivity and excellence, and on inspiring employees to continue to develop and improve (Schwahn & Spady, 1998). Fundamentally, “the role of the leader is radically different in quality organizations than in traditional organizations. ...the leader role is one of enabling everyone in the organization to focus on pleasing the customer” (Siegel & Byrne, 1994, p. 67). In the context of an educational environment, the customer is ultimately the community served by the school organization. Meeting customer



expectations and needs, both present and future, is a foundation of quality leadership. In addition, it is the responsibility of management to provide leadership by recognizing the barriers that prevent workers from taking pride in what they do (Deming, 1986). This focus of leadership to concentrate on meeting customer expectations of organizational outputs recognizes that “[...]leadership] does mean producing the capacity to seek, critically assess, and selectively incorporate new ideas and practices – all the time, inside the organization as well as outside” (Fullan, 2001, p. 44). The need to continually incorporate new ideas and improved practices emphasizes the need for leaders to seek transformation through continuous improvement, the continuous flow and incorporation of new innovations, and for a renewed focus on organizational outputs that meet and exceed the needs and expectations of the consumer. Organizational transformation occurs through a structured process of organizational development and improvement. The next section of this literature review examines in greater detail the elements of organizational improvement.

### **Organizational Improvement**

The principles of organizational improvement are “concerned with systemic organizational change that is a fundamental benefit to individuals and to the organizations” (Porter, 2002, p. 20) requiring “application of behavioral science to promote system effectiveness through change” (Schifo, 2004, p. 82). As senior leaders guide an organization with continuous quality improvement efforts, the organization ideally improves for the benefit of those served by the organization.

A focus on organizational improvement has significance because of the interconnected relationships among leadership, continuous quality improvement, and organizational change. Stated differently, “[...]the skills and competencies of the change agent (leader) are critical to

successful change (TQM and continuous improvement) and the holding together of federations of different interests (organizational structures and dynamics)” (Grieves, 2000, p. 398).

Additionally, when estimates are that more than 90% of all faults and flaws in an organization are dependent upon the design of the system (Deming, 1986), organizational improvement adds relevance in the context of this study.

Organizational development, as part of improvement theory, has eight key characteristics that differentiate this theoretical framework from other more traditional views of organizational transformation and change. These characteristics include such factors as an emphasis on group and organizational processes, an emphasis on the work team as the key unit for learning more effective methods of organizational functions, an emphasis on the collaborative management in the culture, an emphasis on the management of the total system, attention to the system-wide ramifications of decisions, the use of an action-based model for research and improvement, the use of a change agent to facilitate and support improvements, and a view of the improvements as an ongoing process (French & Bell, 1978).

The application of organizational improvement theory in the context of a study examining leadership practices of superintendents in institutions recognized for quality performance lies in the understanding that “organizational development takes whole institutions or their subunits as its focus and seeks to improve their overall functioning, primarily by systematically applying principles of group process and change” (Gaff, 1975, p. 76). The organizational improvements are often grounded in the social process of meaning-making for organizational participants. The process of individual meaning-making and social meaning-making are interrelated, as individuals are deeply connected to the social systems in which they

live (Drath & Palus, 1994). Improvement theory provides an added consideration for continuous improvement efforts guided by leadership.

The relationship between leadership and followership is worth noting in the context of organizational improvement. The importance of the follower is best stated by Bennis (1993), when he articulated, “The longer I study effective leaders, the more I am convinced of the underappreciated importance of effective followers” (p. 157). Leaders must successfully work with followers to develop their effectiveness as an organization transitions from what the organization once was into an organization recognized for performance excellence.

Without the support of effective followership, leadership effectiveness can be compromised. Leaders must have the ability “to know the forces operating within those being led” (Giammatteo & Giammatteo,, 1981, p.28) and be prepared to address those forces in a proactive way. The deliberate focus on the ongoing improvement of the organizational employees is an important consideration for leadership in the application of a TQM model and in continuous quality improvement (Phelps, 1998; Phi Delta Kappan, 1993; Thompson, 2004; Walpole & Noeth, 2002). Stated another way,

if ongoing change is a certainty, it behooves the leaders of organizations to examine how they are designed and managed to cope with change – explore the extent to which the organization must become more capable of dealing with change – become aware of the conditions in the organization that support or inhibit change. (Pieters & Young, 2000, p.

1)

In other words, as organizations, such as school districts, embark on paths of certain change through continuous improvement efforts, organizations must be fit to respond and adjust.

Overall, organizational improvement results in change. Successful systemic change requires effective leadership. A vision for applying the Baldrige criteria successfully requires an effective melding of leadership theory with the fundamental principles of organizational improvement under the umbrella of total quality management. The context for considering the elements of total quality management, leadership, and organizational improvement in this study is a school environment. The next section considers this context by examining elements of educational leadership.

### **Educational Leadership**

The need for effective leaders exists in schools as well as in other organizations (Dahlgaard, Kristensen, & Kanji, 1995; Fullan, 2001; Schwahn & Spady, 2001; Stensaasen, 1995), and “it is clear that individual school and school system effectiveness is a function of leadership” (Guthrie & Reed, 1991, p. 232). Quality educational leadership has a profound impact on schools, particularly in the area of student achievement, the area where school effectiveness most often is measured today.

The Learning from Leadership Project (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004) examined how leadership affects student achievement results. In this project, leadership was identified as second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn in school. The researchers noted that “effective” or “successful” leadership is critical to school reform and improvement efforts.

Further research (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003) correlated “a substantial relationship between leadership and student achievement” (p. 3). This discovery was realized from a meta-analysis of more than 70 studies that included student achievement results and teacher perceptions of leadership. The results emphasized the importance of effective leadership,

particularly senior-level leadership, to provide for improvements in the performance of the school organization as measured by improved results in student achievement. Research (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003) quantified the influence of effective educational leadership, noting that “one standard deviation improvement in leadership practices is associated with an increase in average student achievement from the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile to the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile” ( p. 3).

Waters and Marzano (2006) found effective educational leadership by senior leaders, including school superintendents, contributed to positive gains in student achievement results. Based on their findings, a “substantially positive relationship between district-level leadership and student achievement” (p. 20) exists when the school superintendents are focused on district goals for achievement and instruction. Leaders in educational organizations, particularly those focused on quality improvement, have “the critical task of creating an environment that ensures that employees will work effectively towards quality goals and make suggestions about quality improvements” (Dahlgaard, Kristensen, & Kanji, 1995, p. 448). This observation is consistent with those offered by quality theorists and the role that leadership plays in establishing goals and in creating an environment to achieve those goals. However, in order to achieve goals, organizational transformation is often necessary.

### **Organizational Theory: Four Frames**

Bolman and Deal (2008) presented four different perspectives to categorize and classify experiences in organizations including the structural, human resource, political, and symbolic frames. These four frames “have helped managers and leaders find clarity and meaning amid the confusion of organizational life” (p. 42). A description of these frames and their application to leadership follows:

## **The Structural Frame**

The structural frame, grounded in the principles involving effective use of resources, views organizations as machines, designed, organized, and aligned for maximum efficiency and production. This view of the structural frame is consistent with the early works of scientific management by Frederick Taylor, and later sociologist Max Weber (in Bolman & Deal, 2008). Taylor focused on creating improvement by developing organizational guidelines for management and workers in order to minimize inefficiencies and increase productivity (Taylor, 2011). Weber focused on improving the functions of the bureaucratic structures of the organization, including divisions of labor, rules for guiding performance, and the focus of long-term career employment (Durkheim & Coser, 1997).

A leader or manager applying the structural frame “looks beyond individuals to examine the social architecture of work” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 68) and emphasizes elements such as structure, organization, alignment, policies, and coordination. Applying the structural frame focuses the organization on clearly defined goals, the designation of individuals and teams to achieve the goals, and the use of policies to align and coordinate activities in the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008). By utilizing the structural frame to organizational needs, a leader may realize that a “significant amount of time and attention must be devoted to social architecture – designing structure that allows people to do their best” (p. 51).

Bolman and Deal (2008) note that structural leaders apply several practices to guide their work as leaders. These practices include being aware of the existing “relationships of structure, strategy, and environment” (p. 359), focusing on organizational implementation, and displaying of propensity to experiment. The structural frame of leadership “can be powerful and enduring, even if the style is subtler and more analytical than other forms” (p. 356).

Ultimately, the structural frame considers how to organize and structure the organization to get results. The frame focuses on structures of the organization including the allocation of work, the bureaucratic organization of the organization, and the coordination of the organization to achieve the goals and objectives of the organization.

### **The Human Resource Frame**

The elements of the human resource frame emerged from the work of Mary Parker Follett and Elton Mayo as they challenged the notion that workers “had no rights beyond a paycheck” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 121). The human resource frame views the work of the organization from the perspective of the employees and the relationships shared within the organization and with the organization. Four key assumptions provide the foundation of the human resource frame: “(a) organizations exist to serve human needs rather than the converse; (b) people and organizations need each other; (c) when the fit between individual and system is poor, one or both suffer; and (d) a good fit benefits both” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 122).

The human resource frame emphasizes the perspective of the relationship shared between the individual or employee and the organization. This frame emphasizes and “highlights the relationship between people and organizations” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 137). The frame also places an emphasis on the relationships shared between the organization and the employees of the organization.

Leaders who utilize the human resource frame actively seek to involve others and empower others in the organization. Bolman and Deal (2008) note that human resource leaders “apply a consistent set of people-friendly leadership principles” (p. 362). These principles include a strong belief in people, visibility and accessibility to others, and a commitment to

empower others within the organization. Ultimately, a leader applying the human resource frame values relationships and leads by empowering others in a people-friendly environment.

### **The Political Frame**

The political frame emphasizes the process of decision-making in environments with conflicting interests and limited resources (Bolman and Deal, 2008). The political frame, defined by five core assumptions, suggests that organizations are coalitions of assorted individuals and interest groups; coalition members have enduring differences in values, beliefs, information, interest, and perceptions of reality; most important decisions in an organization involve allocating scarce resources, in other words, deciding who gets what; scarce resources and enduring differences put conflict at the center of the day –to–day dynamics of the organization and make power the most important asset; and finally, goals and decisions emerge from bargaining and negotiation among competing stakeholders jockeying for their own interests. (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 194-195). The five core assumptions center on two important aspects of the political frame – power and conflict.

Power possesses both constructive and destructive implications, depending on how the power is used (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Bolman and Deal (2008) suggest that power can be found in various areas such as position power, control of rewards, coercive power, information and expertise, reputation, personal power, networks, control of agenda, and the control of symbols. The use of power is a delicate element of the political frame. This, “political view suggests that exercising power is a natural part of ongoing contests” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 210) within the operations and structures of organizations.

Bolman and Deal (2008) note that from a political perspective, “conflict is normal and inevitable. It’s a natural by-product of collective life” (p.206). Conflict can be viewed as either



an encumbrance or a benefit to an organization, depending on the leadership and management of the conflict. “The management challenge is to recognize and manage interface conflict” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 207).

Those who lead with the political frame spend much of their time networking and building coalitions to influence decisions in the organization. Political frame leaders apply four practices in their leadership efforts. The political leaders “clarify what they want and what they can get,” “assess the distribution of power and interests,” “build linkages to key stakeholders,” and focus their efforts by understanding the need to “persuade first, negotiate second, and coerce only if necessary” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 365-366). Ultimately, an effective political leader will use the efforts of negotiating, bargaining, and coalition-building to achieve the goals of the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

### **The Symbolic Frame**

The symbolic frame emphasizes that people seek to use story, myths, and values to “bring cohesiveness, clarity, and direction in the presence of confusion and mystery” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 278). The symbolic frame is rooted in the experiences and stories that convey meaning to members of the organization contributing to the creation of culture within the organization. The symbolic frame idealizes the sense of identity within the organization through the use of myth, ritual, ceremony, story, and other symbolic forms and require due diligence. (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

The symbolic frame is defined by five core assumptions. The five elements include factors such as the meaning of an event is important to consider, not just the event itself; that events have multiple meanings and interpretations; people will create symbols to establish direction, mitigate confusion, or anchor beliefs; activities and the related processes can be more

important for what they stand for than what is actually produced; and the culture that emerges from symbols can be the "glue" that binds the organization together (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Through the symbolic frame, symbols and activities provide "the basic building blocks of culture, accumulated over time to shape an organization's unique identity and character" (p. 278).

According to Bolman and Deal (2008), leaders of the symbolic frame pay close attention to the factors such as myth, ritual, stories, and other symbolic forms that shape the culture of the organization. By focusing on the central elements of the symbolic frame, leaders applying the symbolic frame "lead through both actions and words as they interpret and reinterpret experience" (p. 367). The symbolic leader accomplishes this through a variety of means including story-telling, modeling, and communicating.

### **Frames and Data Analysis**

Overall, the four frames offered by Bolman and Deal (2008) provide the basis for analysis in the study. The four frames serve as "both windows on a territory and tools for navigation" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 13) in understanding the leadership practices and effects of the four identified school superintendents. The four frames provide effective tools to understand what is occurring in the organizations by the superintendents. Furthermore, the frames offer "the advantage of multiple angles to size up a situation" (p. 328) and understand what might really be occurring with the leadership practices of the four identified superintendents of the four MBNQA recipient school districts.

### **Summary**

This chapter sought to review the related literature pertaining to the questions specific to leadership in this study. The chapter began with an exploration of working definitions of

leadership and then evolved into a review of predominant leadership theories. The section then explored the recognized key theorists and practitioners in the quality movement that influenced the framework and processes of continuous improvement. Furthermore, this chapter detailed the conceptual framework of the Malcolm Baldrige criteria, with a particular emphasis on the education sector. The review focused on providing an examination of what is known about leadership, continuous improvement, organizational improvement, and the Malcolm Baldrige award and offered a consideration for the interconnectedness of these concepts within the context of this study. Furthermore, examining educational leadership provided a richer context for the study by exploring the significance of effective leadership in school districts, particularly as it relates to overall student achievement results. Finally, Bolman and Deal's (2008) four-frame theory was offered as the means of analysis for the research data. The next chapter will provide details on the specific methodology and the core processes utilized to conduct this study.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### **Introduction**

This chapter describes the methodology for this study regarding leadership practices by school superintendents in MBNQA recipient school districts. The overall framework of the research is a multi-site qualitative case study. This type of research describes and analyzes, through the construction of themes, the meaning that participants create based on their perceptions relative to their experiences with the study research questions. In the qualitative process, data collections often occur in the field, key themes emerge from the data collections, and rich descriptions are used to communicate the results of the study (Merriam, 1998). This research sought to answer two research questions: (a) From the perspective of the school superintendent, are there common leadership practices that were fundamental in successfully applying the Baldrige criteria resulting in the attainment of the MBNQA in education? (b) How have the leadership practices applied by the school superintendent of these four districts that have attained the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award affected the organization?

This chapter describes the study's research methodology. In doing so, the discussion includes: (a) the rationale for the selected research approach, (b) a description of the case study approach, (c) a description of the participant selection, (d) the study participants, (e) information on the methods of data collection, (f) data analysis and synthesis processes, (g) ethical considerations given to the study, and (h) limitations of the study. The chapter closes with a concluding summary.

### **Rationale for Qualitative Research Design**

After considering several legitimate research methodologies, a qualitative research methodology emerged as the approach best suited to this study. The qualitative research

approach, influenced by the theories of Max Weber, is rooted in a social phenomenon described from a unique point of view (Trauth, 2001). Examining the leadership practices of school superintendents in the four identified districts allowed for the superintendents as senior leaders to provide their unique perspectives on the phenomenon of leadership.

Furthermore, qualitative researchers are intrigued with the meaning that people have constructed through the experiences they have in their world (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). This methodology can provide rich insights, perspectives, and revelations about this meaning-making. “Qualitative methods allow us to know people personally and to see them as they are developing their own definitions of the world” (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 4). In application, the qualitative research process allowed the capture of a greater richness of perspective from the identified superintendents and informants utilizing an in-depth interview process. This richness of perspective provided a recognized benefit of the qualitative approach. “The strengths of qualitative research derive primarily from its inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people, and its emphasis on words rather than numbers” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 17).

Within the qualitative research approach, as the research process unfolds, adherence to the qualitative methodology prevents the researcher from losing sight of the human experience because of the interactive, holistic perspective of the qualitative research processes (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The holistic perspective was particularly important to meet the objective of this research, which was to gain a richer perspective of leadership practices of school superintendents who were serving as their district’s senior leader leading to and/or during the attainment of the MBNQA. Applying the qualitative methodology provided the framework to conduct interviews, review documents, and complete an analysis of the leadership practices using rich data from multiple sources in order to examine the phenomenon of leadership. The examination of

leadership practices of the four superintendents from their own perspectives and the perspectives of identified informants provided intimate details regarding the practices and approaches of the four superintendents and supported the recognition of common practices of leadership that transcended the four superintendents.

### **Case Study Research Approach**

The context of the study methodology utilized qualitative methodologies grounded in a case-study environment. Merriam (1998) noted that “the decision to focus on qualitative case study stems from the fact that this design is chosen precisely because researchers are interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing” (p. 29). Because the guiding questions of this study focused on discovering how the school superintendents in these four identified successful MBNQA recipient districts practiced leadership, the case-study approach to address this leadership topic was an appropriate strategy to employ. Recognizing that the case study has particular value in research where multiple sources of evidence are used (Yin, 1994), this collective case-study approach established the boundaries of the study around the perceptions of the superintendents who were serving as such at the time or leading up to the receipt of the MBNQA and examined their leadership in detail. In doing so, multiple points of data, including interviews, document reviews, and site visits, all contributed to the findings. This qualitative case-study approach provided “an intentional, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit” (Merriam, 1998, p. xiii).

