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SUPERINTENDENT LEADERSHIP FOR DEVELOPING

SCHOOL DISTRICTS AS LEARNING COMMUNITIES

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Superintendent Leadership for Developing School Districts As Learning Communities

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to my family – Charles, Eric, and Karli.

Without your patience, love, and support this work would not have been possible.

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Superintendent Leadership for Developing

School Districts as Learning Communities

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Learning community has to do with personal and professional commitments. Learning community is evidenced in the overall quality of organizational life and with how people feel about each other and about their work. Furthermore, learning community provides the culture and the environment that encourages people to fully maximize their skills and talents, giving them the freedom to explore new ideas and new solutions which ultimately lead to significant and sustainable improvements in student learning and in the attainment of organizational goals.

Leadership is critical in establishing the culture, the structures, and the expectations for the creation of learning community. The primary purpose of this study was to examine the leadership perspectives and behaviors of superintendents in developing learning communities. This was a multiple case study of two superintendents of large, complex educational organizations who are working to create learning communities. A cross case analysis was conducted to establish prevalent themes common to each of the cases. Data were collected through the use of interviews, document analysis, and observation.

This study contributes to the field of educational administration by identifying the critical elements of superintendent leadership necessary to create organizations that can be characterized as learning communities. In addition, implications for research and practice were identified.

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Chapter I

Introduction

> *We need courageous leaders who can think and act in integrative, systemic, and soulful ways and who are not afraid to create transformational communities that learn their way into the future by inviting, engaging, and developing the fullness of human capacities.*
>
> -Stephanie Pace Marshall

Even the most casual observer of public schools would readily note the many problems that institutions of public education face today. One of the most significant of these problems is increasing public dissatisfaction with schools. The public's seemingly increasing skepticism of and dissatisfaction with public schools has provided the impetus and fueled momentum for the national voucher and home schooling movements (Hill & Celio, 1998). Davis and Botkin (1994) argue that the problems of public education are so great and educator response so latent that public schools as we know them today may soon become obsolete.

To force change and improvement in public schools, lawmakers have attempted "managed change" of the schools through the enactment of state and national policies (Louis, 1994). The reform movements prompted by these policies include the effective schools movement, decentralization and site-based decision making, and the movement in the 90s towards increased accountability. However, these reforms, and many others like them, have been largely ineffective for these

reforms have prompted relatively little demonstrable change in public school systems (Deal, 1996).

McLaughlin (1998) indicates that research has shown that policies are an ineffective means for impacting local change. She reports that it is "exceedingly difficult for policy to change practice" (p. 71). McLaughlin's findings suggest that "local choices" and "local capacity and will" have much greater influence over how or if policies are implemented (p. 71). Moreover, she states that "local capacity and will" to implement policies were found to be largely contingent upon the attitudes of school or district administrators.

Others have identified the lack of substantive change in public schools, despite state and federal mandates, as significantly associated with the tendency for educational institutions to look to external forces for solutions (Deal, 1996; Liebermann, 1995). "Practitioners at all levels, across sectors, have been trained and encouraged to look outside rather than within for solutions to problems, criteria for improvements, or directions for change" (Deal, 1996, p. 136). To improve educational organizations, Deal (1996) believes

> We need to recognize the value of a strong cohesive identity to a school's productivity and image. School improvement ought to make sure that our primary role is to help people see the power that they themselves have to make things better. (p. 136)

Likewise, Sergiovanni and Moore (1989) suggest that if the nation desires excellence and not mediocrity for our public schools "school improvement efforts will need to focus on the 'inside' of schooling, teaching, and learning" (p. 5).

The National Commission on Teaching & America's Future (1996) identify as one of their key recommendations the development and engagement of "local capacity" for school improvement. The Commission reported that the successful schools they studied recognizes the value of creating communities of individuals that work as "partners" toward common goals. These schools employ strategies for the ongoing learning of teachers and staff into their daily work. Like learning organizations,

> these schools continually improve what they do because they create teams that develop a common sense of organizational goals and shared ideas about how things work. As people work together to analyze what's working and to solve problems, they develop the ability to see how the whole and its parts interact with each other to create today's reality and tomorrow's possibilities. (p. 49)

The Commission calls for the thoughtful redesign of educational institutions around the tenets of learning organizations (Darling-Hammond, 1996). Darling-Hammond (1996) says that for schools to respond to today's changing environments, schools must "become genuine learning organizations for both students and teachers" (p. 198).

