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**SCHOOL EMPLOYEES' PERCEPTIONS OF ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT
DURING A CRITICAL INCIDENT**

By

Donavon P. Soumas

Bachelor of Music, Vocal Pedagogy, Centenary College of Louisiana, 1994
Master of Education, Education and Human Development, The George Washington University
2018

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It was presented on
July 6, 2021
and reviewed by:

Jacqueline Lookabaugh, Ed.D, Lead Advisor
University of New England

Catherine Stieg, Ed.D, Secondary Advisor
University of New England

Evelyn J. Thomas, Ed.D, Affiliate Committee Member
University of New England

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Donavon P. Soumas



UNIVERSITY OF
NEW ENGLAND

College of Graduate and Professional Studies

Portland Campus
716 Stevens Avenue
Portland, ME 04103
(207) 221-4464 T
(207) 523-1924 F

Doctor of Education Program

This Dissertation was reviewed and approved by:

Lead Advisor Signature: *Jacqueline Lookabaugh, Ed.D*

Lead Advisor (print name): Jacqueline Lookabaugh, Ed.D.

Secondary Advisor Signature: *Catherine Stied, Ed.D*

Secondary Advisor (print name): Catherine Stied, Ed.D.

Date: July 13, 2012

SCHOOL EMPLOYEES' PERCEPTIONS OF ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to discover the lived experiences and perceived organizational support (POS) of school employees' during the abrupt transition to remote education instruction resulting from a critical incident such as COVID-19. In direct connection, this study's problem was to fill a gap in the literature regarding school employees' lived experiences and POS during the abrupt transition to remote education instruction as the result of a critical incident. Organizational support theory and experiential learning theory were the conceptual framework that guided this study. The researcher used semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with 10 school employees at a private, primary through eighth grade school located in the northeast region of the United States. Interview questions were used to explore participants' POS, perceptions of well-being, and emotions prior to and during the critical incident. Six themes and three sub-themes emerged and provided insight into the study's research question. The study's results indicated that participants perceived experiences of organizational support through (1) work experience descriptors, (2) feelings about well-being at work, (3) POS, (4) changes in well-being due to COVID-19, (5) POS due to COVID-19, and (6) emotions during the critical incident. These results significantly aligned with literature on POS and emotional responses during a critical incident. Findings from this study may be useful for school leaders, administrators, and employees in K-12 school systems.

Keywords: organizational support, perceived organizational support, remote education, employee well-being, COVID-19 and education.

DEDICATION

To the memory of my loving parents
Clyde Adolph, Sr. & Greta Mae Soumas

You are the sunshine of my life...

Forever you'll stay in my heart. – Stevie Wonder

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“How can I say thanks for the things you have done for me? Things so undeserved, yet you give to prove your love for me.”

—Andrae Crouch, singer/songwriter

First, I thank God for the gift of life. In gratitude for all that God has done for me, I return my best efforts in life and learning. My main desire is to make God smile.

Second, I thank my first piano teacher, Louise Gomolsky, for teaching me the art of practice. Dr. Hattie L. Wade, for teaching me how to apply excellence to musical practice and delivery. Your examples of skill and knowledge live on in me and my students. Thank you.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Well-being and contentment are significant human conditions in life. These conditions are also important aspects of employee work experiences in an organization (Hempfling, 2015). Well-being is defined as the way in which individuals assess their happiness (Field & Buitendach, 2011) and the quality of the goodness in life experiences through subjective perceptions (Susniene & Jurkauskas, 2009). Employee's experiences of well-being and contentment may be projected from the work organization and its ability to demonstrate support and concern for its workers. According to Hempfling (2015), an organization's ability to demonstrate support and appreciation for employees' work contributions has an impact on workers' well-being. An affirmative sense of well-being and contentment in the workplace may improve employee's work-life experience, contribute to their job commitment and happiness (Field & Buitendach, 2011; Hempfling, 2015), and positively and significantly affect job performance (Bataineh, 2019).

In the field of education, school employees include faculty and staff members who may collectively develop professional relationships with one another and or the organization itself. Often, in the development of professional relationships, employees view the actions of members in leadership positions to be the actions of the organization itself (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; Levinson, 1965). Employees form beliefs and opinions about the organization's ability to demonstrate care and concern toward their well-being, therefore, the employee's viewpoint is their perceived organizational support (POS) (Eisenberger et al., 1986). In other words, POS is the extent to which an employee believes the organization cares about their well-being and values their contributions (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Shannock et al., 2019).

Additionally, Eisenberger et al. (1986) claim that employees' POS is influenced by how they are treated by the organization.

In education, the employee-organization relationship (EOR) is a relationship of mutual treatment between employees (i.e., educators and support staff) and those who lead and represent the organization (i.e., leaders and administrators) (Shore et al., 2004). In this current study, the researcher examined the EOR in a learning environment against the backdrop of a critical incident. This examination highlighted school employee's perceptions of (a) the EOR, (b) the impact of a critical incident, and (c) organizational transformation through reflective practice.

The Employee-Organization Relationship: EOR

An important component of a school/organization development strategy should include the cultivation of deep-rooted, long-term relationships with employees (Holtzhausen, 2002). According to Linjuan (2014), the EOR is the degree to which the employee and the organization rely on one another, are satisfied with the other, commit to one another, and "agree on who has the rightful power to influence" (p. 261). According to Eisenberger et al. (2019), organizations should endeavor to develop healthy relationships with employees as a mechanism to enhance workers' POS and affective commitment. In a study conducted on the status of employee-organization relationships (EOR), "findings suggest that employees on average do not currently have strong exchange relationships with their work organization and its representatives" (Eisenberger, Rockstuhl, Shoss, Wen, & Dulebohn, 2019, p. 1036). Even though employees may not have a strong EOR, they continue to seek favorable treatment from the organization (Eisenberger et al., 2019).

Eisenberger et al. (2019) claim that as part of the EOR, the organization is obliged to fulfill employee's social-emotional needs and to encourage workers to develop beliefs that favor

the organization. As a social construct, the EOR is such that each side is either a benefit or a detriment to the other (Eisenberger et al., 2019). Additionally, the EOR is an agreement of mutual support that employees expect (Eisenberger et al., 1986). For example, employees expect that their performance, commitment, and engagement within the organization will be rewarded with a commensurate salary (Eisenberger et al., 1986). The EOR is a powerful component of an employee's work-life experience. A healthy and balanced EOR and work-life experience may provide a greater sense of meaning and purpose to the work employees do (Schlechter & Engelbrecht, 2006). The expectation to reciprocate fair exchange in the EOR may provide a clearer sense of meaning and purpose (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2016) to the benefit of both sides.

Tasnim (2016) states employees spend 8-10 hours at work per workday and perceptions of their human condition depends largely on whether they are happy at work. If employees perceive that the organization supports and cares about their human condition (e.g., well-being), they may demonstrate commitment as a means to maintain happiness. Eisenberger et al. (1986) claim that employees' commitment at work is more deeply rooted within the organization when workers perceive that the organization supports and cares about their well-being and values their work contributions.

As a social construct, the employees within the EOR will undoubtedly experience unexpected challenges that may, in turn, affect their perceptions of the relationship. Shapiro and Gross (2013) point to the critical incident that happened on the morning of September 11, 2001, when the United States experienced a foreign attack on the World Trade Center in New York City. That historic critical incident disrupted the traditional course and delivery of education for many schools across the nation and it both positively and negatively affected people's emotions (Morgan & Zimbardo, 2010). A critical incident may affect both the organization and

employees' perceptions of the relationship with the organization. According to Morgan and Zimbardo (2010), to gain a comprehensive understanding of a critical incident in education requires consideration of both positive and negative outcomes.

The Impact of a Critical Incident on the Learning Process

In a phenomenological case study of the learning processes of entrepreneurs, Cope and Watts (2000) found that participant's descriptions and concepts of critical incidents were not only varied and complex, but they showed "that entrepreneurs often face prolonged and traumatic critical periods" which illustrates "the emotionally-laden nature of these events" (p. 104). Even though participants described a variety of critical incidents, each resulted in higher levels of learning and the resulting perceptions highlighted a need for mentoring support to help participants interpret "critical incidents as learning experiences, in order to increase the power of the learning outcomes" (p. 104). Cope and Watts (2000) state that new research on the reflection of critical incidents may offer academic insight into the nature of experience and learning. In their study, the perceived criticality of incidents may have advanced participant's ability to recall events during the interview process; the antecedents of the incident, its resolution, and what was learned—of which each incident could be explored in great detail (Cope & Watts, 2000).

Although the experiences of a critical incident may vary from person to person (Cope & Watts, 2020), some experiences may be shared within a community.

Mpofu (2019) defines critical incidents in education as sudden unexpected challenges. As a globally recognized critical incident, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has made an impact on the method of educational delivery (Subramanian, Mohamed, & Khanzadah, 2020). As a result of COVID-19, schools around the world were forced to suspend traditional in-school instruction practices and provide new instructive tools for learning (i.e., remote education)

(Subramanian et al., 2020). Korkmaz and Toraman (2020) analyzed the problems educators experienced in remote education instruction during COVID-19 in the Republic of Turkey. Most of the educators in the study reported that they expect certain changes to be made to teaching and learning in a post-COVID-19 world and that they believe there should be plans and measures to guard against potential future outbreaks (Korkmaz & Toraman, 2020).

According to Korkmaz and Toraman (2020), the critical incident of COVID-19 resulted in the need for all levels of education to quickly adapt to remote education instruction.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 outbreak and the interruption of traditional in-school education highlight and expand the previous existing gap in research on school employees' POS.

Therefore, the researcher of this study anticipated diminishing the gap in literature by exploring school employees' POS during a critical incident, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in the abrupt transition to remote education instruction.

According to Shapiro and Gross (2013) organizational turbulence may be a necessary precondition of growth and transformation. Megawati, Mukminatien, Anugerahwati, Indrayani and Unsiah (2020) claim that school leaders who investigate critical incidents as a developmental tool may also encourage growth and transformation of employees and the organization itself.

The Megawati et al. (2020) study implies that critical incidents give those who work in education an opportunity to become more reflective in practice.

Organizational Transformation Through Reflective Practice

According to Gallie (2013), rapidly changing work environments are forcing traditional work processes to evolve. As a result of unstable conditions, workers struggle to maintain traditional job duties and the sense of meaning associated with them (Gallie, 2013). According to Gorli, Nicolini, and Scarlatti (2015), instability and change in an organization makes it

challenging for employees to “find the will and energy to add value to their work experience”, make the necessary investment toward work commitment, and “become open to learning” (p. 1348). Each of the aforementioned challenges are significant if employees are to perceive or pursue opportunities that influence their work and the organization (Gorli et al., 2015). Therefore, introducing spaces for reflective practice is needed in the organization if workers are required to cope in new working conditions (Gorli et al., 2015).

According to Jefferson and Anderson (2017), reflective practice is a key strategy toward organizational transformation. In the past, organizational transformation may have been an option for schools, however, today it is a necessity (Jefferson & Anderson, 2017). Additionally, reflective practice enables educators to gain meaningful experience (Megawati et al., 2020) while providing a way to transfer knowledge to the classroom (Postholm, 2012). Creating time for reflection may be key to the expansion of thinking and team learning (Hilden & Tikkamäki, 2013). Reflection on critical incidents can provide a platform for organizational transformation (Mpofu, 2019). As both an individual and group process, reflective practice may increase organizational learning when facilitated through organized practice (Hilden & Tikkamäki, 2013).

Statement of the Problem

For organizational transformation to occur in educational settings, leaders must be able to guide employee’s development and assist with strategies that encourage learning (Kotter, 2012). According to Holford, Milana, Waller, and Webb (2019), life-long learning is a reiterative process that offers people a better understanding of their potential, improvement in their abilities, and a deeper more meaningful life. Corcoran and Leahy (2003) claim that educators who become life-long learners often adopt an orientation toward their work that includes reflective and self-supported practices. In an examination of organizational transformation in higher

education, Thomas (2019) found that organizations that were aware of turbulence but did not communicate it, contributed to employees' emotions and perceptions of disruption and loss. Therefore, as a way to preserve worker's emotions and perceived organizational support (POS), it may be important for organizations to encourage dialogue with employees during a critical incident.

The need for dialogue and reflection with school employees greatly intensifies in the face of severe turbulence (Gross & Shapiro, 2013). Concern for persons in the field of education has risen as a result of COVID-19 and the abrupt transition to remote education (Hobbs & Hawkins, 2020, in press). A side effect of the COVID-19 pandemic is that it has forced persons in schools to clamor and protest about solutions to educate the more than 50 million kindergarteners through 12th grade students in the United States (Hobbs & Hawkins, 2020). An increase in dialogue and reflection on the noted critical incident of COVID-19 may generate knowledge and improve school employee's capabilities. According to Hobbs and Hawkins (2020), educators had far too little experience with remote education pre-pandemic and many human resources became unavailable to assist them through the transition.

For this study, the researcher examined employee's POS during the critical incident of COVID-19 and the abrupt transition to remote education instruction. It was anticipated that this research would enrich the gap in literature on this topic, gain a better understanding of, and generate new knowledge in the process. Therefore, the problem was a lack of research literature on school employees' lived experiences and POS during the abrupt transition to remote education instruction as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry case study was to discover the lived experiences and perceived organizational support (POS) of school employees' during the abrupt transition to remote education instruction resulting from a critical incident such as COVID-19. The researcher anticipated that this study would give voice to employees within the organization by giving them an opportunity to share their POS during a critical incident that affected them.

Current research on the transition to remote education instruction due to COVID-19 is expanding as interest in educational outcomes during the pandemic continue to elicit inquiry from educators and scholars around the world (Demuyakor, 2020; Dhawan, 2020; Kadi, 2020; Oyedotun, 2020). During COVID-19, some research has assessed school member's perceptions of preparedness with technology and stakeholder support (Barton, 2020; Rasmitadila et al., 2020). Other research emphasized the effects of the transition from face-to-face learning to remote education during COVID-19 (McQuirter, 2020; Trust & Whalen, 2020). Nonetheless, there is a considerable gap in research on school employee's POS during the critical incident of COVID-19.

Research Question

This study provided a detailed look at participants' POS during the abrupt transition to remote education instruction as a result of COVID-19. The research question that guided this study was:

1. How do employees, other than administrators at Leading Way School perceive their experiences of organizational support during times of a critical incident that led to the abrupt transition of remote education instruction?

Conceptual Framework

Organizational and behavioral theories inform academic thought to explain the authoritative range of the organization and the inherent power of employees, in which both entities become engaged in an employee-organization relationship (Jia, Shaw, Tsui, & Park, 2014). The researcher of this study viewed school employees' POS through the lens of organizational support theory (OST) (Eisenberger et al., 1986). According to OST, employees view the organization as having a personified characteristic that is deemed either friendly or adversarial in relation to them (Baran, Shannock, & Miller, 2012; Kurtessis et al., 2017). Therefore, an organization is the collective action of supervisors and leaders who work in the upper echelon of the institution (Shannock, et al., 2019). OST explains how favorable treatment from leaders at the top of an organization translates to employees as a perception of whether the organization supports and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Employees' POS is the extent of the belief that the organization cares about their well-being (Eisenberger, 1986; Shannock et al., 2019). According to Eisenberger et al. (1986) and Shannock et al. (2019) POS affects workers' engagement, performance, and commitment.

Guided also by Dewey's (1938) work on *Experience and Education* through a framework of reflective practice, this researcher sought to understand the effectiveness of reflective practice on employee's POS during a critical incident. Dewey's (1938) seminal work on reflective practice in the learning environment was so uniquely influential that it became the "bible" for Progressive education in the US throughout much of the 20th-century (Rorty, 1987, p. ix). Dewey's views on reflective practice continue to impact education today, as noted in the extended works of researchers such as Boud et al. (1985), Corcoran and Leahy (2003), Johns (2017), and Schön (1983; 1987), as well as Platt's (2014) critical literature review on reflective

practice. Leahy and Corcoran (1996) claim, that reflective practice leads learners to a more certain course of action using a tested rationale previously unavailable to them to help inform future decisions. For this study, the conceptual framework of organizational support theory (OST) (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and experiential learning theory (ELT) (Dewey, 1938) allowed the researcher to investigate participants' POS during the critical incident of COVID-19.

Definition of Key Terms

Critical Incidents. These events are defined as unexpected, intense periods of change in educational settings that cause the organization to pause and reflect on its purpose before successfully returning to practice (Brandenburg & McDonough, 2017).

Employee-Organization Relationship. Based on social exchange and leader-member exchange constructs, this overarching term describes the relationship between employees and the work organization (Shore et al., 2004).

Learning Process. The recursive cycle of experience, reflection, thoughts, and actions that increase individual's learning power (Kolb & Kolb, 2009).

Organization Development. A planned effort managed from the top of the organization that uses behavioral science knowledge as an intervention to increase the organization's effectiveness and health (Gallos, 2006).

Organizational Support. These are the actions of the organization itself and its ability to demonstrate and provide moral, lawful, and financial leadership toward its employees (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

Organizational Transformation. When an organization and its employees learn how to collectively adapt during times of challenge or transition and move from merely using knowledge to actively generating it (Wagner & Kegan, 2006).

Organizational Turbulence. A disruptive or critical incident that occurs in an organization and depending on its extent, might interrupt organizational operations (Gross, 2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013).

Perceived Organizational Support (POS). The beliefs employees form about the capacity of the organization to value and care about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

Well-being. Interrelated with happiness and life satisfaction, well-being is a subjective judgment regarding the quality of balance and goodness in an individual's life experience (Susniene & Jurkauskas, 2009).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

Simon and Goes (2013) explain how assumptions made in academic proposals and dissertations require source citations, otherwise, the research is of little value. With this acknowledgement, the researcher of this study held several beliefs that may not provide proof but were necessary to conduct the study. In this study, the researcher sought to justify the likelihood that each assumption would be met, and then ascertained in the dissertation, if they were probably true (Simon & Goes (2013)). Some assumptions in this study are related to the critical incident of COVID-19 and the transition to remote education instruction while other assumptions are not. In this study, the researcher identified several assumptions and limitations.

Assumptions

First, it was assumed that all participants had been affected, in some way, by the critical incident and shared catastrophe of the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, it was assumed that all participants would want to reflect upon the critical incident of COVID-19 and share their POS. Third, it was assumed that participants would be truthful and transparent about their feelings and POS during the critical incident. The fourth assumption was that participants would respond

differently to interview protocol questions. The fifth assumption was that participants in the study would represent a full spectrum of employees (e.g., faculty/teachers to support staff) at Leading Way School.

Limitations

As an employee at LWS for the past decade, the researcher possessed some inherent biases because of previously established employee-organization relationships formed in the organization. Panucci & Wilkins (2010) define researcher bias as beliefs that researchers possess, which potentially affect the research questions or problems, at any stage of the study—from its design, data collection and analysis, or publication. Therefore, bias could impact the direction of the study's data and its findings. According to Kim (2016), bias can also become a greater issue if researcher and participant rapport is too close. The researcher in this study was mindful that bias may negatively affect data collection and analysis.

A second limitation was participant reactivity. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) define participant reactivity as a phenomenon that occurs when participants feel the need to alter their responses in a way that they believe will benefit the researcher and or the study. Maxwell (2013) refers to participant reactivity as the difficulty participants experience when adjusting to the researcher's role as the interviewer. The researcher in this study acknowledged this phenomenon with participants in an effort to increase trustworthiness: credibility, dependability, and transferability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

A third limitation involved the single site nature of the study and the potential for diminished generalizability and validity in the study's findings. The use of a single site may have limited generalizability and external validity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Findings in this study may not be generalizable or transferable to other schools in the United States.

A fourth limitation is what Thomas (2019) calls “delayed real time”, in which interviewees are asked to convey experiences that began months earlier and continue at the time of the study (p. 11). Participant experiences in this study may have been affected by *delayed real time*. For example, participant perceptions during COVID-19 may have depended on how they recalled actual events and emotions—according to *delayed real time*.