Furthermore, the case study is “a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 54). In this study, the case-study approach was “used in establishing valid and reliable evidence”

(Remenyi, Williams, Money, & Swartz, 1998, p. 164). These elements ensure that the case-study design provided the appropriate format to gain an in-depth understanding of the leadership practices of these four school superintendents as well as the effect of their leadership on the organization they were leading.

Finally, case studies are heuristic in that they “illuminate the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Merriam, 1998, p. 30). This case study provided heuristic value, helping develop a better understanding of the leadership practices of superintendents that cut across the four MBNQA recipient districts. The study enriches the understanding of leadership and organizational development with these four school districts for others.

### **Participant Selection**

The four superintendents who were serving in the identified school districts during and/or leading up to the successful attainment of the MBNQA served as the population for this case study. Each superintendent identified three or more potential informants who could speak to the superintendent’s leadership within the district. From these identified informants, one was selected from each superintendent’s informant list based upon availability and access for face-to-face interviews. These interviews were conducted at each of the identified school district sites to gather information from the identified informants and to gain additional perspective on each of the four school systems. The informant interviews were conducted to triangulate and validate original findings from the interviews with the four superintendents. Appendix A provides the content of the initial interest letters sent to all participants and informants and to the four school districts.

The source of data for the study originated from the four school district recipients of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award from 1999 to 2007 noted in Table 4.

**Table 4:** MBNQA School District Recipients from 1999 to 2007

The Four School District Recipients of the  
Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award from 1999 to 2007

DISTRICT NAME	DISTRICT LOCATION	DISTRICT TYPE	RECIPIENT YEAR
Chugach Public Schools	Alaska	Rural K – 12	2001
Pearl River Public Schools	New York	Suburban – K – 12	2001
Community Consolidated School District 15	Illinois	Suburban – K – 8	2003
Jenks Public Schools	Oklahoma	Suburban – K – 12	2005

While the four school systems in this study are MBNQA recipients through calendar year 2007, each system is different. The following is a brief narrative description of each of the four school districts. These brief descriptors provide greater perspectives on the salient characteristics of each of the districts included in this study.

#### **Chugach School District - Chugach, Alaska**

The Chugach School District (CSD) is located in south-central Alaska. The district serves approximately 214 students from pre-school to age twenty-one that live in nearly 22,000 square miles of the school district's land mass. The district has four school buildings. The student population is diverse. Approximately 3% of the student population are considered African-American, while 39% are Alaska Native and American Indian, 3% are Asian, and 56% are Caucasian. Approximately 48% of the district's students reside in homes that are at or below the poverty level. Roughly 13% of the student body is diagnosed with a disability, and approximately 1% of the students have limited English speaking skills (Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, 2011).

Chugach has been noted for improved graduation rates, post-secondary attendance, and student achievement results on both national and state assessments. Chugach is the smallest



organization to ever win a Baldrige Award. CSD was one of two recipients of the MBNQA in 2001 (Mathews, 2002).

Throughout the Chugach District central administrative offices, there are visible signs of the distinction that the district maintained a focus on results based on student achievement data. The building displayed working documents of large sheets of paper covered with hand-written notes from a recent strategic planning initiative. Displayed alongside the wall charts were graphs and charts demonstrating trend data for student achievement scores from state assessments. The offices reflected a sense of pride related to the history of Alaska and the ethnicity of the student population served by the Chugach district. Various pictures of villages, students, and staff appeared to emphasize and support the purpose of the other charts and graphs that filled the wall.

The district is very proud that it was the first and the smallest school district to receive recognition as a MBNQA recipient. Still today, business cards, stationary, district websites, and other district documents acknowledge the 2001 award recognition.

### **Pearl River School District – Pearl River, New York**

Located twenty miles north of New York City, the Pearl River School District (PRSD) serves approximately 2,400 students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. The student body is served in three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The student body is 91% Caucasian, less than 1% Black/African American, 5% Asian, American Indian, Alaskan or Pacific Islander, and 3% Hispanic. Approximately 3.5% of the student body come from homes at or below the poverty line (New York State Education Department, 2011).

The district received recognition for overall student achievement gains, student and parent satisfaction levels, and overall student success based on state and national measures.

PRSD was one of two 2001 recipients of the MBNQA for performance excellence (Mathews, 2002).

The Pearl River School District, much like Chugach, had a strong sense of pride in receiving the MBNQA. The district proudly displayed acknowledgement of the award through various means in banners and publications noting the award.

The central office had student trend data indicating results on various assessments related to the district goals presented in prominent locations. There was also a clear emphasis on the mission of the district and district achievement goals. Banners noting the district mission statement and district goals were displayed throughout the building and in prominent office locations.

### **Community Consolidated School District 15 – Palatine, Illinois**

Community Consolidated School District 15 (CCSD 15) is a kindergarten through eighth grade public school system serving approximately 12,400 students in Palatine, Illinois, a suburb northwest of Chicago. The students are served in fifteen elementary schools, four junior high schools (7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades), one early childhood center, and an alternative school. As a suburban district, CCSD 15 has a diverse student body. The student body is approximately 66% Caucasian, 20% Hispanic, 10% Asian, 3.5% Black/African American, less than 1% Native American, and less than 1% multi-racial (Illinois Interactive Report Card, 2011).

The district was recognized for student satisfaction, student reading attainments, low staff turnover, and the development of mathematics, reading, writing, and communications skills among the students served by the district. The continuous improvement processes resulted in increased student achievement and overall student and teacher satisfaction in the district. CCSD

15 obtained the MBNQA in 2003. In doing so, the district became the third district to obtain this distinction (Nelson, 2004).

Of the districts included in the study, CCSD 15 had the largest student body and was the only kindergarten through eighth grade district. During the site visit, I developed a sense there is a strong and apparent “business” orientation in the district from the glass-windowed office complex that housed the central office operations of the district. The district mission and vision statements were prominently displayed throughout the district facilities. Further, procedures and processes for the organization were hanging on the walls of the primary meeting room for my interview. The publicly displayed processes contributed to the observation that the district focused on organizational processes to support the functions and schools of the district. The district, much like the others, proudly acknowledged the receipt of the MBNQA by noting the award in various district publications and documents.

### **Jenks Public Schools - Jenks, Oklahoma**

Jenks is a suburb located just south of Tulsa, Oklahoma. The district serves nearly 9,300 students pre-kindergarten through twelfth grades and is in a growth pattern. The student body in the Jenks district is approximately 75% Caucasian, 7% Hispanic, 6% Black/African American, 3% Asian, and 8% Native American. The students are served in nine schools including three elementary schools, two intermediate schools, one middle school, one freshman academy, one high school, and one alternative school (Oklahoma Education Oversight Board Office of Accountability, 2011).

The district has been noted for curriculum alignment with national educational standards, strong professional development, significant student achievement gains, and student participation

and success in Advanced Placement coursework and assessments. Jenks received the MBNQA in 2005 and was the fourth district in the United States to obtain this recognition.

Jenks displayed the MBNQA in a very prominent location in a brightly lit glass case in the central office of the school district. Among the first item that greets visitors to the central office is the three-part Steuben Glass crystal stele with the 22-karat gold-plated medallion in the middle of the central crystal that is the award itself. The district proudly displayed and promoted the receipt of the award throughout the schools and on every piece of literature that left the district. It appeared that not only was the award recognition of accomplishment, but it also served as an outward symbol of the quality of the Jenks schools for perspective district residents.

### **Study Participants**

To begin the process of participant selection, each school district identified as MBNQA recipients between the years 2000 and 2007 received an initial interest letter (Appendix A). The letter invited each district to provide the contact information of those individuals who were serving as the school superintendent leading up to or during the time that the school district received the MBNQA. From this initial contact with these four school districts, each of the identified superintendents received an invitation to participate in this study and to secure their participation in the process. Once the four superintendents indicated a willingness to participate in the study, each was asked to provide the names and contact information of at least three individuals per superintendent who could provide perspectives on the leadership practices and characteristics of the superintendents leading up to and at the time of the respective school district becoming a MBNQA recipient. While a minimum of three names was requested, often the participating superintendents offered more than the three names. In order to protect the anonymity of the identified informants, only one individual from the names provided

participated in the study. These participants served as additional sources to validate and triangulate data collected from interviews with the four school superintendents, document reviews, and on-site observations.

For the study, an invitation letter (Appendix B) and consent form (Appendix C) were sent to each of the identified participants explaining the research. This letter indicated that the goal of the study was to identify common leadership practices among school superintendents in the four school districts that have received the MBNQA. Furthermore, the letter explained that an objective of the study was to understand how the leadership of each of the superintendents influenced the organization. The letter explained that the research process would include semi-structured interviews with each of the identified participants. The invitation letter noted that these interview proceedings would be audio-taped and transcribed and, to the extent possible, each research participant received assurances of confidentiality. Each informant received documentation and assurances detailing that their identities would be protected with pseudonyms in the final study results. However, the letter acknowledged that there are limitations in the ability to bind identifiable characteristics of the school districts visited during the data collection phase of this study because of the finite number of districts that have received the MBNQA as well as the high profile nature of the attainment of the MBNQA.

To provide an added perspective and insight on the superintendent participants, a brief description of the superintendents interviewed for this research study follows.

### **Superintendents**

Steve – When I met Steve, I was struck by his modest, yet commanding presence. He was a well-dressed man of medium athletic build. His warm and welcoming demeanor made me feel comfortable during my visit with him. He answered the interview questions by providing

specific insights through stories and examples about the journey that both he, and the district he served, embarked upon to receive the MBNQA. His responses reflected a strong sense of service to the people and the organization he served. When asked for an analogy for his leadership, he offered,

I would say it would kind of be like a cruise ship captain. You can cause a change in direction. You can have an impact on the experience that people have while they are on board. The cruise ship captain does not change the beds, make the meals, does not greet, often times, does not greet every passenger. Does not micro-manage each department on the ship. But I would suggest that the cruise ship captain is the primary figure in the determination of whether or not the passengers have a pleasurable, therefore fulfilling cruise. The superintendent does not necessarily clean the floors or teach lessons or hire bus drivers personally. But the superintendent will or is the ultimate responsibility for seeing that those things happen in a coordinated way and ultimately result in improved learning on the part of students.

Steve was still a practicing school superintendent at the time of this study.

Sean – Sean was an extremely polished professional with a commanding presence from his tall, athletic build. As we met, I had a sense that his eyes were probing and penetrating, seeking to learn as much about me as I was striving to learn about him and his leadership. He was well dressed and his appearance was matched by his polished and professional approach, which at times, seemed to provide a guarded filter as he responded to the interview questions. In some instances, his responses appeared to be very candid while other answers were thoughtful and guarded, as if answering questions for a job interview. In his response to a question regarding what motivated him and his leadership for continuous improvement, he responded,

It was, it was a way of saying again we owe it to our community. Look at the buildings that you have. Look at the services that you have. Look at the door-to-door transportation that you have. Every teacher has a computer. So, we can't say that we're not doing pretty well. And we want to continue that, right? If you want to continue that, why don't we lead the charge that we're going to do better?

Sean had retired from the school superintendency 9 years from the final date of this study after having served his district for 18 years as the school superintendent.

Sam – When Sam was asked to describe his leadership, he responded,

Um, certainly being able to fulfill people's personal and professional um, goals was important to me. And helping to identify what those goals are for them and then be able to influence those and help them grow both personally and professionally. That was very important to me.

Sam is a very unassuming man in both his presence and his approach during the interview. He graciously offered his time, yet was short and to the point with the responses to the interview questions. He was a heavier built individual that was modestly dressed for a fall afternoon interview. Unlike the other three superintendents interviewed, he did little to expand or extend his answers beyond the question that was asked. He struck me as the most introverted of the four superintendents interviewed, both in his demeanor and in his approach to the interview questions. Sam had retired from the superintendency after 15 years as a school superintendent.

Sonny – Sonny, willing to share freely and openly, appeared to have “larger than life” mannerisms. He was of medium, athletic build. When asked about his leadership, he articulated,

So you have to be strong if you have great conviction and passion about what you believe in and that we're in this together because then they [the teachers] respect you. And that's what you're trying at. And they like the window mirror analogy. I try to use that a lot, you know, when things go right you give credit like through a window to everybody; when it goes wrong, it's all your fault. I use that now a lot, you know, even though it might not be my fault, the fact that I take it on my shoulders I think it sends a strong message to people that it's okay to fail and push on.

His gregarious, yet generous nature commanded an almost "rock star" presence. During the interview, he was quick to name-drop prominent current-day educational researchers and thought leaders. In doing so, it seemed this "name-dropping" validated his work as a superintendent in a much broader sense than the district that he served. Sonny appeared to be the greatest risk-taker of the four superintendents involved in the study.

### **Informants**

The participant informants for the study represented two assistant superintendents and two central office directors. Each of these participants reported directly to the school superintendent within the respective district organizational structures. Thus, each participant was well situated to provide ample insight and information related to the leadership practices of the school superintendent. To provide an added perspective on the informants, a brief description of each of the informants interviewed in this study follows.

Tina – Tina struck me as an energetic, vibrant individual. She rose through the ranks of the district, beginning at a classroom level and advancing to an administrative position. Her passion for the district, coupled with a sense of confidence, seemed to provide energy for the



office and staff where she worked. She was very poised, polished, and warm in her communications. She was a practicing district office employee during the time of this study.

Twyla – Twyla was the most seasoned of the informants interviewed. She had a great deal of educational experience ranging from classroom teaching experience to the central administrative offices of the district she served. She was detailed in speaking about the processes, improvement strategies, and data driven practices of the district. Her vast expertise projected in her interview as she reflected on her experiences in the context of the district's journey toward attainment of the MBNQA. At the time of the study, she was an active member in the central office and the superintendent's cabinet.

Terri – Terri served as an active member of the central office administration. During my interview with her, the passion and enthusiasm for the district's Baldrige experience seemed to exude from her. She spoke eloquently about the district's path to obtain the MBNQA. During the interview, she was the only informant to discuss what the district's journey to receive this national recognition meant to her personally. Specifically, she shared her thoughts in the context of her own children, and how the focus on quality within the district improved the educational experiences for her children attending the district schools.

Tim – As a leader within the district, Tim provided a comprehensive view of the MBNQA voyage. He noted how the journey transformed both the school district and him as a teacher leader and as an administrator in the school system. He spoke passionately about doing what is best for the students, regardless of the price. His thoughts provided valuable insights into the journey toward the MBNQA. As he spoke, he reflected on his involvement in the process as a site level administrator in the district.

### **Method of Data Collection**

An objective of this study was to gather high-quality data for analysis. The primary source of data for this study came from in-depth interviews with the four identified superintendents who were serving the district during or leading up to the successful attainment of the MBNQA. Every superintendent indicated this was the first inquiry of this nature regarding their leadership practices and the effects of their leadership on the districts they served. Interviews occurred with four identified informants out of a possible twelve to validate original findings from the interviews with the four superintendents.

The interviews, conducted in a semi-structured format, served as the foundational source for the research data. The in-depth interviews and document reviews started in August 2008 and continued through January 2009. The primary researcher conducted all interviews, with each interview lasting between 60 and 120 minutes. Each interviewed senior leader and informant received an opportunity to review the transcribed interview as well as an opportunity to provide additional information and insights via electronic mail or telephone communications. However, none of the participants requested to complete a review of the transcribed interview nor did any of the participants send any follow-up communications or insights.

The collection of qualitative evidence usually involves interviews, which may be structured to a greater or lesser degree, in order to collect complex information about a particular aspect of the subject, for example how firms formulate and implement a strategy. (Remenyi, Williams, Money, & Swartz, 1998, p. 126)

Following this advice, questions encouraged interviewees to define what factors they attributed to the successful application for and receipt of the MBNQA.

The interview process involved a comprehensive protocol for superintendents (Appendix D) and the identified informants (Appendix E) that allowed respondents to reply to questions in an open-ended format (Spencer, 1989). Several university faculty and leadership subject-matter experts reviewed the interview protocol and provided constructive insight and feedback regarding the appropriateness of the questions, the question language, and the overall semi-structured interview protocol design prior to the interviewer's utilizing the instrument in the field. This semi-structured interview framework freed the interviewee to let his or her responses flow with deeper reflection, storytelling, and insight into the facts and the unique experiences and beliefs as they related to the leadership practices of the identified superintendents. Additionally, by applying this semi-structured interview approach, participants could share their thoughts and reflections through the "open-ended, flexible, exploratory [questions they were asked]" (Merriam, 1998, p. 73). Finally, this interview approach allowed for the management of time during the interview processes in an effective way by guiding the interview process. While the interview process had the potential to become overwhelming and unmanageable, careful planning and preparation mitigated challenges that might have occurred through a multi-site, multi-person case study.

A hand-held recorder audio-tape recorded all interviews. Following the collection of the data, the interview recordings were transcribed verbatim to word-processed documents by a transcription service. Following this process, the transcribed interviews were reviewed against the recordings to ensure accuracy in the data. In order to ensure the confidential nature of the data, the transcription service provider completed a confidentiality agreement found in Appendix F.

Along with the interviews, critical documents were examined and utilized for data collections. The MBNQA is only attainable by submitting a formal 50-page application to the National Institute of Standards and Technology, the arm of the United States Department of Commerce responsible for management of the MBNQA program (National Institute of Standards and Technology, 2010). These in-depth applications were accessible on the World Wide Web, providing rich external documentation on each of the four identified school districts. In order to supplement data collections from in-depth interviews, the formal government application documents served as an important component of data collection. Triangulation occurred between interviews, observations, and information from the application documents, located predominately in Category 1 of the 50-page application under the title, “Leadership in the Baldrige Application.” This added to the depth and richness offered by the senior leaders and informants.