Empirical research has demonstrated that organizational changes consistent with that of the learning organization and learning community lead to significant and positive outcomes for both productivity and for worker satisfaction and commitment. Gephart et. al. (1996) cite the research findings from a longitudinal study conducted by the Center for Effective Organizations. Researchers for the Center indicate that learning organizations significantly improved financial gains, increased worker productivity, achieved greater employee commitment and satisfaction, and improved employee attendance. Similar findings of the benefits and the enhanced capacity of the learning organizations have been verified by other researchers (Boydell, 1994; Tannenbaum, 1997; Yeung, Nason, Ulrich, & von Glinow,1992).

In educational organizations, the implementation of principles of learning organizations has yielded similar, positive results. Lee, Smith, and Croninger (1995) conclude that in their comprehensive study of over 820 secondary schools across the nation, the schools that could be characterized as professional learning communities had significantly improved all areas of student performance while closing the performance gaps between student groups. Darling-Hammond (1995) suggests that schools that provided focused and ongoing opportunities for professional dialogue between teachers and staff were able to demonstrate student performance gains more quickly than those schools that had not.

Likewise, McLaughlin (1998) reveals the findings from her observations of behaviors and performance in schools that were learning communities. McLaughlin

(1998) notes that the knowledge generated through shared learning and collective contributions extends beyond that possible of any one individual member of the organization.

> In an important sense, the process of generating knowledge was the product because it achieved collective validity for the understandings and benchmarks forged along the way. In this sense, the strong collegiality of a learning organization enhanced rather than undermined teachers' sense of professional autonomy and agency. (p. 77)

The premises and practices of learning organizations hold great promise for the improvement of educational systems. Consequently, the learning organization construct is often used in educational writings to characterize new ways of thinking about educational settings (Shields & Seltzer, 1997). However, few empirical studies exist to promote a clear understanding of the intricacies of organizational learning and the antecedents of learning organizations and learning communities. While the paucity of research about organizational learning and learning communities is evident in the business literature, research in these areas is particularly scant in the educational literature.

While many have suggested that the learning communities' model of organizational life is a possible solution for both business and educational entities, few have seriously examined the holistic concept in either context (Leithwood et. al., 1998). The "landscape" of research on organizational learning is plagued with

scarcity and fragmentation (Huber, 1991; Tsang, 1997). Presently, the organizational learning literature is primarily comprised of organizational learning theories. Many have postulated theories and general schematic models for organizational learning; however, the field is lacking in systematic, empirical learning research (Miner & Mezias, 1996; Tsang, 1997). Ulrich, von Glinow, and Jick (1993) stress the need for more research.

> The challenge we see is to design models that identify and test what managers can do to make learning happen. To date, there have been far more 'thought papers' on why learning matters than empirical research on how managers can build learning capability (p. 59).

Organizational learning experts indicate that because the organizational learning concept is increasing in popularity, there is an increasing and dramatic need for more research to support practice (Hawkins, 1994; Miner & Mezias, 1996). The recommendations from the field include calls for both quantitative and qualitative research (Miner & Mezias, 1996) and for research of the leadership skills and competencies necessary for building organizational learning capacity (Leithwood, et. al., 1998; Shrivastava, 1983). Many others have indicated a significant need for research to connect and synthesize the research previously conducted in different, yet related aspects of organizational learning (Arygis & Schon, 1996; Huber, 1991; Tsang, 1997) and to link the research that has been done by various research groups (Huber, 1991; Tsang, 1997). Moreover, research exploring the leadership behaviors

of the superintendent that positively contribute to organizational learning capability is similarly lacking.

In an increasingly demanding society, continually poised to criticize the role of public servants, superintendents have not been without their critics. Some have even questioned whether or not a need exists for the superintendents in public education systems when site-based decision making and participatory methods of management are utilized. And although many have questioned, few have explored the role of superintendent through empirical research to ascertain whether or not the specific role of superintendent is indeed important to school improvement efforts.