Scope

The scope of this study was limited to employees at a school described as a private progressive, primary/middle school, whose philosophical mission included diversity, equity, and inclusivity. Data produced in this study were anticipated to create rich information and unique insight drawn from participant experiences. Peterson (2019) explains that coding themes developed from interview responses to questions supports evidence of researcher understanding during data analysis. Additionally, *In Vivo* software was used to identify codes, themes, and patterns in the data (Peterson, 2019). Furthermore, the focus of this study was on the meaning of various elements during data analysis, and not necessarily on the “frequency or similarity of language elements” (Peterson, 2019, p. 154). In combination, triangulation strategies may have enhanced data trustworthiness, analysis, and findings (Peterson, 2019). In this study, triangulation was achieved via the following data collection methods: one-on-one interviews and multiple perspectives or theories [organizational support theory (OST) and experiential learning theory (ELT)] to interpret data (Peterson, 2019).

To build researcher/participant rapport, the researcher practiced the skill of rapport during the field test to develop the skills needed to become “respectful, nonjudgmental, and non-threatening” during data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To make participants feel comfortable and safe during interviews, the researcher sought to build a solid and respectful

rapport. The researcher used interviews to understand the world from the participants' point of view, to know what they knew in the way that they knew it, and to understand the meaning of their experience as explained by them (Kim, 2016; Spradley, 1979).

Delimitations

Delimitations are defined by Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) as choices knowingly made by researchers that define the parameters of the study, including acknowledgement of rejected, yet alternative methodological approaches not addressed. By establishing delimitations the researcher identified boundaries that would occur (Simon & Goes, 2013). Roberts (2014) concludes that researchers decide and control what will be included and omitted in delimitations. Furthermore, delimitations offered clarity into the researchers' justification of participants, populations, samples, methodologies, points of interest, and or features of the central phenomenon (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Simon & Goes, 2013).

This study contained two delimitations. First, this study was delimited to the purposive sampling of employees only (e.g., part-time or full-time educators/faculty and support staff) at LWS and, therefore, excluded those who work in upper management or administrative/leadership capacities. Second, the collection of data solely from semi-structured interviews may delimit triangulation (Kim, 2019).

Rationale and Significance

Researchers have concluded that organizational support is an essential precursor to organizational transformation, improves employees' well-being and contentment (Hempfling, 2015), and provides comfort to employees in stressful times (Eisenberger et al., 2016). Additionally, studies focused on employees' well-being find that employees' work engagement, commitment, and performance contribute significantly to their work-life contentment

(Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 2016; Krekel, Ward, & De Neve, 2019). Yu (2018) claims that employees achieve greater levels of engagement and learn more from personal experiences after they are presented with opportunities to reflect on events that affect their practice. Therefore, reflection on experience is a useful and meaningful process that can lead to unforeseen, yet encouraging learning outcomes (Harrison & Lee, 2011).

As a psychological construct Krekel et al. (2019) claim that employees who are engaged, committed, and eager to perform their work duties substantially contribute to the organization's interests and goals, and voluntarily represent the organization beyond formal working hours. Exploring employees' POS during a critical incident was central to this study. The researcher sought to understand participants' experiences and POS, and ergo contribute to the value of the learning community.

Conclusion

The human conditions of well-being and contentment are important aspects of the employee work-life experience (Hempfling, 2015). Organizations that provide support toward these conditions likely experience healthy employee-organization relationships and organizational transformation (Hempfling, 2015). On average, employees do not have substantial relationships with their organization but are willing to remain engaged based on their perceptions of favorable treatment from the organization (Eisenberger et al., 2019). Employee's perceived organizational support (POS) centers around whether they believe the organization cares about their well-being and that their contributions are of value (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Shannock et al., 2019).

During an unexpected critical incident, such as COVID-19, organizations are still obliged to demonstrate support for its employees' development (e.g., learning, awareness, and identity)

(Megawati et al., 2020). Furthermore, organizational support during a critical incident may contribute to organizational transformation (Han et al., 2019). For organizational transformation to occur, it is important that organizations provide an opportunity for employees to assess and reflect on the critical incident that affect them (Bruster & Peterson, 2013; Patahuddin & Lowrie, 2015). This study sought to explore participants' POS at LWS during a critical incident, such as COVID-19 and the transition to remote education. Researchers conclude that the benefit of assessing employees' POS during a critical incident enhances organization development and organizational transformation (Bruster & Peterson, 2013; Han et al., 2019; Korkmaz & Toraman, 2020; Megawati, 2020; Mpofu, 2019; Thomas, 2019; Wagner & Kegan, 2006). Therefore, Leading Way School is an example of an organization that faced prior critical incidents that may have affected employee-organization relationships and employees' POS.

Chapter 2 provides a synthesis of existing literature regarding employee-organization relationships, the effects of POS, historical and current critical incidents in education, and the benefits of reflective practice processes during times of change. In Chapter 3, the researcher reviewed the study site, research sample, and data collection and analysis methods. In Chapter 4, the researcher discussed the analysis of data collected. In Chapter 5, the study was summarized, findings were discussed, and recommendations were made for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Organizations must be able to guide employee's development and improve learning by providing assistance with strategies to help promote healthy employee-organization relationships (EOR), perceived organizational support (POS) and organizational transformation (Eisenberger et al., 2016). Organizational leaders can use strategies that encourage employees to perceive that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 2016). According to Zheng et al. (2013) employees with high POS are often presented with strategies that strengthen and develop the EOR. According to Eisenberger et al. (2016), the strategies that organizations may use to enhance employees' POS are: (a) begin organizational support efforts before the start of employment, (b) teach leaders of the organization to be supportive so they may nurture employees' POS, (c) learn the type of support workers need, and (d) train employees to be supportive of each other.

Organization of Literature Review

In this chapter, the researcher highlighted existing literature related to the state of US education—prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of critical incidents (e.g., COVID-19 or other natural disasters) on education, the effects of POS; on work engagement, work commitment, and work performance, and the impact of experiential learning on organizational transformation. The review of literature took place via the University of New England's online database, Google Scholar and Google searches, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Database, and the Journal Storage (JSTOR) database. Searches were conducted using keywords and phrases such as organizational support, perceived organizational support, employee-organization relationships,

critical incidents, remote education/online learning, employee well-being, COVID-19 and education. In review of the literature, it was evident that additional research is required to understand the effects of school employees' POS during a critical incident such as COVID-19, the abrupt transition to remote education, and other unnamed critical incidents that may affect school employees.

Conceptual Framework

Conceptual frameworks are the building blocks of a study that consist of “personal interests and goals, social location and positionality, topical research, and theoretical frameworks” (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017, p. 13). Researchers use conceptual frameworks graphically or narratively to explain the main issues to be studied (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020). The purpose of a conceptual framework is to learn from the expertise and experience of others while building personal perspective and knowledge on the topic (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017).

Using prior research as an initial framework about the topic of organizational support, the theoretical understanding of organizational support theory (OST) (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and experiential learning theory (ELT) (Dewey, 1938) will conceptually guide the research in this study. Research that supports OST finds that employees' commitment to the work organization is greatly influenced by their perceived organizational support (POS) (Eisenberger et al., 1986). ELT posits that learning is a social behavior and process and “the development of experience comes about through interaction” (Dewey, 1938, p. 58). To better frame this study, the researcher narrowed the many broad possible critical incident topics down to one topic that played a central role in the study (Miles et al., 2020). The critical incident of this study is COVID-19. The central factor in this study was to discover, document, and interpret school

employees' lived experiences and POS during COVID-19 and the abrupt transition to remote education instruction.

The conceptual framework for this study was organizational support theory (OST) and experiential learning (ELT). First, OST sought to explain how employees viewed their work organization and whether the organization was perceived as being supportive and caring toward worker's well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Second, Dewey's (1938) philosophy of experiential learning in education utilizes the social environment and real-life situations as a classroom in itself. According to Roberts (2003), the responsibility of education goes beyond the student-teacher relationship and involves the whole organization. For this "study-by-study review of the literature", the researcher explored OST and ELT, and provided a summary of literature that reflected themes and major divisions of the topic (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 101).

Organizational Support Theory

Organizational support theory (OST) posits employees perceive their work organization as having a disposition that is either favorable or unfavorable, as reflected in the treatment the organization provides them (Eisenberger et al., 1986). According to OST, employees who are treated with approval and respect by the organization are given in-kind support and are most likely to continue to display a high level of performance, engagement, and commitment in order to achieve the goals of the organization (Eisenberger et al., 2019; Eisenberger et al., 2016; Eisenberger et al., 1986). Perceived organizational support (POS) is influenced by employee's interpretation of organizational support and the treatment that is received from the organization (Kurtessis, et al., 2015; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Leaders and upper managers who represent the organization are likely to promote a favorable perception of treatment to employees when support of workers is rendered via friendly actions (e.g., constructive, and considerate policies and practices) (Eisenberger et al., 2016). Perceived organizational support (POS) is the employee's perception of whether the organization values and cares about their work contributions and well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011) and has been shown to benefit the employee-organization relationship (Eisenberger et al., 2016). According to Shaw et al. (2013), the benefits of employees with high POS include less stress at work and the likelihood of returning to work soon after an injury. POS is associated with employees' psychological well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Eisenberger et al., 2016). Therefore, employees with high POS are more likely to achieve the goals of the organization in exchange for a greater sense of well-being (Eisenberger et al., 2016) and happiness.

According to OST, cultivation of employees' POS increases (a) engagement toward helping the organization reach its objectives, (b) affective commitment to the organization, and (c) the expectation that improved performance will be rewarded (Eisenberger et al., 1986). To discover the lived experiences and POS of employees during a critical incident, the researcher of this study included in the review of the literature, POS as it relates to employee (a) engagement, (b) commitment, and (c) performance.

The strength of organizational support theory. Through the lens of organizational support theory (OST) and perceived organizational support (POS), a main strength that emerged in the research was empowerment (Kurtessis et al., 2015; Shore et al., 2004). Shore et al. (2004) define empowerment as the process in which school employees develop enough competency to take charge of personal growth and resolve their own issues. According to OST, POS should be

heightened to the degree in which employees attribute favorable treatment by the organization to positive regard (Kurtessis et al., 2015). According to OST, POS greatly “depends on employees’ attributions concerning the organization’s intent behind their receipt of favorable or unfavorable treatment” (Kurtessis et al., 2015). The benefit of OST as part of the theoretical framework for this study is that it directly deals with employees’ POS. Organizational support theory offered a way to improve upon personal empowerment and growth through self-enhancement processes (Kurtessis et al., 2015).

Even though OST is characterized as a social exchange theory (Kurtessis et al., 2015; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997) it “also emphasizes self-enhancement processes” (Kurtessis et al., 2015, p. 1857). According to Eisenberger and Stinglhamber (2011), social exchange and self-enhancement are foundations of the theory that explain why high POS leads to outcomes that enhance the employee-organization relationship (EOR). As a contributor to empowerment, self-enhancement is concerned with the identification of the organization that arises from employees’ POS, which, through the promotion of stronger employee-organization relationships (EOR) may lead to increased organizational commitment, engagement, and performance (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 2016; Eisenberger et al., 2019; Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Kurtessis et al., 2015).

The weakness of organizational support theory. A key weakness of OST as part of the theoretical framework of this study is that most literature makes use of the theory via quantitative or mixed research methodologies (Bogler & Nir, 2012; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Kurtessis et al., 2015; Shannock & Eisenberger, 2006). However, some researchers have explored the theory in education using qualitative methods (Scanlan, Cleland, Walker, & Johnson, 2018). With more than 1,200 studies on the topic, OST occupied a noticeable place in management and

organizational psychology literature (Caesens & Stinglhamber, 2020). However, the researcher of this study aimed to explore OST in the field of education to better understand school employees' POS during a critical incident. In general, as a weakness, the application of OST and employees' POS in education may benefit the study and generate new knowledge in the field.

Experiential Learning Theory

The English word for experience is derived from the Latin term, *experientia*—which is a to express a “trial, proof, or experiment” (Jay, 2005, p. 10). In Italian, the term *expereri* is “to try”, however, it shares a root with the word *periculum*—which is “peril” or “danger” (Jay, 2005, p. 10). According to Jay (2005) the comprehensive Italian translation suggests a “covert association between experience and peril” in which the person who experiences any particular event endeavors to survive the risk of the experience and learn something from the encounter (p. 10). There are several scholars who express experience as being a central role in the learning process—William James, John Dewey (1938), Kurt Lewin, Carl Rogers, and Paulo Freire (Kolb & Kolb, 2009). However, this study focused on the seminal work of experiential learning theory as influenced by the research and writings of John Dewey (1920/2004, 1928, 1929, 1933/1989, 1938).

John Dewey was an educator, progressivist, philosopher, and social reformer (Gutek, 2014). Dewey's philosophies on education have left an indelible mark on education. His beliefs about learning have made an impact on countless educators and students and are attributed to several learning theories (e.g., progressive education, constructivism, learner-centered education, and experiential learning) (Dewey, 1938; Shiro, 2012). His progressive philosophy of learning, however, was counter-intuitive to the traditional model of education in the US for much of the

20th century. Dewey believed that the traditional classroom was not as developmentally ideal for teaching and learning as is the natural world (Dewey, 1938; Flinders & Thornton, 2013).

The nature of knowledge is the framework of experiential learning theory (Roberts, 2003). Dewey's (1938) experiential learning theory posits that people think and understand through meta-cognitive processes, built from prior knowledge and experience. In his writings on education, Dewey (1928, 1933/1989, 1938) repeatedly stressed the significance of experience, experiment, purposeful and meaningful learning, and other concepts common to progressive education. As a progressivist, he was an advocate for allowing student interests to become the driving force for teacher instruction (Dewey, 1938). Overall, Dewey (1938) argues that the experiential learning process is accomplished through social interactions and that the quality of the whole experience is critical. In other words, knowledge is derived from real-life experiences and socially constructed activities contained in the natural world (Dewey, 1938; Roberts, 2003).

As described by Dewey (1938), an entire learning community can generate knowledge through flexible participation and social interactions derived from real-life situations. In his interpretation of Lao Tzu's (6 B.C.) *Tao Te Ching*, Heider (2015) claims that when individuals from within a community are given time to reflect on real-life experiences, they may see more clearly the things that are essential and vital in themselves and others. Dewey believed that the role of schools and employees therein is to pursue or create educative experiences that benefit the entire learning community.

The strengths of experiential learning theory. Dewey's (1920/2004) view of knowledge is that "knowing is not self-enclosed and final but is instrumental to reconstruction of situations" (p. 84). Educative experiences include real-life situations that are available to educators and students alike (Dewey, 1938). Likewise, everyday life consists of creative,

imaginative, and educative experiences that can be used to promote purposeful and meaningful learning (Dewey, 1938). According to Boyles (2020) and Dewey (1938), true educative experiences are rarely scripted, nor are they necessarily happy or effortless situations, yet those types of experiences increase the quality and quantity of what is learned. In this study, the first strength of experiential learning theory (ELT) is that a critical incident served as the rarely scripted and challenging real-life situations that Boyles (2020) and Dewey (1938) claim benefits learning.

A second strength of ELT is that learning moments that stem from real-life situations can be useful in initiatives that build relationships (Nakaima & Sridharan, 2020; Seed, 2008). According to Seed (2008), close relationships between pre-service teachers and faculty at a middle school were observed during a four-day experiential learning program, in which participants indicated that their relationships were positively affected by their experiences in the program. Close relationships were not only developed, but support from faculty was also noted (Seed, 2008).

The weakness of experiential learning theory. According to Bergsteiner, Avery, Neuman and Kamil (2010) and Jarvis (2012) there is relatively little research conducted on experiential learning theory. Nonetheless, research on experiential learning has more than tripled since the turn of the 21st century in many fields including, education, law, management, medicine, and psychology (Kolb, 2015). Therefore, additional research may be needed to better understand “how educators may conceptualize and facilitate the concept of experiential learning” (Morris, 2019, p. 1073).

Review of the Literature

Eisenberger et al. (1986) present compelling evidence that employees form opinions regarding the extent to which an organization values their contributions and demonstrates care toward their well-being. According to organizational support theory (OST), the concept of POS was primarily developed from employee's tendencies to assign human-like characteristics to the organization—as the organization reflects the agents who exert power over individual workers (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Based on the organization's personification, employees view their treatment at work as a reflection of whether or not the leaders of the organization approve or disapprove of their workmanship (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Such personification is further abetted by role behaviors and supervisory personnel exerted over individual employees (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

In education, individual employees are an important component of the employee-organization relationship (EOR) and without them, the complete relationship does not exist. For much of the 20th century, the main focus of the EOR was most often from the viewpoint of the organization (Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Tripoli, 1997). However, current understanding of the EOR examines the importance of the role employee work engagement plays in the relationship (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017). School employee's engagement, commitment, and performance may be perceived differently prior to and during a critical incident such as COVID-19. Therefore, it is important to understand the state of education prior to and during a time such as COVID-19.

The State of US Education Prior to and During COVID-19

Prior to and into the 21st century, the state of education in the United States was a matter of concern. Many school leaders were concerned with the ongoing quest to improve teaching,

learning, system level supports, policies, technologies, diversity, and equity (Aydin, Ozfidan, & Carothers, 2017; Nehring, Szczesiul, & Charner-Laird, 2019). Many of those concerns were brought on by national policy debates on education system design and the characteristics associated with high-quality educational systems (Hudson, Leask, & Yonnie, 2021). Research on methods to improve teaching, learning, and student achievement (Woessmann, 2016), teacher job satisfaction, well-being, working conditions (Toropova, Myberg, & Johansson, 2020), and relationships between schools and communities (Fox & Buchanan, 2017) were the primary foci for schools across the US prior to COVID-19.

However, some of the concerns to improve education delivery, employee well-being, and professional relationships may have shifted since COVID-19 has forced the educational system to change. Before the COVID-19 outbreak, there were fewer technological platforms available and used throughout education (e.g., FaceBook, WhatsApp, Twitter) (Almarzooq, Lopes, & Kochar, 2020; Norton & Hathaway, 2015). As a result of these and other emerging technological tools, the educational system may benefit from generating new knowledge on the impact of the abrupt shift to remote education (Aljarrah, Ababneh, & Cavus, 2020).

Remote Education During COVID-19

The unprecedented disruption of the educational system during the COVID-19 pandemic was claimed to be a significant factor in the transition to remote education (Almarzooq et al., 2020; Operating Schools During COVID-19, 2020). When COVID-19 abruptly disrupted in-person education, school communities, and school community events, it shaped the experiences of online interactions and community engagement from a distance (Lowenthal, Borup, West, & Archambault, 2020). Researchers claim that the shift to remote education platforms such as

Zoom video communications during the pandemic had only partially supported the needs of traditional curriculum standards in education (Lowenthal et al., 2020).

Technological tools such as Zoom are useful as virtual and social outlets in school communities, however, such tools may lack the depth needed to meet average curricular demands and requirements for school community support (Almarzooq et al., 2020; Lowenthal et al., 2020). According to Trust and Whalen (2020), the pandemic exposed a significant gap in school preparation and training for emergency remote education. The need to provide support and the “need for innovative solutions to optimize educational endeavors” during COVID-19 may be demonstrated through the use of synchronous and or asynchronous technology delivery (Almarzooq et al., 2020, p. 2635).

Synchronous online learning platforms. Existing literature on solutions to optimize remote education during COVID-19 explores school community experiences with synchronous and asynchronous technology platforms (Almarzooq et al., 2020; Trust, Carpenter, Krutka, & Kimmons, 2020). Synchronous platforms such as Zoom are helpful in quickly addressing and clarifying problems in the learning environment, diminishing feelings of isolation, and improving social community (Lowenthal, Dunlap, & Snelson, 2017; McDaniels, Pfund, & Barnicle, 2016). On the contrary, synchronous learning may present a disadvantage for learning communities. Schulman (2020) claims that synchronous platforms such as Zoom leaves people feeling frustrated and fatigue. Zoom participation may also depend on situational factors such as home life and broadband accessibility (Schulman, 2020). Additionally, Setera (2020) and Strauss (2020) claims that security issues such as “Zoom-bombing” can also arise and threaten the security, privacy, and trust of users (in press).

Asynchronous online learning platforms. Asynchronous remote education may also pose advantages and disadvantages for users in a learning community. According to Lowenthal et al. (2020), asynchronous applications like FlipGrid and EdConnect contribute to learning and school-wide communications. The advantage of asynchronous platforms is that they may allow users more time for reflection, create equitable opportunities for participation, increase engagement, and help “maintain a strong sense of connection” while providing the learning community with flexibility during times of school closure (Lowenthal et al., 2020, p. 384). On the contrary, the disadvantages of asynchronous platforms are that they eliminate the ability for learners, school communities, and employees to participate in real-time discussions (DeNoyelles, Zydney, & Chen, 2014; Lowenthal et al., 2020) and they may diminish the ability to effectively assess participant’s well-being and emotions (Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012; Lowenthal et al., 2020).