Additionally, a comprehensive review of the leadership component of the Baldrige award criteria as found in the criteria handbook provided added insights. The review of the criteria document provided an opportunity to gain greater understanding and insights into the evaluation mechanisms of leadership in the Baldrige criteria. The number of interviews, the document reviews, and researcher field notes from the site visits to each of the districts provided a variety of primary and secondary data points for the findings of this study.

### **Analysis and Synthesis of Qualitative Data**

The challenge throughout the data collection, synthesis, and analysis processes was to make meaning from a large amount of raw data and information. The analysis and interpretation of data is a “process of bringing meaning to raw, inexpressive data” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999,

p. 153). The process of analyzing and interpreting the raw qualitative data ultimately gives meaning to the content gathered and presented.

Understanding that the process of data analysis is a “process of inductive reasoning, thinking, and theorizing” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 140), the data analysis process began once all interviews were completed. The process utilized a four-step process of analyzing case study data as outlined by the United States General Accounting Office (1987). The four-step process for analyzing includes (a) observe, (b) think, (c) test, and (d) revise. This process is recognized as OTTR.

This process was followed by first analyzing initial data from interviews, field notes, and documents. The transcripts, notes, and documents were then read without assigning codes to the data. Rather, this step allowed patterns and connections to emerge related to the overlying research questions of the study. Then, the data sets were reviewed again with an inductive approach to the coding process, allowing the codes to emerge from the data rather than assigning pre-determined data codes to the information sets (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In doing so, the data were considered in a sentence-by-sentence format. This process continued for each of the interviews and documents. During the beginning phases of the coding process all categories were temporary (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and subject to revision and change. Therefore, once this process with the data was completed, the coding was tested with an extensive review of all codes. By holding each code as temporary, a refined set of codes developed that grouped the emerging themes into common constructed sets (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I coded the data into common themes that started to emerge from the pool of interview data, observations, and documents. Finally, the data were re-read, applying the coding patterns and eliminating, consolidating, creating, or revising codes as necessary and appropriate. This rigorous approach

was maintained throughout the research process to provide credible findings with internal validity to the research (Yin, 1994).

### **Ethical Considerations**

As ethics involves the considerations of right and wrong (Singer, 1994), the research process provided careful consideration regarding the ethical practices in this research. The research process involved uncovering information about the behaviors of human subjects. Therefore, it was essential that each of the research participants received appropriate protections. In order to adhere to the ethical considerations of the research process, the research followed the safeguards defined within the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board's Policies and Procedures for Human Subject Research. This included the creation of an informed consent form that described the research project and detailed how the data from the interviews would be utilized (Appendix B). Participants signed an informed consent form to fulfill the requirements of the informed consent processes and to establish that each interviewee entered the interview process voluntarily. The interviews were recorded. The recordings and related materials were locked in a file cabinet in a locked room throughout the research, coding, and writing process. Furthermore, to the extent possible, participants received added levels of confidentiality by using pseudonyms for the individuals in the study. The districts, however, did not receive pseudonyms due, in large part, to the public nature of receiving the MBNQA.

### **Limitations of Study**

While all research efforts have limitations, three primary challenges emerged with this case study. Careful considerations have been given to accommodate these limitations and to minimize the impact on the research. First, collecting data from geographically divergent areas of the United States was time consuming and challenging. In all, the data collections involved

approximately 9,500 air miles to conduct site visits and interviews. This distance created limitations to access to participants in a tightly defined timeframe and limited access to the respective school district locations. The vast distance and lack of proximity to the superintendents, informants, and districts proved to be challenging to secure the necessary opportunities to meet with the key individuals in order to gather the necessary data for the study.

By acknowledging this challenge, careful planning and communication accommodated for the limitation of distance. Overcoming the physical limitations of distance and access to the various districts and participants occurred through various means of communication including telephone, regular mail, and electronic mail communications. Carefully planned and well organized meeting times allowed for the time on site visits to be maximized. Further, the carefully designed interview protocols and instruments ensured consistency and limited variations in the qualitative case-study collections process across the various sites and study participants (Yin, 1993). These proactive steps allowed for this limitation of distance and multisite visits involving multiple participants to be overcome.

An additional limitation lies in the basis for the analysis of qualitative research data. The analysis of interview data can be limited by the subjectivity and perspective of the researcher. Therefore, one of the limitations of this study is researcher bias, particularly as it relates to the perceptions and interests that I have as a researcher. This potential bias is a product of my own experiences as a school superintendent providing leadership for a school organization. To address this limitation, researcher bias and the potential for researcher bias were acknowledged at the onset of the process with the faculty advisor. Acknowledging potential bias and working with the faculty advisor allowed for awareness on the part of the advisor regarding potential researcher bias. Additionally, continually referring to the elements of literature, the guiding

research questions, and the OTTR process maintained focus throughout the data collection, coding, and interpretation phases of the research. These efforts helped to limit the potential of bias and guided the fidelity of the research.

Finally, a third limitation relates to the focus of the study on the practices of senior leaders in the four identified Baldrige award recipient school systems. While these senior leaders have been involved in these four systems being recognized as MBNQA recipients, each leader and district is unique. These qualitative study results do not necessarily provide evidence that leaders other than those in this study could utilize these leadership practices to obtain similar results when applying the Baldrige criteria. Despite this limitation in the study, it may be possible for other system leaders to gain understanding from these superintendents regarding the leadership practices and approaches that have contributed to the success of the system, specific to organizational development when applying the Baldrige criteria in an educational environment.

### **Summary**

This case-study utilized an evolutionary process of discovery of the leadership practices of the school superintendents in the four school districts that have been recognized for performance excellence from 1999 to 2007 based upon attainment of the Malcolm Baldrige criteria. The nature of this study was to examine leadership practices across these districts by utilizing a qualitative research methodology. This methodology, “derived primarily from its inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people, and its emphasis on words rather than numbers” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 17), provided the opportunity to examine and explore two key questions. First, from the perspective of the school superintendent, what leadership practices were fundamental in successfully applying the Baldrige criteria by achieving the MBNQA in



education and emerged across each district? Second, how have these practices been applied to the organizational development in each school district?

From the multiple points of data collection including interviews, documents, and site-visit field notes, the data analysis and synthesis occurred from each of these sources. The review, analysis, and synthesis occurred by utilizing the OTTR process.

This multifaceted approach, using primary and secondary data sources, provided the richness of data and perspective to triangulate for the understanding and insights that emerged through this study. Since “many qualitative studies combine several data collection methods over the course of the study” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 99), these processes allowed major patterns and results to emerge through processing and analysis of robust qualitative data. The strategies of document reviews and in-depth interviews as suggested by Taylor and Bogdan (1998) provided the information necessary to develop the findings from this case study on the leadership practices and organizational development efforts of the school superintendents in these four nationally recognized school districts.

A three-fold effort was used to assure participants a high level of ethical consideration. These efforts included: (1) the participants were aware of the research, (2) the participants gave free consent and were willing research participants, and (3) the research participants were assured confidentiality through the study (Robson, 2002). The qualitative case-study methodology, guided by these ethical considerations, provided ample data and evidence in order to develop the findings presented in the next chapters.

## CHAPTER FOUR DATA AND ANALYSIS

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the case-study findings and offers an analysis of the results. The results came from interviews, field observations, and document reviews. These qualitative research processes were applied to fulfill the purpose of this study, which was to explore two research questions on the leadership practices of four identified superintendents and the effects of the superintendent's leadership on the school organization.

The superintendents who participated in this study represented diverse situations and backgrounds. They served school districts ranging from an isolated rural environment with only a few hundred students in the school district to a suburban environment where the school district served thousands of students. Each superintendent served in a unique geographical location of the United States as well, ranging from a remote area in Alaska to a more densely populated area near New York City, New York. The superintendents were identified from the school districts that had received the MBNQA between the years of 1999 and 2007. The informants, who were identified through a selection process with insights from the superintendents, represented different job functions in the districts ranging from a school principal to an assistant superintendent.

The following research questions guided data collections for the study:

- (1) From the perspective of the school superintendent, are there common leadership practices that were fundamental in successfully applying the Baldrige criteria resulting in the attainment of the National Baldrige Award for Quality in education?

- (2) How have the leadership practices applied by the school superintendents of these four MBNQA recipient school districts affected the organization?

These questions were examined by conducting an analysis of qualitative data obtained through a variety of means, including structured interviews with subjects and identified informants, document reviews, and site visits to each of the respective school districts. A structured interview protocol guided the research interviews. Interviews occurred in a mutually agreed upon location with each study participant. Document reviews included a comprehensive examination of each of the school district's MBNQA application document and inspection of district publications such as strategic plan documents, newsletters, promotional brochures, and websites. The on-site visits to each of the districts allowed me to capture observational field notes related to the guiding research questions from school sites, classrooms, and central office locations.

Two themes emerged from the data that were associated with common leadership practices evident among the four superintendents. Each theme was reinforced with sub-themes consistent with the common effects of the superintendent's leadership. In this chapter, I first present data and findings regarding the leadership practices employed by superintendents, and then describe the "cascading" effect of their leadership on their respective organization. Superintendents from these four districts demonstrated a commitment to continuous improvement through their personal actions and work with others. A description of the superintendent's commitment and leadership strategies follow.

#### **"And can we all do a little bit better?": A Commitment to Continuous Improvement**

Superintendents expressed a sense of commitment to continuous improvement in their role as district leaders. Their stories and actions revealed their overarching commitment to

continuous improvement in the form of public statements, interactions with district leaders and stakeholders, and personal actions.

One superintendent described his fundamental view of continuous improvement, stating, “And can we all do a little bit better? Don’t you ask the students in your classroom to do just a little bit better? Just doing a little bit better, that’s what it’s all about.” Another superintendent expressed his commitment to continuous improvement by repeatedly emphasizing goals as the “mantra” for improvement: “It was all about, “we need to get better! We need to get better, we need to get better, we need to get better.”

One of the other superintendent participants, when referencing the context of a commitment to improvements, posited, “We’d been known to set the standard. And so, you know, we realized that it was not just enough for us to set the standard here in our state. There was a desire to set the standard nationally and internationally. It was about doing better.”

The commitment to continuous improvement by the superintendent appeared to cascade throughout the organization. A superintendent communicated his perspective on the “cascading effect” of his commitment to continuous improvement to guide the district, sharing, “Now, it’s ... it’s just kind of what we ... what we do. And knowing that there is never an end to continuous improvement but there’s always something to improve upon.” Informants throughout the various districts reinforced the superintendent’s observations. One informant, speaking of the superintendent’s commitment to continuous improvement in the district as an unending process, said, “He is always saying it is not enough, we’ve got to continue on. There’s still room for improvement!” Other informants shared similar perspectives. One informant in another district described the impact of the superintendent’s commitment to continuous and incremental improvement, noting, “Yeah, we don’t deal with perfection. What we can get across

is that everybody could be just a little bit better.” Another informant, reflecting on her superintendent, described the steady pressure applied to stay the course with improvement efforts, commenting, “He wasn’t on top of the mountain screaming, but he knew where the organization needed to go and he, he wasn’t, he was never happy if he wasn’t working to improve. We *all* knew that.”

Evidence of this commitment to continuous improvement by the superintendents took several forms: (1) they adopted a sense of personal ownership for the results of the district, communicating the goals with followers, (2) they consistently used data as the basis for improvement efforts and focused on specific goals and metrics, and (3) they applied a series of actions, or processes, to guide continuous improvement in the school systems.

#### **“I take it personally!”: Personal Accountability**

Personal accountability by the superintendents was a consistent finding throughout the data. The interviews revealed a sense of personal accountability for the organization and reflected attributes of accountability such as commitment, responsibility, and modeling.

One superintendent articulated this idea of commitment, modeling a sense of personal accountability by sharing,

I wanted to make sure that other people saw that I took it very seriously; that this is important. This isn’t a job. This is a profession. This is what professionals do. They extend themselves above and beyond. And there are rewards associated with that. You feel good about doing a better job.

Informants shared their insights on the superintendent’s personal commitment during the interviews. Commenting on the personal commitment of the superintendent, one informant remarked on his 100% commitment, “I think his efforts were to be able to provide whatever he

could to make our district the best it could be.” Another reflected on the system-wide effects of the superintendent’s commitment and modeling of personal accountability for improvement and quality on individuals throughout the district: “He was all about everybody being the best that they could be. Staff, students, community, everybody...including himself.”

The sense of the superintendent’s personal accountability to the organization resonated in another comment by an informant. This informant, when reflecting on the modeling elements associated with the superintendent’s personal accountability for the success of the school district noted, “If the staff isn’t hearing it from the senior leader, it isn’t going to happen. You know. It’s a key piece of leadership.”

Personal accountability by the superintendent to the districts reverberated in the level of ownership each of the superintendents accepted in their respective school districts. During the course of the interview processes, one superintendent shared, “The superintendent does not necessarily clean the floors or teach the lessons or hire the bus drivers personally. But, the superintendent will or is ultimately responsible for seeing that those things happen in a coordinated way.” The theme of personal responsibility consistently emerged in the comments made by the superintendents. One of the superintendents commented on his core belief of personal accountability, revealing,

The only thing I can talk about is what I believe in and what I put myself on the line for and that is if I’ve been asked to lead or be associated with an organization, what’s the first thing I want? It is going to be the best.

The comments by the superintendents captured a common aspect of leadership practiced among the school superintendents of these four districts. For each superintendent, their role as the superintendent was greater than a position or job title. The responses from the

superintendents, reinforced by informants, suggest that the superintendents maintained a sense of personal accountability for and toward the school district they served. Personal accountability was articulated as a sense of involvement and ownership by the superintendent. The comments from participants emphasized the importance of the superintendent's accountability and ownership for the improvement efforts and results in the district. As one superintendent reflected on the core belief of ownership, he shared, "If your senior leadership is not invested in it (continuous improvement) and they don't see it as important, it just isn't going to happen."

These four superintendents of award winning districts embodied a spirit of personal accountability through visibility and approachability within the district and the schools. One informant shared how the superintendent would manifest personal responsibility and ownership accountability through his visibility, approachability, and personal involvement with staff and students. The informant described the manifestations this way:

I know not all superintendents roam the buildings, have conversations with staff members, and not just teachers, but also support staff as well. He's always been a hands-on type of person...hands-on in a sense that he had the desire to know what is going on. He visits the sites and walks the halls, pops into classrooms, he'll interact with students, he'll interact with teachers. It is not unusual for him to show up in the transportation department and just check in and mingle and have a conversation with the mechanics out there. So that's what I mean about hands-on.

A superintendent described his personal responsibility to the organization as he reflected on his practices of personal involvement. By regularly visiting schools and classrooms, the superintendent shared how he would come to the buildings to meet with staff.

I meet with them on their turf. I really felt this was important for them to, to know that I would come to them, and I did a lot of management by walking around. We would walk around, walk the building, and I would go into classrooms with the principal, without the principal. She'd introduce me to people that were there and I would kind of sense how the building was going.

The personal involvement and visibility in the buildings by the superintendent reinforced the superintendents. The superintendents communicated a sense of personal responsibility by noting how they actively interacted with the staff and the buildings. The essence of personal responsibility through personal involvement was shared by a superintendent participant.

The school districts whose students achieve highest have principals who report directly to the superintendent. So, could I have the assistant superintendent supervise the principals? Sure. But I'm not going to. If I had a school district of 50,000 kids, I would supervise the principals directly. I would go nuts, but I would do it. Because research says kids will achieve more. It's that important.

In another district, one of the informants noted that the superintendent demonstrated personal involvement by making "time to talk with students about their goals and achievements," while another superintendent summarized the leadership practice of personal accountability through active interactions and involvement, humbly stating, "I just found for me personally that it was important for me to get into the buildings, you know, because that's where the most important thing is going on in the district."

Bolman and Deal (2008) would suggest that the findings related to personal accountability by the superintendent would be consistent with the Symbolic Frame. In organizations, symbols such as visual cues and messages communicate the culture of the



organization. Further, from the perspective of Bolman and Deal (2008), “symbolic leaders lead by example” (p. 368).

“Symbolic leaders lead through both actions and words” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 367). In doing so, the symbolic leader considers how they play their roles as leaders. The leaders consider their impression on the group they are leading as well as the message they are communicating through their leadership (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

The superintendents in the study symbolically modeled a commitment to the organization and the organization’s performance for others in the organization through visibility, involvement, and personal accountability. The superintendents would “lead by example” by conducting regular visits to the school sites and engaging in conversations about improvements within the district with various employees throughout the district. An informant, noting the superintendent’s personal commitment to improvement, offered, “He was all about everybody being the best that they could be. Staff, students, community, everybody, including himself.” A superintendent reinforced the importance of modeling and symbolically leading by example, sharing, “...if I’ve been asked to lead or be associated with an organization, what’s the first thing I want? It is going to be the best.”

To reinforce the importance of the symbolic elements of the superintendent’s involvement, an informant noted, “If your senior leadership is not invested in it (continuous improvement) and they don’t see it as important, it just isn’t going to happen.” One superintendent summarized the notion of symbolic modeling as he shared, “I wanted to make sure that other people saw that I took it (continuous improvement) very seriously; that this is important. This isn’t a job. This is a profession. This is what professionals do.”

While the Symbolic Frame of Bolman and Deal's (2008) multi-frame perspective emphasizes modeling and leading by example, the Human Resource Frame suggests a different perspective to leadership practice. Bolman and Deal (2008) suggest that leaders, who use the human resource frame, attempt to establish a relationship with subordinates and, at the same time, modify the organization to meet the needs of the employees while maintaining a commitment to organizational goals. The leader in the human resource frame "helps groups develop a shared sense of direction and commitment. Otherwise, a group becomes rudderless or moves in a direction that no one supports" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 186).

