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THE IMPACT OF PRINCIPALS' COMMUNICATION PRACTICES ON SCHOOL SUCCESS
ENVIRONMENT: AN INTRINSIC CASE STUDY

By

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BA (Old Dominion University) 2014

MA (Norfolk State University) 2015

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Affiliated Faculty of

The College of Graduate and Professional Studies at the University of New England

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the degree of Doctor of Education

Portland & Biddeford, Maine

March, 2019

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THE IMPACT OF PRINCIPALS' COMMUNICATION PRACTICES ON SCHOOL SUCCESS
ENVIRONMENT: AN INTRINSIC CASE STUDY

ABSTRACT

Communication is the foundation for conveying the overall expectations of staff by a principal and is required for educational leadership. Leaders must communicate precisely what is expected for staff members, students, and parents to do in the educational environment may be an essential element in the progression of the school environment as a whole. Traits that are associated with a leader and people who have those traits are commonly found in leadership roles (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). Principals who communicate the importance of school sustainability, attendance, retention, or graduation success may produce a connecting element when supporting the goal of improved school performance. Leaders need to explore how they communicate organizational missions and goals within their schools and strive to decrease conveying wrong messages. The principal's communication, management, behaviors, and practices are essential components support the successful delivery and receiving of important messages.

University of New England

Doctor of Education
Educational Leadership

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to acknowledge God, for he has always given me the wonderful opportunity to learn and grow while helping others. I want to thank my parents and little sister who look down on me from heaven every day, encouraging me from afar. I miss you more than you will ever know! Thank you to my big sister Sandra, who has always been supportive and cared for my son whenever I needed peace and quiet. Thank you to my husband Anthony, friends, and family who listened to my ideas and prayed for me when I felt down and troubled. To my son Beaux' Sherman Phan, mommy loves you so much! To Brittany and Darius Gordon, I pray that I have been a good role model for you. Hard work does pay off! To Debra, words can't express my gratitude for your help and friendship. Lastly, thank you to all members of my advisory committee; Dr. Parsons, Dr. Lowsky, Dr. Maydosz, and Dr. Collay. Thank you for your guidance and patience with me. This journey has been one of the hardest tasks to complete but the best decision I have ever made! God bless you all!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Communication plays a vital role in any organization. As stated by Marion and Gonzales (2014), “first, the manager must effectively communicate goals to workers” (p. 57). Internal communication within an educational organization is as important as outward communication used by the principal. School leaders are required to keep their institution in compliance with federal, state, and local government requirements created by the Department of Education, which holds accrediting agencies accountable by ensuring that they enforce standards effectively requires schools to demonstrate credible success.

While there are many ways that school staff and leaders must attain compliance, one of the challenges that school leaders, particularly principals, commonly face is the need to maintain stability and support throughout their institution in order for teachers to improve student outcomes. The ability to communicate and communication efforts both construct and reflect what is important in the educational environment (Gilbert, 2013). Effective communication in leadership reveals who or what is valued in the organization and lends tone to everyday activities (Bolman & Deal, 2017). According to a 2014 Gallup research study, over one-third of instructional staff indicated that they had resigned their position due to the principal not making them feel valued or providing them with opportunities to be actively engaged in their work (Gallup, 2014).

Staff morale can have positive effects on performance, which can improve the work environment as a whole. Communication is a key component in staff morale and employee retention. Administrative direction and communication are both highly connected to an organization’s structure, stability, and environmental culture. It is vital for school leaders to both

practice effective communication and use it to promote positive leadership (Gilbert, 2012). Further, organizational progress may be a determinant to whether a leader can effectively communicate the goals of the institution. Communication practices principals use to frame a thriving school environment can be analyzed by school officials to understand how they may influence others' actions and beliefs in the mission and purpose of the organization. Principals are called upon to be leaders that influence teachers, students, and staff, but are also called upon to communicate the goals of educational instruction.

The role of senior administration has changed along with the continued growth and development of K12 pedagogy and organizational requirements. Leaders are required to keep abreast of potential organizational challenges to focus on institutional goals may be deemed as an extraordinary act of leadership by the school district. According to Marion and Gonzales (2014), "workers must be oriented to a common purpose, however, and that common purpose comes from the top down. It is the role of management to create the goals that motivate the organization" (p. 57).

Principals often have limited time to communicate with their staff (Katz & Kahn, 1978); therefore, it becomes even more important that the organizational structure and culture support the communication. *Structural functionalism* is the theory that sees society as a complex system where each part works together to create a whole system, it involves the inner workings of an organization in which the participants work together to promote solidarity and having effective communication strategies are values that set the tone for organizations' functional purposes. "Workers must be oriented to a common purpose, however, and that common purpose comes from the top down. It is the role of management to create the goals that motivate the organization" (Marion & Gonzales, 2014, p. 57). Leaders must communicate precisely what is

expected of staff members, students, and parents in the educational environment and that skills is an essential element guiding the progression of the school environment as a whole. The literature is rich with data concerning communication, and effective leadership practices and employee relations all have communication as an underlying common theme. Berman and Hellweg (1989) found that supervisors who participated in quality relationship circles among their employees were viewed as more competent communicators and garnered more satisfaction from their employees.

Leadership Communication

When reviewing communication-themed literature, Bolman and Deal (2013) identified the traits of symbolic leadership and described this style as a leader who models what is expected and communicates the organization's vision effectively. These traits are associated with leadership and people who have those traits are commonly found in leadership roles (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). Cramer (2014) noted that "speaking with courage, hope, and authenticity are the marks of effective leadership, and they are possible only if we focus more on our attention and effort on our assets than our deficits" (p. 87). Communication is the foundation for conveying the overall expectations of staff by a principal and is required for educational leadership. Activities that influence change in leadership generally apply across several perspectives of organizations (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). Principals often have an extensive role in the organization to maintain safety, order, formulate plans, communicate educational goals, and organize the practices of the staff. These activities are just tasks the principal must do as a leader. A principal must use their managerial skills to demonstrate their knowledge of the pedagogy and model how to successfully cause and facilitate the act of learning. As suggested by Burns (1978), "leadership is an aspect of power, but it is also a separate and vital process in

itself” (p. 27). Leadership roles can depend on the individual; overall managerial skills are imperative when leading in an organization. Subsequently, the individual principal can affect the leadership process through his or her personality traits, roles, practices, experience, and style (Hoy & Miskel, 2007; Northouse, 2007; Yukl, 2002).

School improvement relies heavily on the participation of teachers, staff, and parents in the organization, so accurate communication by the principal of goal-oriented tactics has a definitive impact. Adaptability is the rule to help leaders become hardly distinguishable from their followers (Burns, 1978). Principals who communicate the importance of school sustainability, attendance, retention, or graduation success may produce a connecting element when supporting the goal of improved school performance. Influencing a progressive environment for learning and motivating academic success, teacher development, and parental involvement may be a direct result of a leader’s communication practices. According to Burns (1978), “we must acknowledge the knotty problem of events of history that are beyond the control of identifiable persons capable of foreseeing developments and powerful enough to influence them and hence to be held accountable for them” (p. 22). Leaders who ensure agendas are put in place to encourage progression in their organization can influence the behaviors of the followers indirectly.

Principals who research new educational practices for educational leaders in a K-12 setting make an important contribution to organizational improvement. Behavior is at times shaped by internal environmental stimuli (Burns, 1978). Leaders need to explore how they communicate organizational missions and goals within their schools and strive to decrease conveying wrong messages. Marion and Gonzales (2014) contended that the goals of the organization are formulated by its leaders and are not shaped by employees. Analyzing research

data on communication practices and how principals perceive their role as a communicator in an organization can shape and influence the learning environment as a whole. Leadership skills and deciphering data on the information received or presented is an important role for leaders (Charan & Willigan, 2017). Identification of these useful communication attributes may be an essential element influencing educational progression and success.

Statement of the Problem

In educational leadership, obstacles to the vision and mission of the district may arise if a leader's communication approach is not perceived in a manner deemed useful, respectful or timely. A principal's leadership role with staff, students, and parents should include effective communication practices to achieve goals and standards set by the school district. Morrissey (2000) stated that, "the principal's role is a critical one, orchestrating a delicate balance between support and pressure, encouraging teachers to take on new roles while they themselves let go of old paradigms regarding the role of school administrator" (p. 43). Furthermore, it is important for educational administrators and leaders to use exceptional communication skills with constituents to foster positive relationships with the community outside of the school environment.

Effective choices emerge when people combine and share their best ideas, which come from sharing insights that demand being acted upon (Ertel & Solomon, 2014). Principals who do not use proper communication practices to convey goals in an organizational setting can be very damaging to the organization and subsequently the affiliated stakeholders. As mentioned by Harvard Business School Press (2004) "the way you communicate is the way you are perceived" (p. 33). Therefore, the need for understanding communication practices principals' use

exclusively associated with their leadership is of vital importance to any educational organization for progression.

Principals are challenged to be role models, have effective strategies at their disposal, and measure achievement breakthroughs for their students and school as a whole. The use of several leadership models by the principal may be an essential ingredient to effectively communicate. Modeling positive behaviors which demonstrate the vision and mission of the school district may have some formative effect on procedural or environmental outcomes. According to Grusec (1992), “individuals are believed to abstract and integrate information that is encountered in a variety of social experiences, such as exposure to models, verbal discussions, and discipline encounters” (p. 781). The principal’s communication, management, behaviors, and practices are essential components that support the successful delivery and receiving of important messages.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to investigate the effects of communication in an educational organization by principal leaders of a K-12 setting. The schools selected for this case study are fully accredited; the accreditation status and credible data from the selected schools helped to identify trends a successful environment. The schools consisted of A and B rated sites from K-12 on the list of top rated schools from the district’s quality profile as determined by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) from testing and accreditation standards. School quality profile ratings are standards taken from a variety of data on public education in the Virginia commonwealth, including enrollment, demographics, student achievement, finances, and safety; this process is used throughout all schools in the state of Virginia. Communication is defined as the transference of information or the sharing of one's

thoughts to convey ideas and is a two-way process and may be received through many channels (Gilbert, 2013).

Communication is vital for leaders in an organization, so they can accurately convey relevant messages for the proper functioning of their work environment. Good communication is essential and must be used every day. Gilbert (2013) explained effective leadership is one's ability to communicate and one's willingness to see others' perspectives. Communication ranges from formal to informal and may or may not be deliberately planned by a leader. According to Williams (2006), "principals can become agents of change who create schools which are learning centers; that is, places that advance learning through collaboration and the exchange of ideas and best practices" (p. 2). Leadership behavioral practices require a combination of communication skills, learning to effectively hear what is needed by staff to facilitate educational goals. Sebring and Bryk (2000) stated in their research, "the behaviors and practices of the principal have an influence on all aspects of the learning community, which leads to school success" (p. 441). Practicing good communication skills is an important asset for principals modeling ways to establish a successful environment in an educational organization. Goleman (1995) felt that having interpersonal communication skills and recognizing other's emotions in the workplace were good leadership qualities for organizational success. This research study initially defined effective communication practices of principals and then the researcher examined the impact of communication upon leadership on the operation, environment, and overall success of the schools where they lead. According to Marion and Gonzales (2014),

Education and its competitors exist within shifting environments, however; what is a successful strategy one year may be a losing one the next. From this perspective,

education does not improve as it evolves; it simply keeps pace with its environment.

(p. 343)

This research is relevant to school officials because it examines principals' communication practices in the school environment which could ultimately shape the behavior and culture of schools. Stolp (1996) explored the element of culture by answering why the investment in promoting a positive school culture is essential.

There is a correlation between healthy schools and a sound culture, which supports increased student achievement, motivation, and teacher productivity (Stolp, 1996). Learning about effective communication practices principals use could be a guiding factor influencing school effectiveness and how well students, staff, and parents and the community receive information from their school district. Exploring and documenting the common measures or personal implementations different principals used to communicate to staff and students in their school provide beneficial information for new or current education leaders.

Research Questions

In educational organizations, principals provide many forms of leadership, which include school management, supervising students and staff, and communicating the vision and mission of the school district. Group Success and leader effectiveness are measured not only by achievement of the task but by the extent to which the task embodies group values and the achievement furthers fundamental groups (Burns, 1978). Educational leaders may deploy common communication methods that drive their school towards the goals of the schools they serve. As stated by Dyers and Carothers (2000), "Leaders of the 21st century must view leadership through the lens of its effect on the actions of staff members that subsequently affect student achievement" (p. 16). Principals can be flexible and may change their actions and

behavioral responses to reflect the educational needs of the environment they serve. By communicating more effectively, principals improve their ability to get things done with and through people. An educational leader uses the full range of communication skills and resources to overcome interferences and to create and deliver messages that guide, direct, motivate, or inspire others to action.

The primary focus of this intrinsic case study was to investigate school principals' effective communication practices that lead to or create a successful school environment. These practices should be used in accredited schools throughout coastal Virginia. To align the study's accountability and trustworthiness, the schools included in the study are in compliance with full accreditation standards. Therefore, the primary research questions are:

RQ₁: How do public school K-12 principals in an accredited institution use communication to frame a successful school environment?

RQ₂: Which communication strategies do K-12 principals in an accredited school identify as best practice?

According to Creswell (2015), "we study research problems so we can assist policymakers when they make decisions, help teachers and school officials solve practical problems, and provide researchers with a deeper understanding of the issue" (p. 59). Understanding a principal's theories on communication and asking critical questions about communication practices from their perspective provides insight for staff that are struggling to improve school environments.