In studies of effective schools, superintendents were found to have provided the vision and impetus for building the learning community (Firestone & Bader, 1992) and for providing the encouragement and resources to sustain learning capability (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Firestone & Bader, 1992; Leithwood et. al., 1998). Some researchers recognize the importance of the superintendent in building and sustaining learning communities, yet this important leadership role continues to "warrant more research energy" (Leithwood et. al., 1998).

Furthermore, Bridges (1982) identifies the paucity of research pertaining to the superintendency as one of the "most important gaps" in research of educational administration.

> The superintendent stands at the apex of the organizational pyramid in education and manages a multi-million dollar enterprise charged with the moral and technical socialization of youth, aged 6-18. Despite the importance of this administrative role to education and society, less than a handful of studies analyzed in this review investigated the role and impact of the chief executive officer. This topic merits both reflection and empirical examination (p. 26).

Since Bridges' review, educational organizations have experienced accelerated and fundamental change, yet little has improved or changed regarding the research of leaders of educational organizations. Susan Moore Johnson (1997) also recognizes the lack of research specific to the superintendency. "Although superintendents hold a prominent position and are considered important educational leaders, research about them and their work is scant" (p. 19).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership perspectives and behaviors of superintendents in developing learning communities. The following research questions guided this study.

Research Questions

1. What leadership *perspectives and behaviors* did these superintendents use to promote the development of learning communities in their school districts?
   a.) What distinct *expectations* were developed in these school districts?
   b.) What student academic *outcomes* were evident in these districts?

Definition of Terms

Learning capability: the establishment of structures, processes, and strategies to create readiness for organizational learning and to create and sustain learning community.

Learning community: an organization, or purposeful community of people, where individuals are bound together by shared values, ideas, and commitments. Professional learning communities require the active engagement of educators in the improvement of practice through strong professional relationships fundamentally based upon notions of interdependence and collegiality (Louis & Kruse, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1994).

Learning organizations: organizations where people "continually increase their capacity, both individually and collectively, to create the results desired, where new ways of thinking are embraced and nurtured, where collective inspiration is

maximized, and where people are continually learning how to learn together" (Senge, p. 3, 1991).

Leadership behaviors: the manner of conducting oneself in relation to its influence over the behavior of others.

Leadership perspectives: a mental view of facts and ideas and its impact on decision making and action.

Organizational learning: the process by which the knowledge base of the organization is developed, improved, and shaped (Schrivastava, 1981, p. 15).

Organizational memory: organizational information or knowledge that is stored in the memories of individuals within the organization or in formal documents and/or in systems for use in the future (Huber, 1991).

Superintendent: the chief executive officer of a public school system.

Significance of the Study

Within the last few years, concepts associated with organizational learning, learning organizations, and learning communities have begun to claim attention in the educational community. Results from recent studies of learning communities in educational contexts have demonstrated promising results. The positive nature of these results has prompted educational researchers and practitioners to recommend the reconceptualization of schools around the premises of the learning community (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Hord, 1997; McLaughlin, 1998).

The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership perspectives and behaviors of superintendents in developing learning communities. This study contributes research findings unique to the superintendency, a leadership role that has been lacking in empirical research. Consequently, the findings from this study will prove useful to state level policy makers, designers of university superintendent preparation programs, professional development providers for school leaders, and to practicing and aspiring superintendents.

Limitations of the Study

The design of this study created limitations that are unique to the specific designs selected. Qualitative research and case study methodology pose certain inherent limitations that must be overcome by the use of techniques to ensure the "goodness" and the quality of the research (Lincoln, 1992). The primary purpose of qualitative research is in understanding, the particularity of the context and the complex interrelationships (Stake, 1995). Consequently, generalizations cannot be reasonably made to other contexts. The inability to make generalizations and the significant influence of the researcher in the development of research interpretations are considered weaknesses or limitations of qualitative research.

Furthermore, this study may be limited by my own personal biases regarding the need to restructure schools so that the needs of the individual as well as the needs of the organization are met in an engaging working and learning environment. I also

hold personal biases regarding the critical importance of the leadership of superintendents in creating and sustaining learning communities. I attempted to overcome these biases by using proven research techniques such as triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Introduction

The primary aim of this study was to examine the leadership perspectives and behaviors of superintendents in developing learning communities. The antecedents of the learning community originate primarily from the research and commentary on organizational learning. Consequently, any exploration of learning communities must begin with an examination of the associated literature on organizational learning and learning organizations.