The human resource frame places a particular emphasis on the interactions between the organization and the individual (Bolman & Deal, 2008). The leader from the human resource frame applies the tenets of relationships and interpersonal dynamics to "develop a shared sense of direction and commitment" (p. 186) within the organization. Applying the human resource frame helps create connections through interpersonal communications and relationships.

Evidence suggests that elements of the human resource frame were found in the personal accountability and responsibility of the superintendent. The informants in the study defined the superintendents and their commitment to continuous improvement by using such words as "dedication," "sharing," "relationships," and "involvement." Likewise, the superintendents shared how they would engage in "conversations" through interpersonal interactions and participation with students and staff throughout the school district. By visiting various locations in the school districts, from students and teachers in the school classrooms to the mechanics in the bus garage, the superintendents discussed how they would meet with others "on their turf." One superintendent noted, "I really felt this was important for them to, to know that I would come to them." Likewise, an informant's comment reinforced the human resource frame. The

informant shared, “He visits the sites and walks the halls, pops into classrooms, he’ll interact with students, he’ll interact with teachers.” By interacting with others throughout the districts, including taking “time to talk with students about their goals and achievements” the superintendents modeled a commitment to the human resource frame by being visible, accessible, and engaging in interpersonal communications (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

The elements of personal accountability and commitment to continuous improvement by the superintendent appeared to be grounded in the multi-frame perspectives offered by Bolman and Deal (2008). Specifically, evidence suggests that the superintendents exhibited behaviors and understood the symbolic and human resource frames of Bolman and Deal’s (2008) framework. As superintendents commented on their role to “support,” “interact,” or “connect” with others, it was evident they were speaking from the human resource frame, which “centers on what organizations and people do to and for one another” (p. 117). Furthermore, the superintendents in the study appeared to lead from the symbolic frame as modeled by their commitment to lead by example (Bolman & Deal, 2008). They relied on visibility, active involvement, and a commitment to be the very best as symbolic reminders of their personal commitment to the school district. The superintendents shared how visibility and involvement reinforced this sense of personal accountability. The superintendents led by example, often serving as “visible models of men and women committed to a course of action” (Kouzes & Posner, 1987, p. 226). Overall, the embedded sense of personal accountability by the superintendents was best articulated by one of the superintendent participants when he emotionally stated, “I take it personally. You don’t excuse yourself!”

**“In God we trust. All others bring data!”: The Use of Data**

One of the most vividly and widely shared elements of the deeply held commitment to continuous improvement shared by all of the superintendents in each of the districts was the use of data for guiding improvement efforts within the school district. One superintendent described the use of data in the district succinctly saying,

The only way that we can improve more is to have utter and total focus on the use of data. We have a talk about data-based decisions. We talked about this a long time. And we practiced it to a great extent. Now, we have no choice. We use data.

Another superintendent spoke proudly about the focus on data throughout the school district to guide improvement when he noted how the custodial staff had even started to use data to guide improvement efforts within the maintenance department. He shared:

We started seeing all of these things being data-driven .... When the maintenance workers have tied in quality indicators and when they got 92% in quality indicators, the custodians started collecting data three times a year, asking, ‘Was the room cleaned to your satisfaction? Did I come running with a mop during flu season? Did your delivery, was your technology up and running?’ We collected that data. In the third year, we got the highest quality data of anybody in the district. When a custodian pulls you aside and says, ‘Last year my quality indicators were 98.5%. This year my quality indicators were 98%. I’m going to go look for the other 0.5% this year and find out what happened to it.’ Now that is incredible. Now, that custodian has a computer and can track his data or her data!

However, the use of data for continuous improvement had a specific purpose and connection to goals in the four districts. An informant emphatically shared the sense of focus on

continuous improvement connected to the district goals and data by stating, “You have the non-negotiables. You have your district goals, you have your objectives,” while another one of the participating informants commented on the sense of commitment and passion the superintendent had for setting high goals and continually striving to meet the goals, commenting,

He was very adamant. He doesn’t understand why this can’t be embraced more fully.

Because if your goal is to help students leave the system and be successful adults why don’t we do everything in our power to help them?

What were the goals the district superintendents focused on in the districts? Each of the four districts had specific goals. The number of goals varied from district to district, ranging from three overall district goals to as many as six goals. Table 5 contains the stated goal areas of each of the districts.

	<b>Chugach</b>	<b>Pearl River</b>	<b>CCSD #15</b>	<b>Jenks</b>
Goal 1	Mastery of reading, writing, math in early levels prior to advancing to higher levels.	Improve student academic achievement	Students and the School Community Acquire 21st Century Skills	Improve student learning.
Goal 2	Meet the needs of all students in the 10 content areas.	Improve public perception of the district	World-Class Student Academic Achievement	Improve Fiscal Stability.
Goal 3	The ability to interact in a positive manner with others and understand and appreciate own strengths and weaknesses.	Maintain fiscal stability and improve cost-effectiveness	Connected Learning Community	Improve Community Perception of District via Quality Communications Program.
Goal 4	Students are prepared to be economically viable after high school; Accomplished at Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, has reached potential ability applying basic academics to real-life situations.		Caring, Safe, and Orderly Learning Environment	
Goal 5	Students will be able to use technology as a tool throughout the curriculum and into the world beyond school to assist them in achieving their goals.		High-Performing Staff	
Goal 6			Aligned and Integrated Management System	

Table 5: District Goals by MBNQA Recipient School District

Two common goal areas emerged across the four school districts. These goal areas were (1) student achievement/performance, and (2) a focus on connecting with the community and the district constituents. These two goal areas emphasized the focus on student achievement and on the satisfaction of the school district constituents. The goals include multiple data points as measures and indicators of improvement in attaining the goals. Each of the districts' MBNQA applications documented the goals and the extensive number of quantitative performance metrics

utilized to measure progress toward the attainment of the each district goal. Table 5 lists the performance metrics the districts utilized as indicators to assess progress on the goals.

During the site visits, observations of the district goals and measures were noted. In each of the districts, colorful posters adorned the main entrances of the school locations visited. These posters and banners highlighted the district goal statements. The goals statements were typically complemented with posted performance results related to the stated goals and the identified measures noted in Table 6. Additionally, district publications, such as the Jenks Public Schools Annual Report and the Chugach Guide to Reinventing Schools, consistently communicated connections to the goals and the measures noted in Table 6. Furthermore, district websites communicated improvement efforts within the organization related to the stated goals. In each of these instances, one message was clear – goals and data guide improvement and ongoing performance in these four award-recipient districts.

Complaint Data				X
Technology efficiency data		X		X
Copier efficiency data		X		X
Performance pay data			X	
Staff training data	X	X	X	X
Budget and finance data	X	X	X	X
Student enthusiasm data	X			
Student attendance data	X	X		
Accident data	X	X		
Parent satisfaction data	X		X	X
Student satisfaction data	X		X	X
International comparative data	X			
Student retention data		X		
Science achievement data	X	X	X	
Mathematics achievement data	X	X	X	X
Reading / English achievement scores	X	X	X	X
Extracurricular data	X			X
Fitness data	X			
Suspended student data	X			
Human relation / character data	X	X		
Problem solving tools	X			
Student to computer ratio	X			
Books read per year	X			
	CCSD	Jenks	Chugach	PRSD

Population/Demographic Data	X	X	X	X
Student and teacher ratio data	X	X		X
Work-based learning hours			X	
Email use data			X	
Communications data		X		X
Labor Grievance data				X
Market Share data				X
Perceived value of school				X
Alumni data				X
School communication data				X
Student chemical use data				X
SAT/ ACT assessment data		X		X
National Merit scholar data		X		
Advanced course placement data		X		X
Course passage rate data				X
Diploma rate data			X	X
Volunteer hours data	X	X		
Purchase order timeline data	X	X		X
Student transportation data	X	X		X
Student exit rate data – special programs	X			
Salary and benefit data	X	X		
Staff satisfaction data	X	X		
Staff volunteer data		X	X	X
Staff safety data	X	X		X
Staff turnover data	X			X
	CCSD	Jenks	Chugach	PRSD

**Table 6:** Key measures reported by four MBNQA recipients



While multiple measures were evident in each district, several commonly applied measurement areas emerged across the four districts. As can be seen in Table 6, areas consistently monitored by senior leaders across the four districts included reading / English achievement scores, mathematics achievement scores, science achievement data, data on levels of student and parent satisfaction, finance data, staff training, staff turnover and staff safety data, staff volunteerism data, student transportation data, purchase order data, student/teacher ratio data, and population/demographic data.

Related to the goal area of constituent focus, data collections included student satisfaction data, parent satisfaction data, and staff satisfaction data. While not specifically defined under the common goals in Table 5, Table 6 suggests that the four districts measured improvements in several operational areas of the school district including budget and finance data, staff training data, staff safety data, staff volunteer data, student transportation data, purchase order timeline data, student and teacher ratio data, and population/demographic data.

Throughout the application documents of the four districts, visible representations of district performance data reinforced the commitment to continuous improvement on the stated goals. The Jenks Application noted that “Posters are hung throughout all of the buildings as visible reminders to students, staff, and patrons of the commitment of JPS to achieving these goals” (p. 1). Similarly, the CCSD #15 application documents noted that “the use of data related to specific goals help with the ongoing improvement efforts in the district.” Consistently, each of the applications documented charts and graphs detailing the performance of each school district (Pearl River Application; Chugach Application; CCSD Application; Jenks Application). Charts and graphs presented quantitative performance data aligned to the district goals.

Site visit observations reinforced the statements embedded in the various application documents. During the visits to the districts, I noticed prominent displays of performance results based on stated goals similar to what was found in the application documents. Visible evidence related to the organizational goals, including charts and graphs of student performance results on state achievement tests, graphs detailing comparative performance data in relationship to other similar schools and state-wide performance results, and charts presenting longitudinal historical data were prominently displayed in administrative offices, teacher work rooms, and reception areas. While discussing the displays of performance results, a superintendent pointed to the data charts displayed in the reception area near his office and commented how continuous improvement on the stated goals provided focus in the district. He commented how “all the goals are related to what we were working on Baldrige throughout the year.” He proceeded to report that the focus on the stated goals resulted in regular reports from the building sites related to the performance goals by stating, “So, quarterly, I had reports from them written about what they were doing and that refined itself over time.”

Similarly, the comments by another superintendent echoed the importance of a commitment to continuous improvement related to the goals as a means to guide the organization. He pointedly emphasized the importance of using data to promote and identify ongoing improvement in the school district by commenting, “So, I started promoting every quality indicator that I started recognizing that I could prove or show statistically.”

In addition to noting the posters detailing the district goals during the site visits, the superintendents and informants specifically drew my attention to wall charts, graphs, and tables demonstrating levels of performance on various measures in the districts. The charts demonstrated current levels of progress along with historical longitudinal data on the identified

district measures to track performance and improvement. The charts and graphs, such as the examples in Chart 7, Chart 8, Chart 9, Chart 10, Chart 11 and Chart 12 were embedded in the application documents. The following tables are typical examples of evidence superintendents referenced as they described the focus on continuous improvement and goals of academic achievement and constituent satisfaction.

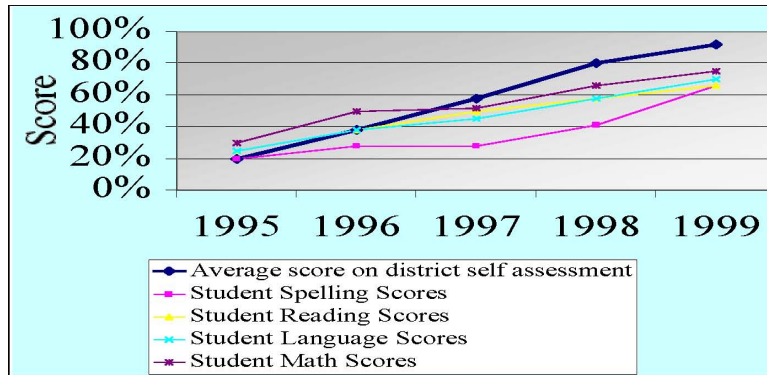


Chart 7: Chugach Student Achievement Chart 1995-99

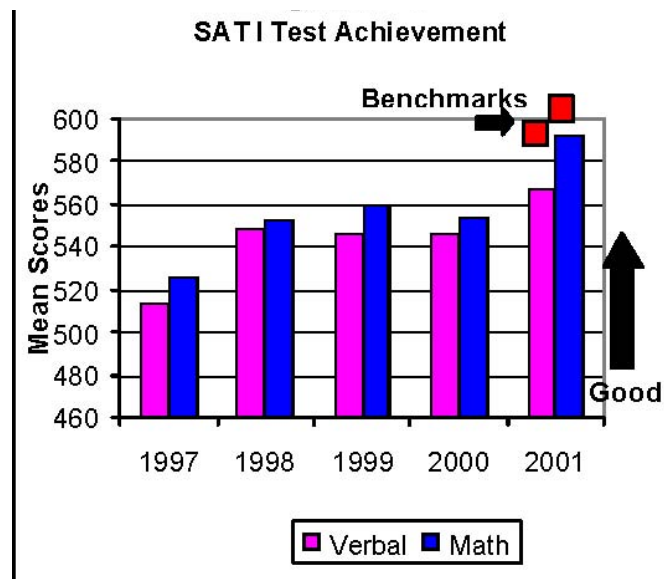


Chart 8: Pearl River Student Achievement 1997-2001

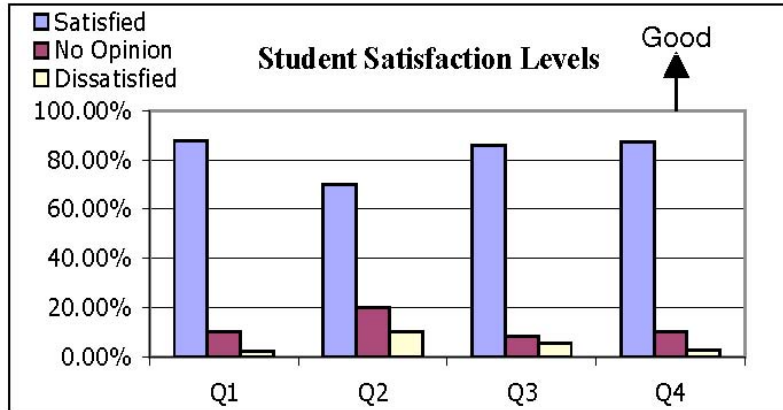


Chart 9: Jenks Student Satisfaction

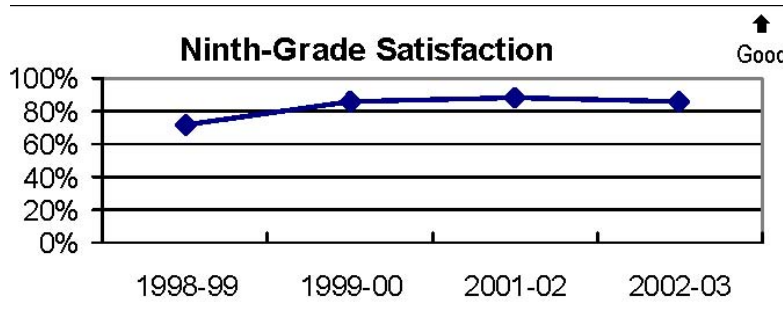


Chart 10: CCSD #15 Ninth-grade Student Satisfaction 1998-2003

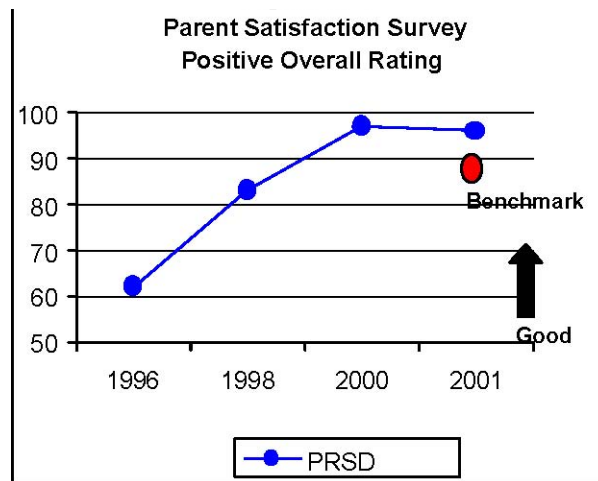


Chart 11: Pearl River Parent Satisfaction 1996-2001

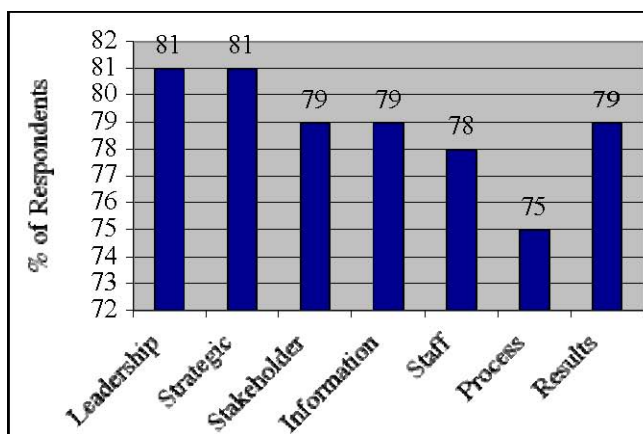


Chart 12: Constituent Satisfaction with Various Areas of Chugach School District

While discussing displays of performance data posted on the district office walls, one of the informants, who was a central office administrator working closely with the superintendent, was quick to express the importance of using data in the district, stating:

We make decisions in this district based on data. You know, it's not about I think, I feel, you know, it's – we're doing this because it's what's best for the students, and here's why. We have the data to back up the position.