Assumptions

Principals often face obstacles when faced with personal beliefs and the expectations of the school district's mission. In school leadership, unique challenges often demand that

administration and leadership adjust regulatory processes or policies to satisfy the needs of the constituents; however successful leadership teams can create purpose in the organizations by sharing the vision of the future and short-term goals by demonstrating high expectations (Leithwood, 2006). Principals are likely to follow school policy explicitly, but certain instances may require them to make personal decisions, behavioral inferences, and adjusted personal ideologies while adhering to district policies during times of mitigating circumstances. According to Burns (1979), “most leaders combine both ideological and charismatic qualities, and great leaders combine them creatively” (p. 251). In an educational organization, communication can be the foundation of the learning environment, and the principal is looked upon to lead their school to accomplish the vision and mission of the district.

Communication involves what is being said or how humans draw upon conclusions from personal experiences (Gilbert, 2013). Principals’ communication style could affect the overall motivation of their constituents, cause staff to have a respectful ethic, and influence the work environment. These outcomes may be pivotal elements that may influence academic progression and the culture of the environment. According to Harvard Business School Press (2004), “communicating face-to-face conveys rich information about these emotional aspects of human interaction. Skilled face-to-face leaders achieve astonishing outcomes that benefit themselves and their companies” (p. 3). Leaders who do not possess clear, concise, and correct information, and do not carefully deliver such information, can have a detrimental impact on the organization and its stakeholders as a whole. This study sought to expose the barriers, environmental factors, presentation of information, and challenges principals face as well as

uncover active, vital behaviors used to communicate proficiently and effectively in an educational organization.

Conceptual Framework

Conceptual frameworks have three vital connecting components: topical research, personal interest, and theoretical framework (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). This intrinsic research investigation provides vital information to educators and those who lead in educational organizations. This researcher's professional background in education for over 18 years as a teacher and a supportive staff member is the catalyst for exploring the questions that guided this study. As an educator in coastal Virginia, the researcher has an interest in gaining knowledge about principals' relational practices on communication in successful school environments. The conceptual framework sets the stage for the researcher that drives the investigation represented in the context of the study. Understanding which technical factors contribute to the communication practices principals use in the organizations they lead will benefit those who are in education or want to pursue leadership in an educational organization.

Implementing an organizational structure is imperative when communicating protocol for constituents, positive feedback and affirmation creates a strong school culture. Veisoh (2014) stated that, "organizational culture is affected by factors such as hopeful influence, inspirational motivation, and personal observations" (p. 113). Having a conceptual framework as an educator helps the researcher understand the vision and mission of an institution's structural stability. As stated by Bolman and Deal (2013), "like an animal's skeleton or a building's framework, both structural forms enhance and constrain what an organization can accomplish" (p. 47). Prior educational research has focused on developing practices on communication skills for effective leadership in a school improvement.

Without communicating clear goals or objectives, it is impossible to measure the efficiency and effectiveness of an educational organization. Schools' continuous growth and advancement are required to incorporate main potentials for generating and sharing the leadership opportunities that give the aptitude for attainment (Leithwood, 2006). Brown (2006) identified five things organizational groups need to be effective: strong self-management, positive group process, financial backing, effective communication, and trust among its members. Studies showed that companies which lack good communication are less successful than their competition, as the less effective working environment causes time inefficiencies (Society for Human Resource Management, 2008).

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks are used to help formulate theories that are used to interpret or explain phenomena in a research study. Theories can provide an innate understanding of how a leader works or reacts within an organizational setting. As stated by Anfara and Mertz (2015), "to understand a theory is to travel into someone else's mind too and become able to perceive reality as that person does" (p. 2). There are several overarching theories involved with communicating effectively in an organizational setting; having interpersonal communication practices, private, and group communication tactics can facilitate productive relationships with constituents. Alfred Bandura's (1977) social learning theory suggested that people learn within a social context and that learning is facilitated through concepts such as modeling suggested behaviors.

Principals can support their school's success by ensuring their constituents have their basic needs met and by providing a supportive educational environment. Educational organizations depend on a structure to help facilitate the goals, vision, performance,

development, practices, and mission of the district. According to Hoban (2005), “to attain NCATE accreditation, faculties of education in the US develop a conceptual framework that addresses these six standards and shows how it has been modified over time to maintain their accreditation” (p. 12). As stated by Robbins and Alvy (2003), “support entails problem-solving, reflecting, clarifying, and helping people develop workable solutions” (p. 49). Furthermore, Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and Bass’s Transformational Leadership (1985) theory may be implemented collaboratively as a strategy to help enhance their leadership capabilities while transmitting pertinent information. According to Bass and Riggio (2006), “the leadership inspires followers with challenge and persuasion, providing both meaning and understanding” (p. 5). An organization is reflective of its leader, modeling what and how the school vision should be represented. Progression can be accomplished by using a distributive leadership model and implementing effective communication strategies while delegating tasks

Distributive leadership, or Fullan’s (2004) change model, is a collective and collaborative effort used in an educational organization to help promote improvement. As stated by Fullan (2004), “what is needed is not a few good leaders, but large numbers to make the extraordinary efforts required” (p. 7). While guiding as a principal, using a distributed leadership model could be an essential component in transformational leadership. According to Hilliard and Jackson (2011), “the distributed leadership model helps to increase the skills, knowledge, and expectations of the school. The distributive leadership model helps to build trust and positive relationships among faculty, school, students, leaders/administrators, and staff” (p. 3). Incorporating a distributive leadership model in an organization allows the leader to engage more in activities with parents, students, and within the community, which can create positive morale in the educational environment. As stated in Crowther, Ferguson, and

Hann (2009), “staff morale has improved greatly; community perceptions of the school have become far more positive; students’ attitudes towards school and engagement with student activities have also shown marked improvement” (p. 9). Creating positive morale among the staff may influence the students in the environment. Leaders who don’t treat others well won’t have any followers (Fullan, 2004). An environment that reflects good morale can help change the attitude of the organization’s constituents. Principals can communicate the need for positive morale and creating an environment that can have a remarkable trickledown effect on the culture of the administrators, teachers, staff, students and those in the community.

Significance of the Study

The study has significance because it explores the concept of the communication practices of principals and how communication can affect a school environment. Ertel and Solomon (2014) touch on the importance of building a strategic conversation when communicating with staff in leadership. According to Ertel and Solomon (2014), “when creating any frame for strategic conversation, you need to keep one eye on the content and one eye on the perspectives of your participants” (pp. 82-83). Discerning the complex ways that principals communicate while managing, supporting staff/students, cultivating learning environments, correlating community partnerships and bringing fundamental change in their school as a whole may be instrumental for replicating school success. Communication relates to the transmission and action for those with the ability to communicate and cooperate (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). Facilitating open communication with constituents in an educational organization may lead to new ideas and willing, cooperative involvement or participation by them.

Rationale for the Study

Learning about effective communication practices used by principals will be imperative to future institutional change. Leaders are visionaries for change; they initiate goals and guide followers in an organization. Through communication, employees can make sense of their organization and get to know it better (Moyer, 2011). The Fullan Change Model (1991) reflects four phases of the change process that could be a leadership model: initiation, implementation, continuation, and outcome. Since communication is the transference of information, in leadership it is essential to know how and what effects communication can have on the change process. According to Fullan (2004), “true leaders commit themselves to continue generating and increasing knowledge inside and outside of an organization” (p. 4). Leading an educational organization takes commitment to the institution, constituents, and the community surrounding the organization.

Communication processes vary with each leader in an organization. Shifts in an organization require the leader to adapt their communication strategies to meet the current needs of the environment. According to Hackman and Johnson (2013), “human leadership is not predetermined as in the animal world; rather, it varies from situation to situation and from individual to individual” (p. 6). Examining communication tactics or forms used in an educational institution may give future knowledge and insight to leaders of failing schools. As stated by Borg and Gall (1989), “The underlying purpose of educational research is the acquisition of new knowledge” (p. 16). There are national and state board expectations that require school district leaders to learn and keep up with educational trends to help ensure that all students achieve academically to the best of their ability. Exceptional leadership may prove to greatly influence their institution's successes, learning what communication practices used may

be helpful to future organizational changes. Creswell (2015) suggested, “a central phenomenon is a key concept, idea, or process studied in qualitative research” (p. 16). Reoccurring ideas or standard practices in communication are described as an extraordinary experience within the school district.

Definitions of Terms

Academic Success: Academic success is defined as the achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills, competencies, persistence, attainment of educational, and outcomes (York, Gibson & Rankin, 2015).

Accreditation: This refers to a voluntary, critical review process consisting of self-study, peer-review evaluation, accountability, and recognition that an accrediting agency grants to an educational institution or program that meets the agency's standards and requirements (CHEA, 2006).

Communication: Communication is the exchange or transference of information or the sharing of ideas in a work environment (Gilbert, 2013)

Educational Mission: Educational mission is a written declaration of an organization's core purpose and focuses that remains typically unchanged over time (Marion & Gonzales, 2014).

Empathy: Feeling and thinking with another person and entering the other person’s frame of reference (Stewart, 2009).

Leadership Practices: Leadership practices must set action and must have a moral purpose to engage others in the development of actions (Fullan, 2002).

Leadership Styles: Leadership behaviors categorized by style; authoritative, transactional, transformative, democratic, autocratic, and collaborative (Bass & Avolio, 1997).

Organizational Vision: Organizational vision provides guidance and inspiration for achievement in an organization (Marion & Gonzales, 2014).

Phenomenon: A phenomenon is a remarkable or significant event that happens at any given place or time (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Rationale: In this study, the rationale is the fundamental reason or reasons serving to account for changes implemented in education (Cohen, 1977).

Stakeholders: Stakeholders in this study are administrators, teachers, staff members, students, parents, families, community members, local business leaders, and elected officials such as the school board constituents (Marion & Gonzales, 2014).

Strategic Leadership: Strategic leadership manages, motivates and persuades staff to share that same vision, and can be an essential tool for implementing change (Burns, 1978).

School Reform: School reform is a change that is focused on research-based solutions to improve student achievement and school success (Elmore, 2004).

Transformational Leadership: Transformational leadership is a leadership style that primarily focuses on stimulating and inspiring people by valuing them and satisfying their needs, so they are motivated to change, to improve themselves, and to be led (Northouse, 2001).

Conclusion

An examination of school principals' effective communication practices could be the basis for future educational leadership models or professional development, as it is important to understand how principals keep their high achieving schools not only productive, but continuing to make progress. To improve the educational institution overall, principals need to display strategies to effectively communicate the alignment of the vision, and mission of the organization. The ability of a principal to influence their followers, create a vision, and

effectively communicate the nuances of the vision for their organization can make a positive difference in a school setting. The institutional premise in leadership influences how individuals see, understand, and value organizational reality (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). In support of the vision and mission of the school district, it is vital that principals communicate what is expected of the constituents. Such leadership involves modeling and enacting policy or procedures that go beyond administrative tasks, but also communicates the importance of educational programming and restructuring processes, which may lead to positive academic outcomes.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication is an essential component for creating and maintaining connected relationships with people. According to Hackman and Johnson (2013), “followers, like leaders, are guided by schemas. In fact, the impact of a leader’s style rests on how subordinates interpret his/her actions” (p. 63). The purpose of this literature review was to examine literature applicable to communication practices school principals use and to learn how they may influence or affect their school’s environment. A communicative leader uses language and communication to motivate different actions (Eriksen, 2001). A comprehensive gathering of relevant resources on communication, organizational leadership, and a principal’s role in the school environment are implemented in this literature review. A summation of scholarly books, articles, and journals has shown the patterns attributed to the communication practices among principals in their educational organizations.

This review explored key communication tactics and features of leadership approach adopted by school principals and review studies on various theories and models of leadership such as: functional, transformative, participative, supportive, directive, situational or achievement-orientated themes. As mentioned by Hackman and Johnson (2013), “one way to look at the unique characteristics of leadership is to look at how others have defined the term” (p. 10). Communication is the foundation of any leadership and as a principal; communication practices can transform environmental outcomes. Whitiker (2010) contends that cultural change involves the choices leaders make in an organization and when the culture has changed the spirit of the group changes.

This in-depth review provided insight on the impact of communication practices with environmental culture, employee productivity, and student academic success. The principal who talks but does not listen doesn't obtain information. Those who revel in a downward flow of information limit the upward flow of knowledge in their organization (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). The objectives of this literature review is defined not only the communication strategies of highly effective principals but their impact of leadership on the operation of the school and even on possible transformations with their school's success. Hackman and Johnson (2009) suggest that the communication process includes the act of shared understanding and interpretation at the organization being led. Since the school environment can be affected by leadership, investigating how the leader communicates organizational goals is essential.

Research Questions

Effective communication practices of the school leader can help promote professional growth, school culture, staff morale, and overall community support. Conveying clear, positive communication with a focus on students, teaching, and learning can build a positive academic environment. Leaders should strive to use effective communication approaches to convey their purposes and goals to all stakeholders. To address the role of principals' communication, the following questions guided this study:

RQ₁: How do public school K-12 principals in an accredited institution use communication to frame a successful school environment?

RQ₂: Which communication strategies do K-12 principals in an accredited school identify as best practice?

Challenges and Changes in Education

Educational leaders continue to experience many challenges and obstacles as they ensure their schools thrive, academically while accomplishing their performance measures. One form of measurement for school success is that of accreditation. Accreditation in the United States is a formal quality assurance system involving an approval from an external group ensuring adherence to certain standards of practice for student's success (Zinskie & Rea, 2016).

The *Every Student Succeeds Act* of 2015 put in place accountability measures that addressed achievement gaps. As a result, educational leaders were faced with the challenge of ensuring that every student, regardless of language or background, not only passed classroom-based assessments, but met the standards on state assessment tests that are administered to determine funding and district sustainability. Social expectations, laws, technological sophistication, fiscal realities, and competition all shape the organizational structure of schools (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). Principals have the capacity to influence how their students are being educated by contributing to their growth through their communication practices.