Remote learning and emotions. Cleveland-Innes and Campbell (2012) conducted research on the emotional responses of learners and remote learning in school communities. The authors find evidence, through exploratory statistical analysis, “that emotions exist in all aspects of an online community” (Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012, p. 284). They conclude that all participants in school communities (e. g., leaders, teachers, support staff, and students) should learn to comprehend the role of emotions in their life and learn to realize the benefits of the emotions (Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012). According to Cleveland-Innes and Campbell (2012), learners who better understand their emotions in a remote education context may effectively move beyond the role of victim and toward becoming a conscious manager of their emotions.

As a result of the abrupt shift to remote education during COVID-19, persons in education should be offered better social and affective tools (Trust and Whalen, 2020), and time to process their emotions through reflective practices to properly balance the emotional work inherent in education (Long & Wong, 2012; O'Toole & Friesen, 2016). Trust and Whalen (2020) offer insight for better preparation and support for school employees who use remote education in times of need. According to Trust and Whalen, (2020), the rationale behind improving preparation and support during any educational event or situation (e.g., a critical incident) is to ensure school program continuity and to support the learning community “across spatial and temporal boundaries” (p. 189).

The Impact of a Critical Incident on Education

Schools do not escape the effects of a critical incident (e.g., natural disasters). Besides being an official landmark for emergency community evacuations during natural disasters (Takahashi et al., 2015), schools play a vital role in the recovery of the learning community following these events (Le Brocque et al., 2016). There is an extensive body of research on the effects of critical incidents on students and schools at different levels of education (Direen, 2017; Kargillis, Kako, & Gilham, 2014; Le Brocque et al., 2016; Longobardi, Prino, Marengo, & Settanni, 2016). However, the same cannot be said about the availability of research at the organizational/leadership level of schools that focus on the impact of critical incidents between employees and the organization.

In a study of social, emotional, and behavioral changes of 8th-grade students who transitioned from middle school into high school, Longobardi et al. (2016) found that levels of student-teacher support during transition significantly predicted academic achievement. Demonstrations of affirmation and exchanges of support within student-teacher relationships, as

perceived by students, may play an important role in student achievement and adaptive behaviors during times of transition (Longobardi et al., 2016). In an adult learning workshop, Scheele (2013) examined how critical incidents affected participants' perceptions and emotions. Scheele's (2013) findings revealed that experiences during critical incidents produced internal subjective changes (i.e., perspective, emotions, and decisions on future actions) in participants' mindsets that became catalysts for transformative learning.

According to the Center for Posttraumatic Mental Health (2015) approximately 66% of students will have experienced at least one critical incident before graduating from high school. A critical incident may produce an adverse psychological impact that can often linger long after physical recovery is complete (Kargillis et al., 2014). The psychological impact from a critical incident can be prevalent in primary and secondary school students and may contribute to behavioral and academic decline (Le Brocque et al., 2016). Similarly, Di Pietro (2018) discussed ways in which a violent earthquake affected academic performance of university students. In addition to a decline in academic performance he cited a slight increase in dropout rates (Di Pietro, 2018). As for school leaders, Direen (2017) focused on what leaders had experienced and learned after leading their organizations through a critical incident. Direen (2017) cited successful school leadership during a natural disaster relies on utilizing support networks, maintaining collaborative employee-organization relationships, and knowing that reflection and feedback on critical incidents present an opportunity for organizational transformation and learning.

Mpofu (2019) claims that what is common among educators' accounts during a critical incident are "that the experiences that shape their comprehension of teaching and learning include heightened professional and emotional distress" (p. 73). In the same vein as Mpofu

(2019), literature yet pointed to the effects of natural disasters as a critical external pressure on educators' personal and professional lives (Cannon, Davis, & Fuller, 2020) and their mental and physical health and safety (Brisbon, Lovett, & Griggs, 2020). Additionally, Megawati et al. (2020) claim that school leaders demonstrate support for educators and promote learning and transformation in the organization through reflection of critical incidents. The US House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor characterized the response and recovery to natural disasters as a critical step to ensure that school staff "not only recover from natural disasters but actually emerge stronger" (US House of Representatives, 2019, p. 3).

For decades, organizational support theory (OST) and perceived organizational support (POS) have been more often applied to the development efforts of business and marketing (e.g., human resources) organizations (Eisenberger et al., 1986), other fields (Caesens & Stinglhamber, 2020), and more recently to the field of education (Kolb, 2015). Based on accumulating research on OST, Eisenberger et al. (2016) claim that current "practices promoting POS are a work in progress" (p. 18). In an effort to generate new knowledge on the topic, in the field of education, this study examined school employees' POS and the employee-organization relationship (EOR) through concepts most familiar to human resource departments: employee work engagement, commitment, and performance (Eisenberger, 1986). Therefore, further exploration of POS and employee work engagement, commitment, and performance was presented.

Perceived organizational support and employee work engagement. Research interest on the concept of employee work engagement has risen dramatically in the 21st century (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2016). Researchers define employee engagement as the employee's responsibility and capacity to focus their effort and energy into enthusiastic involvement during daily working hours (Christian, Garza & Slaughter, 2011; Schaufeli, 2017). However, Kahn

(1990), who is attributed with the theory of employee work engagement described the primary aim was to identify the conditions that enable engagement to occur. Kahn was especially interested in the moments that people enter and exit specific task behaviors (Young, 2018). According to Gallup (2020), employee work engagement generates much of the creativity, innovation, and excellence within an organization. Additionally, there are positive and significant correlations between employee work engagement and employees' POS (Köse, 2016) discovered in more recent research.

In a cross-sectional study, Yang et al. (2020) claim that low levels of employee work engagement led to higher job turnover rates within organizations. The researchers of the quantitative study collected responses from 836 participants to examine the connection between POS and employee work engagement (Yang et al., 2020). Researchers concluded that higher levels of POS may indirectly improve employee's "vigor, dedication, and absorption" on the job (Yang et al., 2020, p. 1).

Additional research on the topic demonstrates employee work engagement as a conceptual area reduced to two zones (i.e., engagement and meaning). According to Lemon and Palenchar (2018), "zones of engagement" and "zones of meaning" were used in a phenomenological study to examine employee work engagement (p. 142). These *zones* are conceptual; however, they demonstrate how employees' POS is related to their work engagement (Lemon & Palenchar, 2018). The findings from the same study provided a framework for scholars who worked to further develop a better understanding of employee work engagement (Lemon & Palenchar, 2018). The *zones of engagement* resulted from patterns that emerged from participant revelations in the study and offered new insight into the complexities of employee's lived experiences—both inside and outside of the workplace. The collective actions of the

organization and its employees were gathered through interviews and coded to identify and understand zones of meaning (Lemon & Palenchar, 2018). The concept of the zones (Figure 1) demonstrates the complexity of employee work engagement (Lemon & Palenchar, 2018).

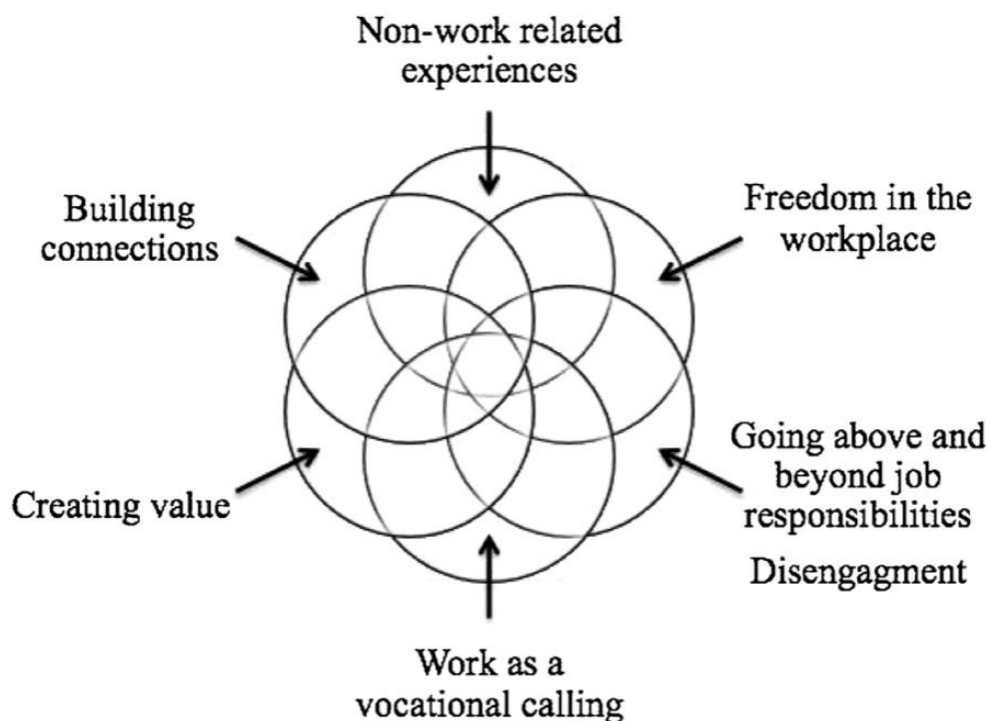


Figure 1. The figure demonstrates the complexity of employee work engagement and how employees may experience multiple dimensions in tandem, even though separate zones are complex within themselves, they apply to a particular zone of meaning. From “Public Relations and Zones of Engagement: Employees' lived experiences and the Fundamental Nature of Employee Engagement, by Lemon and Palenchar (2018), *Public Relations Review*, 44, p. 150. Copyright 2018 by Elsevier Inc.

Findings in the Lemon and Pelenchar (2018) study show that employees' POS may align with segments noted in the zones of engagement. That is to say, each circle of conception in the zones of engagement highlights an important factor to assist in the understanding of shared meaning of employee's lived experiences (Lemon & Pelanchar, 2018). Kahn (1990) defined employee work engagement as an employee's display of physical, cognitive, emotional, and

mental performances. According to Schaufeli (2017), it is essential that humans satisfy their need for meaning through engagement at work.

While the links between POS and employee work engagement are well documented in the management literature (Argawal, 2014; Bolino, Hsiung, Harvey, & LePine, 2015; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 2016; Gupta, Agarwal & Khatri, 2016; Karatepe & Aga, 2016) there is a gap in the literature in the field of education (Köse, 2016). Köse (2016) claims “there is a positive and significant relationship” between school employee’s engagement, POS, and organizational climate (p. 42). According to Çalık ve Kurt (2010), organizational climate is a set of qualities that promote the organization’s identity, affects worker’s behavior, and dominates the entire organization. Studies show that POS, engagement, and organizational climate are linked to employee’s commitment and performance (Bursalıoğlu, 2012; Çalık ve Kurt, 2010; Çelik, 2012). According to Köse (2016), when school employees perceive the organization is being supportive, worthwhile, and productive, levels of work performance and commitment increase. Furthermore, employee engagement is significantly related to employee commitment (Nazir & Islam, 2017).

Perceived organizational support and employee work commitment. Organizational support theory (OST) holds that employee work commitment is borne from both self-enhancement processes and social exchanges (Kurtessis et al., 2015). According to Porter, Steers, and Mowday (1974) employee commitment is the employee’s identification and personal involvement with the organization, which specifically includes: (a) beliefs and acceptance of the organization’s missions and values, (b) willingness to exert substantial effort in support of the organization, and (c) determination to remain a connected member of the organization. Douglas (2010) concluded from his research that the best predictor of employee commitment is

demonstrated in the collective and collaborative activities of the whole organization, as well as through the behaviors of individual employees. According to Tschannen and Moran (2009), employee's work commitment is the responsibility of both leaders and employees. There are several examples in the literature that report a strong association of POS with employee work commitment (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Kim, Eisenberger, & Baik, 2016; Rahman & Rana, 2012; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Riggle, Edmonson, & Hansen, 2009).

Kim et al. (2016) found that POS is the work experience that is most strongly linked to employee commitment (e.g., emotional attachment to the organization). The researchers conducted three studies in one to assess the interactional relationship between POS and affective commitment (AC) to the organization. The first study was conducted to gather insight on the moderating effects of perceived organizational competence (POC) in employees in both the US and South Korea. The study examined the POC—the global perception of “the organization's ability to achieve objectives and goals” of 363 employees (Kim et al., 2016, p. 561). Findings in that study showed that POC was a mediating factor in the relationship between POS and work commitment and is consistent with OST, in that, based on a social exchange construct, employees search for balance in the employee-organization relationship (Kim et al., 2016).

The second study was a replica of the first study, with the exception of being a longitudinal design to better understand the causal relationships between POS and employee commitment. This study “provides evidence of the causal direction of the relationship of POS and AC” (Kim et al., 2016, p. 577). In other words, the researchers found POC to be a moderating influence on the connection between POS and affective commitment (AC) in two countries that have noticeably dissimilar cultural characteristics. The first two studies suggest POC moderates the relationship between POS and AC (Kim et al., 2016).

In the third study, the researchers investigated the leader's behavior toward "initiating structure and consideration" as distinct antecedents of POC and POS (Kim et al., 2016, p. 571). The findings in the third study show that leader's behaviors predicted POS and POC and "may be more strongly related to supervisors' support and competence than to comparable perceptions regarding the organization" (Kim et al., 2016, p. 576). Interestingly, according to Kim et al. (2016) and Meyer and Maltin (2010), affective commitment (AC) is related to increases in employee well-being and work performance.

Researchers in the field of education have begun to explore how knowledge of employee work engagement, commitment, and performance may affect school employee's perceived organizational support (POS). Findings from a study of school employees in India revealed a positive influence of POS on employee's work commitment and performance (Nazir & Islam, 2017). Moreover, these relationships are found to be mediated by employee work engagement (Nazir & Islam, 2017). According to Garg and Dhar (2014), employees who perceived a lower degree of POS more frequently demonstrated lower levels of work commitment to the organization. Therefore, POS is a significant antecedent of an employee's work commitment (Kurtessis et al., 2015). In addition to the above discussed relationships regarding POS and employee work commitment via engagement, researchers also claim POS is significantly related to an increase in employee performance (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Nazir & Islam, 2017; Neves & Eisenberger, 2012).

Perceived organizational support and employee work performance. High levels of POS have been known to increase employee's sense of responsibility and indebtedness to perform organizational objectives (Eisenberger, et al., 1986; Vatankhah, Javid & Raofi, 2016). According to Cullen, Edwards, Casper, and Gue (2013), when employees develop high levels of

POS, they are more likely to attempt to reciprocate and repay the organization through better performance on the job. Furthermore, the development of positive impressions and POS that employees receive from the organization may lead to better outcomes within the employee-organization relationship (Cullen et al., 2013). However, if employees fail to feel support from the organization, they may begin to withhold efforts and demonstrate “lower levels of performance” (Cullen et al., 2013, p. 270). According to Eisenberger et al. (2016), many organizations have yet to fully understand how favorable relationships increase employee performance and contribute to the mission, vision, and objectives of the organization. Studies on how favorable relationships may increase employee’s performance have been conducted extensively in various fields, however, there is a substantial gap in the field of education.

The research on the evidence of the employee-organization relationship, employee performance, and POS in various fields such as business, marketing, and management is well documented (Biswakarma, 2017; Chiang & Hsieh, 2011; Conway, & Coyle-Shapiro, 2011; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eliyana, & Ma’arif, 2019; Karaalioglu, & Karabalut, 2019; Karatepe & Aga, 2016; Kim, Hur, Moon, & Jun, 2017; Nazir & Islam, 2017; Neves & Eisenberger, 2012; Scanlan et al., 2018; Vatankhah, et al., 2016; Warren, 2020). There have been fewer examples on the school employee-organization relationship, employee performance, and POS in the field of education (Afzali, Motahari & Shirkouhi, 2014; Guan, 2014; Muhammad, Ahmed, & Ashiq, 2019; Ridwan, Mulyani, & Ali, 2020). However, the existing research on POS and employee work performance in education reveals there is a significant relationship between the two concepts.

Educational researchers conclude that school employees performed better when they experienced support from higher authorities within the organization (Afzali et al., 2014;

Muhammad et al., 2019). According to Muhammad et al. (2019), in review of the studies on POS in the field of education, the common view of researchers around the world, is that organizational support may be associated with employee performance. Therefore, the optimal quality of the employee-organization relationship may serve to enhance school employee's performance and the organization's success. According to Muhammad et al. (2019), the quality of the employee-organization relationship between secondary school employees and their supervisors plays a significant role in organizational transformation.

The Impact of Experiential Learning and Support on Organizational Transformation

Schools may present professional development opportunities as interventions and pathways to learning and organizational transformation (Admiraal, Schenke, De Jong, Emmelot, & Sligte, 2019; Tuli, 2017). In a longitudinal study of three years, Admiraal et al. (2019) investigated professional development and school support and found that the type of learning opportunities and the kind of support demonstrated by an organization may make a difference in the amount of transformation experienced. The researchers studied educators at 14 Dutch secondary schools that offered a series of five intervention program opportunities: (a) "shared school vision on learning, (b) professional learning opportunities for all, (c) collaborative work and learning, (d) change of school organization, and (e) learning leadership" (Admiraal et al., 2019, p. 7). The data revealed that after the interventions were offered and participants were interviewed, the two most frequently mentioned and favorable interventions were the professional learning opportunities for all and collaborative work and learning (Admiraal et al., 2019).

Opfer and Pedder (2011) argue that literature on teachers' learning places too much emphasis on individual teachers and programs with little inclusion of the influences provided by

an institution or organization. In organizations, such as schools, the act of learning is the process and act of cognition and behavior (Yeo & Marquardt, 2015). Therefore, schools, as organizations, are centers for learning about thinking and behavior.

In another study, Baker, Jensen, and Kolb (2015) propose that the experiential learning process may occur during conversations, in which, “learners construct meaning from their experiences” (p. 411). The study considers conversations as an important ingredient in the experiential learning process. The researchers explored how conversations were able to promote participant work engagement. Furthermore, findings suggest that guided conversations allowed differing perspectives to accelerate learning experientially, advance individual learning, and promote organizational learning and transformation (Baker et al., 2015).

Conclusion

The challenges facing education and school employees during the critical incident of COVID-19 and the abrupt transition to remote education have given rise to questions about issues surrounding perceived organizational support (POS) during such events. Through this literature review, the researcher examined the issue of employees’ POS during a critical incident by highlighting the state of US education prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of critical incidents on education, the effects of POS on employees’ engagement, commitment, and performance, and the significance of reflective practice as a platform for learning and organizational transformation.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

In this qualitative narrative case study, the researcher elicited responses from participants and used real-world situations in the process to develop a better understanding of the study's problem, generate new ideas, (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016), and conclusively excavate stories as data (Kim, 2016). Specifically, in this narrative inquiry, the researcher of this study explored the experiences and perspectives of participants regarding their perceived organizational support (POS) during the COVID-19 pandemic and the abrupt transition to remote education instruction. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2016), researchers of narrative inquiry should become one with the stories of human experience as an authentic way to access the information-rich complexities waiting to be discovered in people's lives. Therefore, the stories inherent in the lives and experiences of school employees may be a reflection of the organization's intentions.

Oftentimes, highly controlling organizations tend to diminish employees' growth by not encouraging workers' experiences to be reflected upon, questioned, or developed (Kotter, 2012). On the other hand, less controlling organizations are more successful because they make better use of employee's talents and, therefore, produce a culture of risk-taking that inevitably enhances the employee-organization relationship (Kotter, 2012). The researcher of this study hopes to have empowered participants through an opportunity to reflect on a critical incident that affected them.

Purpose of the Proposed Study

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry case study was to discover the lived experiences and perceived organizational support (POS) of school employees' abrupt transition to remote educational instruction resulting from a critical incident such as COVID-19. Every

year, schools endure challenges that test the organization's fortitude—in which some of those challenges may be expected while others may be unexpected/critical incidents (Mpofu, 2019). Mpofu (2019) and Patahuddin and Lowrie (2012) describe critical incidents as unexpected crises that affect education. Additionally, Mpofu (2019) suggests school leaders and employees should immediately reflect on a critical incident before returning to effective teaching and learning practices. Looking forward to the future of education in a post-COVID-19 world, Korkmaz and Toraman (2020) find that educators expect teaching and learning practices will change. Their findings suggest that the professional competencies of educators will be enhanced and result in a transformation of education (Korkman & Toraman, 2020).