The Jenks application document reflected the informants' observations regarding the ongoing consideration of data to maintain a focus on continuous improvement. The application document stated, "By reviewing data related to key measures, administrators are able to see trends and make any necessary modifications in their respective action plans" (p. 19). A study informant articulated her perspective on how connecting performance goals to continuous improvement on district goals reinforced efforts to improve while also providing a sense of focus and purpose in the district. "We had goals. But goal number one is number one for a reason. It is all about student performance here. And we have our mission, every child can and will learn."

Likewise, one of the superintendents summarized the notion that the use of goals and data for continuous improvement provided a sense of purpose and focus throughout the district by noting,

... your custodians, they're not just there to clean the buildings. They're there to provide better, a healthier – a safe and healthier work environment, and they support the environment for our students to learn in. So, I think, you know, we all function probably more effectively and efficiently when we have purpose. And our teachers have a purpose. Our administrative assistants have a purpose. Our administrators have a purpose ... It's for the greater good of all.

The superintendents shared how important it was to maintain a focus on improvement by using data and goals to communicate results and design ongoing improvements in the district. In one conversation, a superintendent noted,

A key piece of the leadership lens is how you communicate with your staff. How to communicate better the mission, the values, and the goals of the district. That's key. If you can't communicate it to the staff, it isn't going to happen.

Another superintendent expressed his thoughts regarding the importance of communicating the connection between goals, continuous improvement, and data by articulating, "Make it real; make it the language that you use every day and make those connections visible." Each informant indicated the important role the superintendent played in making the connections between the goals, the data, and a focus on improvement. Exemplifying this fact, an informant stated, "He (the superintendent) was very instrumental in helping us streamline the bigger goal process, multiple professional goals, down to a truly refined focus along with the district goals for all of our employees."

Effective school superintendents “continually monitor district progress toward achievement and instructional goals to ensure that these goals remain the driving force behind a district’s action” (Waters & Marzano, 2006, p. 4). The superintendents in the study appeared to effectively influence and organize their respective systems through the ongoing monitoring and continuous inquiry into the performance of the school district through the use of metrics. Fullan (1991) emphasizes the importance of data to evaluate and monitor progress and the results of the district goals and strategies to gauge improvements in the district. Fullan (1991) also stresses the important role of data gathering, stating, “the success of implementation is highly dependent on the establishment of effective ways of getting information on how well or poorly change is going in the school or classroom” (p.87). This observation embodies the spirit of using and applying data to guide continuous inquiry by the four superintendents. The districts continually monitored key data points to understand current levels of performance along with historical data and future projections of performance. The metrics focused on elements found to be important in each school district. The process of gathering and communicating data points indentified during the study included a variety of means including survey instruments, school district meetings, and community forums.

Every organization, as noted by Bolman and Deal (2008) “needs to respond to a universal set of internal and external parameters” (p. 62). Among the “universal” parameters suggested by Bolman and Deal (2008) is the inclusion of strategy and goals. Through the use of goals, organizations shape the structure and the work of the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Specifically, “organizations exist to achieve established goals and objectives” (p. 47). Bolman and Deal’s observations define the structural frame of leadership.

Leaders from the structural frame consider how the organizational structures, such as procedures and roles, can be viewed. Specifically, the leader from the structural frame is “focused on designing and building an effective organization” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 356). Leadership, according to the Bolman and Deal structural frame, focuses on implementation of efforts to “rethink the relationship of structure, strategy, and environment” (p. 359).

The responses from the superintendents, informants, and documents provided a myriad of examples where the district superintendent considered the factors of the district’s environment and performance. The superintendents monitored performance metrics related to the district goals and objectives. Through the use of data, metrics, and goals, the superintendents applied the structural frame of leadership within their respective districts. One of the superintendents acknowledged the structural focus when he stated, “I started promoting every quality indicator that I started recognizing that I could prove or show statistically.” An informant reinforced the superintendent’s role related to the structural process of goals commenting that the superintendent “was very instrumental in helping us streamline the bigger goal process.” Observations made during the site visits confirmed that the charts and graphs aligned structures within the district to the reported performance data.

The district leaders in the study commented on how the use of goals and measurements influence the work of others in the organization. Whether it was the custodian striving to improve his performance indicators, or the principal seeking to increase achievement results or satisfaction results, the focus on goals served to influence the structure of the district.

In developing the four-frames, Bolman and Deal (2008) acknowledged that symbols and symbolic actions help “shape an organization’s unique identity and character” (p. 278). Through the use of symbols, leaders in the symbolic frame can create order and structure. As the



superintendents focused on data and performance metrics within the districts, they appeared to use symbols within the organization to maintain a focus on improvement within the school district. The wall charts, colorful posters, and graphic representations of data and metrics utilized in each of the districts symbolically modeled a focus on results and improvement. These visual symbols communicated the focus of the district, providing a sense of direction around the explicitly stated goals and objectives of the districts.

Furthermore, in the lives of these professional school leaders, we see the symbolic frame in action through the ongoing examination of data. The displays of data along with the ongoing examination of data symbolically represented a commitment to ongoing improvement. These symbols provided a sense of focus that embodied, as Bolman and Deal (2008) note, “cohesiveness, clarity, and direction” (p. 278) for the school districts and the members of the school organization.

The superintendents in the study appeared to realize the importance and influence of data in making decisions through continuous inquiry. The leaders embraced the concept that data, ...can help us confront what we may wish to avoid and what is difficult to perceive, trace, or gauge; data can substantiate theories, inform decision, impel action, marshal support, thwart misperceptions and unwarranted optimism, maintain focus and goal-orientation, and capture and sustain collective energy and momentum. (Schmoker, 1996, p. 42)

Through continuous inquiry using specific metrics, the superintendents were able to guide the organization’s direction. One superintendent, speaking about using data for continuous improvement and inquiry, shared that the district had to “stop making decisions by the seat of our pants and use data!”

Overall, compelling evidence from the superintendents, informants, and documents suggests that the school superintendents applied a structural frame of leadership by focusing on improvements within their respective districts through the use of goals and performance metrics. The observed depth and breadth of performance data collected, analyzed, and utilized in each district created a focus on the structure of the organization and purpose for the work of the organizational employees. Furthermore, the use of wall charts, graphs, and posters symbolically represented what was important in the district. The notion of using data for improvement was best summarized by a superintendent whose district developed a motto that synthesized the structural and symbolic use of data to maintain a focus of continuous improvement on the goals of the school district, that motto being – “In God we trust, all others bring data!”

#### **“The way we do things now.”: A Focus on Processes**

A focus on processes was another sub-theme under the overall continuous improvement theme. The process efforts emerged through multiple conversations and observations. During an interview, one superintendent detailed, “One of the things that the Baldrige criteria caused was a focus on processes and a focus on improving those processes.” Focusing on processes for improvement emerged as a common concept among all superintendents. Three of the four district superintendents referenced the approach to continuous improvement in their district as the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle of improvement. The fourth district superintendent commented that his district “personalized the approach by naming the process after a school board member, Peter.” They referred to the model as the plan-do-evaluate-refine (P-DER) model. Regardless of the name used, each district application noted that a continuous improvement model served as a structural approach for guiding improvements within the organization. A superintendent expanded on the concept, sharing, “A key thing we introduced in

the district was this Plan, Do, Study, Act model. That was critical. That became really the, the operating model of the district.” The observation by the superintendent was similarly noted by another participant, sharing that the adoption of a process of continuous improvement meant “...many measures have been abandoned and replaced with higher stakes assessments as part of our continuous improvement process and raising the bar.”

One application document recognized the PDSA model as a tool to “incrementally improve specific processes,” while another noted the plan-do-study act (PDSA) cycle served as a means to “facilitate continuous improvement.” The Chugach application acknowledged that the Plan- Do- Evaluate- Refine model was the continuous improvement process for the district, while the Jenks application document provided a more elaborate description of the PDSA approach for guiding improvements in the district. They stated,

The PDSA Process is used to plan, implement, analyze, review, and revise practices and procedures. By reviewing data related to key measures, administrators are able to see trends and make any necessary modifications in their respective action plans (p. v).

The description of the approach offered in the Jenks application details how the process for improvement was applied in the districts. One informant credited the PDSA model for the district improvements, stating succinctly, “It was how we got better.”

The MBNQA application documents acknowledged the efforts of senior leadership to influence continuous improvement by utilizing the model for improvement. “Senior leaders employ the Continuous Improvement Model to encourage and support organizational learning” (Chugach Application, p. 5) while the Community Consolidated School District 15 articulated a similar observation,

This process improvement has contributed significantly to the use of systematic organization-wide performance reviews to monitor program and practice results, provides that ability to analyze data and identify and isolate root cause, and to implement timely improvements. (CCSD Application, p. 9)

The process created the conditions for ongoing improvement. As one superintendent stated, “it is in a constant state of improvement . . . literally, a constant state of improvement.”

Evidence noted in documents and site visits demonstrated how senior leadership embedded the PDSA process within the operations of the schools. In one district, the superintendent required each school site to create an annual school improvement plan utilizing the PDSA process as the structural framework for school improvement plans in each district building. As described by an informant, “The school improvement plans defined what building personnel planned to improve within the schools (Plan), how the site would implement the plans (Do), how the site would evaluate the implementation activities (Study), and how the evaluation would influence and inform future activity (Act).” Figure 13 provides a district’s improvement process using the PDSA model.

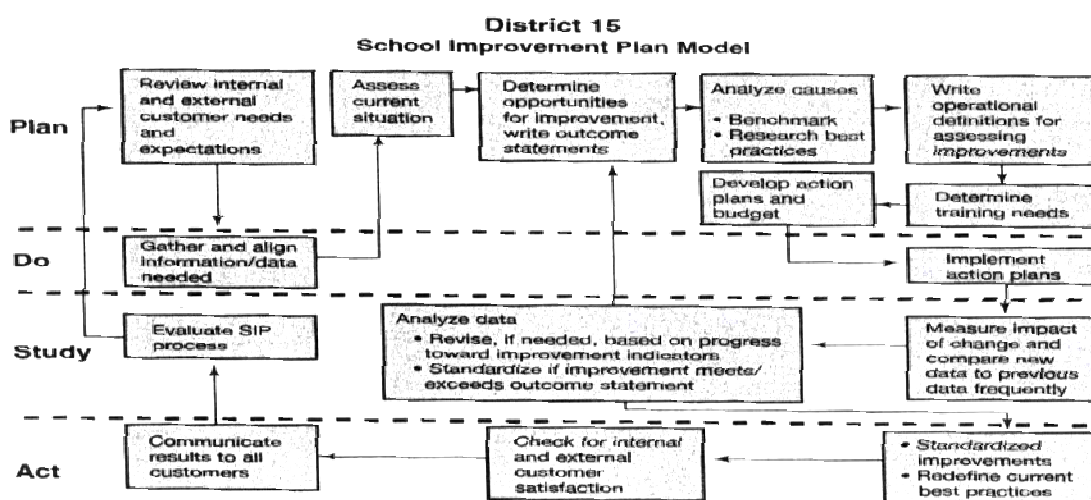


Figure 13: The CCSD #15 PDSA School Improvement Plan Process Model

Similarly, other superintendents applied the PDSA approach to key procedures and district functions including areas such as curriculum development, curriculum alignment, district student assessment processes, building maintenance efforts, and other operational functions in the district. For example, the Pearl River district applied the PDSA model to guide instructional improvements in the classrooms. Referred to as the A+ Approach to Classroom Success (Figure 14), the PDSA model provided guidance for the classroom teachers to improve instruction.

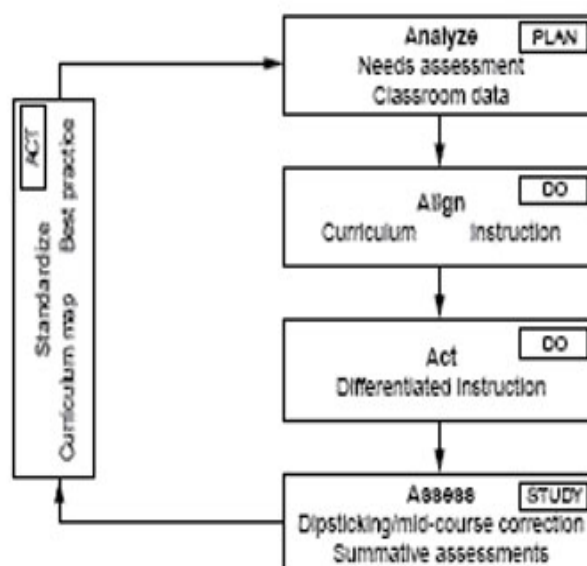


Figure 14: The Pearl River A+ Approach to Classroom Success Utilizing the PDSA Process

The district superintendents acknowledged that the PDSA model for continuous improvement was an essential component to guide decision making and leadership within the organization. Superintendents utilized words such as “guide,” “direction,” “focus,” and “alignment” as they described the improvement process model. The Jenks application document expanded on the notion that the process model guided the leadership of the district by the superintendent “through cycles of evaluation and improvement” (p. 3). The application documents suggested that the PDSA process for improvement provided a structure for guiding organizational improvement distinguishing that the process was utilized

... for selecting, gathering, analyzing and deploying data and information is linked from the key measures developed in the Strategic Planning Process to the action plans which guide daily operations at the district, building, and classroom levels and then returns in the cycle of refinement. It is fully deployed and has gone through multiple evaluation and improvement cycles. (Jenks Application, p. 18)

The statement from the Jenks application noted the PDSA model guided continuous improvement efforts specific to the stated goals and measures in each district. Likewise, Chugach utilized the P-DER process to examine student achievement scores and applied a district-wide “gap analysis which drove the action plan. The action plan was deployed and evaluated by benchmarking against other organizations’ scores” (Chugach application, p. 27). Through the process, the district would make necessary refinements to inform ongoing improvement efforts and to organize the work of the district. The implementation of the process for improvement provided an important structure for guiding improvement and the functions of the district.

An informant noted that staff involvement and staff development was essential to establish the PDSA process in the district. One informant, commenting on the initial efforts of embedding the PDSA process in the district, acknowledged that, “We trained everybody on the Plan, Do, Study, Act improvement process. Everybody!” Another informant, while discussing staff training related to the improvement process model indicated, “We bring staff together every two months for multiple days at a time because continuous improvement is what we do!” A summary of the emphasis on a process for improvement by the superintendent is noted in an application document that shared, “The District’s senior leaders have taken a systematic

approach for continuously improving and exceeding the organization's all time best" (Jenks Application, p. 1).

The superintendent played an important role in embedding and utilizing the PDSA process for improvement in the districts. Acknowledging the role the superintendents played in utilizing and incorporating the process of improvement in the districts, one informant shared,

The superintendent would bring in the people that were doing the work, whatever it was that we were looking to improve, and he would say, 'OK, here's the model out here, you know, Plan-Do-Study-Act was our model . . . what are we doing right now? Let's talk about how we do this right now'. And people would say, 'Well we do this' and he would make a little flow chart in his office and we do this and we would, we would try and take those steps, whatever people would articulate and we would plug them into Plan-Do-Study-Act and then we would look and say OK, where are the gaps? What aren't we doing? It helped us improve.

Another informant also articulated how the superintendent's efforts to implement a process for improvement influenced the district by stating, "These continuous improvement processes became the culture of the district."

Evidence in the applications, interviews, and site visit observations demonstrated a systemic approach to continuous improvement grounded in a process applied by leaders in the organizations. Each of the application documents provided evidence of a continuous improvement process utilized by leaders to guide the organizations' efforts.

The information embedded in the application documents consistently emphasized that the Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) model served as the primary process for improvement utilized by the senior leaders and the four districts. The PDSA model, influenced by the works of Galileo,

Sir Francis Bacon, Charles Peirce and William James, John Dewey, Clarence I. Lewis, Walter A. Shewhart, and W. Edwards Deming (Moen & Norman, 2010), provided a process and organizational structure for ongoing improvement. The model encourages the formation of a hypothesis for improvement (Plan), a study protocol with collection of data (Do), analysis and interpretation of the results (Study), and the iteration for what to do next (Act) (Moen & Norman, 2010). Each district displayed posters of the PDSA process in schools, workrooms, and even classrooms. Furthermore, the interviews and the application documents frequently referenced the improvement process as a means for guiding systems improvement.

The basis for a continuous cycle of improvement, ultimately applied and refined by Deming, stressed the importance of constant interaction among four steps of planning, doing, studying, and acting (Moen & Norman). Deming emphasized that the PDSA steps should be cycled “constantly, with quality of product and service as the aim” (p. 25). Details from informants, superintendents, and documents suggested the model of planning, doing, studying, and acting was a key element for a systemic approach to ongoing learning and improvement within the school districts. Comments such as “benchmarking,” “all time best,” and “continuous improvement” articulated by the study participants suggest that the cycle of continuous improvement created opportunities for learning and improving within the organizations.

Senge (2000) suggests that the process of a continuous cycle of improvement is a building block of system improvement and organizational learning. “Systems continually send signals to themselves, through circular loops of cause-and-effect relationships” (p. 84). Research acknowledges “the idea of developing capacities for individual and organizational learning has established itself as a key priority in designing and managing organizations that can deal with the challenges of a turbulent world” (Morgan, 1997, p. 88). The circular process of planning, doing,



studying, and acting creates conditions for the organization to become a learning organization. The main purpose of the PDSA process is to help the organization improve through an approach that engenders commitment and involvement of those within the organization and provide a structure for continual feedback for ongoing organizational learning.

Bolman and Deal (2008) point out that, through the structural frame, leadership helps focus teams on functional processes, rules, structures, and goals of the organization to achieve results. Leaders operating out of the structural frame apply several principles including structure, rationality, and efficiency (Bolman & Deal, 2008). In doing so, Bolman and Deal (2008) note that leaders from the structural frame apply policies, procedures, and more formal structures to guide organizational functions.