In the United States of America, schools are adopting new approaches for teaching and learning curriculums to keep up with societal technology demands (Southern Regional Education Board, 2007). School districts across the country are slowly breaking away from traditional models of education which bring on new leadership challenges. Educational leaders may be influential in classroom-based instruction which sets the tone of the culture while fostering high expectations of the constituents.

Effective communication includes both written and oral skills and the use of technology to convey ideas, evidence, images, and emotions. Despite the evidence on the importance of

communication by formal leaders, the use of evidence-based practices to assess communication skills is remarkably low (Kiuahara, Graham, & Hawken, 2009).

Technology trends, new teaching innovations, and different learning environments including online learning systems compel principals to be flexible within their leadership roles when communicating. The principal must be able to communicate effectively to deliver quick decisions based on the focus of the school district's vision. According to Spillane (2012), "accounts of leadership often dwell exclusively on the structures and roles that schools should put in place and the leadership functions that need attention" (p. 28). Improving or affecting school-based outcomes may be difficult for some principals depending on the community in which they serve. Different communities have different dynamics and their constituents have different educational goals or values. Leaders should anticipate difficulties that may occur when communicating pending organizational changes. Northouse (2016) explained that to get followers to achieve goals the leaders must align specific behaviors that are best suited to the follower's expectations for success. Leaders must shape the character of the organizing and sensitizing it to ways of thinking and responding so that so that increased reliability in the execution of policy achieved Marion & Gonzales, 2014).

Staying abreast of administrative changes, whether negative or positive, and educating employees on the new changes is essential for educational improvement. Bolman and Deal (2013) suggested, "information is necessary but not essential to engage employees fully. The work itself needs to offer opportunities for autonomy, influence, and intrinsic rewards" (p. 148). In leadership studies, researchers found that interactions with followers, in particular in the context of teaching and learning, must work towards supporting improvement (Neumerski, 2012). Neumerski (2012) felt that principals help shape the culture of the school and they can

reinforce positive norms, core values, and future outcomes with the various communication practices they use.

Effective Leadership Practices

Principals who are deemed effective engage in regular conversations with their constituents concerning decision making, educational leaders have the responsibility of academic goals, school vision, and the overall needs of the school. Principals who effectively decentralize decision making learn how to deal with school district changes on a regular basis and have distributed responsibility to head off problems before they occur (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). Educational leaders work to create resources and learning tools to stimulate students' performance so they can reach learning objectives. Motivation is a driving force for many individuals; thus, when individuals ground personal fulfillment in goal realization, their pursuit becomes resolute and they work diligently to achieve their objectives (Bandura, 1977). The school principal may be at the forefront for shaping daily progress.

Principals who participate in opportunities to communicate the importance of school safety, appropriate curriculums and accommodations for all students are actively shaping their environment. Heath and Heath (2017) stated, "Once you realize how important moments can be, it is easy to spot opportunities to shape them" (p. 253). Principals are responsible for creating the agenda for daily progress to ensure the day-to-day operations of the school they lead are effective. Requirements for school leaders to implement departmental changes for student achievement data rests upon the principals' leadership decisions. Leithwood (2004) explained that leadership has as much influence on student achievement as does classroom instruction. Quality principal results in quality school performance. Principals who are not prepared don't lead schools anywhere, obstructing their improvement (SREB, 2007, p. 10). Using effective

communication practices that clearly state goals or the interpretation of the expectations for students and staff allows principals to be more efficient. Such a leadership approach may prove to be a trend that can lead to a productive environment for all its constituents.

Types of Leadership Styles and Characteristics

Leading a team of individuals from current circumstances to obtaining notable progress may take a deeper understanding of how organizational messages are communicated or received. Principals may interchange several characteristics or styles to accomplish their leadership role to fulfill the needs of their followers. A leader who gives into the wants and the needs of the followers allows them to define those wants and needs, which changes the continuing interplay of leadership (Burns, 1978, p. 69). As a hierarchal leader, principals react differently from school to school due to institutional needs or changes caused by administration. According to Fullan (2004), “good leaders foster good leadership at other levels. Leadership at other levels produces a steady stream of future leaders for the whole system” (p. 8). Therefore, communicating and modeling effective communication practices may be beneficial to all constituents and stakeholders affiliated with the organization.

Key Characteristics of Leadership Styles

There are several characteristics associated with leadership in an organizational setting, many common traits interchange and fluctuate with each environment. Individual principals can affect the leadership process through their traits, role, skills, experience, and style (Hoy & Miskel, 2007; Northouse, 2007; Yukl, 2002). Principals can integrate their leadership style with organizational and personal interests to reach the mission of the institution they lead. According to Kouzes and Posner (2007) “leadership is not about personality, but rather about behavior”

(p. 15). Specific leadership behaviors, styles and characteristics can determine the qualities of an organizational climate. The way a leader communicates and behaves needs to reflect congruency. Carl Rogers indicated that congruency needs to be between words, to demonstrate understanding and action (Craig, 1999). Social learning theorists assert that there are eight key leadership characteristics and styles a leader may use while leading an educational organization that can affect communication practices:

1. *Autocratic Leadership*: Leaders who typically make choices based on their ideas and judgments and rarely accept advice from followers.
2. *Democratic Leadership*: This is where everyone is given the opportunity to participate, ideas are exchanged freely, and discussion is encouraged.
3. *Strategic Leadership Style*: This style is used to motivate workers to take the initiative to improve their productivity in the company.
4. *Transformational Leadership*: This is where the leader works with employees to identify the needed change, creating a vision to guide the change through inspiration.
5. *Team Leadership*: Incorporating a leader or a designated team member with a theoretical road map to help diagnose problems in the organization.
6. *Cross-Cultural Leadership*: This is where a leader develops an environment conducive to adjusting to different environments quickly and work with partners and employees of other cultures.
7. *Facilitative Leadership*: A facilitative leadership style makes it easier for employee group members to get things done in an organization.
8. *Laissez-faire Leadership*: A Laissez-faire leader uses a relaxed approach and does not micromanage staff in an organization.

9. *Participative Leadership*: Participative leadership involves the entire team. This is a leadership style in which the leader works closely with team members, focusing on building relationships and rapport.

Principals' behaviors are influential; they demonstrate behaviors that vary in leadership styles while leading an educational organization. Lord and Maher (1991) stated that, "influence associated with leadership depends on a person's behavior being recognized as leadership by others who thereby cast themselves into the role of followers" (p. 513). When leading, a principal's communication practices and style of leadership may be impactful on the attitudes or perspectives of teachers, students, parents and those in the community. This study provides a theoretical framework of the tenets of communication practices of principals and shows the connected relationship between the sender, communicator, receiver, and feedback of constituents.

Distributed Leadership Model

A distributed leadership model serves as one practice principals can use to explain how responsibilities are divided and distributed among instructors or staff members in an organizational setting. In educational organizations, principals who use a distributed leadership model can achieve desired outcomes sooner by pooling their resources while collaborating with their followers. According to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (2003), "regardless of how much formal power any given role has in a school community, all participants remain dependent on others to achieve desired outcomes and feel empowered by their efforts" (p. 41). Collaborating with the people being led could prove to be a highly effective strategy used by school principals as part of their leadership role. According to Bolman and Deal (2013), "workers with enriched jobs often develop higher

opinions of themselves. They may demand sometimes more increased benefits and other times career opportunities or training for new tasks” (p. 153). Implementing a positive communication approach is an integral part of the planning process, which may lead to effective outcomes and positive relationships among the staff. As stated by Hilliard and Jackson (2011), “the distributed leadership model helps to increase the skills, knowledge, and expectations of the school. The distributive leadership model helps to build trust and positive relationships among faculty, school, students, leaders/administrators, and staff” (p. 3). Creating a clear path for followers is essential quality principals need and communicating the goals of the organization effectively is necessary for successful student and staff outcomes.

Connection to Organizational Leadership Framework

Educational research is the process of gathering specified academic information that can lead to the answering of a query or problematic issue. In an organization, a leader uses several types of theoretical structures to help with processes like decision making. According to Hackman and Johnson (2013), “followers, like leaders, are guided by schemas. In fact, the impact of a leader’s style rests on how subordinates interpret his/her actions” (p. 63). Determining the needs of the school may be considered the starting point for a principal follow. Understanding the connection to a leader’s organizational framework and how they communicate work tasks could help researchers find connectedness to culture and a positive educational environment. As stated by Strozzi-Heckler (2007), “leaders create a vision and then mobilize and organize others (or themselves) towards an observable goal. We can see the results of their actions. But action is not necessarily movement” (p. 97). Creating small achievable goals as a leader in an organization allows followers to see the vision desired.

By incorporating organizational frameworks, a leader can articulate to their staff the supported need to advance and focus on improving teaching and learning. As stated by Hackman and Johnson (2013), “leading towards a common goal is based on a strong display of authority, the implementation of systems, controls and procedures is seen as a vehicle promoting success” (p. 69). Inherently, a principal’s interactive approach to leadership is imperative for cultivating high performing schools, attracting and retaining high-quality teachers, and building community support. According to Marion and Gonzales (2014), a "critical theorist would argue, for instance, that strategic planning controls organizational behavior by, among other things, controlling the language by which organizational participants define their activities” (p. 294).

Using several styles of leadership and promoting alternative overviews that could be supportive for all students may help create an environment of motivation. Principals who frequently use tools such as formative assessments and yearly performance rubrics, and establish SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely) to help set specific timelines for school improvement and establish attainable academic goals for its participants. According to Marzano, Waters & McNulty (2005), “The school leader demonstrates the role of the Change Agent when he says to faculty; perhaps we are becoming too comfortable with ourselves. What could we be doing that we are not?” (p. 45). Leading in an organization means implementing change, and to be effective, a leader must adequately communicate the vision must to their followers.

Methods of Research in Education

The study of principals’ communication practices could provide vital information to learn in connection with organizational change and school success. Lack of understanding of change implementation techniques and the inability to modify one’s management style or organizational

functions are cited as barriers to success (Bossidy & Charan, 2002; Gilley, 2005). Studying the interactions and principals and how they communicate within their school environment may prove to identify innovative leadership approaches for educational institutions. A meta-analysis of 70 empirical studies done by Robinson et al. (2008) at Stanford, stated,

A close reading of the instruments suggest that strong instructional leaders spend their time engaging in behaviors relating to supervising, coordinating, and evaluating classroom instruction; building a learning climate by, for example, facilitating professional development opportunities; and framing and communicating school goals.

(p. 24)

Research on school leadership along with communication practices may be necessary to understand a school leader's role better.

A Cranfield University study (2003) was conducted on the correlation between leadership style and the communication practice of leaders. The focus was communicating a strong basis for decision making or setting priorities for its constituents; using mixed methods in research can help accomplish those goals with an educational study. Many factors impact leadership communication and the Cranfield research provided evidence that culture is important (Hackman & Johnson, 2013). As stated by Simmons (2010), “in response for more demand for effective leadership the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) was formed, six standards were developed by the ISLLC addressing school leader’s knowledge, performance and disposition” (p. 29). Communication can be an effective tool for motivating employees involved in change (Luecke, 2003). Robertson and Tantee (2007) evaluated district data on school improvement, students and staffs, as well as data input on climate surveys. These data have been used to measure present environment challenges and probable improvement strategies.

Questionnaires from the Excellent Principal Inventory and the Purdue Teacher Opinionnaire found that a leader clearly impacts morale and behavior many areas (Robertson & Tantee 2007, p. 22). Educational research informs school improvement by documenting the needs of the staff who work in the environment.

Summary of Literature Findings

Several studies found in this literature review display the connectedness commonly found with educational leaders and may show a pattern of communication practices associated with progressive school environments. According to Hanushek and Rivkin (2012), “an egalitarian principal might place more disruptive children with a higher-quality teacher, whereas a principal that desires to please senior staff might give more experienced teachers the more compliant intellectually engaged children” (p. 10). There is evidence that student outcomes are affected by interventions, evaluation systems, principal preparation, professional learning, school autonomy, and school reform (Wallace Foundation, 2013).

Successful school environments may be determined by the communication and collaborative practices displayed by the school principal and their constituents. A study by Crowther, Ferguson, and Hann (2009) discussed how leaders could enhance teachers as leaders by using strategies that demonstrate teacher and administration collaboration. As stated in Crowther, Ferguson, and Hann (2009), “staff morale has improved greatly; community perceptions of the school have become far more positive; students’ attitudes towards school and engagement with student activities have also shown marked improvement” (p. 9). Teams thrive with open communications, shared leadership, clearly defined roles and work assignments, valued diversity of styles, and a sense of informality (Parker, 1990). Knapp and Feldman (2012) found that the most successful leaders internalized external expectations, promoted more

responsible practices within the school, led through data, and modeled what it meant to learn to lead in a fully accountable way (Knapp & Feldman, 2012). Another aspect that contributes to a successful school environment may be how principals communicate with the parents and the community they serve. Interviewing and studying how principals regard parent involvement may be an important research component when examining factors that contribute to a successful school environment.

A common trait among some educational leaders is the understanding that results take time; highly communicative leaders who want to transform their environment need time to see if any changes take place. According to Sparks and Hirsch (2005), “communication can be categorized as a trait that circumvents all leadership processes. The inability to communicate can derail the educational leader’s ability in all areas” (p. 40). Formative studies that encompassed more than just one viewpoint demographically may prove to display what factors could help drive a leader's educational organization to succeed. The time given for evidence of turnaround to take place could also be a significant factor in evaluating the success or failure of the environment to support achievement.