Research Question and Design

The researcher proposed a qualitative research design—a narrative inquiry, single instrument case study to explore participants' perspectives and feelings about organizational support during a critical incident. A narrative inquiry design effectively supports data collection through interviews and, therefore, better informs the research purpose and research question (Kim, 2016). This study's research question was focused on the purpose of the research.

Research Question

The research question that guided this study was:

1. How do employees, other than administrators at Leading Way School perceive their experiences of organizational support during times of a critical incident that led to the abrupt transition of remote education instruction?

Research Design

This researcher proposed a qualitative narrative research design to investigate the single instrument case. A case is defined as a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The case is, in effect, “the researcher’s unit of analysis” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 25). The phenomenon that was studied by this researcher occurred within one bounded case. As a qualitative research methodology, the researcher examined Leading Way School as a single instrumental case study. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2016), a “case study is an exploratory form of inquiry” that involves significant interaction with participants, which renders a more in-depth view of the unit under study (p. 46). Binding the case ensures that the scope of the study remains reasonable (Ficke, 2020).

The general purpose of humanities-oriented research is to explore and understand different human phenomena that generate new ideas and “advance human well-being” (Kim, 2019, p. 157). As qualitative research becomes increasingly represented in contemporary academic literature, resources and models of study methodologies continue to evolve (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In the evolution and innovation of qualitative research, new academic resources offer intriguing and provocative perspectives that reflect various theoretical views found in contemporary research (Peterson, 2019). Patton (2015) claims the process of qualitative research is personal, and how a researcher chooses to conduct their study of interest is a vital component of its methodology.

In all of human history, narratives have been an integral part of society (Kim, 2016). According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), the major characteristics of narrative research focuses on participant experiences, details regarding the setting or context of their experiences, the retelling of experiences, and an opportunity to strengthen the participant/researcher relationship. To retell participants’ experiences via narrative inquiry may bring validation to their feelings and beliefs. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) claim that to provide participants with an opportunity to share their opinions, or to make room for additional discussions about

their experiences gives people a sense of pride, in that, their experiences and their voices are being heard. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) express how researchers of qualitative studies do not find knowledge, rather, knowledge is constructed and interpreted by connecting and turning multiple social realities into a collection of interpretations of single events. Additionally, Creswell and Guetterman (2019) claim that qualitative methods (i.e., narrative research) are best applied to research that endeavors to record the life-experiences of individuals.

Qualitative research encourages direct communication with people to allow their experiences and discoveries to be expressed unencumbered by researcher expectations, or from what is gleaned in the literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2016), a qualitative approach is best suited for investigations that seek to answer research problems with subject matter driven by questions of *how* and, or *what*. Additionally, Creswell and Guetterman (2019) claim that narrative research is useful for researchers who endeavor to capture the microanalytical picture of participants' stories, which, are then commonly used as data. Therefore, a narrative inquiry methodology was appropriate for this study as it was an investigation into how employees described their experiences and perceived organizational support (POS).

This study's conceptual framework consisted of organizational support theory (OST) (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and experiential learning theory (ELT) (Dewey, 1938). OST posits, employees form universal beliefs about the extent to which the organization cares about their well-being and values personal contributions (Eisenberger et al., 1986). The theory incorporates a focus on work engagement, commitment, and performance, of which each contribute to employee's well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Furthermore, enhancements to the employee-organization relationship may improve employees' POS (Eisenberger, 1986; Eisenberger et al.,

2016). According to ELT, educative experiences are those that are produced in real-world situations and follow a “fundamental principle of connection with life experience” (Dewey, 1938, p. 78). For this study, OST and ELT were the lenses through which the researcher explored employees’ POS during the critical incident of COVID-19 and the abrupt transition to remote education instruction. Finally, as a narrative inquiry, interview questions were anticipated to capture participants’ POS during data collection (Appendix D).

The researcher of this study sought purposeful inquiry of participants’ POS and promoted their reflection on real-world experiences during the critical incident of COVID-19. Dewey’s (1938) work on experiential learning focuses on the human ability to reflect on lived experiences, which further compels people to promote or reject previously held assumptions (Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett, & Norman, 2010). Dewey (1938) claims the ability to reimagine personal events or experiences is akin to the process of learning, which is the constant examination of past, present, and future events and decisions.

According to Dewey (1938) and Miettinen (2000), experiential learning, specifically noted for adult learners, is a two-fold reiterative process that cycles between the experience and intentional reflection of the experience. The use of Dewey’s (1938) theory of experiential learning in education may have provided insight into participants’ perceptions, as well as become a logical tool to inform organizations of the significance of reflective practice during a critical incident. The researcher used semi-structured interviews to encourage participants to provide flexible data responses to questions, increase momentum and interest toward the issues that were explored, and promote a healthy bond between the researcher and participant (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Site Information and Population

Leading Way School (LWS), the site for this study, is a Pre-Kindergarten through 8th grade private progressive school whose philosophy and mission combines academic excellence with educational ideals of social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion; an education that seeks to instill activist values in the community. Like many schools, LWS endured the critical incident of COVID-19 and continues to endure the fallout from it (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020). LWS is located in the northeast region of the United States. The school shares an educational philosophy similar to Dewey's (1938) progressive education ideology and learning through real-life situations and reflective practice. It is important to note that the study setting is one in which an examination of a critical incident in a progressive school environment was a prominent factor in its identification as a study site.

Population

Participants in qualitative research are chosen for their knowledge of significant events (Creswell, 2012). The participants in this study were school employees—excluding workers in leadership or administrative positions—who were willing to share their lived experiences and POS during the transition to remote educational instruction resulting from the critical incident of COVID-19. The total employee population at LWS, including leaders and administrators is approximately 69 members, however, there are only 54 staff members who are either full-time or part-time employees. In addition, there are approximately 361 students in the LWS student body.

Participation was voluntary, however, school administrators (e.g., leaders and directors) were not included. Eisenberger et al. (1986) and Levinson (1965) claim that directors and upper managers are personified by employees as the organization itself. Therefore, to participate in

this study, full-time and part-time employees from all departments, except those in administrative positions were considered for recruitment. Additionally, to be eligible to participate in this study, employees must have worked for more than two academic years at LWS and they must not work in an administrative position. Anonymity was given to all participants. Pseudonyms, in place of actual names were assigned to all participants before data collection began.

Sampling Method

The use of purposive sampling allowed the researcher to discover and gain insight from individuals, who because of their experience with the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2014), best “frame[d] what matters as data” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 148). For this study, the researcher used criterion-based sampling to recruit employees specifically and solely. Merriam (2009) states that criterion-based sampling is anchored on the assumption that the researcher seeks to gain understanding from individuals “from which the most can be learned” (p. 77). Participants were chosen using a purposive sampling method based on their criterion as employees. Therefore, school administrators and or school leaders were excluded from participation. That being said, the study comprised of part-time and or full-time employees, rather than administrators. The researcher, while employed at LWS was not representative of the studied sample, however, the researcher’s relationship to the study site and participants was as a member of the organization. The researcher avoided personal bias in interviewer-respondent interactions by “taking a stance that [was] non-judgmental, sensitive, and respectful” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 130).

In studies where the focus is on the collection of life stories, Beitin (2012) suggests that an optimal sample size should range between six and 12 participants, provided a thematic

redundancy appears after six participants. The faculty and staff population of 54 members at the site was relatively large, therefore, it was anticipated that this study's sample would consist of 10 participants who met eligibility criteria. Kim (2016) claims that a smaller sample size is appropriate for the rigor of a narrative inquiry, as interviewing via this method may become a lengthy process. Kim (2016) also describes how narrative inquiry thrives on the researchers' ability to find as many creative types of data points as possible to accomplish the research purpose at-hand. In this study, it was anticipated that many of the imaginative data points would be produced by employees from different school departments at LWS.

The study included semi-structured interviews, in which participants recounted their lived experiences and POS. As a narrative inquiry, the study's design allowed the researcher to peer into the lives of participants who potentially possessed diverse experiences while at work. Through the interview process, coding and emerging themes uncovered a deeper understanding of employees' POS and the employee-organization relationship.

Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedures

Employees were recruited through an *Invitation to Participate in Study* (Appendix C) email sent to all eligible full-time and part-time workers at LWS—with the exception of administrators and or school leaders—from the researchers' email address at the University of New England (UNE). The information contained in the invitation to participate in the study included: the invitation, the purpose of the research, the methodology (i.e., interviews), participant eligibility, voluntary clause with permission to withdraw, and the assurance of anonymity. To recruit participants, the researcher emailed the school's administrative secretary and requested a list of employees' names and email addresses from the school directory. For consideration to participate, potential participants were instructed to respond to the invitation via

the researcher's UNE email address within 10 days. The first 10 respondents that met eligibility criteria to participate were emailed a follow-up *Subject Consent to Participation in Research* (Appendix B) document. That being said, the first 10 respondents who met the eligibility criteria were chosen as participants in the study. The researcher did not admit any other requests to participate after the first 10 respondents were enlisted. All respondent data is kept in a password protected electronic folder known only to the researcher.

Informed consent and confidentiality were paramount at all times; before, during, and after data collection. Before participation began, participants were fully informed of the risks and procedures involved in the study (Roberts, 2014). Information on the risks and procedures was communicated to participants through the informed consent document (Appendix B).

Creswell and Guetterman (2019) stress the importance of researcher's attention toward building a healthy participant-researcher rapport. For the past 10 years, the researcher has been an employee in the LWS organization. Therefore, the researcher was aware of existing professional relationships between fellow colleagues but set aside such relationships by forthright acknowledging the condition with participants as a way to create a trusting bond in the relationship. As part of this acknowledgement, the researcher informed participants of the study's purpose, with full disclosure that shared information is stored securely on the researcher's personal computer and server, and that employees' experiences and identifiable information would remain anonymous (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Field Test

Before conducting actual participant interviews, a field test was conducted to assist the researcher in the refining of the interview questions. The questions were field tested using two educators from neighboring communities who had worked for more than two years at their

school. To meet and exceed the recommended safety and social distancing protocols during the COVID-19 pandemic (Operating Schools During Covid-19, 2021), field test interviews were conducted through Zoom online video services. The field test “simulate[d] the actual data collection process” (Roberts, 2014, p. 156).

Prior to interviewing individuals who had directly experienced the topic of study, the researcher explored his personal experiences to gain understanding. The aim of this exploration was to examine the attributes of the experience and develop an awareness of bias, perspectives, and assumptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researcher assumptions were bracketed and set aside to allow the phenomenon to be re-conceived (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Interviews

The method of data collection was conducted through one-on-one participant interviews. One-on-one interviews are the foremost method of data collection in narrative inquiry research (Kim, 2016). Upon securing necessary institutional review board (IRB) approvals, the researcher gathered data through open-ended, semi-structured interview questions (Appendix D). Semi-structured interview questions were used to encourage participant reflection by offering “a mix of more and less structured questions”, which complemented the narrative inquiry methodology (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 110). For each interview, data were properly managed and securely stored using a Galaxy S10+ smartphone, Zoom technology cloud recording, and research field note entries. As stated before, all respondent data are kept in a password protected electronic folder known only to the researcher and stored away from public view and access.

Responses to semi-structured interview questions may lead to unexpected conversations and open up new avenues of inquiry (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Merriam and

Tisdell (2016), semi-structured interview questions allowed the researcher an opportunity to enter the participants' perspective and clearly understand the effects of what the participant had experienced and observed, which included feelings, thoughts, and events that framed how they organized the world and shaped meaning. Participants were informed of the significance of understanding that their perceptions and beliefs could potentially bring value to the learning community. The research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, therefore, the researcher desired to protect participant's well-being by placing their safety first (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019), and conducted the interviews through Zoom, an online video-conference platform. The researcher conducted all interviews in the privacy of his home office, away from public view. Participants were located in a private setting as well. The majority of interview lengths ranged from 45 to 60 minutes.

The researcher was aware of *participant reactivity*, a phenomenon that occurs when participants respond less candidly or in ways that they perceive the researcher desires (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Creswell (2014) cautions of the disadvantages of interviewing, including, the filtering of participant responses through the lens of the interviewer, or with responses that may be unclear or inarticulate. The researcher explained and disclosed this phenomenon to each participant.

The researcher audio recorded participant interview question responses and procured services for verbatim transcription through Rev.com, a software application company (Rev.com, 2020). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) claim that verbatim transcriptions of recorded interviews provide a good platform for data analysis. Data collected and managed via technology were properly saved and secured on an Apple™ MacBook Pro with iCloud security—with whom the researcher had sole access to the device and security passwords.

A copy of the interview transcripts were emailed to the respective participants to confirm the validity of the interview through member checking procedures. During the member checking process, participants checked their transcript and were invited to make corrections via email referring to the page number and line of text they wished to address. Upon completion of participant corrections and modifications, the researcher requested participants return the edits via email within three to five business days. The participants were informed that the interpreted interview data and final report would be made available to them at a specified time.

Field Notes

Field notes helped keep track of the researcher's thoughts, speculations, impressions, and hunches (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Field notes were taken to highlight and reflect the researcher's perceptions during the course of the study. Field notes were recorded and notations from formal interviews with audio recordings were collected (Creswell, 2013). During interviews, notes on participants' body language and general demeanor were included in the researchers' reflections. Keeping reflective field notes throughout the research process may minimize researcher bias and promote an objective perspective (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

Data Analysis

The rationale for interviews is that they have the potential to produce rich, meaningful descriptive data related to participants' emotions and perceptions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 154). The member-checking of interviews provided the researcher an opportunity to clarify or question the accuracy of participants' statements (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The interview questions elicited more in-depth responses regarding participants POS, as well as gained insight into employee-organization relationships at LWS.

Creswell and Guetterman's (2019) six steps to analyze data were used as a template for the coding process—a data analysis process that identified and listed actual words and phrases presented by participants. First, the researcher made an initial read-through of the text data to get a sense of the whole document. Second, the researcher chose one document at a time and considered the underlying meaning of what the interviewee was talking about. Third, segments of the document were labeled with codes that described the meaning of the text. Fourth, after coding the whole text, the researcher made a list of all the code words in the effort to eliminate redundant codes. Fifth, the researcher took the list and revisited the data in an effort to identify new or emerging codes. Sixth, the researcher reduced the penultimate list of codes to five to seven themes that were discussed “most frequently, [were] unique or surprising, ha[d] the most evidence to support them” or those that were expected (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 245). The researcher used *In Vivo* coding software to analyze unstructured audio and text files. The *In Vivo* software further assisted in coding participant responses. After those steps, the researcher further segmented and labeled the coded data to form emergent themes (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

The cataloging of codes was kept to a minimum and closely examined for repetitive words and phrases, and funneled into themes across transcripts (Creswell, 2012). Finally, the emergent themes were further reflected upon and presented in Chapter 4 (Creswell, 2014). In essence, raw data were reduced, coded and recoded, and represented in a final research text that includes figures and narratives (Kim, 2016). To assure data validity and trustworthiness, the researcher used *In Vivo* text mining software to conduct across data sources triangulation and searched for convergence among data sources or interview participants (Lemon & Hayes, 2020).

Limitations of the Research Design

According to Rossman and Rallis (2012) limitations may expose conditions that weaken the study and affect the results. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2016), limitations are a subjective process, in which the researcher needs to address the extent of problems that may arise in research methods, including problems that may compromise the study's trustworthiness; credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) claim a primary objective in the identification of research limitations is to discover new knowledge and confront assumptions about what is unknown. In this research proposal, the researcher confronted limitations to gain understanding and insight into the "characteristics of design or methodology that impact[ed] or influence[d] the interpretation of the findings" (Bloomberg & Volpe, (2016, p. 164). Additionally, limitations in this study may provide a useful bridge for other researchers who may want to conduct a duplicate study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

In this study, the first limitation involved potential bias between the researcher, participants, and the study topic. The researcher had been employed by the LWS organization for 10 years, had experienced critical incidents in the interim, and had formed opinions regarding the employee-organization relationship and organizational support. This limitation was addressed and set aside to protect the integrity of the study. As a way to promote healthy relationships and attitudes that strengthen the bond between participants and readers, the researcher informed participants of researcher biases at the outset of the study. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) claim that forthright clarification regarding researcher bias creates a healthy atmosphere that will resonate well with others. Therefore, the researcher in this study disclosed their experiences of POS in relation to the critical incident.

Another limitation of this study was participant reactivity, which encompasses the relationship between researcher and participants. Participant reactivity occurs when participants respond less candidly or find it difficult to cooperate with someone familiar to them, and/or when participants share information in hopes it matches the researcher's expectations (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Ng, Lingard, & Kennedy (2013) describe it more broadly, as when observed participant actions are different from their actions when they are not being observed. The phenomenology and possibility of participant reactivity were addressed with each participant in the study. It is the researcher's hope that disclosing information about participant reactivity to participants may have reduced any altered changes in their behavior.

A third limitation involved the single-site nature of the study. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) acknowledge researchers who conduct qualitative studies do not anticipate findings to be transferable, however, "it is likely that the lessons learned in one setting might be useful to others" (p. 164). As a qualitative inquiry, Creswell and Guetterman (2019) state researchers should deeply explore the central phenomenon rather than generalize it to a given population. Therefore, data collection in this study were deeply explored rather than presented as transferable to other educational settings. Nonetheless, employees at other schools may experience similar POS during a critical incident such as COVID-19.

During and after data collection and analysis, the researcher composed detailed thick descriptions and developed researcher/participant relationships to improve the accuracy of findings in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), "all research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner" (p. 237). Furthermore, ethical practices are important in the establishment of a study's trustworthiness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In qualitative research, the importance of adhering

to trustworthy strategies should be considered as findings may be recognized as more credible. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) member checks, adequate involvement in data collection, audit trails or detailed accounts of methods and procedures, rich descriptions that contextualize the research, and peer review examinations are strategies that ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of a qualitative study. In this study, trustworthiness was established by adhering to the following identified strategies.

Member Checking

During data collection and analysis, the researcher ensured the accuracy of findings and the interpretation of participant experiences through member checking (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the common strategy of member checking involves taking interpretations and findings back to participants to assess the plausibility of their perceptions, which, therefore, ensures credibility. Furthermore, to organize and keep a journal for member checking helps the researcher maintain and monitor observations and comments to better capture participant perspectives—as the actions taken can be properly scripted, reassessed, and/or corrected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). At the end of each interview of this study, the researcher communicated the details of the member checking process with participants, after it was transcribed, and provided a transcript of the interview to confirm that responses were correctly interpreted. Specifically, this iterative strategy was used throughout data collection and analysis to gain ultimate clarity of employees' POS during the critical incident and the abrupt transition to remote education instruction.

Credibility

Credibility was demonstrated by how well-matched the logic of the methodology was to the research question being posed, and the kind of understanding the researcher expected to

develop (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). To support credibility in this qualitative study, the researcher portrayed participants' perceptions, thoughts, and feelings via criteria that paralleled standards of validity in quantitative research approaches. Trustworthiness in quantitative research is related to validity and reliability, however, those standards in qualitative research are identified as credibility and dependability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Bloomberg & Volpe (2016) claim that evidence of credibility is demonstrated when researchers clarify bias through self-reflection, discuss and convey details of participants and the study site, collect multiple sources of data, triangulate data, present negative examples or discrepant findings, and conduct member checks.

Transferability

Transferability was shown by "establishing the context of a study", which was demonstrated by providing descriptions of its procedures, vividly detailing findings with clarity, and academic support using quotes and citations (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 261). Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) describe the context of a study as the supposition that the applicability of findings to similar situations and conditions are likely. To achieve transferability in this study, the researcher used thick, rich, and clear descriptions of participants to address the context and applicability throughout the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Confirmability

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2016), confirmability parallels the notion of objectivity standards found within quantitative research, which implies "that the findings are the result of the research" (p. 177). Therefore, to achieve confirmability in this qualitative study, the researcher conducted member checking and discussed details among respective participants.