The PDSA process identified by the four superintendents provided a structure that the organizational leaders could apply throughout the school district to guide improvement. As such, the Plan – Do – Study – Act approach provided a procedure, or tool, to support necessary organizational improvements or structural changes in order to improve. The process incorporated an assessment of current levels of performance with concepts for improvement resulting in action for improvement and restructuring.

The circular, continuous process of the PDSA model is consistent with the structural frame articulated by Bolman and Deal (2008). Bolman and Deal (2008) note that “Effective restructuring requires both a fine-grained, microscopic assessment of typical problems and an overall, topographical sense of structural options” (p. 97). Similarly, the utilization, emphasis on, and the deployment of the PDSA process for improvement created opportunities within the school districts, buildings, departments, and classrooms to conduct a “fine-grained” analysis of

current performance and ultimately assess options available within the organization to improve or restructure.

The PDSA process created the structure for ongoing improvements in the school district. A superintendent acknowledged that the process “became the, the operating model of the district.” The model provided the organizational structure to “improve the district” and help organize the “operations at the district, building, and classroom levels” with cycles of refinement. The structure of the PDSA process influenced the core operations of the districts.

The PDSA process created the structure for ongoing improvements within the districts. One informant commented, “These continuous improvement processes became the culture of the district,” while another acknowledged the power of the PDSA structure to influence the culture of the district, remarking, “In the areas where we had strong processes developed, those are the way we do things now.”

### **“And can we all do a little bit better?” ~ A Reprise**

Overall, the superintendents in each of the four districts possessed a strong commitment to continuous improvement. The findings from the interviews, document reviews, site visits, and observations provided evidence that a commitment to continuous improvement was a constant practice by the four superintendents. The overall commitment to continuous improvement by the four superintendents was supported by three sub-themes. First, the study participants provided insights and evidence suggesting that the superintendents’ personal commitment to continuous improvement helped focus the district on achieving goals and results. Second, the superintendents maintained a focus on data and results within the district. The data associated with the district goals provided essential information to guide improvements within the organization. Third, the superintendents applied a structured process for improvement; the

PDSA process provided the process for continuous improvement throughout the districts. Each of these three elements supported the commitment to continuous improvement evident among the four superintendents.

The Bolman and Deal (2008) multi-frame perspective provides insights and understanding related to this first theme. The superintendents maintained a focus on continuous improvement within each of their respective districts by applying the human resource frame, the symbolic frame, and the structural frame to their leadership. Bolman and Deal (2008) suggest that “effective leaders and effective organizations rely on multiple frames” (p. 326). As the superintendents applied multiple frames within their respective districts, they were able to instill a commitment to continuous improvement throughout the organization by maintaining a deep personal commitment, focusing on data, and applying a process for improvement within the district.

The commitment to continuous organizational improvement allowed the superintendent to challenge the school district organization and the organization participants to get better. Yet, the superintendents acknowledged that the efforts to improve the performance of the school district relied on the efforts of others. As a result, a second commonly held theme by the four superintendents in their leadership practices was a practice of collaborative leadership. Superintendents, informants, and documents from across the four districts consistently pointed to collaborative leadership practices in the school districts. Interview participants as well as application documents emphasized the importance of two elements of collaboration that consistently emerged through the study. The elements of “shared decision making” and “empowerment” by the superintendents resounded throughout the research process among the

superintendents, informants, and documents. The next section of this chapter will examine this theme of collaborative leadership along with the two related sub-themes.

### **“We’re in this together!”: Collaborative Leadership**

The second major theme arising from this study was the practice of collaborative leadership. It emerged consistently among study participants. As one superintendent noted, leading the district required, “collaborative, shared decision making,” while another commented that leading the school district required “empowering people to make decisions and be accountable.” During the research, interview participants, as well as the application documents, reinforced the notion of collaborative leadership by articulating concepts of “empowerment,” “shared decision-making,” and “collaboration.”

Two sub-themes emerged that defined the practice of collaborative leadership. The first sub-theme that characterized the theme of collaborative leadership was a sense of shared responsibility among the organization participants. The second sub-theme conceptualized the ability of the superintendent to empower others within the school district. In the following sections, each sub-theme, along with supporting details, provide further definition to the theme of collaborative leadership.

### **“It is a fundamental value of citizenship in our district.”: Sharing Leadership**

Each superintendent communicated the importance of the sharing leadership responsibilities with others in the district. To emphasize the point, one superintendent noted, “My assistant superintendent, she is kind of my right arm. A right arm in management, instructional leadership, and academic improvement.” Another superintendent commented that it was essential to have others share in the responsibility of leadership because leading a school

district "... isn't a one-person job." A third discussed shared leadership from a similar perspective. He acknowledged the importance of shared leadership, by stating:

She really had no line of authority per se. She wasn't in charge of kids, she wasn't in charge of teachers, she really wasn't in charge of principals . . . she was kind of a direct report to me. So, I kind of offered her that kind of ombudsman role of being cheerleader without any portfolio . . . that was a key role.

Just as the superintendents acknowledged sharing leadership with others, study informants likewise noted how the superintendents shared leadership responsibilities. One informant suggested that the concept of shared leadership resulted in a dynamic two-way flow of leadership between the superintendent and the staff. The superintendent shared leadership with another individual in the district. In doing so, an informant noted that the individual "takes direction from the superintendent. But he also is a liaison and a representative of a site staff. So he's like a conduit of information."

Beyond sharing leadership responsibilities with other individuals, study participants and document sources often reinforced the concept of collaboration and "shared decision making" throughout the community of the school organization. For example, one application document stated that various teams such as the "Building Leadership Team (BLT), a site-based groups of stakeholders who guide action plans at each school building, and the Labor Management Council (LMC), a committee of leaders and representatives of all labor groups, were working alongside administration" to share in decision making (Pearl River Application, p. 1). In a similar fashion, the Jenks School District MBNQA Application acknowledged the practice of collaboration through shared decision-making by the superintendent. "The senior leadership 'walks the talk' of shared decision making via committee work which involves teachers, parents, and/or

administrators (and classified staff when appropriate)” (Jenks Application, p. 1). The CCSD’s application document emphasized collaboration by senior leadership by recognizing “shared decision making” (p. 2) as a formal process in the district that underwent “yearly evaluations and improvement cycles through staff surveys and focus groups” (CCSD application, p. 19). While the MBNQA application documents noted that shared decision making of the district operations occurred in different ways such as “teamwork” or through the “active involvement from all stakeholders,” the Chugach application noted the practice of shared decision making served as a means of “creating a collaborative and cohesive team culture” (p. 30).

The superintendents were quick to acknowledge what was stated in the application documents. The superintendents described the importance of a collaborative approach within the school districts. Often, superintendents commented on the need to “work together,” “share in decision-making,” or “be collaborative” in working with the staff and the district community. One superintendent expanded on this idea by describing that shared decision-making, as a means of collaboration, was fundamental for the success of the district. The superintendent bluntly stated, “If you weren’t an administrator who dealt with things in a collaborative way with parents, community organizations, with the teacher union . . . well, you weren’t going to survive in my administration.” Another superintendent summarily captured the spirit of shared decision-making observations stating, “The shared-decision making process *is* a fundamental value of citizenship in our district.”

The district senior leaders appeared to embrace shared decision making on a consistent basis in the school organizations. The superintendents suggested that the shared leadership efforts provided the means to engage others in the direction and operations of the district. The focus on shared leadership and decision making appeared to provide a sense of democracy and

citizenship in the school districts. Schools with “strong democracies” are more likely to indicate systemic improvement efforts (Bryk, 1993), suggesting that a “systemic change process demands a strong democratic practice” (Bryk & Rollow, 1992, p. 6). The four districts appeared to embrace the “democratic practice” that encouraged engagement through a sincere effort to share in the decision making processes. Shared decision making that enhanced engagement took many forms in the schools from more formalized labor councils to less formal structures such as ad-hoc committees.

Bolman and Deal (2008) note that sharing in leadership and decision making are means to enlist people’s commitment and involvement to the organization. The responses offered by the superintendents, informants, and in the documents suggest that the superintendent promoted egalitarianism or “a democratic workplace where employees participate in decision making” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 155). As one superintendent noted, “leading (the school district) is not a one person job!” The leadership of the school district required “teamwork,” “collaboration,” and “shared leadership” to build connections and foster a democratic workplace.

Bolman and Deal (2008) note that the values and character of the organization are defined through the human resource frame. By applying shared leadership and decision making through the use of teams, councils, and groups in the school districts, the superintendents transmitted a message that the organization values participation, collaboration, and the involvement of others. In doing so, the values of collaboration communicated by these superintendents conveyed a sense of identity within the school district and helped “people feel special about what they do” (Bolman and Deal, 2008, p. 255).

Furthermore, Bolman and Deal (2008) suggest that culture is often developed and established within the organization through the use of the symbolic frame. Culture is “defined as

‘the way we do things around here’” and “anchors an organization’s identity and sense of itself” (p. 278). The symbolic frame recognizes that culture can serve as a “wellspring of high performance” (p. 290). Through this lens of leadership, the superintendents appeared to embrace a strong human resource frame as detailed by the work of Bolman and Deal (2008).

Data collected from this case study demonstrated how the superintendents shared leadership to symbolize the value of collaborating with others in the district. Study participants commented how the superintendents “shared the leadership efforts” with others throughout the districts. The leaders consistently applied shared decision making by actively engaging others in the work of the district. The superintendent described how, through a variety of means such as “leadership teams,” “district committees,” and “councils,” the decision making efforts were shared among others in the district. At the same time, the superintendents promoted a culture of collaboration that focused on improving the overall performance of the school district. As one district noted, senior leadership was instrumental for “creating a collaborative and cohesive team culture.” The ongoing commitment to shared decision making by the superintendents resulted in a sense of citizenship and symbolized participation by the staff members of the districts. Shared decision making, as one superintendent summarily stated, “*is* a fundamental value of citizenship in our district.”

While the study participants spoke to the elements of shared leadership within the schools by these senior leaders, they also recognized that the superintendents worked to empower others throughout the organization, a second sub-theme of collaborative leadership.



**“It can’t be just the superintendent.”: Empowering and Engaging Others**

As the superintendents were speaking about shared leadership and decision making, they often described the importance of empowering and engaging others within the district. One superintendent thoughtfully reflected,

Part of your leadership is to give away power. You don’t retain it anymore, you don’t. You’re not the head shed anymore. You’re not the one totally in charge anymore, you have given that up. You’ve trained other people, but now they can question your decisions using quality tools. Now they can face you and you know that you are getting there when you go to a meeting and one of them says, ‘Well, how do you know that is the root cause, Mr. Superintendent?’ And you go, ‘Oh my God, what have I created? What did we create together?’ You know, but what a wonderful position to be in because now you know it is in the soul of the organization.

Each superintendent acknowledged that his successes as a leader as well as the successes of the organization were dependent upon the superintendent’s ability to empower others within the organization. Empowerment, in the eyes of the superintendents and informants, fostered collaborative relationships and created organizational structures that supported collaborative leadership. The Community Consolidated School District application noted how the focus on staff empowerment was reinforced through the district goal structures. The application document stated, “Staff empowerment is supported by the ‘high-performing staff’ key goal and reinforced by district and school committee structures, participation expectations, shared decision making, survey results analysis, and staff training” (CCSD Application, p. 2).

This sense of empowerment consistently resonated among the four superintendents as they used descriptors such as “coaching,” “facilitation,” and “shared decision making” to

describe their leadership. For example, during a dialog with one of the superintendent participants, he reflected on empowering others by recognizing the shared responsibility for the success of the district. He commented on his overall efforts to empower others,

Not all superintendents would be willing to go out and meet with a small group of maintenance employees to say, ‘We’re all in this together, from every employee in the ranks all the way to the superintendent, we’re in this together’, but I did.

An informant reinforced how empowerment by the superintendent was instrumental for the improvements in the district. One informant, who was a central office employee, indicated that the superintendent’s efforts “encouraged me to kind of think outside the box, to take ownership for my learning . . . to become empowered as a leader within the organization.”

As the superintendents noted the importance of empowering others, they recognized and emphasized the need for staff engagement and empowerment. One articulated the notion of empowerment, sharing,

Staff would come up with their own initiative and their ideas and they would read something or they would come in with an idea that, you know, that wasn’t my idea. They would self-perpetuate things or they would seek allies among their own staff to help them with the task, and we would encourage that, that they would be back in their buildings, identifying people in their buildings that would help them do what they have got to do. Empowering them to kind of extend it out.

In much the same way, another superintendent shared how he empowered staff members by involving them in a “leadership mentor group.” By participating in the group, the superintendent acknowledged that “teachers are empowered to provide insights and information for me related to different district initiatives or efforts.” One informant conveyed the

superintendent's ability to empower others throughout the organization, acknowledging, "The superintendent is very much bottom up. He wants to hear from us." In other words, the superintendent actively empowered others in the school organization to communicate, to share, and to be involved in helping the district improve.

The Chugach School District application pointed to empowerment as a means to motivate staff to improve. Their MBNQA application noted, "The motivation stems from the empowerment to take immediate action by staff and faculty and in this way the CSD system is geared to expand the leadership capacity of each staff member" (Chugach Application, p. 30).

Superintendents and informants alike communicated a sense of team-work and teaming when describing empowerment within the organization. In one particular instance, while referencing the team approach to empowerment, a superintendent reflected,

I think it's a team approach, though. Because it can't just be the leader. It can't be just the superintendent. He has to empower that workforce all the way to the ground level, whether they have students or not in their care. Because if you're not all together in the journey, then it's going to start breaking apart.

The identified informants acknowledged the teamwork analogy through the interviews. The informants applied words such as "coach" or "trainer" when describing the superintendent. One informant recognized the superintendent as a person who "encourages" like a coach, while another informant described the superintendent as a baseball coach.

I see his superintendency as kind of like a coach on a baseball team. That maybe he was once a very strong player. And yet, through experience and through time, has moved into more of a coaching position. And that way he can empower others to be stronger.

Another informant applied the coaching concept metaphorically, comparing the leadership of the superintendent to that of swimming coach.

He is in the pool showing you how to do it, and getting under the pool watching you as you bobble to see if you're getting it from underneath. And really, really detail-oriented a coach that is interested in the detail, he would really make you perform at your best.

Just as the superintendents and informants recognized the role of the superintendent to empower others, another common element of empowerment recognized through the study was the use of recognition as a means of staff empowerment. Throughout each of the districts, senior leaders worked to recognize staff contributions. In Jenks, the senior leaders “worked assiduously at motivating staff by utilizing classroom visits, personal notes, and one-to-one communications in person and via telephone and e-mail” (Jenks Application, p. 11). As the superintendents spoke about empowering staff, one shared how he was particularly proud of his efforts to empower staff in the transportation department by recognizing the overall efforts and contributions of the bus drivers in the district. He reflectively shared,

We had a special celebration for all of the transportation workers because – you know – why our score is so good this year? Because you (the bus drivers) get them to school on time! And who's the last person to say “See you”? Who's the last person they (the students) talk to in the day? The bus driver! You (the bus drivers) are our (school district's) primary quality indicator!

Consistently, the message of recognition for empowerment proudly resonated through the interviews with the study participants. Superintendents shared how they used “staff notes,” “building visits,” and “personal communications” as means of recognition and connection to empower others. Some districts noted the use of an annual awards banquet to provide

recognition and empower staff. One informant surmised that recognition served as a means of connecting others to efforts of collaboration, team-work, and empowerment. In order to ensure engagement of all staff, she shared that the process was changed from an awards banquet to an appreciation banquet for all staff: “It’s really about the big picture of working together and that’s when we moved to an appreciation banquet.”

As the superintendents discussed empowering others within the district, each acknowledged that his successes as a leader were dependent upon his ability to empower others within the organization. The superintendents in this study articulated a reality that their work as leaders went beyond what any one leader could accomplish alone and found that it was incumbent on them to empower others within the organization. In order to maximize the organizational communications, talents, and efforts, the superintendents recognized that the leadership efforts in the district were greater than one person in the district.

Bolman and Deal (2008) note that “effective human resource leaders empower others” (p. 363). This observation suggests that the use of empowerment emerged from a human resource frame of leadership by the school superintendents. Leaders in the human resource frame “make it clear that workers have a stake in the organization’s success and a right to be involved in making decisions” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 363). As the superintendents sought to empower others, they applied a human resource frame to their leadership practices.

The superintendents took action to empower employees and to keep employees informed and involved in an effort to foster collaboration. The evidence suggests that the superintendents in the study applied the human resource frame of leadership and created conditions that empowered employees by providing opportunities for participation, teaming, and job enrichment (Bolman & Deal, 2008). One of the superintendent’s comments appeared to reflect the

importance of the human resource frame of leadership as he sought to empower others in the district. He shared, “Because it can’t just be the leader. It can’t be just the superintendent. He has to empower the workforce all the way to the ground level.”

### **“We’re in this together!” ~ A Reprise**

While the first theme suggests that the concept of a strong personal commitment to improvement by the superintendent was important to the success of the organization, the second theme offers that it was important for the superintendents to work in a collaborative approach to lead the district. The superintendents recognized that sharing leadership with others and empowering others in the school organization were significant to their success. Evidence from the study points to key efforts made by the superintendents to purposefully engage in collaborative leadership and empowering others throughout the organization.

The ability of leaders to share leadership and to empower others provided opportunities to focus on organizational impediments to ongoing, continuous improvement. It is the responsibility of management to provide leadership that encourages workers to take pride in what they do (Deming, 1986).

Just as in their commitment to continuous improvement, the superintendents addressed the practice of collaborative leadership through a multi-frame approach. In order to effectively lead, leaders rely upon multiple frames (Bolman & Deal, 2008). As the superintendents fostered collaborative leadership through practice of shared-leadership and shared decision-making along with the practice of empowering others, they applied the human resource and symbolic frames. The multiple frames perspectives provide a better understanding of how collaborative leadership occurred by the four superintendents.