The literature suggests that time affects principals' strategic effectiveness in two ways. First, a principal could make the most dramatic increases in their communication effectiveness in the first one to two years of being a principal. Adding in a positive leadership communication can improve the school culture tremendously. The second is possibly showing school-based outcomes may have a direct correlation to principal leadership. In the last 15 years leaders have applied equity audits across a range of school-based outcomes such as student placement, academic achievement, and discipline (Green, 2016, p. 7). Educational leaders want to transform

the work environment and bring about change, and armed with effective strategies, they may make a difference in the progression of positive change.

Gap in Research

Communication problems between leaders and employees occur at all levels of an organization. In an educational organization, clarity on policy, procedure, or daily routines can ultimately affect the learning environment, which could result in possible achievement decline. Principals' responsibilities require prompt communication exchanges to enact district mission goals that address any achievement gaps. Communicating effectively and efficiently to constituents can ultimately affect school funding or grant allocation needed for academic programming. Communication is a means to improve commitment and to stimulate employees to achieve organizational goals (Tsai, Chuang & Hsieh, 2009). In their study, Tsai et al. (2009) found that employees do not always realize the importance of communication to organizational goals or know how to establish and maintain healthy communication systems (Tsai et al. 2009). Tsai et al. (2009) research offers insight to current constituents and stakeholders in educational organizations which could help them reach their full potential.

School leaders can use the information found in this study on the communication practices of principals to inform new organizational ideas, present new information on leadership inferences or introduce leaders to ways to communicate the school district's future goals. According to Foster (1986), "what we do depends on how we see, and how we see depends on what we have done" (p. 12). Educational leadership is influential on the environment and student achievement respectively. A common goal for school district leaders is to find methods for closing the achievement gap for students in their educational organization. There is a direct correlation between the quality of education offered to and obtained by each student enrolled in

any school across this nation and the continued success of this country (Dillon, 2009). There are many organizations that lack clearly defined communication from leaders and the overall performance or lack of performance can be tied back to the principals' leadership practices. Learning from other leaders about how communication activated throughout their work environment can change the trajectory of how an organization operates as a whole. Schools that narrow the achievement gap have strong leadership that is essential to the success of any school, especially those serving disadvantaged students (Viadero & Johnston, 2000).

Summary

A review of the literature demonstrated that effective communication practices of principals might take several years to fully impact a school's performance, particularly regarding putting in place a staff whose vision is aligned with the principal's and to have fully implemented policies/practices to improve student achievement. Data collection on performance and assessments to gauge progress is a systematic process, does not come quickly and can be dependent on the individual's interpersonal style or communication delivery. Current trends in education show that the assessment year has less to do with scores and more to do with institutionalizing the changes the principal have made that will improve student achievement. Logistically, a turnaround strategy would identify highly effective principals and provide the proper incentives/support for them to implement improvements over several years.

In educational research findings are not always an absolute. When reviewing the literature in educational research, factors such as environment, personal belief, communication style, school culture and individual leadership practices could collectively affect the outcome. According to Creswell (2015), "despite the importance of research, we need to realistically evaluate its contributions, sometimes the results show contradictory or vague findings"

(Creswell, 2015). All of the findings in this research review lean towards the same theory: that a successful school environment is as only as good as its leader. A leadership mechanism that impacts outcomes includes the need for project managers to prioritize continuous improvement enhances the leader's outcomes (Nixon, Harrington & Parker, 2012). A principal who successfully communicates the school's vision and mission or holds their constituents in high regard has a better chance of reaching a thriving school environment.

Understanding that not all results are perfect and conclusive may give a better understanding that the results and findings of this research theme could be strictly situational. Several dynamics could play a role in helping principals lead and create a thriving school environment; communicating practices along with collaborative efforts of all stakeholders may help a leader maximize their chances of reaching the school's goals and mission. Szczesiul (2014) felt it was necessary for leaders trying to establish coherence across a system, "to establish coherence, individuals on leadership teams need to be able to surface, test and sharpen and align their internal pictures of how change works" (Szczesiul, 2014). The act of communicating necessary change may not be a single effort done only by principals, rather everyone connected to the school environment and school culture itself may contribute to progress in the environment in which they serve.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This intrinsic case study investigated communication practices used by K-12 principals in their accredited institutions. This approach is in line with Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) suggestion that, "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 6). An intrinsic case employs exploration of a specified group or persons of interest. This research design was used to explain, interpret, and gain insight into the effective communication practices of school principals in coastal Virginia. Stake (1995) noted that conducting an informal research study is a holistic process and resists reductionism and stated that "the most contemporary qualitative researchers nourish the belief that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered" (p. 99). Examining the constructed experiences of principals may help address the future needs of the organization to facilitate change.

This study employed interviews, personal artifacts collected from the timeframe of five years and reflective field notes, on the practices that principals' use to lead K-12 schools will be employed to investigate the research questions:

RQ₁: How do public school K-12 principals in an accredited institution use communication to frame a successful school environment?

RQ₂: Which communication strategies do K-12 principals in an accredited school identify as best practice?

According to Foster (1986), "understanding the school can be seen as the equivalent of understanding a work of literature: it is multifaceted, complex, and tells a story" (p. 29). The study's participants provided school district artifacts, which were a compilation of school

district leaders' vision and mission statements, strategic plan outlooks, and district core values delineated by the educational organization. These artifacts addressed the five-year strategic framework for teaching and learning for their school division. Stake (2000) delineates three types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. Intrinsic case studies focus on a case that is unusual and is of particular interest to the researcher (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 2000). This intrinsic case study examined the typical traits, style, and common characteristics of effective communication practices of principals and captured their experiences in their educational organizations. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) mentioned, "rather than determining cause and effect, predicting, or describing the distribution of some attribute among a population, we might be interested in uncovering the meaning of phenomena for those involved" (p. 5-6). Employing a qualitative research design allowed the researcher to generate an understanding and connectedness of data found for a deeper understanding of principal's effective communication practices in the educational environment.

Qualitative research is the world of lived experience; it is where belief and action intersect with culture (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). This case study employed school accreditation ratings and school quality profiles provided by the Virginia Department of Education's research on school divisions, to more effectively communicate to parents and the public about the status and achievements of Virginia's public schools. The Virginia Board of Education's regulations for public schools were implemented to ensure effective educational programming is maintained as per the accreditation standards.

Setting

The setting for this study was the primary and secondary accredited schools with A and B ratings as deemed by the Virginia Department of Education throughout the Hampton Roads area

of coastal Virginia, USA. Face-to-face or online interviews were chosen over phone interviews as the interpersonal interaction allows for a naturalistic setting while investigating a social phenomenon (Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1999). As stated by Creswell (2015), “it is important to respect the site where the research takes place” (p. 23). The researcher conducted research in person and via zoom to accommodate the research participants. Interviews were scheduled based on the participants’ availability and the interviews were done on site. Conducting interviews in a familiar setting may have had a direct effect on comfort and openness when interviewing research participants.

Sampling

There are two types of sampling that were used to gather participants for this study and sampling was purposeful. Sites, persons, or documents were chosen deliberately because they have a bearing on category, dimensions, or properties associated with the social phenomena (Emmel, 2013). Second, a random stratified sampling method was used to select the principals of accredited schools identified with A and B ratings as determined by the Virginia Department of Education for authenticity and trustworthiness. Random stratified sampling is the process of identifying a selected population of interest in a way that selects cases that are not based on advanced knowledge to increase credibility of the research. This technique was used by the researcher to divide the principal participants into two different subgroups, A and B rated schools. Then the researcher randomly selected the final sample proportionally from the different strata.

The VDOE uses school quality profile ratings to communicate to the public, while providing detailed information about the quality of learning, instruction, state and federal accountability ratings, grade data, graduation rates, teacher qualifications, and student

achievement within the district. In this research study, schools with C and D ratings were excluded from the research criteria to maximize quality examples as they exemplify the studies communication practices of principals in successful school environments.

For this study, the accredited schools selected were grouped into five schools with A ratings and five schools with B ratings, for a sample of size 10 research sites. This purposeful selection style was used to ensure a more cohesive selection of rich information related to the phenomena of the communication practices of principals within the school district (Creswell, 2018). Participants in this case study were purposely selected to ensure diversity and maximum variation with several demographic characteristics such as race, gender, age, and employment duration with their organization (Patton, 2015). The stakeholders who will benefit from this research study are school board leaders, school administrators, teachers, staff, parents, students, community, and local businesses.

Accountability policies and procedures are often used as measurements to evaluate a leader's functionality in the educational environment. A diverse sampling of principals was used to provide the different perspectives and possible connected communication practices they use in their work environment. Symbolic interactionism lends to understand qualitative inquiry and its importance of interactions of understanding human behavior (Patton, 2015). Organizational diversity lends a wider access to different perspectives leading to more innovative ideas and better decision making (McCuiston & Wooldridge, 2004; Ollapally & Ghatnagar, 2009). Employing a diverse population of participants encompassed a wider perspective for the researcher to compare the communication practices principals used. As stated by Blase and Blase (2001), "there were two major themes that principals exhibit in effective instructional leadership: (a) "talking with teachers to promote reflection and (b) promoting professional growth" (p. 22).

Understanding the common experiences of principals and their effective communication practices could help restructure and provide educational needs and outcomes for more schools throughout the system. According to Marion and Gonzales (2014), “the structural-functionalist, for example, talk about task-related and people-oriented leaders--the latter being leaders who are particularly attuned to the relational needs of their followers” (p. 108).

Communicating effectively while leading in an educational environment can help principals decipher the relational needs of their followers so they can facilitate their work.

Data Collection

Data collection for this research occurred through semi-structured interviews, studying organizational artifacts, and reviewing scholarly publications that have been approved and recognized by experts in the field, will be used to explore the communication practices of principals in coastal, VA. The interview time frame was approximately one to two months. Along with the interviews, the researcher collected data from school district artifacts or information given by the participants on their educational organization’s vision and mission, core values, and future outlook of the district. Field notes were used as well to help reflect principals’ thoughts, activities or provide insight into communication practices used. The field notes were used as an account of participant observation and provide valuable insight into behaviors, interactions, and patterns that emerged through qualitative research (Crabtree & Miller, 1992). In this intrinsic case study, descriptive data from the interview transcripts, notes, and artifacts from the participants were yielded from this research undertaking. Subsequently, all audio recordings of the interview sessions were transcribed then categorized in preparation for coding. To best capture and organize participant experiences, interviews were conducted at the schools where they lead. The participant and researcher first reviewed the informed consent form

(Appendix C). The interview was recorded using the application Dragon Professional Volume 15. When the participants agreed to the terms of the study, the interviews began.

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

A semi-structured interview was used by employing open-ended questions prepared by the researcher allowing room for an open discussion with the interviewee. The semi-structured interviews consisted of 10 questions and lasted no longer than 30-60 minutes (see Appendix A for questions). Hill et al., (2005) recommend developing an interview protocol that consists of 8-10 questions. These questions were developed by the researcher to gain a variety of perspectives from a diverse sampling of principal participants to help gain knowledge and find possible connectedness among the educational leaders. Participants were asked to read and sign a participant consent form for participation this case study before the interview started (see Appendix C). Investigating how principals communicate verbally and non-verbally in their educational organization can provide support for systematic changes or future policy. Gupton (2003) noted that non-verbal communication and listening skills are critical vital characteristics of a principal. Open-ended questions were employed to ensure a wide range of answers and learn more about the respondents' thinking processes. These questions were developed by the researcher to gain a variety of perspectives from a diverse sampling of principal participants to document their knowledge and find common communication practices among the educational leaders. Field notes were written during the interview process which provided a clearer picture of communication strategies principals use within in their respective settings. According to Creswell (2013), "qualitative researchers are interested in how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 6). Following the interview, the participants were offered a copy of the interview transcripts to

review for credibility purposes. Participants were asked if they desired to add any further input and subsequently were thanked by the researcher for their participation.

Pilot Study

A pilot interview was conducted for this research study with a non-study participant principal at a local school in the same school district as the study participants. According to Yin (2016), “pilot studies help to test and refine one or more aspects of a final study—for example, its design, fieldwork procedures, data collection instruments, or analysis plan” (p. 39). This pilot study enabled the researcher to test out the interview format and revise any questions, acceptance of an interview protocol or barriers related to participants’ recruitment.

The use of a pilot study gave the researcher an opportunity to practice procedures for the development of the study and fine tune any procedures that can occur at the time of data collection. Gaining feedback from the pilot study participant allowed the researcher insight into creating a more effective interview experience for the prospective participant. Creswell (2015) mentioned that a qualitative interview occurs when the one who is researching asks several open-ended questions, and then the data is filed for further analysis.

Artifacts

The researcher analyzed artifacts produced and used by the participants to foster their own understanding of the school’s environment. The unit of analysis can vary from an individual to a corporation. Data came largely from documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation and physical artifacts (Yin, 2009). Organizational artifacts given from the participants were used to provide the researcher with information on the vision and mission, core values, and policy and procedure that could affect the principals’ communication with their constituents.

Data Analysis

First, all data and research gathered in the case study were read through thoroughly before uploading into the coding software selected by the researcher. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by the application Dragon Professional Volume 15. Organizational artifacts, notes, and data from the interview were processed by the software package NVivo. The software application NVivo was used by the researcher to store, organize, analyze and categorize the data found in the case study. The data was then organized and prepared for analysis by arranging according to source, then coded anonymously with pseudonyms to replace any identifying participant information. The coding process helped the researcher sort, categorize themes, and synthesize the emergent data extracted from the transcripts.