Furthermore, participants had access to written records, including study journals, field notes, and transcripts of their interview. The review of material for a study gave participants an opportunity to assess and confirm data or findings for themselves (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). This audit trail of confirmability strengthened the dependability in the study, through ongoing, reflective, and transparent practices that safeguarded all persons surrounding the research (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; as in Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

Dependability

In qualitative research, dependability is an indication that the study is reported in a way that others may arrive at similar interpretations, if data is reviewed (Nassaji, 2020). The notion of dependability can be enhanced by taking careful notes on all research activities, conclusions, or changes that occur as the study evolves (Nassaji, 2020). Therefore, the researcher in this study carefully documented the research activities.

Ethical Issues in the Proposed Study

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), researchers should anticipate ethical issues when dealing with data collection; the physical medium in which to record data, responses to issues that arise in the field, and the storage of data in secure places. According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), the process of gathering data for a qualitative project inevitably requires researchers to develop healthy and honest relationships with participants, founded on trust. Patton (2015) provides a checklist of ethical issues to consider when conducting qualitative research. These identified issues help ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of a study (Patton, 2015). In an effort to carry out this study in a quality ethical manner with participants, the researcher explained the purpose of the research, upheld promises and reciprocity, assessed risks, maintained confidentiality, utilized informed consent, and acknowledged data access and

ownership (Patton, 2015). Additionally, the researcher was cognizant of data collection boundaries as well as personal mental health during the course of the study (Patton, 2015). The researcher also relied on his designated UNE affiliate member advisor for advice on ethical issues.

Furthermore, the researcher was cognizant of Creswell and Guetterman's (2019) precautions to ethical practices that should be upheld throughout the research process. Many of the important ethical issues arose from "the inhumane treatment of participants in past years" (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 27). For this study, the researcher was aware of ethical and fair treatment of all individuals connected to the development of the study, including participant invitees and participant interviewees.

Participant Rights

The protection of participant rights was grounded in the three-part ethical framework and guidelines for research that involve human subjects set forth by the *Belmont Report* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). The first guideline explains and describes the boundaries between research and practice. The guideline highlights a primary requirement for research and practice, in that, every activity involved in research must undergo a review process and protect the well-being and safety of human participants. The second guideline is centered around three basic ethical principles: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. These principles guided the study to ensure participants received (a) respect—treated autonomously, capable of acting with their own judgment, (b) beneficence—to ensure well-being, and (c) justice—to ensure that the benefits of the research and the opportunity to participate in the research were distributed equally. The final guideline that this study honored refers to

applications, such as informed consent/permission, risk/benefit assessment, and the selection of participants for the study.

Prior to interviews, the researcher informed participants of the study's purpose, maintained participant and site confidentiality, and obtained informed consent. Specifically, the first item prepared for interviewees was to inform consent (Kim, 2016), which complied with UNE's IRB protocol. Furthermore, to protect participant confidentiality the researcher referred to all participants and the study site via pseudonyms. Creswell (2014) emphasized that researchers must be honest with participants regarding the purpose of the study and must not deceive participants about the nature of the study. Additionally, Creswell (2014) discussed other ethical issues, such as, how to handle off-the-record information, researcher self-disclosure, member checking, and recommendations for sharing the study results and interpretations with participants. The aforementioned recommendations were adhered to in this study. For this study, the researcher was mindful of all information-sharing procedures, including member checks, end-of-interview documentation, and the sharing of interpretations and study results with participants with whom the information was obtained.

Conflict of Interest

As an employee of Leading Way School for the past decade, there may have been a conflict of interest. However, whether a conflict of interest is significant depends on individual circumstances (APA, 2010). Researchers should consider disclosure if circumstances might suggest positive conflict toward the organization or persons (APA, 2010). To ensure there were no conflict of potential distorting influences during this study, the researcher disclosed activities and relationships that may have been viewed by others as a conflict of interest. The safest way to disclose activities and relationships that might either be viewed as a conflict of interest or puts

forth a presumption of a conflict of interest is for researchers to identify such information in an author note (APA, 2010).

Conclusion and Summary

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry case study was to discover the lived experiences and perceived organizational support (POS) of school employees' abrupt transition to remote educational instruction resulting from a critical incident such as COVID-19. The researcher gathered data from employee/participants via semi-structured interviews. These data were analyzed through complex comparisons, consolidations, reductions, and interpretations of participant testimonies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through an inductive process of gathering data and building concepts, it was anticipated that the research led to new insights, to richly descriptive contexts, and results that clarified the study's research question (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The researcher approached the study through the conceptual lens of organizational support theory (OST), perceived organizational support (POS) (Eisenberger et al., 1986), and the theory of experiential and reflective learning (Dewey, 1910). OST and POS allowed the researcher to explore employee experiences during the transition to remote education and instruction. Experiential learning theory allowed new insights to emerge and for participants to evaluate techniques for potential future critical incidents.

The study took place through Zoom technology application with employees at Leading Way School, a pre-kindergarten through 8th-grade private progressive school in the northeast region of the US. The study sample included 10 participants. Criterion-based sampling was used to specifically recruit employees only, to explore their perceptions, and to enlist their interpretation of perceived organization support during a critical incident. Semi-structured

interview questions led to unexpected conversations that opened up new avenues of inquiry with participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data were collected, managed, and safely stored manually and electronically (e.g., smartphone, Zoom cloud server, electronic or paper journal keeping applications), recordings of interviews, as well as field notes of the researchers' thoughts, speculations, impressions, and hunches were noted.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry case study was to discover the lived experiences and perceived organizational support (POS) of school employees' abrupt transition to remote educational instruction resulting from a critical incident such as COVID-19. In this chapter, the researcher analyzes and presents the results of this study, and further analyzes the research question as it relates to data collected from school employees at Leading Way School. The research question that guided this study was: How do employees, other than administrators at Leading Way School perceive their experiences of organizational support during times of a critical incident that led to the abrupt transition of remote education instruction? In direct connection to the research question, this study's problem was to fill a gap in the literature regarding school employees' lived experiences and POS during the abrupt transition to remote education instruction as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. To gather data for this study, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews. Organizational Support Theory (OST) (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) (Dewey, 1938) provided the theoretical framework for this study.

Ethical interpretations were carefully considered during data collection and analysis. To facilitate better understanding and provide a confidential and faithful account of participant experiences, the researcher of this study incorporated two types of interpretation. According to Gracia (2012), the first type of interpretation is the *act of understanding*, in which the researcher develops and provides evidence for interpretations (Gracia, 2012). The second type of interpretation is *instrumental understanding*, in which the researcher mediates an effective understanding on behalf of the participants (Gracia, 2012).

Criterion-based sampling (Merriam, 2009) was used to solely explore the POS and lived experiences of school employees, while not including administration, students, or surrounding community members. The first 10 eligible employees who responded to the invitation letter of participation were accepted to participate in the study. Nine participants were full-time employees, while the remaining participant was employed part-time. Four participants were employed between two to nine years and the remaining six participants were employed for 10 or more years at Leading Way School (LWS).

Participants & Site

In this qualitative study, the researcher explored employee's perceived organizational support (POS) during the abrupt transition to remote education instruction at LWS. Fifty-four employees, excluding administrative leaders and school program directors were invited via email to participate in this study. The objective was to include 10 eligible participants in individual remote interviews using Zoom audio/video and smartphone recording application. After the participants were determined eligible to participate in this study, and pseudonyms were assigned to each, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews over a two-week period. Once the interviews were recorded, the files were uploaded into Rev.com for verbatim and time-stamped transcription services. All 10 transcribed interview responses were returned via email from Rev.com to the researcher in a Word document format within 24 hours. Prior to analyzing each transcript, the researcher emailed an editable copy to each participant, respectively, for member checking. Participants were invited to make edits onto the editable copy of their transcript provided through Rev.com's transcription services. Each participant returned a statement of approval status via email; a few participants made corrections in areas that were deemed either inaudible and or of question.

For the remainder of this chapter, the researcher discussed the data and results of the study which include participant demographics, data-analysis methods, and emergent themes from interviews. Furthermore, the researcher presented a comprehensive summary of the findings through narrative inquiry. The 10 participants were assigned a pseudonym for confidentiality (Table 1). Additionally, the participants' employment was noted at either less than or greater than 10 years.

Table 1. *Participant Demographic Information*

Name (Pseudonym)	Years at Leading Way School
Angelou	<10
Christie	<10
Dahl	>10
Dickens	<10
London	<10
Morrison	<10
Murakami	>10
Rice	>10
Rowling	<10
Wells	>10

Note. Pseudonyms are surnames of well-known writers and novelists.

Analysis Method

The objective of semi-structured interview data collection was intended to produce and identify emerging themes among participants relative to their POS. During the interviews, the researcher asked participants to communicate their (1) POS prior to and during the abrupt

transition to remote education instruction, (2) perceptions of well-being in the workplace prior to COVID-19, (3) description of organizational support, in general, and (4) recollections of emotions since the critical incident and the abrupt transition to remote education instruction began. Each interview lasted an average of 26 minutes and was audio recorded using Zoom recording and the researcher's Samsung Android smartphone. The longest interview lasted 61 minutes, but the typical interview duration was between 22 and 30 minutes.

The completed audio-recorded interviews were transcribed into text files using Rev.com transcription services. The researcher read through the interview transcripts several times. The first read through was to gain a sense of the data, in general (Creswell, 2014), while subsequent readings were conducted for the purposes of manual coding. The coding of the data for the first transcript followed Creswell and Guetterman's (2019) approach, which called for several cycles of coding. The first round of summarized data segments produced short statements, after which the researcher completed a first round of coding for all 10 interview transcripts to establish initial data summaries. This was done in Microsoft Word using color-coded text for each participant. Segments of each document were labeled with codes that described the meaning of the text.

After coding each document of participant responses, the researcher made a list of all the code words in the effort to eliminate redundant codes. The researcher then took the list of initial codes and revisited the data in an effort to identify new or emerging codes. The researcher then reduced the list of codes to six themes that were discussed most frequently, had commonalities to support them, and or were deemed expected (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). NVivo coding software was then used to analyze unstructured audio and text files. The NVivo software further assisted in the researcher's understanding of participant responses. After those steps, the researcher further segmented and labeled the coded data to form emergent themes.

As both a single instrument/bounded case study and narrative inquiry, the analysis method included traditional features associated with each research genre. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2016), a single instrument case study should focus “on an issue or concern in one bounded case” (p. 46). Additionally, a case study should produce detailed descriptions of the setting, its participants, and the analysis of data for themes and patterns (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). As a case study, the researcher used a thematic analysis of data to provide rich descriptions to better understand the complexities of the case (Merriam, 2009). As a narrative inquiry, the researcher found meaning by exploring participant’s lived experiences of COVID-19 and the abrupt transition to remote education instruction. Narratives illustrate how people exist as a part of the many elements that make up a life (Carlson, 2020). According to Kim (2016), living narratives are conversations with people who experience an event that occurs close to the time of its telling. Data analysis and interpretation connected to storytelling provides qualitative researchers with an avenue to better understand human existence. According to Kim (2016), “narrative data analysis and interpretation work in tandem” (p. 324). In this study, data analysis as communicated via participant stories provided a framework for the researcher to better understand the events of their lives.

An important concern of the researcher surrounded the fact that his lens would be that of one who had developed POS during the same critical incident explored in the study. Throughout the study, the researcher’s aim was to set aside his personal experiences and biases and rely heavily on Merriam and Tisdell’s (2016) notion of bracketing feelings while conducting a study. To effectively understand the meaning of employee’s experiences, the researcher bracketed his biases and assumptions to the best of his abilities.

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) suggest that researchers use caution when or if the choice is made to conduct *backyard research*. Backyard research is “qualitative research in the site that is part of the researcher’s daily life” (Kim, 2016, p. 301). According to Kim (2016) backyard research is convenient, legitimate, and valid, as multiple voices, subjectivities, and particularities in familiar workplace surroundings may effectively contribute to and generate new knowledge. Overall, the researcher of this study put forth an effort to separate his feelings and opinions about POS during data collection.

It was also anticipated at the beginning of this study that participant reactivity would be a point of interest that the researcher would disclose to each participant. The researcher believed that participants were candid in their responses, which in turn, enabled the researcher to maximize his efforts to set aside biases during data collection and analysis. The disclosure of the phenomenon of participant reactivity to each participant seems to have resulted in forthright responses. The researcher’s assurance in this process was well-founded, as each participant appeared to reply with concise, open, and honest answers.

Data Analysis

After the interview responses were transcribed and coded, the researcher collapsed the codes into emergent themes for better clarity and organization to analyze the data against the research question. Creswell & Geuterman’s (2019) six steps approach to coding produced a wealth of codes across participant responses, which resulted in six emergent themes. The six emergent themes were: (1) work experience descriptors, (2) feelings about well-being at work, (3) perceived organizational support (POS), (4) changes in well-being due to a critical incident, (5) POS due to a critical incident, and (6) emotions experienced during the critical incident. Emergent themes and corresponding interview data coding patterns are presented (Tables 2-6).

Table 2. *Emergent Theme 1: Interview Coding Data Patterns*

Theme 1	Coding Data Patterns	Interview Questions
Work experience descriptors	Amazing	2
	Collegial/camaraderie	2
	Comfortable	2
	Fairly negative	2
	Frustrating	2
	Grateful	2
	I like/love my work here	2
	Difficult	2
	Mixed feelings	2
	Positive	2
	Respected	2
	Rewarding	2
	Stressful	2
	Supportive	2
Useful	2	

Note. Five participants responded with mixed feelings.

Emergent theme 1: Work experience descriptors. The participants were asked to describe their experience as an employee at LWS. The most pronounced initial codes to emerge during the first two rounds of coding surrounded Interview Question 2 regarding participants' feelings about the organization. However, the unexpected findings in Theme 1 were the responses expressed by Angelou and Rice. Angelou described the experience at work as being uniquely "useful", especially during COVID-19 and the abrupt transition to remote education instruction. While Rice described feelings of "gratitude" for simply being employed during the pandemic. Overall, participant responses reflected the general nature of organizational culture at LWS. Gallos (2006) referred to organizational culture as the shared values, beliefs, and behavioral norms of all persons in an organization, and it encompasses informal rules, work practices, "patterns of communication and influence", and "the actual behavior of leaders" (p. 259). Responses to Interview Question 2 were quite broad and varied (Table 2).

Table 3. *Emergent Theme 2: Interview Coding Data Patterns*

Theme 2	Coding Data Patterns	Interview Questions
Feelings about well-being at work	Content	3, 4
	Mixed feelings	3, 4
	Discontent	3, 4

Note. Six participants expressed mixed feelings prior to the critical incident.

Emergent theme 2: Feelings about well-being at work. The participants were asked to share feelings about their well-being and the organization's concern for their well-being before the critical incident of COVID-19 and the abrupt transition to remote education instruction (Table 3). Interview Questions 3 and 4 were used to ask participants to characterize their POS and their perceptions of well-being expressed by the organization prior to the critical incident. On average, participant responses regarding well-being were expressed as a mixture of feelings. Dahl, an unexpected outlier shared overall feelings of contentment in well-being prior to the critical incident. In contrast, there were three participants, Christie, Morrison, and Rice who expressed feelings of discontentment before the critical incident.

Emergent theme 3: Perceived organizational support. The participants were asked to express their understanding of organizational support and their beliefs about what the organization should do to demonstrate support. Interview Questions 5 and 12 were used to ask participants to describe their POS. Kim et al. (2016), suggest employees' POS concerns the organization's ability to achieve its goals and purposes. In accordance with Kim et al. (2016), concerning POS as the organization's achievements toward its goals and purposes, all participants in this study expressed POS as either (a) communication of vision and mission, (b) professional development, and or (c) supervisory engagement and observation (Table 4).

Table 4. *Emergent Theme 3: Interview Coding Data Patterns*

Theme 3	Coding Data Patterns	Interview Questions
Perceived organizational support	Communication of vision and mission	5, 12
	More professional development	5, 12
	More supervisory engagement and observation	5, 12

Note. Nine out of 10 participants expressed *communication of vision and mission* as being integral to their understanding of perceived organizational support.

Emergent theme 4: Changes in well-being due to a critical incident. The participants were asked to express feelings about their well-being and the organization's concern for their well-being during COVID-19 and the transition to remote education instruction (Table 5). Questions 6 and 7 were used to ask participants to characterize their perceptions of well-being and organizational support during the critical incident. Most notable, Angelou, London, and Rowling expressed overall discontentment in well-being during the critical incident. Therefore, they did not feel their well-being or the organization's concern for their well-being was satisfactory.

Table 5. *Emergent Theme 4: Interview Coding Data Patterns*

Theme 4	Coding Data Patterns	Interview Questions
Changes in well-being due to a critical incident	Mixed feelings	6, 7
	Discontent	6, 7

Note. Seven participants expressed mixed feelings during COVID-19 and the transition to remote education instruction.

Emergent theme 5: Perceived organizational support due to a critical incident. The participants discussed their POS during the critical incident (Table 6). Interview Questions 10 and 11 were used to ask participants about their feelings regarding organizational support due to the critical incident. The unexpected findings were the reports of two participants who experienced little or no POS during the critical incident. Participants who experienced little to no POS may perceive a greater gulf between themselves and the organization when compared to participants with neutral or acceptable POS. Kurtessis et al. (2015) discuss how POS may affect employees' socioemotional needs, identity, commitment to the organization, and psychological well-being.

Table 6. *Emergent Theme 5: Interview Coding Data Patterns*

Theme 5	Coding Data Patterns	Interview Questions
Perceived organizational support due to a critical incident	Acceptable	10, 11
	Neutral	10, 11
	Little or none	10, 11

Note. Six participants reflected a neutral sense of POS during the critical incident, while two participants found there were acceptable levels, and two participants experienced little or none.

Emergent theme 6: Emotions during the critical incident. In this theme, participants listed the emotions that most affected them during the critical incident (Table 7). The initial list participant responses consisted of 34 emotions. However, the researcher eliminated 23 emotions. The eliminated emotions were those that were expressed solely by individual participants. The remaining 11 emotions were expressed by multiple participants. The most varied responses emerged during Interview Questions 8, 9, and 13 which involved the listing of emotions during the 2020-21 school year. The respondents were also asked to express the emotions that were most prominent during that time.

Table 7. *Emergent Theme 6: Interview Coding Data Patterns*

Theme 6	Coding Data Patterns	Interview Questions
Emotions during the critical incident	Anger	8, 9, 13
	Confusion	8, 9, 13
	Disappointment	8, 9, 13
	Exhaustion	8, 9, 13
	Fear	8, 9, 13
	Frustration	8, 9, 13
	Grief	8, 9, 13
	Isolation	8, 9, 13
	Overwhelmed	8, 9, 13
	Sadness	8, 9, 13
	Uncertainty	8, 9, 13

Note. Four participants listed *frustration* as the most prominent emotion.

The codes associated with Emergent Theme 6 were very direct, and each respondent was able to list, on average, about four emotions. All 10 respondents communicated their feelings and emotions regarding Questions 8 and 9 with great intensity and fervor. Interview Question 13 gave respondents an opportunity to add their choice of additional information or emotions. Rice was the sole participant to decline a response to Interview Question 13. The remaining nine participants responded to Interview Question 13 by either adding to their list of emotions and or reiterating points of interest from previous responses. The additional responses to Interview Question 13 aided the researcher in the clarity and identification of codes.

Presentation of Results

The methodological approach to analyzing the results were formed using a biographical approach, which is common in narrative inquiry (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data and results of the study are displayed in narrative biographical form in the order of frequency within each theme and the associated interview questions are discussed in detail. The six emergent themes

that resulted from the coding of data: (1) work experience descriptors, (2) feelings about well-being at work, (3) perceived organizational support (POS), (4) changes in well-being due to a critical incident, (5) POS due to a critical incident, and (6) emotions experienced during the critical incident are presented narratively. Many parts of this study occurred in delayed real time, in which Thomas (2019) claims is when participants are asked to relate experiences that began months or years prior to the moment of recall. During this study, the critical incident of COVID-19 and the transition to remote education were still occurring. Therefore, the notion of delayed real time is a fluid component within each theme.

Theme 1: Work Experience Descriptors

Theme 1 emerged from participant responses to an interview question in which the participants were asked to express their experience as an employee at LWS. The associated interview question was “How would you describe your experience as an employee at [Leading Way School]?”. Five participants expressed “mixed feelings”.