### **The Leadership Practice – Effect Connection**

Leading with a commitment to continually improve the organization allowed the superintendents in this study to construct a sense of possibility among the district members and participants. A commitment to continuous improvement throughout the organization did not and could not occur in isolation. Collaboration was more than just cooperation. For the superintendents in this study, collaboration was recognized as a democratic process that empowered others in the school district. The four superintendents modeled and articulated the concept that a single leader cannot provide the knowledge, resources, or skills necessary to lead an organization as complex as a school district. The senior leaders in this study combined a blend of commitment to continuous improvement and a collaborative leadership approach as they served their respective districts.

Upon deeper consideration of the leadership themes, evidence from the superintendents and informants alike infer that leadership from the superintendent occurred through a symbiotic relationship between leadership practices and the effects of the leadership on the organization. The leadership practices and the effects of the leadership in this study were found to be inextricably linked. In reviewing the findings, I discovered that the more frequently a particular practice occurred, the greater the practice was manifested in the overall structure and performance of the district. Likewise, the greater the practice was manifested, the more likely the manifestation of the practice was reflected in the leadership practices of a commitment to continuous improvement and collaborative leadership. Based upon what I observed and discovered during the course of this study, I developed the model found in Figure 15 which demonstrates the relationships and the dynamic exchange between leadership practices and the effects of the leadership within the organization.

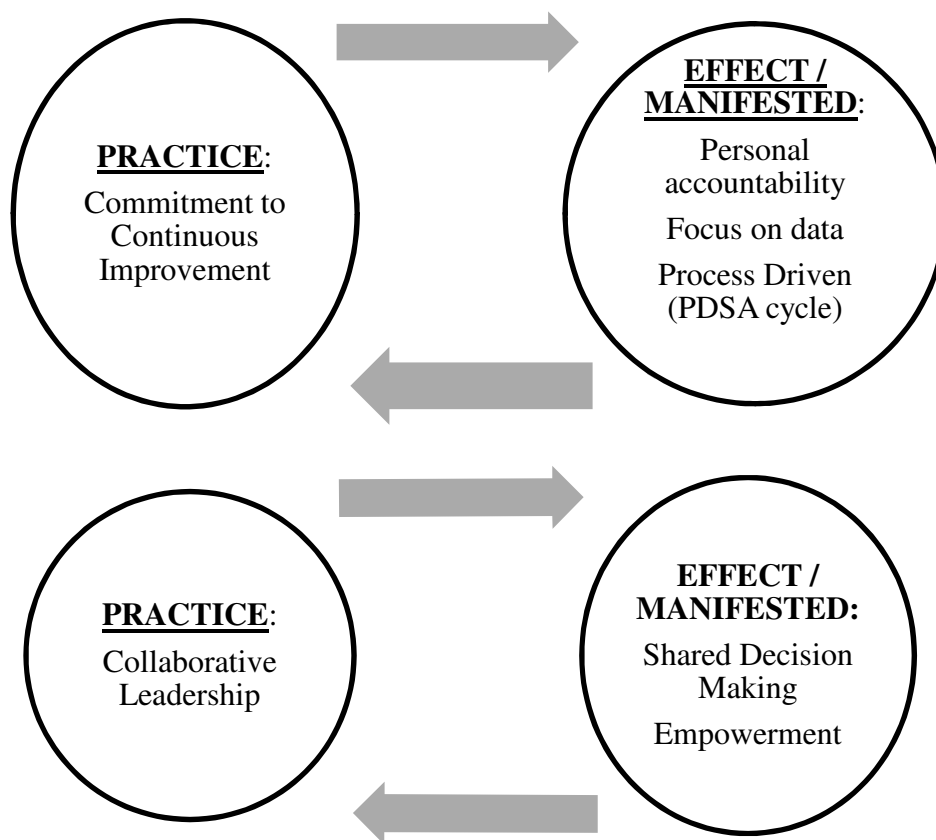


Figure 15: A Model of Leadership Practice – Effect Relationship

In the study, it appeared that the superintendents worked to create meaning and purpose within the organization through compelling discourse on improving the organization. They talked passionately about personal commitment and involvement that was greater than the daily work of management. The superintendents' stories focused on the organizational long-term goals and improvements into the future. Through the use of the PDSA process for improvement, the superintendents helped navigate the organization through a process of ongoing improvement focused on the identified organizational goals. The superintendent committed to shared decision making throughout the organization to help add greater meaning to the work of the employees in the organization. Individuals in the schools were supported and encouraged through



empowerment by the superintendent. Finally, through collaborative efforts and a deep commitment to continuous improvement, the superintendent reinforced the goals of the district.

Overall, the emerging themes and related sub-themes can be viewed through a multi-frame perspective. Bolman and Deal (2008) suggest that the four frames help provide “clarity and meaning amid the confusion of organizational life” (p. 42). The four frames help clarify understanding and meaning. In the noted practices of a commitment to continuous improvement and collaborative leadership, the superintendents modeled a multi-frame approach. The multi-frame thinking was manifested through the actions, stories, insights, and observations of the four superintendents and the identified informants. As Bolman and Deal (2008) note, “making sense of a complex situation is not a single-frame activity” (p. 309). Clearly, the leadership practices of the four superintendents occurred through the application of multiple leadership frames as they helped lead their respective districts through the complex process of recognized performance excellence.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided a review of the data and an analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of the findings. Two themes and five related sub-themes emerged from the analysis of the data. First, the superintendents practiced a deep commitment to continuous improvement. The supporting sub-themes noted that the commitment to continuous improvement came through a sense of personal accountability by the superintendent, a focus on data and results, and a process for continuous improvement within the district. Second, the superintendents practiced collaborative leadership. Two related sub-themes supported the practice of collaborative leadership. First, as the senior leaders of the district, these superintendents realized it was essential to share leadership with others in order to lead an organization as complex as a school

district. Additionally, the superintendents noted that in order to foster collaborative leadership, they had to empower others throughout the organization.

Bolman and Deal's (2008) multi-frame thinking perspectives provided insights into the leadership practices of the superintendents. As I applied Bolman and Deal's (2008) multi-frame approach to further analyze and synthesize the results, it was evident that the superintendents applied multiple frames to the identified leadership practices.

From the findings, I was able to develop a model that graphically represented the symbiotic relationship between the major themes and related subthemes. This model provides additional perspectives and insights for considering the relationships between the leadership practices and effects found through this study. In the next chapter, I will conclude the study with a review of recommendations and conclusions related to study.

## CHAPTER FIVE SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMENDATIONS

### **Introduction**

This case study sought to determine and examine the common leadership practices among four MBNQA recipient school district superintendents through the 2007 award cycle. Furthermore, the study sought to understand the effects of the superintendents' leadership on their respective school organization. Through the completion of this study, including data collections and findings, the research provided an analysis of the two questions that guided this study.

To satisfy the purpose of the study, I conducted interviews with individuals identified as the school superintendent during or leading up to the attainment of the MBNQA. These interviews provided insights regarding their practices as the superintendent of schools in their respective districts. In addition to the superintendents, I interviewed four identified informants to gather additional perspectives on the leadership practices of the superintendent and the effects of the superintendent's leadership. The interviews were conducted utilizing semi-structured interviews (See appendices D and E). In addition to the interviews, data for the study came from a comprehensive examination of each district's 50 page official MBNQA application document submitted to the National Institute of Standards and Technology through the United States Department of Commerce. Additional documents, such as annual reports, district publications, and district web sites, were also included in the data collections. Finally, I was able to capture additional perspectives and insights in field notes from observations made during site visits to each of the four MBNQA recipient school districts.

Through the research process, I utilized a qualitative research framework including in-depth audio-recorded interviews, document reviews, site visits, and field notes. Interview data

from the participants in the study, four superintendents, and four identified informants were transcribed and coded. Likewise, the application documents, field notes, and data from other documents such as web sites were coded. The collection of data was analyzed, organized, and categorized using the (a) observe, (b) think, (c) test, and (d) revise or OTTR method (United States General Accounting Office, 1987).

Chapter 1 of the study explained the overall questions to be studied. In Chapter 2, relevant literature and related research were presented. The related literature included the concepts of prevalent leadership theory, along with the Bolman and Deal's (2008) four frame perspectives, as well as research related to total quality management and the Malcolm Baldrige Award. Chapter 3 provided a detailed explanation of the qualitative methodology utilized in the study. In Chapter 4, the results of the study along with an analysis of the findings and discussion of the findings were presented. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings along with limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and closes with concluding remarks on implications for practitioners.

### **Summary**

Through this study, participants described the leadership practices and effects of the school superintendents from the four MBNQA school districts. From the collection of data from interviews, document reviews, and site visits, two major themes associated with the leadership practices of the four identified school superintendents emerged. The first major theme that emerged was the strong commitment to continuous improvement held by the superintendent. Superintendents in the study spoke about an unwavering focus on constantly improving the organization. The stories from the superintendents and the informants communicated the expectation that the organization was always striving to get better. From the data collections

related to the focus on continuous improvement, three sub-themes emerged that reinforced the superintendent's commitment to continuous improvement.

First, as the superintendents spoke to commitment to continuous improvement, a clear message emerged that the superintendents held a deep sense of personal responsibility and accountability to the school district. The superintendents took personal accountability for the improvements of the district and used their own sense of ownership and accountability to foster a similar sense of ownership and accountability throughout the organization.

The message of personal accountability shared by the superintendents was reinforced through the interviews, observations, and document reviews as well. Participants recognized that the superintendents had high personal expectations and worked to cascade those expectations to others in the district. The participants and related documents echoed the importance of the superintendent's personal accountability to embrace continuous improvement in the district.

Through an analysis of this sub-theme, it became evident that the superintendent's sense of personal accountability impacted the organization through two of the four Bolman and Deal (2008) frames. The superintendents applied the human resource frame to appeal to the employees of the organization and instill in the organization's employees the same sense of accountability the superintendent had for himself. Additionally, the superintendent applied the symbolic frame. By modeling a sense of personal accountability, the superintendent symbolically portrayed the message of personal accountability for others in the organization.

The second sub-theme related to the commitment to continuous improvement was a focus on data within the organization. The superintendents focused on specific metrics related to organizational goals. The use of data helped focus the energy of the superintendent and the district as it related to the goals of the school districts. Field observations noted that the data was

prominently displayed throughout the districts and was used to communicate the focus on improvement.

By focusing on data and metrics related to the district goals, the superintendents communicated a clear message that goals and data are essential to guide improvement and ongoing performance in the school district. As the superintendents used data to communicate the commitment to continuous improvement, they applied both the structural frame and the symbolic frame from Bolman and Deal's (2008) four frames. A structural process occurred in each of the districts through the posting of data on charts and posters in the district and communicating the data on charts and graphs in district publications. As the district focused on data and metrics, it provided a focus on the structures and organizations of the districts. The use of the data informed and influenced the structures of the district such as the work of staff and the indicators identified data reports of the district.

Furthermore, through the use of data charts, posters, and graphs, the superintendents symbolically communicated the priorities and focus of the district. For example, the document reviews and field observations noted that the superintendents used the data to share and communicate a commitment to performance results in student achievement as well as a commitment to the connecting with the community and the constituents the district served. The charts, graphs, wall posters, and other communications were important symbols that communicated the commitment to continuous improvement in the districts.

A strong process orientation was the third sub-theme to emerge related to the commitment to continuous improvement. The superintendents all embraced a cycle of improvement called the plan-do-study-act (PDSA) model. The superintendents supported, promoted, communicated, and reinforced the PDSA model throughout the school district. The

PDSA model served as an approach for guiding improvements within the organization and defined a culture of continuous improvement within each of the districts.

The PDSA model provided a structural procedure for continuous improvement within each of the districts. Bolman and Deal (2008) suggest that through the use of the structural frame, leaders apply policies, procedures, and more formal structures to guide organizational functions. The PDSA model guided the steps and processes for ongoing improvement and refinement within each of the districts. The use of the PDSA model provided all organizational participants a structural process to guide ongoing, continuous improvement within the school district.

The second major theme that emerged was a focus on collaborative leadership among the four superintendents. From the insights of the superintendents and informants, the findings identified that the superintendents promoted and encouraged collaborative leadership by taking steps to empower others, sharing decision-making with others, and focusing on collaboration among others within the school district. The practice of collaborative leadership was reinforced by two sub-themes.

The first sub-theme noted that the superintendent's willingness to share leadership was a critical factor for collaborative leadership within the school districts. The superintendents, participants, and related documents noted that collaborative leadership was fostered as the superintendent shared leadership with others throughout the organization. The data suggested that superintendents recognized that, in order to lead an organization as complex and dynamic as a school district, it was essential to share leadership with others throughout the organization.

As superintendents shared leadership responsibilities with others through such means as councils, teams, and committees, they symbolically created a culture of collaboration. The

culture of collaboration, as viewed by Bolman and Deal (2008), emerges predominantly through the symbolic frame. By sharing leadership with others throughout the organization, the superintendents communicated a strong message to others: sharing leadership with others is essential to collaborative leadership in the school district.

Additionally, the process of shared leadership developing relationships with others is consistent with Bolman and Deal's (2008) human resource frame. Through the human resource frame, leaders can communicate what the organization values. By applying shared leadership through the use of teams, councils, and groups in the school districts, the superintendents in these four MBNQA recipient districts transmitted a message to the organizational participants that the organization values participation, collaboration, and the involvement of others.

The importance of empowering and engaging others within the district surfaced as the second sub-theme related to collaborative leadership. Empowerment of others in the organization occurred as a direct result of the superintendent meeting with others, engaging in conversations with others, and supporting others. The superintendents recognized that involving employees in a team environment and providing recognition to employees cultivated a sense of empowerment among the district faculty and staff.

Data analysis suggests that the methods of empowerment applied by the superintendents were consistent with Bolman and Deal's (2008) human resource frame. Through the use of the human resource frame, the four superintendents took action to keep employees informed and to foster collaboration. The superintendents applied the human resource frame to create conditions that empowered district employees.

Ultimately, in analyzing the results and the findings, I realized that the relationships between the themes and the subthemes occurred through a symbiotic relationship connecting the



observed practices and the sub-themes. As a result, I developed a model that provides a visual representation between the identified themes and subthemes that resulted from the data.

Overall, utilizing a qualitative methodology, I found meaning in the stories, comments, and observations associated with these senior leaders. Bolman and Deal's (2008) four-frame perspectives served as an interpretive framework to understand the leadership practices. Analysis of the data suggests that the superintendents applied multiple frames in their leadership practices. Furthermore, the reported findings note that the identified leadership practices and subsequent themes come together in a symbiotic, inextricable manner.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

As a result of this research, there are six recommendations for further study.

First, the results from the case study revealed common leadership practices among senior leaders in the four identified school districts. The focus of this study concentrated on the educational sector of the MBNQA criteria, with a particular emphasis on kindergarten through grade twelve school districts. It is recommended that a similar study on the leadership practices of senior leaders occur in other sectors of the award criteria. The additional research into leadership practices and leadership effects in these sectors could allow leaders, consultants, higher education institutions, and other interested parties to compare and contrast the emerging leadership practices of senior leaders from various MBNQA recipient organizations in various sectors of the award. It would be beneficial to learn about the leadership of other award recipient senior leaders as it could provide those interested in implementing the MBNQA criteria in their organization with a broader range of leadership examples and practices from which to draw upon as they attempt to operationalize the Malcolm Baldrige criteria.

Second, the research focused on leadership practices and leadership effects from the perspective of the school superintendent. It is recommended that an exploration of these same practices and the resulting leadership effects be examined through the eyes of the community members served by these school districts. In many instances, the school district is a cornerstone of the community. The external view from community members related to the MBNQA, the leadership of the superintendent, and the resulting impacts on the school organization would provide insights that could further validate leadership practices, along with the various leadership effects.

Third, this study did not explore employee development and training programs related to the institutionalization of the MBNQA precepts. Therefore, it is recommended for future research to conduct an in-depth exploration on employee development and training in MBNQA recipient school districts, including the school superintendent and others in the district. Examining employee development and training programs could provide insights into the types of training and staff development that the senior leaders found to be successful.

Furthermore, the improvement of leadership skills and knowledge development of school superintendents to improve educational outcomes and performances is just as important as the skill and knowledge development of other organizational employees. To meet these demands, school leaders must be equipped with the skills to provide leadership that will offer the intended effects to improve the school organization over time. Therefore, an element of ongoing research into employee development should include research into the personal and professional development of the superintendents who successfully applied the MBNQA criteria to their school organization. The research could present insights for higher education institutions for

superintendent preparation programs. Further, the research could uncover insights for state and national superintendent associations for their continuing education programs.

Fourth, while these findings provide insights on the leadership practices and the resulting effects of leadership from four MBNQA recipient school district superintendents, the study did not embrace the most recent school district recipients: the Iredell-Statesville Schools in southwestern North Carolina and the Montgomery County Schools of Maryland. Since each MBNQA recipient is considered a role model, it would be beneficial to study the more recent school district award recipient superintendents in addition to the four superintendents included in this study. The examination of more recent recipients may provide additional insights into additional similarities and differences in leadership practices, and may address more contemporary issues facing school district senior leaders today.

Fifth, the need to keep a focus on specific goals and outcomes within an organization may result in differences and politically driven disagreements among organizational participants. While one could assume that such disagreements exist within these school organizations, there was little evidence suggesting the superintendents in this study applied Bolman and Deal's (2008) political frame. Further exploration and research specific to instances within the districts that required the application of the political frame by the superintendent would be beneficial to provide insights on how this frame may have been applied to leadership practices in the organization.