A code in qualitative inquiry is a word or a short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence capturing, and evocative attribute for a portion of language based or visual data (Saldana, 2009). This process of coding the interviews data began with the extraction of NVivo codes to maintain close meaning themes to the actual transcribed interview feedback. The NVivo program coded the transcripts and the researcher compared the answers of the participants' responses. According to Marion and Gonzales (2014), "One system is a source of feedback for others, and systems work on each other's maps through the feedback exchange of symbolic information" (p. 76). The coding led to development of themes within the research and the information given by the participants demonstrated a commonality of communication practices principals used in their educational environments.

During coding, the researcher grouped reoccurring themes (codes) from the participants' interviews and categorized for analysis. The purpose of creating categories was to provide a means of describing the phenomenon, to increase understanding and to generate knowledge

(Cavanagh, 1997). The reoccurring themed categories coded using NVivo were used to further understanding of the principals' communication practices while leading their school. The resulting coded categories were translated to emergent themes for each analysis. The themes that fit each interview served as findings of the commonalities of each participant's interview. The final coded data processed demonstrated the action of the participants' statements from the research interview (Saldana, 2009). Finally, the emergent themes were identified across all 10 interviews and the analysis was used to confirm findings pertaining to the research questions.

Field Notes

Field notes were taken during the interview to allow the researcher to document any behaviors, environmental inferences, non-verbal communication, or any events that occurred while on the participant's site. Without multiple sources, an invaluable advantage of the case study strategy will have been lost (Yin, 2009). The field notes from this case study were read by the researcher only as evidence of the social experience during the interview process. The more complex the organization and context is, the more important it is to use several methods and ways to understand what is valued as important (MacBeath & McGlynn, 2002).

Member Checking

Determining trustworthiness and validity of findings is an important practice in qualitative research. In research, trustworthiness is important and ensuring credible content from the participants is imperative. In member checking, providing participants with information that ensures their views have been properly captured during the research process (Kellett, 2005). The researcher allowed all participants of the study an opportunity to member check and review the interview transcripts for preciseness and authenticity.

Triangulation of Data

Analysis of the collected qualitative data enabled the researcher to connect phenomena and related information found in this case study to find the commonalities of the principals' communication methods. According to Yin (2003), "the case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation where there will be many more variables of interest than data points; relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion" (pp. 13-14). Triangulating data when using a variety of research evidence may help enable a clearer or more authentic portrait of principals' communication practices.

Employing a variety of information to triangulate is vital in qualitative research, and it can give a more precise perspective on the evidence found. Stake (1995) mentioned, "The more qualitative approach usually means finding good moments to reveal the unique complexity of the case" (p. 63). Educational research may be insightful for future principals' leadership practices and can also strengthen the institution to help foster positive changes for constituents.

As stated by Creswell (2015) "by examining the problem, your research may lead to the identification of new techniques or technologies, the recognition of the value of historical or current practice, or the necessity of changing current teaching practices" (p. 63). The knowledge gained in this study may help determine the characteristic qualities and communication practices principals employ on a daily basis and give insight into the participants displaying similar characteristics. The information found from collected interviews, organizational artifacts, and field notes helped solidify a deeper understanding of this intended case study.

The coding process identified the themes that emerged from the data. Subsequently, the codes found were labeled by the researcher, and then related concepts and patterns began to emerge. The emerging concepts were grouped according to specific codes and category. The

researcher examined the content of the interview data to determine what was learned and what still needed to be discovered or needed elaboration. In reviewing the narrative data collected from the interview, the identified emerging themes were categorized and coded to uncover any patterns. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2015), “an aspect of credibility involves checking on whether your interpretation of the processes and interactions in the setting is valid” (p. 77). The review of data interpreted the occurrence of common themes or practices in each participant's interview and the relationship that exists between them. After triangulating the coded data in the case study, the last phase was to interpret the interview themes that emerged from the research.

Credibility and Validity

To reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation, the researcher employed various procedures, including review and redundancy of the gathered data. For validity during the interview process, the researcher provided limited guidance in the interviews process to encourage the participants to speak freely and to avoid influencing the answers. A pilot-test of the preliminary interview was done beforehand to help confirm the relevance of the interview content, and it alerted the researcher to any revisions needed. The triangulation of data used in this case study helped enhance the credibility and validity of the study, by incorporating a wide range of participants' interviews, organizational artifacts, scholarly literature, and field notes to help solidify the researcher's claims. This procedure, called *triangulation*, is a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2012). The researcher asked the participants to review the researcher's interpretation of that interview data to ensure credibility. Member checking is often used in qualitative research to enhance credibility, and involves requesting input from one's study participants (Padgett, 2008). This process provided participants

with the opportunity to engage with the researcher and add information to the interpreted data several weeks after the interview process and provided additional trustworthiness.

Benefits

There were several benefits, limitations, and delimitations to this study. Since the foundation of educational leadership revolves around interaction with people, research was essential for understanding the effective practices principals use to communicate intended goals and missions of the district in which they serve. According to Charan and Willigan (2017), “given that your skill as a leader lies in being able to extract insights from data, shaping the kinds of information you receive and how it is presented will be tremendously beneficial” (p. 32). Fostering open communication pathways with constituents as a principal creates stronger collaborative teams in efforts to reach academic goals. Teams thrive with open communications, shared leadership, clearly defined roles and work assignments, valued diversity of styles, and a sense of informality (Parker, 1990). Understanding emerging common communication traits may be the key to unlocking opportunities for success at other schools that face similar challenges.

Limitations

This study was limited to one city in coastal Virginia. A wider study scope, for example, of Hampton Roads area, would have provided a different perspective on the topic. The data were derived only from an elite pool of schools that were deemed A and B rated determined through the Virginia Department of Education. The participants’ responses only represent one school district, and no other demographically comparable or other regional district information was used. The small sample of 10 participants included only principals and no other constituents such as other administrators or parents. This study was conducted in accordance with Foster (1986) who noted that, “all theories, all construct, and all practices are open to critical reflection. No one

individual, no one school of thought is privy to the secret of the universe” (p. 13). Additionally, the data collected formed a retrospective look at how each principal carried out the process of their communication practices in his or her school through a small local lens. The research had several time constraints as the researcher had to accommodate 10 principals at various times of the day for the convenience of the participants to maintain the quality of the research process. As stated by Creswell (2015), “both during the process of conducting a study and at its conclusion, you need to be mindful of the quality of the research. The improvement of practice, the quality of policy debates, and the advancement of knowledge all call for high-quality educational research” (p. 282). Subsequently, with qualitative research no one theory or practice is absolute.

Delimitations

The focus of the research only encompassed the views of the principals and did not include any other constituents in this case study; as the primary goal of this research is to only understand the communication practices from the education leader, not the constituents. Marion and Gonzales (2014) elaborated and stated that “goals of the organization are typically formulated by those in leadership roles and are not in any substantive way by workers” (p. 61). The interviews were restricted to face-to-face contact and took place in person and via the web application Zoom, allowing the researcher the opportunity to develop field notes on the social experiences of the environment. The study only considered the point of view of the principal participants, which limited the scope of the research investigation of communication theories and practices experienced throughout the educational environment.

Conclusion

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to provide comprehensive insight into the communication practices principals use to facilitate a successful school environment. School

leadership, school achievement, and other school variables are interrelated (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). Communication is a multidimensional process that involves affirmation, feedback, and confirmation. In leadership, it is essential to effectively communicate the vision and mission of the organization to ensure maximum success. When not successful, the thoughts and ideas that one conveys do not necessarily reflect one's own, which can cause a communications breakdown and creating roadblocks that stand in the way of goals-both personally and professionally (Fowler & Mankelow, 2005). This study's findings can inform a principal's communication skills, which can then be used to assist with organizational goals for geared for student learning and outcomes.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to investigate principals' effective communication practices in successful school environments and gain a deeper understanding about communication influences. Communication in organizations has a broader purpose than simply transmitting information; rather, communication is an interpretative process of coordinating activities, creating understanding, and building acceptance of organizational goals (Heide et al., 2005). This intrinsic case study employed three types of data collection: interviews, personal artifacts, and reflective field notes on the practices principals use to lead K-12 schools that are A and B ranked according to the Virginia Department of Education. The following two questions guided this study:

RQ₁: How do principals use communication to frame a successful school environment?

RQ₂: Which communication strategies do principals identify as best practice?

This chapter provides and describes the findings which include; participant demographics, data analysis processes and emergent themes, and the presentation of artifacts chosen by participants. Merriam (2009) explained that, "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 5). Chapter Five will discuss the implications of the data, recommendations, and next steps researchers should take in the future.

Participant Information

The researcher interviewed a total of 10 principals for this study. Two sample methods were used in this study, purposeful and random stratified. The final sample was

comprised of seven female and three male participants, all who were currently working as principals, and all had worked as a principal for at least a two-year term. Five of the principals worked for A rated schools, and five worked for B rated schools, so the sample was even in terms of rating distribution. However, of the A rated schools, two were elementary schools, two were middle schools and one was a high school. The B rated schools had a slightly different distribution, with two elementary, one middle school and two high schools represented by the participant sample. All participants agreed to meet in person with the researcher for one-to-one interviews or via Zoom web application, and each participant worked with the researcher to select the time and place of the interviews. Table 1 displays the demographics and the principals' and years of leadership with their organization.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Principal	Years of Service	Gender	School Environment	School Ratings	School Size
Mr. Yellow	2	M	High School	B	1801
Mrs. Blue	3	F	Elementary	B	370
Mrs. White	2	F	Middle	A	864
Mrs. Grey	5	F	Middle	A	1225
Mr. Red	10	M	High School	A	2132
Mrs. Green	5	F	Elementary	B	475
Mrs. Purple	4	F	Elementary	A	604
Mr. Orange	17	M	Elementary	A	922
Mrs. Brown	5	F	High School	B	1858
Mrs. Pink	13	F	Middle	B	912

Data Analysis

The researcher canvassed several potential participants within one school district in coastal Virginia. The participants all worked in K-12 schools at various grade levels and were contacted via email and in person using a participant invitation letter (see Appendix D). The participants contacted the researcher via email or telephone in response to their interest in the study. The researcher arranged the most convenient time and place at the direction of the participants. At the time of the interview, each participant was provided with a consent form which they reviewed with the researcher and signed acknowledging their consent to participate in this study. Data was collected through ten semi-structured interviews that were face-to-face via in person or web application Zoom. Interviews were also recorded using Windows PC recorder. Each interview was then transcribed by the researcher. The interview times ranged from 30-60 minutes in length. Merriam (2009) stated that, “the largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time” (p. 90). Each of these research approaches were used to help determine the communication practices used by principals in K-12 settings throughout coastal Virginia.

The information collected from the interviews was then transcribed using Dragon Volume 15, coded using NVivo software, and evaluated for common themes. Each of the transcripts was presented in person or via email to each participant for member checking to ensure accuracy of the research data. Each participant in this case study examined their transcripts and no revisions were suggested. All transcripts were saved on the researcher’s computer securely and will only be made available for IRB and the advisory committee if requested.

Once the interviews were completed, all information discovered was reviewed and scrubbed all personal identifying names from the transcript then participants were given pseudonyms for confidentiality purposes. Colors were used as the participants' pseudonyms to provide confidentiality for the participant only allowing the researcher a way for identifying each participant of the study and the application NVivo was used in the coding process for content analysis. The process of coding involves identifying a word or short phrase that represents descriptive meaning in the narrative in order to capture the essence of the phenomenon (Saldana, 2009). Open coding was used as the researcher read through the data several times from the emergent data. The development of codes emerged from the analyzed interview transcripts as connected meanings that emerged from the data.

After the first round of data review there were 242 codes that emerged from the interviews. The development of codes categorized from the analyzed interview transcripts were used as connected meanings that emerged from the data. The coding process allows the data to be seen in "separate categories, forcing one to look at each detail, whereas synthesis involves piecing these fragments together to reconstruct a holistic and integrated explanation" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 175). Axial coding was used to identify the relationships among the open codes found from the interview responses.

After the emergent codes were analyzed to find the similarities, the researcher grouped them into categories based on their common properties. The researcher then separated the different codes that also emerged and created subthemes from those codes, subsequently linking them to their respective categories. Creswell (2018) explains that the process of coding information helps "narrow data into a few themes" (p. 306). Themes emerged from responses to the guiding questions and to find specific connections between effective communication

practices principals used for a successful school environment in accredited schools throughout coastal Virginia. A description of leadership styles was expressed by each participant of the study.

Table 2

Leadership Styles

Leadership Styles of Participants	Number of Responses
Transformative	√ √ √ √ √
Transactional	√
Authoritative	√ √
Democratic	√
Participative	√

Coding and Emergent Themes

Several cycles of the open coding process were used to help bring out the essence and meaning of the information respondents provided. The process of coding entailed identifying a word or short phrase that designated descriptive meaning in the narrative of an interview (Saldana, 2009). First, the researcher went through the transcripts by hand to identify possible emergent themes. During the first round of open coding, the researcher analyzed the data line by line, looking over every sentence word by word. These themes represented ideas, issues, or areas that summarized several different codes (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Secondly, the researcher used the NVivo application to help extract the participants' responses from the transcripts which provided information about principals' communication practices used in their educational organization.

Third, the statements were organized under each pseudonym name given. Using the coding application NVivo, the development of codes and content analysis from interview transcripts identified several similar emerging themes. Lastly, the final codes were used to show the principals' leadership practices as they relate to communication in their educational organization, then major themes were identified. Table 3 notes the reoccurring common themes and subthemes found throughout the interview data. During interviews participants identified situations where they practiced their communication skills and explained the importance of communication.