The examples of Rowling, Dahl, Wells, Rice, and Morrison’s response demonstrates how mixed feelings were experienced by employees of different employment duration. For example, Rowling has been employed at LWS for more than 10 years and expressed their experience as an employee as being both “amazing” and that of “mixed feelings”. Rowling, claimed that even though their experience “has changed over the years”, it is still,

Amazing and that, um, we are very much like a community. Um, as an employee, I have a lot of freedom. Yet at the same time, my experience, my experience is problematic. You can't say I need coverage the whole day, you know. You'll kinda wing it on your own. So, there is a problem with, um, as an employee with that.

In the case of Dahl, who has been employed at LWS for less than 10 years, when sharing about their experiences stated, “I really love [LWS]. I love working there. I just feel like respected. It's a magical place and I, I really love the school.”

Wells, who has also been employed for less than 10 years described their experience as an employee before COVID-19 and the transition to remote education as being “positive”, yet during the aforementioned critical incidents the experience turned “fairly negative”. Wells shared,

It has been uneven. Uh, I would say that prior to the pandemic it was mostly a really positive experience, uh with some kind of like dips of uh, either disillusionment or um frustration with lack of organization and a lack of systems, um, and then during the pandemic it's been uh fairly negative.

Likewise, Rice, who has also been employed for less than 10 years, concisely stated the experience as an employee has been both “stressful and very rewarding, as well”. However, Morrison, who has been employed for more than 10 years at LWS, described the experience as an employee at LWS as containing a mixture of feelings, which ranged from “supportive” and “grateful” to “difficult”. Morrison responde,:

It's mixed feelings, it's mixed emotions. Um, the reason why I have chosen to work in this place is because I believe in the philosophy and I believe in progressive education. Um, at the same time, I'm so grateful for this place. I will always feel grateful but you know, there are also other pieces when, um, you start practicing and you start teaching, um, there are lots of, lots of difficulties that, um, you know, sometimes it makes it really hard to be here.

On the contrary, Angelou expressed mixed feelings that leaned primarily toward a more positive experience, overall. Angelou shared feelings of being “comfortable” and “useful” while adding that they “like” their work at LWS. Furthermore, Angelou, like Morrison, who has been employed at LWS for more than 10 years, added,

I feel comfortable there. You know, I feel like, um, I get to do a lot of good work. By and large, I like the school, we've lived through a lot of chaos and a lot of change. Um, but I, I, um, I intend to stay and I, um, and, and for the most part I like my work there. I think it's really been, uh, been useful.

London, who has been employed for more than 10 years expressed an understanding that the organization was in the process of enduring difficult transitions responded,

It is a place of a lot of collegiality. Um, a lot of, I feel, uh, that the staff is, is um, has a lot of camaraderie and mutual respect. Um, I would say, my experience has been one, where the school has been growing and has been experiencing those growing pains that are kind of been, uh, you know, part of that process. Going from smaller to bigger, um, as it's shifting its identity.

Christie, however, who has also been employed at LWS for more than 10 years, takes a firm stance to communicate a sense of “overarching frustration” in their experiences as an LWS employee. In the same vein, Morrison expressed the experience as being “difficult”.

Nonetheless, five participants revealed a range and mixture of emotions prior to and during the critical incident of COVID-19 and the transition to remote education instruction.

Theme 2: Feelings About Well-being at Work

Theme 2 emerged from participant responses to interview questions that asked participants to describe their sense of well-being. The associated interview questions were,

“Before COVID-19, how would you describe your sense of well-being and contentment at work?” and “Before the COVID-19 outbreak, how would you describe the organization’s concern for your well-being?”. The data revealed participants expressed mixed feelings about their well-being prior to the critical incident. Of interest was the finding of an outlier response, as Dahl expressed contentment in well-being prior to the critical incident. However, Christie, Morrison, and Rice expressed discontentment in well-being during the same time.

Four of the six participants who expressed mixed feelings in response to these questions had been employed at the school for more than 10 years. Those four participants were Angelou, Dickens, London, and Rowling. Considering that six participants were neither content nor discontent in their well-being at work, the researcher found that employees expressed well-being as indifferent during COVID-19 and the abrupt transition to remote education instruction. This was evidenced by the disparate expressions of Rice and Wells, who expressed their experiences quite differently. Rice felt their work experience at LWS had been both “stressful” and “rewarding”. However, Wells communicated that “prior to the pandemic it was mostly a really positive experience”, however, “during the pandemic it’s been, uh, fairly negative”. According to Robbins, Ford, and Tetrick (2012), emotions contribute to well-being and may help explain adverse effects of unfavorable treatment on employee’s physical and mental health. Ford, Wang, Jin and Eisenberger (2017) might argue that employees’ emotions and temperaments of *anger* would be reciprocated “toward the organization itself” (p. 175).

In the case of Angelou, mixed feelings were derived from two very polarized responses regarding the questions of well-being in the workplace. In the first question, Angelou described their sense of well-being as an extension of relationships built from work experiences. Angelou responded,

Well-being for me is based on what kind of relationships I have with my colleagues and with students. Right? And so, in that sense I've always had a nice sense of well-being, you know? I mean, not all my colleagues are easy to get along with. But, you know, I've always felt like I'm available for them and that I could see them, and there's that closeness I have with them. Um, and the same thing with students, being able to just sit next to a student and talk to them or check up on them in class and to maybe see them in the hallway passing by.

However, when responding to the second question of this emergent theme, Angelou expressed a response that compelled the researcher to categorize them as having mixed feelings. In response to the second question, Angelou claimed, they “feel very peripheral at [LWS]”. The question asked to describe the organization’s concern for their well-being, in which Angelou admitted, “I don't get the feeling a lot of attention is paid to me”. Angelou further described,

It's not because I don't make any trouble. I'm not like, you know, I'll come in with an agenda and say like, "We have to do this, this, and this", but at the same time I feel like, um, I'm sort of low on the, on the drama scale. Um, and I, I do what they ask me to do, for the most part, you know. So, when we have to run an event, I run the event. When they ask me, if teachers ask me to do something, I'm always available to do anything.

Likewise, there were similar responses of mixed feelings identified in participants responses to the second question, as answered by Dickens, London, and Rowling. However, Dahl was the sole participant to describe their well-being as “content” both before and during the critical incident of this study. Dahl’s feelings were uniquely positive in this second emergent theme. Additionally, Dahl specifically noted a different critical incident that affected employee’s “retirement accounts”, that occurred prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the abrupt transition

to remote education instruction. Even though the critical incident regarding the retirement accounts “was a much bigger problem” than it appeared to be, Dahl was forgiving and remained content in their responses regarding the critical incident of this study. Dahl justified their belief in the organization by stating,

It always had my interest at heart, but also the school, uh, of course was also struggling financially. So, I feel like they were only trying to survive. I, uh, kind of negotiated myself to make sure I was paid appropriately and looked at the pay scale and so on. So, I felt content. I felt like they cared about me as, as an individual, and as an employee.

Unlike Dahl, the remaining three participants, Christie, Morrison, and Rice recalled being discontent in their overall well-being. Christie and Morrison have been employed for more than 10 years, while Rice has served less than 10 years. Nonetheless, when asked to describe their sense of well-being and contentment at work prior to the critical incident, Christie concisely replied, “not great”. While Morrison recounts that “it was a difficult time”, and added,

On top of that, we were, um, getting ready to transition to a new director, a new administration. So, there was a lot of tension, there was a lot of pressure. It, it was, it didn't really feel like the general working environment at [LWS]. It felt very, I would say stressful, very stressful because, um, things were just escalating and escalating and escalating. And the more the faculty and the staff found about the, the struggles that [LWS] still had, um, the more disappointed we felt and there were certain things that we didn't know. There were other things that were probably misinterpreted. So, they weren't just, it was just very confusing, very confusing. So, it was not the greatest feeling before COVID hit.

In response to the second question, Morrison solidified a description of the organization's concern for their well-being by stating, "I have to really deconstruct that idea and that concept because if, if I just look at it, um, it's sometimes hard to really understand and see how [LWS] is taking care of my well-being.

In response to the same question, Christie responded, "I don't think the organization had much concern for my well-being. I think there were individuals in the organization who had concern for my well-being. But, I don't think the organization did at all."

Finally, Rice's position and sentiment on both questions of this theme reflected Morrison and Christie's response. Clearly, the participants held varying perceptions of well-being prior to the critical incident of COVID-19 and the transition to remote education instruction. Overall, participants described well-being as a mixture of feelings. Nonetheless, Christie, Morrison, and Rice expressed feelings of distinct discontentment. And, one outlier, Dahl, who had been employed at LWS for less than 10 years, described being "very content" in well-being both prior to and during the critical incident.

Theme 3: Perceived Organizational Support (POS)

Theme 3 emerged from participant responses to interview questions that asked participants to describe their perceptions of organizational support. The associated interview questions were "How do you describe organizational support?" and a follow-up question, "Do you feel supported in this manner?". A second main question was "What do you feel the organization could do more of, or differently to make you feel supported during critical incidents?". Participant responses to this question produced three separate sub-themes. In order of participant favorability, the sub-themes were: (a) communication of vision and mission, (b) more professional development, and (c) more supervisory engagement and observation.

Sub-theme: Communication of vision and mission. Nine of 10 participants described perceived organizational support (POS) as the need for the organization to follow, advocate, and communicate the school's vision and mission. Dickens claimed that organizational support is important and "is the crucial integral pieces of the mission of the school" that brings with it "a sense of community". Dickens adds, "[LWS] really has been, like, awesome and amazing and deeply, deeply, um, uh, impactful in my professional life in terms of support". In deeper description, Dickens expresses organizational support as,

A mission statement. And, I should be able to, um, meet that expectation or that idea in practice, uh, to the best of my ability. If you're hiring me to do this role, this idea, this particular thing, um, do I have those tools? Do I have the support to be able to carry that out?

When asked the follow-up question, "Do you feel supported in this manner?", Dickens acknowledged support by saying, "Yeah, I do. I know without a doubt, having worked at other places that purported to do the same kind of work, either progressive work or diversity, work in diversity. I didn't feel the support."

The remaining eight participants also reported that communication of the school's vision and mission was central to their understanding of POS. Murakami directly tied school leadership to their description of organizational support. Murakami, who believed that the organization's leadership has the power to improve employee's lived experiences via communication, responded organizational support is,

Leaders communicating what can and cannot be done but always, in terms of organizational support, trying to do something to make the lived experience of the people

on the ground, like, slightly better. You know? I think of organizational support is just really like treating the people that are working at the school, like, like humans (laughs).

However, when asked the follow-up question, “Do you feel supported in this manner?” Murakami’s response was in opposition to that of Dickens. Murakami’s reply was, “Not entirely, no”. Murakami goes on to express that they feel their “supervisor was trying to do their best”. Murakami admitted that, “I feel like I’m aware of the limits” of what can be done, effectively. Then added, “So, um, it's not for lack of desire to feel supported, it's just the consequence of how we work”. Even though Dickens and Murakami expressed organizational support as a factor related to communication issues from either the school’s mission statement or its leadership, these two participants expressed different feelings when it came to whether they felt supported in the manner in which they described.

Sub-theme: Professional development. The second sub-theme revealed that six of the 10 participants included a need for better systems, which mostly included more professional development in their descriptions of organizational support. Angelou, Dahl, Morrison, Murakami, Rowling, and Wells responded with professional development, in some capacity or another. A look through the perceptions of Dahl and Rowling revealed similarities in responses that included the need for professional development. Dahl responded for the need of expert assistance with technology during the transition to remote education instruction this way,

Um, so being more prepared with the, for example, with the infrastructure, in this case, like in the Fall, [technological] platforms. Having somebody who knew and could explain and have, you know, questions answered, um, with the platforms really, really was one of the most frustrating things.

In response to the first question, “How do you describe organizational support?”, Dahl responded,

Time to prep. Uh, the support for my particular curriculum. Uh, professional development offered. Structural support in the schedules, of course. Um, of having a schedule, of knowing where to be. Um, so there was that support, but as far as actual teaching, uh, online or remotely, uh, I would say there was very little support. But again, I feel like that is due to the fact that no one knew what they were doing. It had never happened before. There was no time. Everyone was burning the candle at two ends. So, um, so I, I don't necessarily feel like I didn't have the support, given the circumstances.

During the response to this question, Dahl expressed, that it was,

My perception of what happened to me. Um, I just feel like they didn't have any idea of the workload. So, it's just kind of, there wasn't an idea or an idea of people's workloads and their availability. And just simply by finding that out then, that would have helped so many other people, uh, including myself.

Rowling expressed the need for support as,

Someone coming in and really evaluating your work and, and helping you grow. Um, organizational support is making sure that you have all the materials you need in your classroom. Um, making sure that you have all the coverage you need in your classroom, if someone is ill or unable to come. Um, that you have professional development, um, so that you can grow as [an employee].

Sub-theme: Supervisory engagement and observation. When asked the second main interview question in Theme 2, “What do you feel the organization could do more of, or differently to make you feel supported during critical incidents?”, three respondents cited a need

for more supervisory engagement and observations. The identification of this sub-theme arose as Morrison, Murakami, and Rowling identified supervisory engagement and observation as integral components in their response. A case in point, Rowling implied that additional supervisory engagement and observation would help make them feel supported during a critical incident. It was noted that Rowling's responses included more time with their supervisor and concluded with the desire to be observed more often. Rowling stated,

Um, maybe more meeting time. You know, one-on-one meeting time with my supervisor to talk about what's going on in the classroom. How are the children doing? Are there children you need to talk about? You know? Do you need support with the curriculum? How are things going? So, coming in and maybe observing.

Similarly, Murakami suggested that organizational support is lacking because of a lack of supervisory engagement. Murakami share,

It just feels like the, the lived experience of the people actually doing the work is not the most urgent or pressing concern for the organization currently.

Murakami then summed up how observation and supervisory engagement could be a solution to feeling supported during a critical incident, by stating,

If it's the question about whether, like, I'm getting encouragement for the things I'm doing in my classroom, then the organization or whoever in the organization should actually, like, be in my classroom to see a thing, you know, or, or ask me about the work or, like, check in to get to know what's going on.

Morrison responded similarly to Rowling and Murakami when asked "What do you feel the organization could do more of, or differently to make you feel supported during critical incidents?", Morrison replied,

Make sure that you have a meeting with your teachers just to talk about how you are. How are you doing? How do you feel? How is your family coping with all of these new changes? What's happening in your life?

Theme 4: Changes in Well-being Due to a Critical Incident

Theme 4 emerged from participant responses to interview questions that asked participants to describe their well-being during the critical incident. The first associated interview question was “Currently, during the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of remote education instruction, how would you describe your sense of well-being at work?”. The second interview question was “During the transition to remote education instruction, did the organization do anything different to help you perform your assigned duties?”

In analysis of Theme 4, there were seven participants who experienced mixed feelings regarding their well-being during the critical incident, while three participants expressed a feeling of discontentment. Four of the seven participants who communicated mixed feelings were employed at LWS for less than 10 years. Those four participants were Dahl, Murakami, Rice, and Wells. The remaining three participants who reported mixed feelings were Angelou, London, and Rowling. As a result, this close to even split of mixed feelings resulted in responses, such as with Dahl, whose replies reflected mixed feelings, in general.

After probing the question, the researcher asked Dahl if those feelings of well-being had changed since the beginning of the pandemic. Dahl responded,

So, in the, in the Fall, I feel like, um, things were, we had some new, uh, some new platforms, but I would say that we had absolutely...I mean, there was almost no support provided to us other than some instructional videos. So that did help, but someone answering us live and supporting, which is what we needed, um, who knew the programs,

um, that didn't exist. So, I would say there was very little to no support with the new platforms, which were the infrastructure of everything we do, we've been doing since the Fall.

For Dahl, the sense of well-being during the transition to remote education instruction is connected to the lack of assistance with technology both at the time of the transition, as well as throughout. When asked the second question, "During the transition to remote education instruction, did the organization do anything different to help you perform your assigned duties?", Dahl circled back to how "we had meetings" in which, Dahl was able "to discuss some of the challenges. Um, I would... that, that would be one and, um, then lightening my, my load after I voiced this". So, for Dahl, the professional needs surrounding support were met, however, only somewhat. These mixed feelings resulted from participants who were able to meet and communicate with supervisors about their hopes and desires for a lighter workload. Dahl felt support in receiving help with technology. When asked, "Did you feel supported in this manner?" Dahl replied: "I did still feel supported. When I asked for help. Yeah".

On the contrary, three participants experienced feelings of discontentment in their well-being during the critical incident of this study. Angelou, London, and Rowling have each been employed at LWS for more than 10 years and reported discontentment in their well-being during COVID-19. When asked the second question in this theme, "Currently, during the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of remote education instruction, how would you describe your sense of well-being at work?", London recalled,

Oh, man. Not so great. Not so great. It's hard because our organization was in the midst of other transitions during that time that I think can't be parsed apart from COVID, right? And I'll also say that, unfortunately, for us, the transition to remote learning is clearly

very technologically dependent and we are not a technologically dependent school. And so, um, that felt really, really tricky. And something that I think we all experienced is the fact that, something I've learned through teaching remotely, is that every family has different needs and desires of what will work for them. So, I think that we, that I really struggled with that shift. I think the school was understandably playing so much catch-up...that, that it felt like, we were just constantly responding to whatever families said or wanted. As opposed to coming out with a like, definitive plan and vision to articulate so that we, we weren't so reactive.

Likewise, Angelou bore a tone of isolation in their response to the second question, "During the transition to remote education instruction, did the organization do anything different to help you perform your assigned duties?". Angelou replied, "No, I was, I was pretty much ignored. I had to, I just figured it out on my own." And, when asked if Angelou felt supported during that time, they communicated,

We started using all these new tools, and then I was like, "okay." Um, and I just learned them on my own, you know. I was pretty much left alone because I think there was a lot of, uh, there were far bigger things to, to be concerned with. And, I recognized that, and I didn't, and that's why I didn't, I didn't, you know, really make any, any waves. Like when I didn't get responses back to emails, I didn't, I just, I never got angry because I knew that there was like, you know, when, when the whole world around you is swirling around and you're not, I'm not the center of the universe here.

Angelou continued to explain the overall sense of discontentment in their well-being during the critical incident and described their experience as being akin to,

Sending out a message in a bottle, is the best way I can describe it. You know? You know, my assumption was from the beginning that I would not, um, I would not hear from anybody.

Although Angelou expressed feeling this way during the transition to remote education instruction, it was interesting to note that Angelou not only experienced mixed feelings as an employee, but they also expressed being “comfortable” and claimed, “for the most part, I like my work there. I think it's really been, uh, been useful”.

Theme 5: Perceived Organizational Support Due to a Critical Incident

Theme 5 emerged from participant responses to interview questions that asked participants to describe their POS during the critical incident. The first associated interview question was “During the transition to remote education practices, do you feel the organization was concerned about your feelings regarding the changes that were made?”. The second question was “In reflection of the critical incident we have discussed, have supervisors expressed or demonstrated that they are pleased with your work?”

Six participants described their POS as being “somewhat” or “neutral” during the critical incident. Additionally, Dickens and Wells reported “little” to “none” when expressing their POS, while Dahl and London reported “acceptable” POS. When asked the first question in this theme, “During the transition to remote education practices, do you feel the organization was concerned about your feelings regarding the changes that were made?” Dahl responded, “Yeah, I would say so.” When asked the follow-up question, “What happened to make you feel this way?”, Dahl answered “Uh, it's a little bit tricky, but I would say generally, yes. Um, when we voiced concerns generally, um, we were, I feel like they, that the school, the organization, um, helped address those concerns”.

London's response to this first question was, "I believe that the organization was concerned about my feelings". When asked what made them feel that way, London responded, "Uh, just personal individual conversations with my supervisor". The responses given by Dahl and London demonstrate how their POS was justified as acceptable.

Dickens and Wells, who have been employed for more than 10 years and less than 10 years, respectively, expressed POS as being "little" to "none" during the critical incident. When asked the first question, "During the transition to remote education practices, do you feel the organization was concerned about your feelings regarding the changes that were made?", Dickens responded,

I will say no. I will have to say that, that lack of communication that's existed since then, has been the source of frustration for me, and even anger. What's been really hard for me is that, um, uh, the form- the forming of the union and having a new director. Uh, the transition to those pieces, uh, um, uh, and then not being able to talk to anybody, per se, in person, um, all have led to a level of, I think, I won't say lack of communication, but, uh, um, sort of a dysfunction of communication.