Finally, the call for accountability and quality remain a constant in the ongoing debate for educational improvement and reform. Examining the concept of accountability relative to the MBNQA may demonstrate that accountability has a much greater role related to leadership practices and the focus of the organization than what was discovered in the course of this

examination. A focus on accountability may be particularly true in the increasingly competitive world of education. How will school leaders, without a focused framework and the necessary leadership skills, answer the ongoing demands for educational quality and improvement? The calls from state and national policy-makers for educational excellence continue. How do leadership practices of these four MBNQA recipient school districts correlate with ongoing state and/or federal accountability and improvement measures? If the prevailing leadership practices in MBNQA recipient school districts are consistent with improved student achievement, an examination of these phenomena could certainly enhance the professional development of practicing superintendents as well as the skill development of aspiring senior leaders.

### **Implications of Findings for Practitioners**

Overall, the research and the literature review added to the knowledge base and awareness of leadership practices of the superintendent in four MBNQA organizations and the effects of the identified leadership practices on the overall organization. While the topic of leadership has been examined through multiple studies, there is little literature specific to leadership practices of senior leaders in MBNQA recipient organizations. Using existing research and popular writing, leaders often seek to find the “keys” to effective leadership yet, as noted through the literature review, there continue to be multiple perspectives among experts regarding the most effective leadership practices to guide organizations.

Ultimately, the blend of leadership practices and the leadership effects of these four practitioners, viewed through multiple frames of leadership, offer a perspective on the means and methods utilized to lead their respective school districts to a level of performance excellence. Regardless of the size or location of the school district, evidence suggests that several common leadership practices are consistently applied through multiple frames of leadership by these four

superintendents. The symbiotic relationship between these identified practices and the related leadership effects may be beneficial for other school superintendents and organizations committed to performance excellence.

Furthermore, as a practicing superintendent, the outcomes of the research have resulted in implications for my own leadership practices. In my own practice, I have emphasized the use of data throughout the school district. In order to maximize the effective use of data, I have called for all administrators in my current school district to be trained in process development and management. On a personal level, I have become much more engaged in the operations of the site principals by conducting regular meetings with each principal on a weekly basis at the school they are charged with leading. In addition, I have developed a greater sense of awareness regarding how my practices may be viewed through the political, human resource, structural, and symbolic frames. I believe this has made me a more effective and conscientious superintendent.

Ongoing challenges for schools and school districts such as an increasingly competitive marketplace, growing demand for educational success including high levels of student achievement for all students, along with a need for improved quality in a rapidly changing society, and the ongoing call for educational accountability, will require leaders to be committed to continuous improvement. A strong personal commitment to improvement along with the ability to work collaboratively may help educational leaders, both present and future, meet these challenges.

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APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### Interest Letter

Dear XXXX,

I am a practicing school administrator and a doctoral student at the University of St. Thomas in Minneapolis, MN. You have been selected to participate in a research study. I am conducting a study exploring how school superintendents in the school districts recognized as Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) recipients practiced leadership within the school district. Through this study, I will investigate the following research questions:

1. How does the superintendent define leadership?
2. What are the key leadership practices of the school superintendent?
3. What are the leadership characteristics of the school superintendent?
4. How has the superintendent applied leadership practices and characteristics to the school district organization that led to the development of the school organization as one recognized for quality production based on the Baldrige Criteria?

Through this study, I am seeking to determine if there are common leadership behaviors, attributes, characteristics, traits, patterns, and styles that were fundamental in contributing to the district's distinction as a MBNQA recipient in education. The ultimate objective of this research is to discern if there is a dominant approach to leadership that aligns to the Baldrige in education model.

This letter is sent to determine your willingness to participate in this study. The study will include a personal interview that will last from 60 to 90 minutes in length at a location that is convenient for you. Furthermore, the research process will include an on-site visitation to the district you served. The site visits will include a review of related documents related to the MBNQA process. The objectives of this site visit are to triangulate the initial findings from the personal interviews and initial document reviews related to the school district. Participants will be guaranteed confidentiality with pseudonyms to protect personal identities to the extent possible. However, this will be extremely difficult for the specific superintendents in this study due to the very few MBNQA recipient school districts and the few superintendents in the study.

Please indicate your willingness to participate in this survey by completing the attached survey and returning the survey to my attention in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope.

Thank-you in advance for your consideration in this matter.

With many thanks,

Klint W. Willert

### Interest Survey - Superintendent

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_ District: \_\_\_\_\_
2. How long have you been or were you with the district? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Are you willing to participate in a research project related to the leadership practices in your school district leading to the attainment of the MBNQA? \_\_\_\_\_
4. If yes, please provide the following contact information for research contact purposes only:
  - Work telephone: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Work email: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Home telephone: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Home email: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Other contact information: \_\_\_\_\_
5. If you are willing to participate in this research, what location and method would be most convenient for you to participate in an interview?
6. Can you provide the name and contact information of up to two (2) individuals from your tenure as the school superintendent leading to the NMBQA who can speak to your leadership characteristics, styles, and attributes?

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DUTY: \_\_\_\_\_ DUTY: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_ ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ TELEPHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

*Thank-you for completing this interest survey. I look forward to meeting with you in the near future.*

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Interest Survey - Participant

Superintendent \_\_\_\_\_ identified you as a potential participant in a research project exploring the leadership behaviors, attributes, characteristics, traits, patterns, and styles that were evident in the superintendent at the time of or leading up to the district's distinction as a National Baldrige Quality Award recipient in education

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_ District: \_\_\_\_\_
2. How long have you been or were you with the district? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Were you involved with the district when the district completed the application that led to the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (NMBQA) for the district? If yes, check here \_\_\_\_\_.
4. If no, please indicate who was serving the district in the capacity that you currently are when the district obtained the MBNQA \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Are you willing to participate in a research project related to the leadership practices in your school district leading to the attainment of the MBNQA? \_\_\_\_\_
6. If yes, please provide the following contact information for research contact purposes only:
7. Work telephone: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Work email: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Home telephone: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Home email: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other contact information: \_\_\_\_\_
8. If you are willing to participate in this research, what location and method would be most convenient for you to participate in an interview?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Thank-you for completing this interest survey.  
 I look forward to meeting with you in the near future.*

## Appendix B

## LETTER OF INVITATION

Klint W. Willert  
 2044 290<sup>th</sup> Street  
 Marshall, MN 56258

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am a current doctorate student conducting a study about the leadership practices of school superintendents serving their district leading up to or at the time of the school district obtaining the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. In order to gain a richer perspective on the leadership practices of superintendent \_\_\_\_\_, I am extending an invitation for you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because you were serving as an employee during the tenure of superintendent \_\_\_\_\_ and were identified as someone who could articulate the leadership characteristics of this school superintendent leading to or at the time of the school district obtaining the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. This study is being conducted by: Mr. Klint Willert under the advisement of Dr. Tom Fish, University of St. Thomas School of Education.

The purpose of this study is to explore the leadership practices of school superintendents in school districts that have been Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) recipients. From this study, I seek to provide both scholars and practitioners with deeper perspectives and broader understandings of how the superintendents in the four MBNQA recipient districts define leadership and practice the application of leadership in implementing the Malcolm Baldrige continuous improvement model. I will focus my study on the leadership practices of superintendent \_\_\_\_\_, along with the other superintendents employed in the school districts at the time of or leading up to the school districts receiving the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may opt not to participate in this research study. Further, if you should choose to participate in this study, you may skip any question asked during the course of the interview processes. Finally, if you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Should you decide to withdraw from this study, to the extent possible, all identifiable data collected will not be included in the study. Data that can be attributed to an identifiable source linked to an individual will not be included.

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in up to three sessions of audio tape recorded interviews lasting between 60 and 90 minutes I will conduct multiple interviews including, one on the telephone, a second face to face, and additionally interviews in either a face to face or telephone or electronic format. The specific questions I will explore are attached (see interview protocol). You may opt not to participate in this study. Additionally, if you should choose to participate in this study, you may opt to skip any question in the interview protocol during the course of the interview processes.
2. To share related documents that provide insight and information regarding the leadership of the school superintendent.

3. To offer candid insights on the leadership practices of the school superintendent

The records of this study will be kept private. Since the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award is a high profile award and there are limited recipients, it will be improbable to avoid identifying the specific school district or superintendent in the study. However, informants will be protected to the extent possible with the use of pseudonyms. Research records will be kept in a locked file and will be destroyed within one year following the conclusion of the research project. I am the only person who will have access to the records.

This letter of invitation includes a form on the bottom of this letter for you to complete if you consent to participate in this study. Please complete this form and return to the attention of Mr. Klint Willert, 2044 290<sup>th</sup> Street, Marshall, MN 56258 in the enclosed envelope. You may contact me with any questions at (507)-532-2450 or (507)-828-4240. Additionally, you may contact me via email at [klint.willert@marshall.k12.mn.us](mailto:klint.willert@marshall.k12.mn.us) or at [willertka@starpoint.net](mailto:willertka@starpoint.net).

Sincerely,

Mr. Klint W. Willert

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### **CONSENT SLIP/FORM**

(PLEASE PRINT)

Contact Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Email: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ I wish to take part in the afore mentioned study. I understand that a consent to participate form will follow.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not wish to take part in the afore mentioned study. Thank-you for considering me in this process.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix C

**CONSENT FORM  
UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS****CONSENT FOR IDENTIFIED PARTICIPANTS****Leadership for Excellence: A Case Study of the Leadership Practices of School Superintendents from the Four National Malcolm Baldrige Quality Award Recipient School Districts****IRB log number B08-044-3**

I am conducting a study about the leadership practices of school superintendents serving their district leading up to or at the time of the school district obtaining the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because you were serving as a superintendent leading to or at the time of the school district obtaining the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Mr. Klint Willert under the advisement of Dr. Tom Fish, University of St. Thomas School of Education.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is: to explore, in a qualitative manner, the leadership practices of school superintendents in school districts that have been Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) recipients. From this study, I seek to provide both scholars and practitioners with deeper perspectives and broader understandings of how the superintendents in the four MBNQA recipient districts define leadership and practice the application of leadership in implementing the Malcolm Baldrige continuous improvement model. I will focus my study on the leadership practices of the four superintendents employed in the school districts at the time of or leading up to the school districts receiving the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. These districts, located in Chugach, Alaska, Pearl River, New York, Palatine, Illinois, and Jenks, Oklahoma, are the only school systems in the United States to receive the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award since the inception of the Award criteria for education.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. participate in up to three sessions of taped interviews lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. I will conduct multiple interviews including, one on the telephone, a second face to face, and additionally interviews in either a face to face or telephone or electronic format. The specific questions I will explore are attached (see interview protocol). You may opt not to participate in this study. Additionally, if you should choose to participate in this study,

you may opt to skip any question in the interview protocol during the course of the interview processes.

2. To share related documents that provide insight and information regarding the leadership of the school superintendent.
3. To offer candid insights on the leadership practices of the school superintendent
4. To ensure that you will, in no way, seek to discover who has participated as an informant in the research.

### **Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. Since the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award is a high profile award and there are limited recipients, it will be improbable to avoid identifying the specific school district or superintendent in the study. However, informants will be protected to the extent possible with the use of pseudonyms. Research records will be kept in a locked file. I am the only person who will have access to the records. If I decide to employ the services of another individual to complete the transcription process, I will require that the individual complete a confidentiality statement. I, along with my advisor, will have sole access to the final transcripts and the recordings. The field notes, recordings, and transcribed notes will be destroyed at the completion of the research.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may opt not to participate in this research study. Further, you may skip any question asked during the course of the interview processes. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Mr. Klint Willert, his school district where employed (Marshall Public Schools) or the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Should you decide to withdraw from this study, to the extent possible, all identifiable data collected will not be included in the study. Data that can be attributed to an identifiable source linked to an individual will not be included.

### **Contacts and Questions**

My name is Mr. Klint Willert. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at (507)-532-2450 or (507)-828-4240. Additionally, you may contact the research advisor, Dr. Tom Fish at 651-962-4436. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341 with any questions or concerns.

**You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.**

### **Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I consent to participate in this study and understand that by doing so, I hereby consent to participate in recorded interview sessions. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Study Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Researcher**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

## Appendix D

**Interview Protocol – Superintendent**  
**Interview Protocol and Questions utilized for the superintendents in the study.**

**School Superintendent**

*Thank-you for agreeing to participate in this study on the leadership practices of school superintendents in National Malcolm Baldrige award recipient school districts. It is an honor and delight for me to have this opportunity to discuss leadership practices and organizational developments with you. I am going to ask you several questions that relate to your leadership practices as the superintendent while serving the \_\_\_\_\_ School District. To begin:*

- Tell me what led your district to apply the Baldrige criteria model. When did the process begin in your district?
- What changes were made to help your district receive this national recognition?
- What leadership efforts did you find most effective in managing these changes?
- How would you describe your leadership approach when you embarked on the continuous quality improvement journey using the Baldrige criteria? How did your leadership approach influence this continuous improvement process in the district?
- What leadership practices/actions did you embrace and apply that enabled your success?
- Can you describe a particular event by another leader in the district, such as a principal, that validated the impacts of your leadership through the continuous improvement efforts?
- How do you personally define leadership and your leadership?
- What changes in attitudes and actions have you/did you notice(d) in the district after starting the continuous quality improvement processes in the district?
- What have been the results of these changes in attitudes and actions by those in the system?
- Can you share some thoughts about your experience as a the superintendent in the continuous improvement process in your district? Specifically, what leadership practices did you find most effective in supporting the transformation?

- What leadership practices by others enabled and encouraged the progress of the district? How did you know that your leadership was effective?
- How do you believe the Baldrige process challenged, reinforced, or changed any of your beliefs about leadership in the school district?
- How much of your success on the continuous quality improvement journey do you attribute to leadership? Why?
- Leadership is a key criterion in the Baldrige application process based on the Baldrige criteria. How did you prepare for the implementation of continuous quality improvement utilizing the Baldrige criteria?
- If you were to provide an analogy for your leadership approach, what would it be? Why?
- Do you have any last thoughts on leadership as it applies to the Baldrige criteria?
- Follow-up interview questions may include probes into defining moments for the leader in the efforts of applying the Baldrige criteria such as exploring unanticipated consequences of the efforts by senior leaders, as well as the significance to the district once the organization achieved the National Baldrige recognition.

***Thank-you for once again for agreeing to participate in this study. I may need to follow-up with additional interview questions to clarify some of the items and information that you have shared. Once again, thank-you and congratulations on your outstanding achievements!***

## Appendix E

**Interview Protocol – Informant**  
**Interview Protocol and Questions utilized for the informants in the study.**

**Informant**

*Thank-you for agreeing to participate in this study on the leadership practices of school superintendents in National Malcolm Baldrige award recipient school districts. It is an honor and delight for me to have this opportunity to discuss leadership practices and organizational developments with you. I am going to ask you several questions that relate to the leadership practices of superintendent \_\_\_\_\_ . To begin:*

- Tell me what led your district to apply the Baldrige criteria model. When did the process begin in your district?
- What changes were made to help your district receive this national recognition?
- What leadership efforts of the superintendent did you observe that was most effective in managing these changes?
- How would you describe your leadership approach of superintendent \_\_\_\_\_ when you embarked on the continuous quality improvement journey using the Baldrige criteria? How did the superintendent's leadership approach influence this continuous improvement process in the district? Why or why not?
- What leadership practices/actions did other leaders in the organization seem to embrace and apply that enabled the district's success?
- Can you describe a particular event by another leader in the district, such as a principal, that validated the impacts of the superintendent's leadership through the continuous improvement efforts?
- How would you personally define the leadership of the superintendent?
- What changes in attitudes and actions have you/did you notice(d) in the district after starting the continuous quality improvement processes in the district?
- What have been the results of these changes in attitudes and actions by those in the system?
- Can you share some thoughts about your experience as a leader/participant/senior leader in the continuous improvement process in your district? Specifically, what leadership practices do you believe were most in supporting the implementation of Baldrige?

- What leadership practices by others enabled and encouraged the progress of the district? How did you know that the superintendent's leadership was effective?
- How do you believe the Baldrige process challenged, reinforced, or changed any of your beliefs about leadership in the school district?
- How much of your success on the continuous quality improvement journey do you attribute to the leadership of the superintendent? Why?
- Leadership is a key criterion in the Baldrige application process based on the Baldrige criteria. How did you observe the district leadership prepare for the implementation of continuous quality improvement utilizing the Baldrige criteria?
- If you were to provide an analogy for the superintendent's leadership approach, what would it be? Why?
- Do you have any last thoughts on leadership as it applies to the Baldrige criteria?
- Follow-up interview questions may include probes into defining moments for the leader in the efforts of applying the Baldrige criteria such as exploring unanticipated consequences of the efforts by senior leaders, as well as the significance to the district once the organization achieved the National Baldrige recognition.

***Thank-you for once again for agreeing to participate in this study. I may need to follow-up with additional interview questions to clarify some of the items and information that you have shared. Once again, thank-you and congratulations on your outstanding achievements!***

## Appendix F

## Confidentiality Agreement

It is understood and agreed to that the below identified discloser of confidential information may provide certain information that is and must be kept confidential. To ensure the protection of such information, and to preserve any confidentiality, it is agreed that:

1. The Confidential Information to be disclosed can be described as and includes:

research and personal and identifiable information regardless of whether such information is designated as “Confidential Information” at the time of its disclosure.

2. The Recipient agrees not to disclose the confidential information obtained from the discloser to anyone unless required to do so by law.

3. This Agreement states the entire agreement between the parties concerning the disclosure of Confidential Information. Any addition or modification to this Agreement must be made in writing and signed by the parties.

**WHEREFORE**, the parties acknowledge that they have read and understand this Agreement and voluntarily accept the duties and obligations set forth herein.

Recipient of Confidential Information:

Name (Print or Type): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Discloser of Confidential Information: \_\_\_\_\_

Name (Print of Type): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_