Table 3

Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Theme 1: Leadership Style as a Principal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transformative • Transactional • Democratic • Participative • Authoritative 	Subtheme 1: Staff Meeting Strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As needed • Weekly • Monthly • Bi-weekly
Theme 2: How the Communication Style Relates to the Needs of Staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trustworthiness • Identifying needs • Listening skills 	Subtheme 1: Communication and the Needs of Their Constituents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open door policy • Open communication
Theme 3: Communicate the Vision and Mission <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model the vision and mission • Discuss daily activities • Update any district changes • Information on District and school websites 	Subtheme 1: Promoting Motivation Tactics Strengths of Communication Style <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentives • Weekly dress incentives • Words of encouragement • Free food incentives • Small gifts
Theme 4: Recognition of Areas in Need of Improvement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More parent involvement • More active with community 	Subtheme 1: Solution to Areas of Improvement by Participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create more planning time • Recruit more parents to volunteer

Theme 1: Leadership Style as a Principal

Communication in leadership is a constant process where as a principal's communication practices need to be effective and efficient regarding organizational matters, student progress or parental concerns. Each principal may require a different communication strategies and leadership style. Principals must be able to adapt their communication tactics based on the group they are communicating with at the time. Mrs. White noted that she wants to be open-minded when it comes to her leadership style and does not think she stays with a particular leadership style. She feels that she can use transactional tactics from time to time. During state testing, Mrs. White tries to use incentives for the teaching teams whose students are performing well. She makes it known that transactional style is not a long-term solution but it will work when time is of the essence. Mr. Yellow stated "I feel that my leadership skills can be authoritative and transformational at times." Mr. Red noted that, "I want my school environment to feel like a democracy, where everyone has a say so to a certain extent. I want everyone to feel that they have a voice". Mr. Red feels that when the constituents in his environment feel that they contribute to an organization, they feel positive about their experiences. Torres (2008) believed that when effective leadership skills are gained through leadership development programs, positive learning experiences about leadership are the result. Principals should identify the audience and their interests by adjusting their communication practices based on the needs of the organization.

Principals should identify the audience and their interests so they can adjust their communication practices based on the needs of the organization. Mrs. Purple expressed "depending on what goal needs to be met, I have been known to be very transactional." She explained that her staff can be very driven by incentives but can become complacent so there is a

need to pull back at times from a transactional leadership style. Mr. Orange shared “I don’t have a formal style; I believe that because I trust them, they trust me.” He felt that by displaying himself as a trustworthy person, the staff feels more secure in their environment. Mrs. Grey noted “I change my leadership skills depending on my exact situation.” Mrs. Green shared, “I can be very participative as a leader. I like to help out at meetings and workshops alongside my staff.” Mrs. Pink said, “I have always been one to try and be helpful. I like to be as transformative with education that I can be, although at times it can be very hard to do but worth the effort.” The researcher noticed different tactical leadership skills expressed throughout this interview process. The communication practices varied amongst the principals and the incentives they expressed using were tailored to their educational environment.

Subtheme 1: Staff Meeting Strategies. Participants had a wide variety of staff meeting strategies used in their educational organization. Communication is vital for leaders in an organization, having efficiency and effectiveness as a principal can lead to a more positive learning environment. Mrs. Brown shared “I have my meetings whenever it is necessary.” Mr. Orange stated “I don’t have weekly meetings with my employees each week. I do however have departmental meetings with each grade respectively every Friday.” Mrs. Blue expressed “I have meetings once a week which is little bit more formal. I have the weekly meetings because as you can imagine being a principal at a high school there are things that go on.” Additionally, she felt that one has to stay abreast of current events when dealing with a high school environment. Mr. Red shared that “I don’t like to micromanage my staff; we meet every two weeks to give them time to settle into new ideas and departmental changes.” Mr. Yellow also meets every two weeks as he feels that it gives space for new policy implementations. He likes to give the staff room to

respond to any student or curricular issues that may arise. As a result, Mr. Yellow can attend to the needs of the students and staff more efficiently.

Theme 2: Communication and the Needs of Their Constituents

Many leaders suggested that staff meetings are an ideal forum to discuss the goals of the organization, and hearing the needs of the constituents can help them facilitate change for optimal performance. Communicating clear expectations for the teaching staff will promote achievement, as communication is a two-way process that involves having the ability to speak effectively and the skill to listen. According to Ediger (2001), “The principal must work in the direction of helping teachers teach so students achieve at a higher rate” (p. 5). Mr. Orange expressed “I have an open door policy in my school where my staff and students are free to discuss with me confidentially any issues they are facing.” Mrs. Blue feels that creating a safe comfortable environment as a whole provides the opportunity for optimal performance for students and staff. Mrs. Grey shared that “showing empathy for others is my strong suit. I always try to imagine myself in their situation. I am human and I understand things will happen.” Mrs. Green said, “I try to facilitate an environment where everyone feels that they have a voice”. Open communication allows employees to be more engaged and understand the needs of the organization. When employees feel vested in their workplace they produce better outcomes. Mr. Orange said “with communication everything boils down to trust. If you don’t have that as a base then nothing you do for the organization will flourish”. According to Hoy and Tschann-Moran (2003), “Trust relationships involve risk, reliability, vulnerability, and expectation” (p. 20). Communicating the concept of trust can be an important prerequisite when leading in an educational organization.

Subtheme 1: Understanding the Communication Needs of Staff. Principal leadership also has an impact on changing attitudes of teachers who historically did not support a program. Participants described teachers who perceived principal leadership to be appropriate tended to grow in commitment, professional involvement, and willingness to innovate (Hallinger, 2003). Mrs. White shared,

My willingness to listen to the students' issues keeps me busy. My students come on occasion to have lunch with me and feel open to sharing how their day is going. I take pride in my open communication style and I think my staff feels they can be more honest when issues arise within the school environment.

Mr. Orange recalled that he felt that his largest strength is that he is trustworthy. He added "when your staff trusts you then they feel more relaxed to come to you when a crisis happens." Mrs. Grey shared "my strengths in communication is all in the delivery. In my experience, if you talk to people with respect, they will show you the same, most times." Many of the participants discussed having open communication with their staff and students. They discussed how using the practice of using open communication helped create a sense of trust with the administration and a sense of belonging. Porter, Wrench, and Hoskinson (2007) found a supervisor's temperament did affect a subordinate's perception of a supervisor's communicative behavior. Creating a welcoming environment is important for constituents to feel secure and important enough to talk to administrations. Mrs. Brown expressed "my strengths are upholding my own personal morality. I try and have a sympathetic ear and really listen when others are talking." She felt that having a sympathetic ear fosters loyalty and mutual respect throughout the workplace with the outcome of creating a more productive and successful environment.

Theme 3: Communicating the Vision and the Mission

Educational administrators communicate and work with a variety of people involved in the school community to accomplish the vision and goals of the school as outlined with their respective organizations. Behaviors of the leaders are categorized into five topics including: modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encourage the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2009). Mr. Orange expressed “I don’t just talk about the vision and mission I know it and demonstrate it.” Mr. Red said “our school website explains our vision and mission and well as the district’s website. I restate what our schools are about in our PTA meetings and staff workshops.” Mrs. White felt that the vision and mission of the school should be implemented in everyday activities. Each participant shared their process, interpretation, and experiences of how they demonstrate and teach the vision and mission of the organization. Leadership represents the values of the organization, where management emphasizes the implementation of initiatives (Bush, 1998). Mrs. Pink shared “I talk about the district’s mission in meetings and even in morning announcements. Keeping the staff and students fully informed on our goals are a helpful roadmap to achieving success.” Principals are models of the organization at the school level. They lead, review current practices, and guide their constituents towards success in the organization that change the way in which their buildings do business. Social cognitive theory supports the idea that, “people’s shared beliefs in their collective efficacy influence the types of futures they seek to achieve through collective action” (Bandura, 2000, p. 76). The vision and mission of the participants’ school districts in the study is to help each student achieve at their maximum potential and to be a responsible citizen in the community in which they live. To achieve the goal derived by the school district, the principal must be able to communicate the vision and the mission effectively. Mr. Yellow also

felt that communicating the vision and the mission of the school district on a regular basis will help instill the values of the educational organization.

Subtheme 1: Promoting Motivation Tactics Strengthens Communication. Incentives in an organization can be a main links between people and future change. Goals and initiatives can be dependent on having the right incentives in place for positive change. According to Marion and Gonzales (2014), “some researchers have argued that different types of organizational experiences provide different types of incentives for their employees” (p. 38). Mr. Orange shared that “I just love giving out small incentives to my staff to motivate them. I constantly compliment them and let them know just how valuable they are.” A popular incentive found in most of the schools interviewed was relaxing the dress codes on Wednesdays and Fridays. Dress down days are on every Friday district-wide. Each school may allot as an incentive another day of the week where an employees can dress down. Employees can donate five dollars per month to the PTA or another school charity and they will be allowed to wear jeans on that day designated by the individual principal. Mr. Yellow shared “when we have half workdays, I let my staff wear jeans to work and possibly leave early. It’s the little things that go a long way with my staff.” The motivation to leverage a change in teacher collaboration and capacity building is built upon a desire to improve the conditions and outcomes of student learning (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015). Mrs. White likes to do “fun things” for her staff. She said “casual day is something we do in my school for fun; I am the school’s biggest cheerleader! So they have fun in their environment as long as it's professional and tasteful.” Mr. Red expressed “keeping a light-hearted environment makes the days go faster. I try and have relaxed dress days and themed dressed days to help motivate my staff and students.” Mrs. Pink said “I read inspirational quotes to my students and staff during the morning announcements to help

motivate the entire environment.” Each study participant employed several different motivation tactics to help strengthen teams, build camaraderie among the staff, and teach the staff about how to create a quality classroom environment for students.

Theme 4: Recognition of Areas in Need of Improvement

As an educational leader, a school principal’s progressive goal is to ensure the standards of the district being upheld. This requires principals to communicate effectively and balance prioritizing along with all other job responsibilities for the day-to-day functioning of the school. Mr. Orange shared “I know that personally I need to talk and spend more time with my parents. I would like to get out and talk to folks in the community more often.” Many aspects of what is understood and experienced as organizational reality are constructed and reconstructed by the organizational members through their daily actions (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1993; Heide, Clarén, Johansson, & Simonsson, 2005). The actions principals use to communicate with their staff are ever changing. Because an organization’s needs change, actively working together towards a common goal demonstrates a principal’s ability to communicate effectively. Mrs. Pink felt that she needed to go out and be more involved in community activities. She shared “I would like to have more involvement with the surrounding community. If our parents and students see me out in their community, they will see me as more approachable.” Taking an active involvement in community functions builds a strong partnership among constituents and stakeholders that can strengthen the organization as a whole.

Subtheme 1: Proposed Solution to Areas of Improvement by Participants.

Communication is the vehicle that principals use to achieve areas of improvement or desired organizational outcomes. Bass and Avolio (1997) suggest that transformational leaders provide the symbolic and emotional force behind organizational change. Mrs. Blue shared “I am always

open to learning and advocating for school improvement. I try and be open minded to departmental suggestions although I may fall short when it comes to my response timing.” Mrs. Pink discussed how she is planning to attend the next neighborhood watch meetings in her school zone and community functions so she could meet parents and future prospective students. Mr. Yellow explained, “I have been moving around my schedule to fit in more departmental planning time.” Because time is a huge factor limiting many parents’ involvement, Mr. Orange expressed how he wants to use different tactics to get more parental interaction. Mr. Orange shared how he will be at this week’s PTA meeting and personally ask parents to volunteer for SOL tutoring and activities. He spoke about how he will canvass the parents and create some volunteer opportunities. Mr. Orange felt that parental presence can be helpful to students because they are servicing the community and helping the students achieve their goals. “Schools depend on leadership throughout the organization to shape productive futures through a process of self-renewal (Senge et al., 2000). Parents can be a huge asset to the school environment and fostering collaborative efforts can be beneficial to all that are involved.

Artifacts Presented from Participants

The artifacts used in this research added commonly found elements to the communication practices principals use in a K-12 environment. The researcher requested that participants bring school artifacts to the interviews that demonstrate other communication forms to provide additional information that could contribute to the case study. In research, artifacts can complement primary data sources and provide an insight with a tangible aspect to the researcher’s evidence. In general, artifacts in research can provide historical, demographic, and organizational information about the constituents or institution.

Participants in this study shared staff memos, newsletters, district websites information, and strategic outlooks with the researcher during the course of the interviews. Participants pointed out the individual leadership styles and the practices they use to communicate with their parents, students, and staff respectively. Mr. Yellow shared “I send out every week, a newsletter to staff as well as the students and parents via email, this way everyone is on the same page”. How frequent information is communicated can be the difference between progression and regression. Hackman and Johnson (1994) indicate “leadership competence is the product of communication competence” (p. 50). Mrs. Pink directed the researcher to their district’s website, which displayed the school’s academic goals and outlook over the next five years. Mrs. Grey explained, “every month our webmaster changes our individual school website to communicate updates on school events and inclement weather changes and such”. Consistently updating important district information helped maintain the needs of the school where they serve. Further, Mr. Red provided the researcher with a copy of a staff memo as an example of what they use to communicate changes or updated school policies the district has made. Mrs. Blue shared a flyer her school distributes about upcoming activities and clubs. Communicating to constituents the vision and mission of the district takes more than physical communication, it takes a plethora of methods to keep everyone with one accord. The more channels of communication a principal uses, the better the chance constituents and stakeholders in the educational organization understand the vision and the mission.