In response to this second question, "In reflection of the critical incident we have discussed, have supervisors expressed or demonstrated that they are pleased with your work?". Four responses to this question were of great interest to the researcher. The first two responses were evidenced by Dahl and London, who expressed a belief that supervisors were pleased with their work. London shared that [the supervisor] was pleased because "things that we've written up and sent to families have been shared on social media". Adding to the recollection of supervisors' pleasure with their work, London further recalls, "we've gotten good feedback, uh, [my supervisor], specifically has talked to us about how [they are] so happy with how it's going".

In contrast, Dickens and Wells expressed their beliefs that supervisors were not pleased with their work. Wells shared, “My supervisors don't know what my work is. Part of the reason I'm upset is that nobody has come to watch me. However, the remaining six participants responded with neutral beliefs about supervisors' pleasure or displeasure with their work.

The midway responses are where most participants perceptions lie, and which yielded the code of “neutral” for the researcher. The majority of participants who claimed neutrality in their POS during the critical incident were Angelou, Christie, Morrison, Murakami, Rice, and Rowling. To demonstrate neutrality, the first question in this theme is examined, “During the transition to remote education practices, do you feel the organization was concerned about your feelings regarding the changes that were made?”. Angelou responded,

I don't think they had time to. I mean, I think they would have. Given the situation we were in, right? I don't know how much, there was not much I had personally like one-to-one, but as the group I felt like we were supported. Yeah. I felt like we were, you know, like here's the situation and here's how we're gonna take care of everybody. You know, we're gonna make sure everybody's gonna have jobs. Um, if you're not gonna have a job, we'll make sure that you have health insurance or we'll rehire you, we'll do this and we'll do that.

Rowling explicitly responded, “Maybe somewhat...somewhat concerned” to the first question of this theme. Likewise, Morrison's neutrality was revealed in response to both questions of this theme. In responding to the first question, Morrison stated,

I don't think so. 'Cause I feel like, um, there were so many new things that were changing that were, so it was like a foreign land for everyone. It was an entire whole new universe. And I don't think the organization stopped for a second to say like, ‘Wait a

minute, let's really check in on how everyone is feeling before we step into this new, um, huge, huge change'.

When asked the second question of this theme, “In reflection of the critical incident we have discussed, have supervisors expressed or demonstrated that they are pleased with your work?”, Morrison shared,

Yes, I met with my supervisor. When I finished the school year and then we went quote unquote went on vacation, it was not a (laughs) vacation. Um, I received an email from [my supervisor], uh, really saying, "Thank you so much [Morrison] for the work that you did, um, during remote learning.

Theme 6: Emotions During the Critical Incident

Theme 6 emerged from participant responses to interview questions that asked participants to describe their emotions during the critical incident. The first associated interview question was “In reflection of the critical incident of COVID-19 and the abrupt transition to remote education instruction, which emotions do you recall experiencing?”. The second question was “Which of those emotions have been most prominent during the 2020-2021 school year up to this point?”. The third question was “In closing, are there any other reflections or emotions that you would like to add before we conclude?”.

Crawford (2018) maintained that the emotions of school employees, in general, are the essential building blocks that help build professional and social capital in the school environment. In the analysis of participant responses to the questions in this theme, LWS has a wealth of emotional building blocks in which to build professional and social capital. Overall, each participant listed about four emotions throughout the questions in this theme. The responses ranged from the positive feelings of being “activated” and “grateful” to more negative

feelings of “devastation” and “mournfulness”. The varied emotions were fervently communicated by each participant during data collection. However, the most common emotion shared by participants during the critical incident of this study was “frustration”. The four participants who experienced frustration were, Angelou, Christie, Dahl, and Dickens.

Additionally, when asked to recall the list of emotions that were experienced during the critical incident, Angelou added loneliness, boredom, and isolation to the list. Angelou explained how their emotions during the delayed real time of the critical incident had changed, but contained,

Mostly frustration. Um, a lot of loneliness. So, frustration, loneliness, um, yeah, and boredom. For me, it was a lot of waiting because I was waiting for everything to get into place. Um, as everything started moving to place, I felt like I was, you know, it was just a lot of isolation I guess, because I wasn't, um, I didn't, I didn't know where anything was.

Angelou further recalled,

There was very little attention I could get. And I, and eventually I just recognized this, you know, that, that there was just too much going on.

The feeling of the lack of organizational support during the critical incident at LWS caused Angelou's emotions of frustration and loneliness to transition to boredom. In the explanation of how the transition to boredom occurred, Angelou stated,

So, there was frustration in the beginning, but as I saw like how, how, how hard it was on everybody, um, that I just sort of like, it just led to the resignation and the idea that like the next couple of months are gonna be kind of boring because I'm not, you know, we have to wait and see how I'm gonna fit in. You know, all the pieces. And then when all the pieces fell into place, then I, only then was I able to find my place. So, in the first,

you know, I'd say the first month or so I wasn't doing a lot. I probably spent most of the time just like doing other things.

Like Angelou, Christie recalled frustration as being a primary emotion during COVID-19 and the abrupt transition to remote education instruction. However, Christie experienced a different subset of emotions from that of Angelou, which included exhaustion and feelings of being overwhelmed. Christie explained,

I felt very overwhelmed with the technology, it was overwhelming. Absolutely overwhelming. And then extreme exhaustion. I mean, when I finished teaching at the end of the day I was immobilized. Absolute immobilized. Um. So those... In the beginning, that's what was going on. Really, I was exhausted.

Of the four participants who experienced frustration, Angelou, Christie, Dickens, and Dahl had the most expansive subset of emotions, which included, anger, disappointment, exhaustion, sadness, feelings of being overwhelmed, and not well. Dahl recalls the list of emotions during the critical incidents of this study, as being “Frustration, uh, being overwhelmed, exhausted, uh, physically, uh, just physically not well. Um, so you know, that physical, physical impact really affected my emotional impact”.

Dahl stated that they realized that the physical impact had taken a toll on their emotional impact and resulted in sadness. Dahl ended the question by responding, “Um, yeah. Tired, uh, frustrated and then sad, I guess. Yeah”. However, when asked, “Which of those emotions have been most prominent during the 2020-2021 school year up to this point?” Dahl replied “frustration”.

Even though the remaining emotions are part of an extensive list, Morrison and Rice combined positive emotions in their lists. Even though Rice’s emotions were a mixture of

feelings, one emotion expressed was the feeling of being activated, while their mixed emotions consisted of feeling stressful, and grateful. When asked, “Which emotions do you recall experiencing?” Rice responded with diverse language,

I felt activated, and I felt, um, it definitely felt stressful. But also, again, it was so extreme, and everyone was dealing with so many things, I also felt very grateful that I still had a job. And I felt grateful for the sense of community with my students and my peers. Um, s- so while it was stressful, it, it felt good to not have just been left with nothing and have everything taken off the table.

When asked, “Which of those emotions have been most prominent during the 2020-2021 school year up to this point?” Rice answered, “I would say it's a mixture of grateful and stressful (laughs)”. Rice’s emotions are outliers within this theme.

The other outlier response in this theme was Morrison, who felt a combination of emotions different from those of Rice. Morrison’s broad array of emotions spanned from “hopefulness” to “sadness” during the critical incident. When asked, “Which emotions do you recall experiencing?” Morrison said, “I felt, um, overwhelmed. I felt confused. I felt insecure. I felt sad.”. Additionally, Morrison’s sadness was the most prominent during the 2020-2021 school year. Morrison then explained the foundation for feeling sad,

I felt sad for the children because I knew exactly that we were just trying to provide something through this platform but I knew exactly what they were missing. A lot, they were missing a lot. So that was the reason why I felt sad. I felt sad because I couldn't give closure to my previous students. And I felt sad because I had to start a new school year remotely. And I knew all of the pieces that the kids were missing. And especially

when you see the struggles on Zoom and there's only so much that you can do for them on Zoom. That was the part that really made me sad, not being able to really help.

All the emotions shared by participants were delivered with an intensity of tone. However, none were as extensive as Murakami's list of emotions. Murakami identified nine distinct emotions during the critical incident,

Um, lots of, like, fear, uncertainty, anxiety, um, anger, um, I guess, like, feeling defeated a lot, like, guilty (laughs) in, in a lot of ways, inadequate, um, um, like, and then eventually just numb, the numbness set in at some point. Um, yeah. I was, like, uninspired, unfulfilled.

Murakami narrowed down the previous lengthy list to five emotions that were the most prominent for the 2020-2021 school year. Murakami stated that feeling,

Inadequate is definitely still there, um, uninspired is also there, um, definitely frustrated, um, and which toggle in between, like, frustrated and angry. And I think, I think most recently I'm just, I'm, I'm in the numb sort of, like, just keeping my head down and trying to get through these, these weeks until it's over.

Humphrey, Ashforth and Diefendorff (2015) speak of emotions as being signals of what is important to individuals in organizations. Ashkanasy and Dorris (2017) also claim that an employee's commitment in the workplace is "intrinsically related to emotion in that it is a psychological state that binds an employee to an organization" (p. 69). Overall, participant responses in interviews reflected a broad range of emotions, and—as Ashkanasy and Dorris (2017) might argue—the psychological state that connects the employee to the organization is a result of the ongoing emotions felt by participants during the critical incident.

Summary

In this qualitative study, the researcher explored the perceived organizational support (POS) of school employees during the abrupt transition to remote education instruction that resulted from the critical incident of COVID-19 at Leading Way School, a Pre-Kindergarten through 8th grade setting. Recorded via Zoom technology application/services, interviews were conducted with 10 employees, nine of whom were full-time and one employee, who was part-time. Interview questions were used to explore participants' POS, perceptions of well-being, and emotions prior to and during the critical incident. Each participant shared personal accounts and perceptions of their experiences at Leading Way School. After identifying codes from the collected data, codes were collapsed into emergent themes that directly addressed the research question. The interview data yielded six emergent themes:

Theme 1: Work experience descriptors.

Theme 2: Feelings about well-being at work.

Theme 3: Perceived organizational support (POS). This theme presented three subthemes: (a) communication of vision and mission, (b) professional development, and (c) supervisory engagement and observation.

Theme 4: Changes in well-being due to a critical incident.

Theme 5: Perceived organizational support due to a critical incident.

Theme 6: Emotions during the critical incident.

Each theme provided insight to understanding the study's research question and participants' perceptions and feelings both before and during the tumultuous and life-changing events of the COVID-19 pandemic. The three sub-themes in Theme 3 provide an in-depth clarity regarding their central relationship to the research question and to employees perceived

organizational support (POS). Participants' responses regarding the lack of a unified articulation of vision and mission, professional development, and supervisory engagement and observation during the critical incident were of note and justified the researcher's reasoning for sub-themes. Participants expressed a wide range of POS and emotions during the 2020-2021 school year. Overall, during the past academic year, the critical incident of COVID-19 and the abrupt transition to remote education instruction were sources of intense reflection for all 10 participants.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry case study was to discover the lived experiences and perceived organizational support (POS) of school employees' abrupt transition to remote educational instruction resulting from a critical incident such as COVID-19. This chapter presents a summary of the study, findings and important conclusions drawn from data collected and analyzed and provides a discussion of the implications for action and recommendations for further research. This research was conducted to fill the gap on the topic of study and provide insight into the lived experiences of school employees during the critical incident that affected the 2020-2021 academic school year.

School employees around the United States have endured professional challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic and the abrupt transition to remote education (Marshall, Shannon, & Love, 2020). During the pandemic, school employees had to operate in unusual, disorienting, and untraditional teaching and learning environments (Merrill, 2020). According to Marshall et al. (2020), school employees indicated that they had never experienced online education before the transition to remote education "and very few had received any meaningful training" or support from their school or district (p. 48).

According to Merrill (2020), school employees often experience emotions of anxiety and depression when isolated and disconnected from others during a critical incident. Interaction with other human beings during a critical incident may enhance well-being. During COVID-19 and the transition to remote education, even the most optimistic school employees required a shift in their mindset to regulate a sense of well-being (Merrill, 2020). Milman (2020) suggested that school administrators and educators establish short- and long-term priorities, create

flexibility in policy and practice, and collaborate in online communities that promote employee assistance and support. Furthermore, access to training and professional development during a critical incident may play a key role in the formation of employee's POS.

By highlighting the importance of school employees' emotions and POS during a critical incident, the present research argued that organizations need to focus on employees, as an important and valuable resource. According to organizational support theory (OST), POS suggests favorable treatment by leaders of an organization results in a positive attitude or emotional link of the employee toward the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Therefore, favorable treatment from the organization enhances employees' POS and well-being. The resulting attitudes or emotions experienced by employees during a critical incident are either a benefit or a detriment to the organization (Provost, 2015).

OST is generally successful in predicting the antecedents and consequences of POS (Kurtessis et al., 2017). The antecedents of POS often include the organization's ability to develop and maintain quality human resource practices, employee-organization relationships, and working conditions (Kurtessis et al., 2017). According to OST, "POS should be enhanced to the degree that employees attribute favorable treatment received from the organization to positive regard" (Kurtessis et al., 2017, p. 1855).

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) provided an additional theoretical lens to examine this bounded case study. ELT posits that the quality of lived, shared experiences is a primary component of the theory, in which learning and education essentially occur in social environments during real-life experiences (Dewey, 1938). Upon the reflection of an experience, learners have the ability to apply understanding to different situations, and therefore, "increase readiness for continued acquisition and construction of new knowledge" (Roberts, 2003, p. 11).

Therefore, knowledge and learning are socially constructed experiences. According to Holford et al. (2019), life-long learning is a reiterative process that offers people a better understanding of their potential, improvement in their abilities, and a deeper more meaningful life. Therefore, opportunities to reflect on life experiences are useful and meaningful processes that can lead to unforeseen, yet encouraging learning outcomes (Harrison & Lee, 2011).

Leading Way School (LWS) employees, those located at this study's site, who had been employed for less than two academic years were exempt from participating in the study. The invitation to participate also excluded administrative leaders, supervisors, and school program directors. Therefore, eligible participants were employees who had been employed for two or more academic years at LWS. Using a criterion sampling method with LWS employees as the sole criterion, nine part-time employees and one full-time employee participated in the study. Participants were contacted via email for interviews and were sent consent forms upon confirmation of eligibility.

Interpretation of Findings

One-on-one, semi-structured interviews were used to gain insight into the perceived organizational support (POS) and lived experiences of school employees at LWS. Ten LWS employees participated in the study to communicate their (a) POS prior to and during the critical incident of COVID-19 and the abrupt transition to remote education instruction, (b) assessment of well-being in the workplace prior to and during the critical incident, (c) description of organizational support, in general, and (d) recollection of emotions since the inception of the critical incident. According to Kurtessis et al. (2017), POS should elicit a norm of reciprocity, wherein, employees are led to feel obligated to help the organization meet its goals. Additionally, it is important for organizations to understand the emotions of its members, and

how feelings affect employee readiness during times of change (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008; Stein, 2009).

Data collected from semi-structured interview questions were used to identify emerging themes. The collected data and emergent themes helped answer this study's research question, "How do employees, other than administrators at Leading Way School perceive their experiences of organizational support during times of a critical incident that led to the abrupt transition of remote education instruction?". The researcher collected, transcribed, and coded interview response data through a combination of Creswell and Geutterman's (2016) six steps and an NVivo software process. During the analysis process, manual coding and NVivo were used to help organize and identify codes. The interviewee responses resulted in emergent themes. Analyzed data from this study answered the research question by presenting an understanding of employees' POS prior to and during COVID-19 and the abrupt transition to remote education instruction. Through this bounded case study six primary themes emerged from participant interviews:

Theme 1: Work experience descriptors.

Theme 2: Feelings about well-being at work.

Theme 3: Perceived organizational support (POS). This theme presented three subthemes: (a) communication of vision and mission, (b) professional development and, (c) supervisory engagement and observation.

Theme 4: Changes in well-being due to a critical incident.

Theme 5: Perceived organizational support due to a critical incident.

Theme 6: Emotions during the critical incident.

All six themes were significant to this study; however, three of the six emergent themes were of great interest to this researcher. First, was emergent Theme 1: Work experience descriptors. Theme 1 was important as it established a foundation for understanding employees' feelings about their work experience, in general. The second theme of great interest was emergent Theme 3: POS. Within Theme 3 drew additional interest as it produced three sub-themes. In Theme 3, participants expressed their understanding of POS as: (a) the communication of vision and mission, (b) the employee's desire for professional development and, (c) supervisory engagement and observation. The third theme that was also of great interest is, Theme 6: Emotions during the critical incident, was also of great interest to the researcher because it reflected the employee's emotions and perceptions, especially the emotions that were listed most frequently.

First Theme of Great Interest Theme 1: Work Experience Descriptors

Organizational culture should be assessed periodically to measure how it enriches the satisfaction and growth of its members (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). Despite the ongoing challenges of COVID-19 and the transition to remote education instruction, LWS employees expressed a wide range of feelings about the organization both prior to and during the critical incident. The findings of such a wide range of feelings were revealed through the varied participant responses to Interview Question 2, in which participants were asked to describe their experiences as an employee at LWS. For example, Dahl expressed a sentiment of "love" for working at such "a magical place" as LWS, while Christie viewed the overarching experience as an employee as being "frustrating". Although throughout the interviews, participants communicated varying levels of POS prior to and during the critical incident, and expressed

diverse emotional reactions, all of the participants conveyed a strong connection to the LWS organization.

Second Theme of Great Interest Theme 3: Perceived Organizational Support (POS)

For Interview Questions 5 and 12, participants were asked to characterize organizational support, according to their terms and perceptions. According to organizational support theory (OST), employees form a generalized perception regarding the extent to which the organization values and cares about their contributions and well-being (Kurtessis et al., 2017). All 10 participants characterized organizational support as being either one or a combination of the following three sub-themes: (1) communication of vision and mission, (2) professional development, and (3) supervisory engagement and observation. Nine of 10 participants characterized POS as the communication of the organization's vision and mission. The researcher found that participants expressed POS as the unwavering demonstration of the organization's commitment to and demonstration of its core values, at all times—prior to and during a critical incident.

For example, Dickens, Murakami, and Rowling expressed POS as indicated by the three sub-themes: (1) communication of vision and mission, (2) professional development, and (3) supervisory engagement and observation. In sub-theme 1: communication of vision and mission, Dickens viewed POS as the communication of the organization's direction, as demonstrated in “a mission statement”, in which “I should be able to, um, meet that expectation or that idea in practice, uh, to the best of my ability”. Murakami expressed POS as the organization's ability to “make sure that, um, there's always a professional development day every month, kind of thing”. Rowling stated “organizational support would be, um, would be having, um, evaluations. Someone coming in and really evaluating your work and, and helping you grow”.

Sub-theme 2: professional development was evidenced by responses from participants such as Wells. When asked Interview Question 5, Wells responded, “I would say that there was a fair amount of organizational support for my day-to-day life in the classroom. Um, and there were wildly fluctuating levels of organizational support for things like professional development”.

Third Theme of Great Interest Theme 6: Emotions During the Critical Incident

Participant responses to Interview Questions 8, 9, and 13, focused on their emotions, feelings, and perspectives, led to the researcher’s finding that employees’ POS was most unstable during the initial outbreak of COVID-19. During the critical incident, participants recalled emotions of frustration, fear, sadness, and being overwhelmed. This is evidenced by the responses of Angelou, Christie, Dahl, and Dickens, in which each participant communicated “frustration” as the overarching emotion during the critical incident. However, Rice and Morrison reported positive emotions in which they felt “activated”, “hopeful”, and “grateful”. Rice was the sole participant to express gratitude during the critical incident. Ford et al. (2017) specifically suggest that the emotion of gratitude or gratefulness is an “indicator[s] of employee affective well-being” and plays a “mediating role in the effects of organizational and supervisor supportiveness on employee performance” (p. 125).