Table 4

Artifacts

Artifacts Examples	Communication Practices
➤ Staff Memos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative memos sent out weekly • Staff memos sent out daily via email • District memos sent out monthly via emailed to all staff
➤ School Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contains parent portal • Student activities • School hours • School schedules • Vision and Mission • Staff contacts • Flyers
➤ School Newsletter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student newsletter weekly and in morning announcements • Parents newsletter monthly via email
➤ District Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website contains district policies • Parent information • Vision and Mission • Student services • Employee/employment information • Strategic outlook

Summary

This chapter provided insight on the communication practices of principals in K-12 settings seeking to develop successful school environments in coastal Virginia. Each of the ten participants shared their experiences on how they communicate in their educational organization. The principals who participated talked very highly of their staff and students. They communicated, believed, and demonstrated the vision and mission of their organization, which in turn trickles down to the staff, students, and the community. Spillane, Hallett and Diamond (2003) defined instructional leadership as “an influential relationship that motivates, enables, and supports teachers’ efforts to learn about and change their instructional practices” (p. 104). The

environments of each principal's school who participated in the study were friendly, warm and inviting. Although each participant has served in their school environments for a range of years, they all were very pleased with their educational organization and showed pride to be able to serve in their community as a leader.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The intrinsic case study examined communication practices of principals in successful school environments in coastal Virginia with A and B ratings as determined by the Virginia Department of Education. This study mapped a variety of communication strategies that principals employed as leaders in their educational organizations on a daily basis. A communicative leadership approach uses language and communication to motivate different actions (Eriksen, 2001). Communication becomes a way to understand and conduct leadership and actions within the organization. Research shows that communication of the leader and environmental culture are closely connected. Communication becomes the medium where the culture becomes visible (Clegg, Kornberger, & Pitsis, 2004). Educational institution structures are prerequisite for communication processes in schools. Since structure and culture are integral parts of the organization, the leader's practices can affect the culture of the environment.

Depending on how a principal and their constituents interpret their communication strategies, its processes can play a role the organizational outcomes. According to the Southern Regional Education Board (2007), "Quality principals result in quality schools that produce higher student performance. And the opposite is also true: Poorly prepared principals lead schools nowhere and once certified they remain in the system for many years, obstructing school improvement" (p. 10). Communication encompasses several components and tenets in order for proper transmission to have taken place. Figure one displays the process of communication in an educational organization by a principal in leadership.

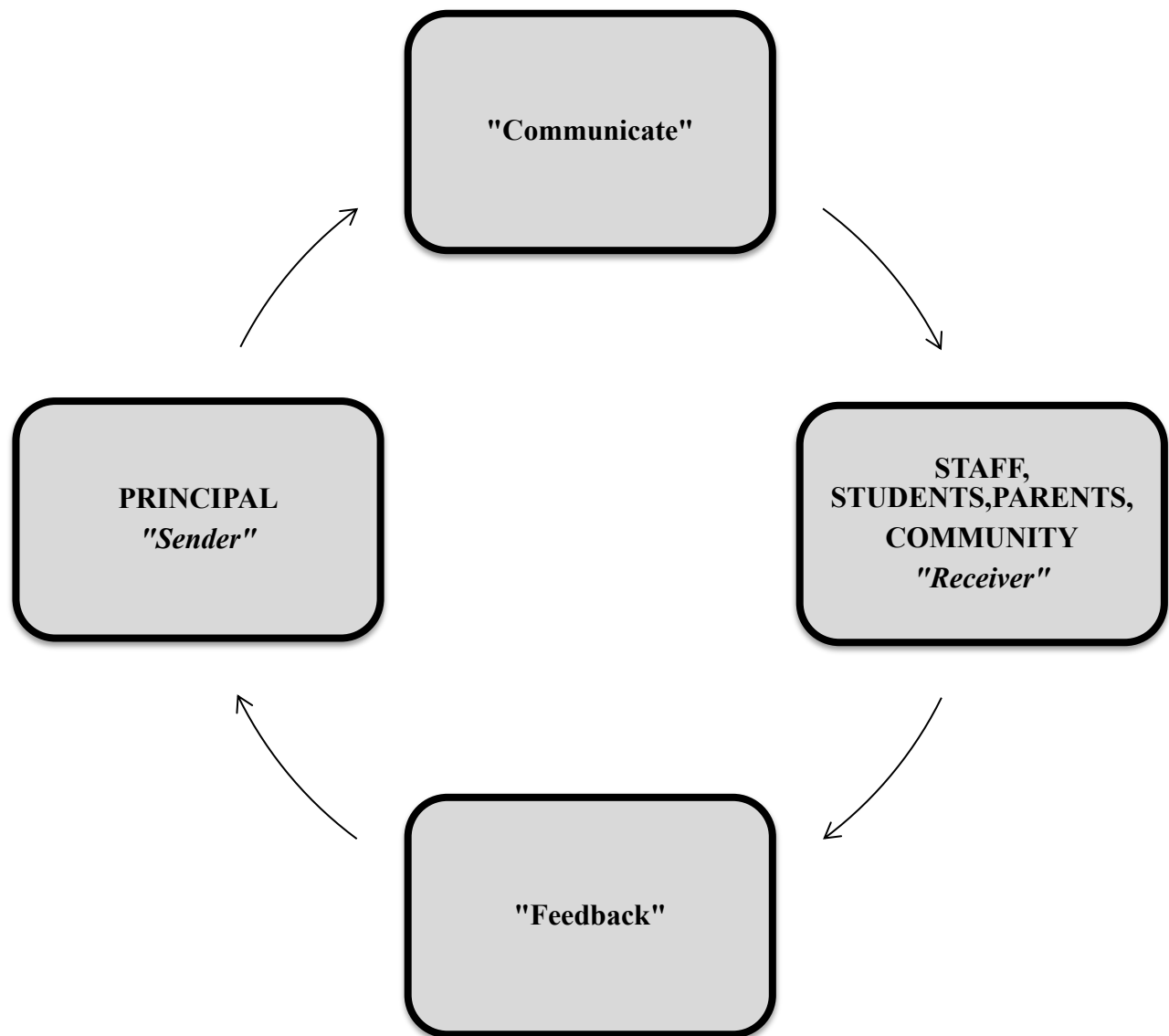


Figure 1. This figure displays the transmission of communication in an educational institution and shows the connection to its organizational constituents. *Sherron Gordon Phan*, researcher.

Review of Theoretical Frameworks

This review of theoretical framework exhibits technical factors that contribute to the communication practices principals use in the organizations can be useful in educational leadership. Educational leaders take on many responsibilities, tasks and challenges that reflect an ability to organize, prioritize, and lead. Each principal uses individual approaches that display patterns of communication actions that are not always predictable but may be unique to their own educational environment. This suggests that principals' communication practices or leadership characteristics could be used to guide school improvement efforts. When leaders successfully communicate the core values of the organization they give structure to constituents and build a foundation for its environment. Incorporating an organizational framework into an educational environment, principals can articulate to their staff the school's vision and further enhance school success. A productive leader communicates to their followers clearly and efficiently to put words into action and progression. "Discerning principals are conscious of subtle reactions to their actions that negatively affect school climate" (Dyer & Carothers, 2000, p. 18). Principals who are interactive with their leadership effectively communicate the vision and mission to their followers. This study indicated that the principals' practices and knowledge are inherently important to make communication effective and meaningful.

Interpretation of Findings

This intrinsic case study explored the shared communication practices principals used in successful school environments. Leadership and effective communication practices build a bond of trust, confidence, and positivity among their constituents. Two overarching questions were used to guide the researcher.

RQ1: How do principals use communication to frame a successful school environment?

RQ2: Which communication strategies do principals identify as best practice?

Principals are role models and effectively sharing expectations and clearly defining goals with teachers are imperative for successful outcomes. Sergiovanni (2001) states, “If you wish them to behave in a given way, make the desired behavior clear to them and make it worth their while to engage in it” (p. 14). Effective communication for principals should provide clarity, honesty, and professionalism. Principals should be a motivator for change among staff, students and the community.

Overarching Themes and Communication Practices: Relation to Literature and Theory

The data across the interviews and artifacts illustrated a common understanding among principals’ communication practices in successful school environments. The themes that developed from the interview data, summation of scholarly books, articles, and journals that informed this intrinsic case study, all showed common connective practices principals used when communication in their educational institutions. According to Sergiovanni (2001) “being connected to others and being connected to institutions we value is a way to become connected to ourselves; to know that we belong; to know that we count for something; to know that we are valued” (p. 63). Mr. Red shared that “I don’t like to micromanage my staff; we meet every two weeks to give them time to settle into new ideas and departmental changes.” Mr. Yellow also meets every two weeks as he feels that it gives space for new policy implementations. The results have shown there are similarities and connections with communication practices among principals in their educational organizations. “Principal behaviors include setting clear goals and expectations, creating structured time for faculty to examine data, and fostering a collaborative

environment” (Supovitz & Klein, 2003; Wayman & Stringfield, 2006; Young, 2006). The information shared by the participants of the study shows great commonality among principals in coastal Virginia who lead in successful K-12 environments, which can enact future leadership models for the school district.

The themes emerging from the individual interviews demonstrated similar principal practices and leadership styles as they related to (1) trustworthiness, (2) staff meetings and interactions, (3) empathy and sympathy for the constituents, (4) parent involvement and planning, (5) motivation and incentives, and (6) open door communication. These themes were carried consistently throughout interviews and were reinforced by the artifacts collected. Reflecting on the literature found on the theme about research-based practices for the communication practices of principals, the leadership role of the principal is instrumental to school culture and student achievement. Each principal participant of the study brings to their school a unique set of communication experiences that ultimately affect their leadership style and goals for school improvement.

Parental Involvement and Planning. The study’s participants spoke about their desire to have more planning time within their organization and to be more interactive with students’ parents. Parental involvement can be important predictors in the process of students’ success. School principals have a strong ability to influence, encourage and empower parents to participate in their child’s educational experience, thereby promoting a positive school and community climate for learning (Brofenbrenner, 1975). Although participants were pleased with the school’s activities and organization direction, they expressed that the lack of time during the course of a school year affected planning activities and interactions with the parents in the community. According to Robbins and Alvy (2003), “spending time in corridors, classrooms,

stairwells, and throughout the building gives the principal a chance to spread good news and caring words to the staff, students, community members, and parents” (p. 14). Principals who recognize deficiencies in their leadership and expressing the desire to change can ultimately foster and positive development of future relationships with teachers, students and parents.

Motivation and Incentives. In principal leadership, motivation is an important strategy to practice in an organizational setting. Several study participants expressed their practices for motivating their students and staff on a daily basis. Webster’s dictionary (2002) defines the concept of motivation as “the act or process of moving or drive, or an incentive”. One participant spoke about the importance of daily motivational words spoken during the morning announcements. Principals who incorporated work incentives frequently throughout the school year helped motivate staff and students to accomplish departmental goals. Buchanan and Huczynski (1997) indicated that motivation is the single most important determinant of individual job performance. Boosting the school’s morale creates an environment where teamwork, collaboration, and development happen. One principal shared that she is her staff’s biggest “cheerleader” and tries to encourage them all hours of the day. Encouraging staff regularly motivates individuals which changes, which influences the school environment as a whole and fosters a positive culture.

Leadership Styles and Influences. The partnership that principals have with their staff and faculty illustrates their commitment and dedication of organizational change through the use of communication. According to Fullan (2004), “in order to be effective at change, mastery is essential, both in relation to specific innovations and personal habit” (p. 17). Principals discussed throughout the interviews that they may interchange their leadership style depending on organizational need to help reach the vision and mission of the institution they lead. They felt

that engaging in a wide variety of techniques helped influence stakeholders and improve the culture of the school. When principals lead by example they can ultimately change the tone of the environment. Communicating organizational goals and modeling a transformative style helps follower's share the same passion to obtaining the goal.

Sympathy and Empathy. Several principals explained that communicating humanistic qualities like sympathy and empathy towards the students and staff creates a "safe space" for issues to be worked through and resolved. According to Reeves (2006), "while passion does not appear on the balance sheet, it is surely the asset that matters most leaders and followers alike, and passion is most wisely invested by leaders in human relationships" (p. 43). Showing one's human side according to one principal allows him to appear more "approachable" and staff complains less when they feel as though their voice is being heard. Having compassion for one's employees and showing an authentic understanding of their feelings can foster a positive work environment.

Staff Meetings and Interactions. The time constraints of being a principal can be daunting. Several of the participants felt that the area they wanted to work on was having more planning time and time interacting with the parents in the community. Having frequent staff meetings not only boosts morale, they can be used as platforms to gain support for the goals of the organization. Parental involvement helps foster a positive culture throughout the school environment. When staff and students experience positive interactions among the parents connected with the school it brings together collaborative efforts between its constituents. Taking time to recognize the efforts of staff, parents, and students can help positively change the trajectory of the culture.

Communication of the Vision and the Mission of the Organization. Principals have to successfully communicate and articulate the vision of the organization to accomplish the common goals for the school. “Leadership is closely associated with the ability to visualize, articulate, and create structures for supporting a vision for teaching and learning” (Dyer & Carothers, 2000, p. 42). A principal’s role is to inspire people into action; one participant felt that they have to be the vision and live it every day to become a change agent. Hackman and Johnson (2009) suggest that “communicating a vision may well be the most important act of the transformational leader” (p. 114). Organizational changes don’t only fall upon principals’ shoulders but are also contributed by the constituents.

Trustworthiness as a Base for Communication. The participants were consistent in saying that trust was a very important quality to have and that it was the base for all relationships. Trust in the leader allows the development of relationships and allows for an opportunity for greater risk taking (Brownell, 2010). Creating a safe and confidential environment where the staff and students trust the principal creates security and respect. “Leaders who value others, display empathy, and deal forthrightly with their colleagues help set a tone of mutual trust and respect in their institutions” (Copland & Knapp, 2006, p. 46). Trust and trustworthiness were common words expressed by participants when reflecting on their practices. After having examined and coded concepts from the principals’ common responses that emerged from the data, several reoccurring themes became evident. The word *trust* was mentioned many times throughout the interviews and was the catalyst for creating open communication with their constituents. Leaders who inspire trust garner loyalty keep the stakeholders grounded because they understand the necessities of teachers and students.

Implications

The results of this study highlighted, examined, and reviewed findings which generated in response to the two research questions used in this study:

RQ1: How do principals use communication to frame a successful school environment?

RQ2: Which communication strategies do principals identify as best practice?

This study described principals' communication practices in a K-12 setting. This researcher studied the commonalities in communication practices principals use in their successful environment. The overall goal was to highlight the communication practices of principals in successful K-12 settings and discovered common connective elements prevalent in communication in an educational organization. The research was conducted to learn and understand what communication practices principals use to support, create, and develop a successful environment.

The schools used in this case study are only a small representation of K-12 schools in coastal Virginia. The principals included in this study were ten principals comprised of seven females and three males in a K-12 environment. The participants included in this intrinsic case study verified use of different communication practices, flexible leadership styles, trust, encouragement, frequent staff meetings, empathy and sympathy for the constituents, parent interactions, time planning, motivation and incentives, and open communication. All these themes were evident in most cases in this study. Yukl (2010) described leadership as several series of independent activities that may be subjected to interchangeable styles at times to operate in their educational environments. This research found that a principal's leadership style may be interchangeable depending on the needs of the educational organization and district.

When principals effectively communicate the vision and mission of the district, that action has a positive effect on future progress towards student achievement.

Limitations

This intrinsic case study was viewed from a narrow lens of research. The scope of the research was limited to the specific demographic of only school principals in K-12 settings. The research did not include teachers, students, or parents' opinions in the study. The socio-economic background of schools being led by participant principals was not a part of the study and did not lend any insight. Social expectations, laws, raw materials, technological sophistications, the behavior of other systems, fiscal realities, competition, and clients all shape and constrain organizational structure and behavior (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). A small sample size of 10 principals was interviewed in this study, and as a result, this intrinsic case study was limited to the scope of their experience and understanding. Gaining different perspectives of other constituents could show different variations in organizational outcomes. This research was also limited to schools only in the coastal Virginia area; if the research was conducted on a wider scope of schools in Virginia, the demographical differences could shape participant interpretations of best practices for leadership and produce different results.

Recommendations for Actions

Communication is a multifaceted process in educational leadership. Further research can give principals opportunity to gain greater insight into the communications practices of principals in successful school environments; it can also play an important role in professional development within the organization. Therefore, school district leaders need to do further research on communication and create team building workshops for educational leaders. A wider range of studies needs to be conducted across several school districts to gain a better

understanding of the topic. Bringing awareness by articulating organizational changes occur when district leaders understand how communication can be the basis for improving school culture and ultimately affecting student success.

Recommendation for Future Research

This research identified several key communication practices of principals in schools that function with successful school environments that promote change. Several principals in the study provided constituents with opportunities to openly communicate organizational concerns and give feedback on their policy changes with the school. Principals who establish an open-door policy and offer active listening opportunities provide effective lines of communication with staff (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005). Establishing strong communication practices in the school environment from principals where trust is valued strengthens the culture for constituents and stakeholders in the community. The forces that motivate individuals within a system lie in its environment; the environment is its source of energy, the medium that determines its internal structure and function dictates change (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). Principals who share their distinct communication styles can help others in the district or beyond make changes in policies and procedures that can support the goal of student achievement. Recommendations for future studies about the communication practices of principals would help to determine why some school environments do not support success and others allow students to thrive academically. Additional research could explore environmental factors, socioeconomic factors, and demographic differences that could affect a principals' communication and leadership styles. The ultimate success of ideological leaders "is tested not by peoples' delight in a performance or personality but by actual social change measured by the ideologists' purposes, programs, and values" (Burns, 1978, p. 249). Future research can be beneficial in documenting common

communication practices that can help principals promote change, articulate policies, and support the vision and mission in the educational organization they serve.

Conclusion

This study exposed several communication practices which were affected by environmental factors and challenges principals faced while communicating in their educational organization. The findings supported the literature discussed in Chapter Two and explored the relationships between the principals, staff, students, parents and the community in which they serve. The researcher observed in the participants' workplaces the commonalities of across schools' cultures. Each school displayed employees who were eager to help the researcher feel welcome while waiting to interview the principal participants; the environments were warm, positive and inviting. Clark (1982) summarized that a school's leadership is crucial in defining school success and that this leadership is typically attitudinal as well as motivational and capable of changing an entire school climate. Therefore, principals who effectively communicate the vision and mission of their district are motivated by a desire to foster positive relationships based on honesty and integrity. Trusting one's leadership in turn brings security with the constituents and a willingness to see a task completed.

These effective communication practices K-12 principals use do correlate with the emerging themes in this research study. According to Reeves (2006), "great visionary leaders challenge the status quo with terminology that is clear and vivid" (p. 35). Effectively communicating a clear shared vision empowers the school district as a whole and those in the community. While these processes are not the only determination of school success, they represent the truthful, practical, and lived experiences of principals who lead in K-12 settings in coastal Virginia.

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Appendix A

1. How long have you been a principal?
2. Why did you choose to become a principal?
3. How would you describe your leadership style as a principal?
4. As the principal, how frequently do you meet with staff?
 1. How does your communication style allow you to understand the needs of staff and faculty?
5. How do you communicate the vision and mission of the district to your staff, students, and parents?
6. How would you describe your communication style as an educational leader?
7. What are the strengths of your communication style? What are the areas that you'd still like to improve?
8. How do you avoid a breakdown in communication at the school you lead?
9. Tell me about a time that you were able to resolve an issue that stemmed from poor communication.
10. What communication practices do you use to motivate your staff?

Appendix B

Case Study: Interview Protocol Form**Name of School:** _____**Interviewee (Title and Name):** _____**Interviewer:** _____**Communication Topics Discussed:** _____

Documents/Artifacts Obtained from Participants: _____

Post Interview Comments-Notes:

Appendix C

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Case Study Title: Principals' Effective Communication Practices for a Successful School

Environment

Researcher: Sherron Gordon-Phan **University of New England** (sgordonphan@une.edu), (757)-515-5880

Lead Advisor: Brianna Parsons **University of New England** (bparsons4@une.edu), (207)-221-4860

The time required: The interview will take approximately 40-60 minutes

BY SIGNING THIS FORM, I AM GIVING MY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS CASE STUDY

I _____ voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. In signing this form, I understand and agree to the following:

- ✓ I understand that even if I agree to participate, I can withdraw my participation in this study at any time.
- ✓ I understand that I can withdraw my permission to use data from my interview within three weeks after the interview, in which the material will be scrubbed from the case study and destroyed.
- ✓ I understand and agree to my interview to be audio-recorded and later transcribed.
- ✓ I understand and agree that all information used for this case study will be treated with strict confidentiality.
- ✓ I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous and a pseudonym will be used for privacy purposes.
- ✓ I understand that a copy of the interview transcription will be available upon my request and the study will become UNE's property.

Participant's Signature _____ **Date:** _____

Appendix D

PARTICIPANT INVITATION LETTER

Research Study: Principals' Effective Communication Practices for a Successful School

Environment

Researcher: Sherron Gordon-Phan, Doctoral Student

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Sherron Gordon-Phan and I am a doctoral student from the University of New England. This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a research study. The purpose of this intrinsic case study is to investigate the effects of communication in an educational organization in connection to the principal leaders of a K-12 setting. The schools selected for this case study will be fully accredited and will consist of A and B rated sites from K-12 on the list of top rated schools in the district as determined by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) from testing and accreditation standards. The standards used for the accreditation process of public schools in coastal Virginia provide the provision with quality education for continuous student improvement. If this research study is of interest and you would like to participate in this project, please read and sign the attached consent form informing you of your privacy and rights. Your help with this study would be greatly appreciated! Thank you!

Best Regards,

Sherron Gordon-Phan, researcher

Doctoral Candidate, University of New England

Appendix E

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Project Title: The Impact of Principal's Communication Practices on School Success
Environment: An Intrinsic Case Study

Principal Investigator(s): Sherron Gordon-Phan

Introduction:

- Please read this form. You may also request that the form is read to you. The purpose of this form is to give you information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document that choice.
- You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.

Why is this research study being done?

- The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of communication in an educational organization in connection to the principal leaders of a K-12 setting.
- The study is solely for the purpose of adding to the existing knowledge base while satisfying the Doctor of Education Degree dissertation requirements of the University of New England.

Who will be in this study?

- You must be at least 18 years old to participate.
- You must be a Principal in Coastal Virginia K-12 school with an A or B rating determined by the Virginia Department of Education.

What will I be asked to do?

- If selected for this study, you will be contacted by the researcher via phone or email to schedule an individual interview, review/complete the Informed Consent Form and you will be provided your informed consent form in person, prior to the start of the interview.
- You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.

- The time commitment of the individual interview will be approximately 30-60 minutes.
- You will be asked to provide organizational artifacts for the research study.
- Interviews will take place in a manner that you deem comfortable (i.e. in person or web conference) at a mutually convenient time.

What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?

- There are minimal, if any, foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.
- If you experiences any problems or discomfort related to the interview process it will be addressed immediately by the researcher and her advisory committee.
- Withdrawal or refusal to participate will not impact or affect your employment.

What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?

- There are no direct benefits for participating in this study.

What will it cost me?

- There are no costs affiliated with participation in this study.

How will my privacy be protected?

- All demographic information and interview question responses will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law, and stored and transcribed in Dragon Professional Volume 15 software.
- All research records will be kept in a locked file in the locked home office of the principal investigator. As an added provision of privacy, the identity of participants will not be revealed at any time and pseudonyms or numbers will be assigned to research participants.
- All recordings from the research study will be destroyed after the interview is transcribed. All identifying information will be removed from the transcript.
- Only the researcher's advisor and the IRB Committee at the University of New England have the right to review the study data.

How will my data be kept confidential?

- The recordings of the interview will be electronically stored and password protected. Only the researcher, the researcher's dissertation committee, and University of New England IRB will have access to the recordings and study data. The recordings will be deleted upon transcription of the interviews.

- Identifiable information in the data collected will be omitted. Participants will be given a pseudonym to maintain the confidentiality of individually identifiable interview transcripts and recordings.
- All research data will be physically destroyed or erased after the dissertation is completed and is deposited in the institutional repository of the University of New England.
- Consent forms will be stored in a secure location. A copy of your signed consent form will be maintained by the researcher for at least 3 years after the project is complete before it is destroyed.

What are my rights as a research participant?

- Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the University.
- You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.
- If you choose not to participate, there is no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason.
 - If you choose to withdraw from the research there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You will be informed of any significant findings developed during the course of the research that may affect your willingness to participate in the research. Inquiries or concerns about the research can be directed to the researcher, Faculty Advisor, or the IRB Office at University of New England.
- If you sustain an injury while participating in this study, your participation may be ended.

What other options do I have?

- You may choose not to participate.

Whom may I contact with questions?

- The researcher conducting this study is **Sherron Gordon-Phan**.
- For more information regarding this study, please contact **Sherron Gordon-Phan** [REDACTED], sgordonphan@une.edu
- If you choose to participate in this research study and believe you may have suffered a research related injury, please contact Brianna Parsons Lead Advisor bparsons4@une.edu [REDACTED]
- If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Mary Bachman DeSilva, Sc.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at [REDACTED] or irb@une.edu.

Will I receive a copy of this consent form?

- You will be given a copy of this consent form.

Participant's Statement

I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily.

Participant's signature or
Legally authorized representative

Date

Printed name

Researcher's Statement

The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.

Sherron Gordon-Phan
Researcher's signature

11-29-2018
Date

Sherron Gordon-Phan
Printed Name



Institutional Review Board

Mary DeSilva, Chair

Biddeford Campus

11 Hills Beach Road

Biddeford, ME 04005

(207)602-2244 T

(207)602-5905 F

Portland Campus

716 Stevens Avenue

Portland, ME 04103

To: Sherron Gordon-Phan

Cc: Brianna Parsons, Ph.D.

From: Lliam Harrison, M.A., J.D.

Date: December 4, 2018

Project # & Title: 18.11.07-002 The Impact of Principal's Communication Practices on School
Success Environment: An Intrinsic Case Study

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects has reviewed the materials submitted in connection with the above captioned project, and has determined that the proposed work is exempt from IRB review and oversight as defined by 45 CFR 46.104(d)(2).

Additional IRB review and approval is not required for this protocol as submitted. If you wish to change your protocol at any time, including after any subsequent review by any other IRB, you must first submit the changes for review.

Please contact Lliam Harrison at (207) 602-2244 or wharrison@une.edu with any questions.

Sincerely,

William R. Harrison, M.A., J.D.

Director of Research Integrity

IRB#: 18.11.07-002

Submission Date: 11/05/18

Status: Exempt, 45 CFR 46.104(d)(2)

Status Date: 12/4/18

Appendix G



Completion Date 03-Feb-2018
Expiration Date 02-Feb-2022
Record ID 26075449

This is to certify that:

Sherron Gordon-Phan

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Human Research	(Curriculum Group)
Social & Behavioral Research Investigators	(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course	(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

University of New England

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w92d6ccfc-7215-4962-985d-1e995ce59301-26075449