The remaining nine participants experienced a mixture of emotions during the critical incident that ranged from frustration, fear, grief, and sadness to feelings of being overwhelmed by the workload. Although these responses were somewhat anticipated by the researcher, the wide range of emotions on the composite participant list in this study were unexpected. In total, the participants expressed 34 emotions during this study, 11 of which were mentioned only once. Those 11 single, yet separate responses included anxiety, confusion, despair, defeat, devastation,

helplessness, insecurity, rage, numbness, instability, and feelings of being uninspired. Ford et al. (2017) might argue that the predominant emotions expressed by participants in this study would be more closely related to emotions of anger. According to Carver and Harmon-Jones (2009), anger is an emotion that is directed toward another person or thing, is activated by perceived wrongdoing, and evokes a path of action that encourages rectification from the responsible party and potentially exacts revenge.

According to Ford et al. (2017) the disparity between anger and gratitude represents a wide gap between emotions, however, treatment demonstrated by an organization toward employees relates to the degree of employees' mental and physical health. In other words, in the workplace, anger directed at the organization from employees contributes to the detriment of the employee-organization relationship, while gratitude contributes to the health and well-being of both entities. During the critical incident of COVID-19 and the abrupt transition to remote education instruction, Leading Way School employees experienced a range of emotions and POS that contributed to their well-being.

Implications

The findings of this study have implications not only for school leaders and employees at LWS, but also for leaders and employees in other schools and organizations. The first implication of this study is the importance of organizational leaders to understand employees' well-being prior to and/or during critical incidents. Of the participants studied in this research, each presented unique perspectives about their well-being prior to and during the critical incident of COVID-19 and the abrupt transition to remote education instruction. Each participant expressed their well-being in a manner specific to themselves. Before the critical incident, six participants described mixed feelings regarding their well-being while at work; yet surprisingly,

three expressed discontentment, while one participant was content in their well-being. However, during the critical incident, no participants were content in their well-being; yet seven experienced mixed feelings, and three were discontent in their well-being. The interviews suggest that potential for improvements to employees' well-being should be addressed by the organization before and during a critical incident. LWS employees are ready to repair their sense of well-being, but the organization will need to lead the way toward improvements.

A second implication of this study is for organizational leaders and school employees to understand the importance of POS, especially during a critical incident. Participant interview responses suggest employees' POS was inadequate and insufficient during the critical incident of this study; therefore, school leaders did not, according to the participants' perceptions at the onset of the critical incident, offer substantial organizational support. Participants described their beliefs about what the organization's leadership should do to demonstrate support for employees. According to participants, organizational support is effectively demonstrated when organizations (a) communicate its mission and vision prior to and during a critical incident, (b) increase professional development efforts, and (c) increase supervisory engagement and observation. Furthermore, six participants described their POS as being neutral during the critical incident of this study, while two found it acceptable, and two others found there to be little or no support at all.

A third implication of this study is for organizational leaders to investigate and explore employee's emotions, especially during a critical incident. For organizational transformation to occur it is important for organizational leaders to provide opportunities for employees to assess and reflect on challenges and events that affect them (Bruster & Peterson, 2013; Patahuddin & Lowrie, 2015). This study's findings indicate that a perceived lack of organizational support

during COVID-19 and the abrupt transition to remote education instruction, led to employee's fear, frustration, sadness, and feelings of being overwhelmed at work. Therefore, these emotions negatively affected employee's feelings and POS over time. According to Restubog, Ocampo, and Wang (2020), an "effective regulation of emotions is crucial to reducing negative emotions and enhancing well-being" (p. 3).

Recommendations for Action

In this study, results indicate several gaps exist in areas related to education, organizational support, and critical incidents, particularly in primary and middle school settings, and that should be addressed with further study. Recommendations for action rest on this study's findings, analyses, and conclusions. The findings of this research could aid persons in all areas of leadership to gain a better understanding of employees' POS and the impact emotions have on employees during a critical incident. These recommendations are intended for (a) school leaders, and administrators and (b) school employees.

Recommendations for School Leaders and Administrators

The researcher of this study recommends school leaders and administrators consider the following. First, seek ongoing feedback from employees through actions, such as: (a) exit interviews of departing employees that center on POS and (b) focus groups with employees to discuss POS. Doing so may encourage employees to perceive that the organization values their contributions and cares for their well-being. The failure to provide feedback, especially positive feedback toward "a given employee signals to the employee that the organization is paying little attention to his or her performance" (Eisenberger et al., 2016, p. 11).

Second, school leaders also should take action to demonstrate how employee's feelings and perspectives are a priority within the organization. According to Eisenberger et al. (2016),

favorable supervision results in employees who feel more connected to the organization, are compelled to view the organization's goals as their own and are more committed to the organization. Organizational leaders can demonstrate that employee's perspectives are a priority by providing supportive policies, human resource practices, and other helpful and considerate actions of support (Eisenberger et al., 2016), such as, effective vision and mission statements, professional development, and supervisory engagement and employee observation.

Third, during dilemmas or transitions, learn to use different leadership skills for different situations (Fullan, 2001). School leaders should consider Fullan's (2001) assertion that when "facing an urgent, crisis-ridden situation" or critical incident, resourceful and resolute leadership will rely on a coercive stance and communication of "authoritative ideas, democratic empowerment, affiliative bonds, and coaching", specifically, during the initial stages of a crisis (p. 46). Doing so might help employees through the chaos that ensues during a critical incident, and more broadly assist all administrators and leaders in more successfully navigating future plans.

Although leaders might not know what to plan for, in terms of future critical incident scenarios, they should, at a minimum assess and carefully consider employees' POS, well-being, and emotions during such times. Doing so might help reduce frustration and other negative emotions that impede organizational transformation during a critical incident. As the authors in the literature indicated (Quezada, Talbot & Quezada-Parker, 2020), LWS is just one of many schools during COVID-19 whose experiences have led them to this point in time, in which they should prepare a set of strategies in case of a future critical incident.

Lastly, prior to and during a critical incident, make attempts to understand employee's emotions. Organizational leaders can better support employees by providing opportunities for

employees to communicate emotions. According to Eisenberger et al. (2016), employee assistance programs (EAP) offer professional counseling “to help employees with personal problems that may adversely affect employee performance and well-being” (p. 8). By offering an EAP with a professional counseling component, organizational leaders may identify solutions that may help employees manage their emotions more effectively. In connection to this, consider employee’s perceived organizational support (POS) as being integral to the enhancement of the employee-organization relationship.

Recommendations for School Employees

The researcher of this study recommends that school employees consider the following. First, during a critical incident, recognize and voice emotions to appropriate administrative leaders and or supervisors. Try writing down feelings and the triggers that activate difficult feelings. Doing so may enable and empower emotional support for yourself and others. According to Miller, Considine, and Garner (2007), identifying and understanding the triggers of emotions at work may assist in the effective management of such emotions. Additionally, learning to express emotions in appropriate ways, such as to a supervisor or the organization’s EAP, can help employees gain a better perspective on problems, derive solutions through specific techniques, and help manage emotions more effectively (Miller et al., 2007).

Second, take ownership of strengths and achievements in the workplace and speak up about them. Doing so may strengthen POS and improve the employee-organization relationship. According to Premeaux and Bedeian (2003), “speaking up focuses exclusively on employee expression” and “speaking up may enable organizations to develop better mechanisms for encouraging greater employee input” (p. 1538).

Third, during a critical incident, reflect on positive and fulfilling events or situations that occur within the work environment or those that increase work engagement. According to Buric and Macuka (2017), school employees who “reported higher levels of positive emotions” at work “tended to be more engaged in their work” (p. 1917). Therefore, welcome positive opportunities that foster healthy work engagement. Doing so may both reduce negative emotions and increase well-being and POS.

Recommendations for Further Study

Based on the limitations and findings from this study, a recommendation for further study would be to investigate how personal work engagement, commitment, and performance are connected to what is already known about emotions in schools. Educational researchers could explore if work engagement, commitment, and performance evoke a different perspective from school employees during a critical incident. This examination might help identify how POS affects well-being.

Another recommendation would be to investigate school employees’ POS in a larger district or a greater participant population of employees to determine if the data varies. Educational researchers could most effectively explore these demographics. Examining POS in a larger district or participant population would provide a greater understanding as to whether similar perceptions parallel such settings.

Additionally, exploring school employees’ POS in a longitudinal study to investigate if there are any long-term effects of the abrupt change to remote education may lead to interesting data. Again, educational researchers could explore such long-term effects. A longitudinal study of this nature could also inform the literature on school employee retention, attrition, and absenteeism.

Lastly, examining what effects school employees' POS might have on students is also recommended. Do students perceive or reciprocate the perceptions and emotions relayed from school employees during a critical incident? This understanding would allow a comparison of data results connected to school employees' POS and student's perceptions of educational support.

Conclusion

School employees throughout the United States faced many personal and professional challenges during the critical incident of COVID-19 and the abrupt transition to remote education (Marshall et al., 2020). This study was conducted to explore Leading Way School employees' lived experiences and perceived organizational support (POS) during COVID-19 and the abrupt transition to remote education. The theoretical framework of organizational support theory (OST) (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and experiential learning theory (ELT) (Dewey, 1938) conceptually guided the research in this study. Ten eligible employees affected by the critical incident participated in one-on-one interviews. Participant employees were asked to describe their lived experiences and POS by communicating their (a) overall feelings about the organization, (b) feelings about well-being at work, (c) POS, and (d) emotions during a critical incident.

This study's findings affirm the importance of acknowledging and understanding (1) employees' POS—at all times, (2) the state of employees' emotional reactions during a critical incident, and (3) the necessity for organizations and employees to reflect on critical incidents to construct new knowledge. Furthermore, employees' lived experiences, emotions, and POS may affect work commitment, performance, and engagement (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Therefore, it is important that organizational leaders gain insight as they reflect on the impact of a critical incident such as COVID-19 and remote education in their communities. Although research on

organizational support and research on the emotional responses of employees have been prevalent, studies that examine employees' POS during a critical incident—expressly the critical incident of this study—necessitate further study. The researcher of this study sought to fill that need in the literature.

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Appendix A

Permission for Study

March 2, 2021

Mr. Corey X
Director of Leading Way School
RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear Corey:

As a Doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership at the University of New England, I request permission to conduct research at your school per Administrative Regulation 6162.8.

Key information:

The study's purpose is to explore school employees' perceptions of organizational support during times of critical incidents. In this study, critical incidents are defined as unexpected, intense periods of change in the educational setting that causes the organization to pause and reflect on its purpose before successfully returning to practice. Specifically, I'm interested in reflecting on the critical incident of COVID-19 and the abrupt transition to remote education practices. The study will give employee/participants an opportunity to share their beliefs, opinions, perceptions, stories, and experiences during the critical incident.

The problem statement:

The problem is a lack of research literature on school employees' perceived organizational support (POS) during the critical incidents of COVID-19 and the abrupt transition to remote education practices.

Methods:

As a narrative inquiry, I will seek 10 participants for 1:1 semi-structured interviews.

Participants' guarantee: All participants will remain anonymous and I will ensure confidentiality.

Other:

After I receive formal Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to conduct the study I will provide you with IRB documentation.

Benefits to the school:

Though there are no direct benefits to you or the school for participating in this research, it is my hope that the findings of my study will provide insight that may help the school and other schools to improve the development and implementation of discretionary policies in order to ensure coherence among programs and practices linked to district goals.

Proposed project period:

The research proposed research period is from April through June, 2021.

Participation:

All participants will be asked to sign an informed consent to participate. All participants will be informed of the purpose of the research and I will be responsible to obtain consent from each participant. Participants will be informed that their participation is completely voluntary.

Participants can choose to answer only the questions with which they feel comfortable and can discontinue participation at any time. Some of the data may be used for future research purposes consistent with the original purpose stated in the consent document. The final data will be stored for a period of not longer than two years after which it will be destroyed.

There is a risk of loss of privacy. However, no names or any other identifying information will appear in any published reports of the research. The research material will be kept in a secure location, and only I will have access to the data. At the conclusion of the study, all audiotapes of interviews will be deleted and any other identifying information from the transcripts will be removed.

Additionally, to effectively conduct my study, I will need to reach out to employees via their work email.

Certification:

This letter is to certify that information obtained from research will not include names of interviewees, the school, student names, or personal information.

Thanks in advance,

Donavon Soumas
dsoumas@une.edu^[1] Doctoral Candidate
University of New England

Re: Permission to conduct study

Corey [redacted]school.org>

Tue 3/2/2021 10:57 PM

To: Donavon Soumas



Hi Donavon,

Thanks for your email. My permission is granted. Truly looking forward to learning what you discover.

Best,
Corey

On Tue, Mar 2, 2021 at 7:35 PM Donavon Soumas <dsoumas@une.edu> wrote:

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Version 8.22.18
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Project Title:

School Employees' Perceptions of Organizational Support During Critical Incidents

Principal Investigator:

Donavon P. Soumas

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?

This research is being done to explore school employees' perceptions of organizational support at [name of school] during the critical incidents of COVID-19 and the abrupt transition to remote education practices.

Who will be in this study?

Individuals recruited for participation will consist of employees at [name of school], with the exception of those in administrative or leadership positions.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to engage in a one hour, one-to-one, audio recorded interview with the lead researcher to share your perceptions of organizational support during the critical incidents of COVID-19 and the transition to remote education practices.

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

There are no experimental manipulations, no deception, and no known or predicted risks or discomforts associated with this research.

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

It is unlikely that you will directly benefit from participation in this study.

What will it cost me?

With the exception of time, there is no cost to you associated with this study.

How will my privacy be protected?

The collected data and research report will protect the identities of [name of school] and all research participants/employees. Pseudonyms will be used for each participant as well as the institution to reduce the possibility of direct or indirect re-identification.

How will my data be kept confidential?

Data will be kept in a password protected electronic folder known only to the researcher.

What are my rights as a research participant?

1. Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the University.
2. Your decision to participate will not affect your relationship with Donavon Soumas, the lead researcher.
3. You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.
4. 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.
5. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason.
6. 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.
7. 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.
8. 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 Donavon Soumas, Lead Investigator. For more information regarding this study, please contact Donavon Soumas at dsoumas@une.edu

If you choose to participate in this research study and believe you may have suffered a research related injury, please contact Jacqueline Lookabaugh, Ed.D. at (207) 221-4960 or jlookabaugh@une.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may contact Jacqueline Lookabaugh, Ed.D. at (207) 221-4960 or jlookabaugh@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

Date

Legally authorized representative

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.

Researcher's signature

Date

Printed name

APPENDIX C: LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**Invitation to Participate in Study**

Invitee Name:

Date:

Dear _____:

I am writing to invite you to be a participant in a one-on-one interview as a part of research I am conducting here at [Organization Name]. In addition to my position at [Organization Name], I am also a doctoral candidate at the University of New England in the Educational Leadership program, and this research study is part of my dissertation requirement.

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry case study is to discover participants' lived experiences and gain insight into their perceptions of organizational support during critical incidents such as COVID-19 and the abrupt transition to remote education practices. Data will be collected from participants who possess firsthand knowledge of these critical incidents.

Using qualitative methods, inquiry will be made of full-time and/or part-time employees, however, excluding those in leadership/administrative positions. Additionally, eligibility for participation is limited to employees who have served for more than 2 complete years. Furthermore, only the first 10 respondents to this email will be accepted to participate.

Participation is entirely voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the Lead Researcher or [Organization Name]. The interview would involve a 45 to 60-minute, audio recorded interview with me as Lead Researcher.

As part of the study, I will take measures to assure the anonymity of your direct or indirect re-identification. Once the interview is complete, it will be transcribed into a text file that will be shared with you to make sure I have captured your statements correctly. On completion of the study, I will share a summary of the findings with you.

Please let me know of your interest in participating in this research by emailing me at dsoumas@une.edu by [date].

Thank you for your consideration to this invitation.

Sincerely,

Donavon Soumas
Doctoral Candidate
The University of New England

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL & QUESTIONS

Interviewee:

School Employees' Perceptions of Organizational Support During Critical Incidents

Interviewer:

Interviewee Pseudonym:

Interview Date:

Interview Location/Platform:

Opening Statement:

Thank you very much for agreeing to this interview. As I have shared, I am a doctoral candidate at the University of New England in the Educational Leadership program, and this research study is part of my dissertation requirement. The study's goal is to further understand the emotions and feelings of employees' perceptions of organizational support as it relates to the critical incidents of COVID-19 and the abrupt transition to remote education practices at your school. As you have seen from the Informed Consent Form you completed, your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, and you may end participation at any time. As part of this study, I have taken measures to assure your anonymity as well as that of your school to reduce the possibility of your direct or indirect re-identification. After this audio recorded interview is complete, it will be transcribed into a text file, with any identifiable information removed, using a third-party agency. Once transcribed, I will share the transcript of your interview with you to make sure I have captured your statements accurately.

Furthermore, I would like to share that being the researcher of this study and an employee at your school may present a level of bias on my part, as I have experienced critical incidents and have formed opinions and perceptions of organizational support. However, for the integrity of this study, I will set my role as an employee aside for the duration of this interview.

Finally, I will describe a phenomenon in research known as participant reactivity. Participant reactivity occurs when participants in a study respond less candidly or find it difficult to cooperate with someone familiar to them, and/or when participants share information in hopes it matches the researcher's expectations. As the researcher of this study, it is my hope that disclosing information about participant reactivity to participants may reduce any altered changes in their behavior.

To begin, I will ask you a set of questions that focuses on the response to organizational support at your school during critical incidents that may have affected you. As a reminder, I will record the interview and take notes during the session. Do I have your permission to record?

Remember that you may skip any question or choose to stop the interview at any time. I am starting the recording now.

Question 1: What is your current position at the school and how long have you been an employee?

Question 2: How would you describe your experience as an employee here?

Question 3: Before COVID-19, how would you describe your sense of well-being and contentment at work?

Question 4: Before the COVID-19 outbreak, how would you describe the organization's concern for your well-being?

Question 5: How do you describe organizational support?

Probe: Do you feel supported in this manner?

Probe: Can you give me an example of what the organization does when you feel supported?

The next section of questions will focus on your perception of the organization during COVID-19 and the abrupt transition to remote education practices.

Question 6: Currently, during the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of remote education practices, how would you describe your sense of well-being at work?

Probe: Do you feel the organization's concern for you has changed since the beginning of COVID-19 and the transition to remote educational practices?

Probe: Can you give an example?

Question 7: During the transition to remote education practices, did the organization do anything different to help you perform your assigned duties?

Probe: Did you feel supported?

Transition: Part of my study consists of exploring participants' emotions during critical incidents such as COVID-19 and the abrupt transition to remote education practices. The next section will focus on your recollection of events and the emotions you experienced during these times.

Question 8: In reflection of the critical incidents of COVID-19 and the abrupt transition to remote education practices, which emotions do you recall experiencing?

Question 9: Which of those emotions have been most prominent during the 2020-2021 school year up to this point?

Question 10: During the transition to remote education practices, do you feel the organization was concerned about your feelings regarding the changes that were made?

Probe: What happened to make you feel this way?

Question 11: In reflection of the critical incidents we have discussed, have supervisors expressed or demonstrated that they are pleased with your work?

Probe: Can you give an example?

Question 12: What do you feel the organization could do more of, or differently to make you feel supported during critical incidents?

Question 13: In closing, are there any other reflections or emotions that you would like to add before we conclude?

Closing Statement

Thank you! This has been very helpful. As I mentioned at the beginning of the interview, I will be contacting you in a few days with a transcript of our discussion today, and would appreciate your feedback to ensure I have correctly captured your responses. Once the study is complete, I will contact you again with study interpretations and conclusions. Again, thank you for your time and assistance.

APPENDIX E: COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI) PROGRAM CERTIFICATION

		<p>Completion Date 04-Oct-2020 Expiration Date 03-Oct-2024 Record ID 38566615</p>
<p>This is to certify that:</p>		
<p>Donavon Soumas</p>		
<p>Has completed the following CITI Program course:</p>		
<p>Human Research</p>	<p>(Curriculum Group)</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>Not valid for renewal of certification through CME. Do not use for TransCelerate mutual recognition (see Completion Report).</p> </div>
<p>Social & Behavioral Research Investigators</p>	<p>(Course Learner Group)</p>	
<p>1 - Basic Course</p>	<p>(Stage)</p>	
<p>Under requirements set by:</p>		
<p>University of New England</p>		
 <p>CITI Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative</p>		
<p>Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wcf5a6791-8c17-4dc0-a658-a9923245e436-38566615</p>		