This review of the literature includes research and expert commentary related to the many, varied aspects of organizational learning such as individual learning versus organizational learning, knowledge acquisition, information interpretation, communication, organizational memory, and leadership. This analysis will be subsequently followed by what is known and/or suspected about the combined characteristics of organizational learning into learning organizations or learning communities. This study is directed at the leadership of superintendents. Consequently, research and expert community related to the role, influence, and the leadership of superintendents is also included.

Because of the limited number of empirical studies of the learning organization in educational contexts, it is necessary to examine related research literature to ameliorate understanding of the concept. Consequently, this literature review contains findings primarily from contexts other than education. Peter Senge referred to the applicability of the organizational learning literature to educational settings by saying,

> It's about how human beings learn, and about the new ways we will need to think and interact in the 21st century, in a world characterized by increasing interdependence. There is really nothing intrinsic in any of the basic disciplines, for example, that distinguishes business from education. You can make pretty compelling arguments that systems thinking, building a shared vision, dialogue, and learning how to reflect on our mental models are, at some level, educational undertakings more than business undertakings. (as cited in O'Neill, 1995, p. 23)

Therefore, while this study is concerned with the learning communities construct as it relates to educational organizations, the research literature of organizational learning in organizational sciences serves as a foundation to understanding this construct.

Organizational Learning Organizational learning is a concept that has been reflected in the organizational research and commentary for many years. To date, the research on organizational learning has been primarily focused on its many discrete

aspects. Thus, the research has been substantially fragmented and has rarely been focused on connecting the concepts and theories into a holistic model descriptive of the concept in practice (Huber, 1991; Shrivastava, 1983).

The fragmentation of the research surrounding the concept of organizational learning can be attributed to the various, diverse conceptualizations of its meaning (Fiol & Lyles, 1985) and the varied perspectives and foci guiding the research (Huber, 1991; Nicolini & Meznar, 1995). It is common in the organizational learning literature to find many associated terms that seem to be used in a synonymous fashion. For example, the terms learning organizations, learning communities, and communities of learners are often used interchangeably with organizational learning in the literature, yet they have relatively different meanings (DiBella & Nevis, 1998).

The concept of the learning organization or learning communities is similar and closely related to the concept of organizational learning. Peter Vaill (1996) distinguishes between organizational learning and the learning organization in his book, *Learning As A Way of Being: Strategies for Survival in a World of Permanent White Water*. Vaill contends that

> *organizational learning* is learning that goes on inside an organization, usually the learning of an individual but also the learning of pairs or teams of people. The organizational learning movement is thus occupied with the questions of the nature of learning in organizational environments and with

> what managerial leaders can do to enhance learning processes within organizations. (p. 52)

In contrast to his description of organizational learning, Vaill (1996) describes *learning organizations* as places of high-quality learning:

> The learning organization in contemporary vision has achieved a new kind of internal structure and process marked by imaginative flexibility of style in its leadership and by empowered contributions from its membership. It is constituted to learn and grow and change – as opposed to traditional bureaucratic models constituted to be stable and predictable in their operation, to hold the line and not to change. (p. 53)

Eric Tsang (1997) also refers to the correlation between these concepts by characterizing organizational learning as *types of activity* that occur in organizations, while indicating that learning organizations refers to particular *types of organizations*. "There is a simple relationship between the two – a learning organization is one which is good at organizational learning. Therefore, once the definition of organizational learning is settled, that of the learning organization will follow" (p. 75).

When attempting to define organizational learning, organizational theorists have posited many different definitions. Some have focused their definitions of organizational learning primarily on the observable and measurable results or outcomes of learning, while others have emphasized competitive or innovative

efficiency (Nicolini & Meznar, 1995). According to Fiol and Lyles (1985), organizational learning deals with cognitive changes, or new, shared understandings and behavioral changes usually evidenced by new organizational responses and structures. Huber (1991) characterizes organizational learning as a process of changing a group's understandings thereby changing the range of its potential behaviors. Still others have characterized the organizational learning concept in more broadly defined and holistic terms. For example, Dodgson (1993) describes organizational learning as both processes and outcomes. He indicates that organizational learning "can be described as the ways firms build, supplement and organize knowledge and routines around their activities and within their cultures, and adapt and develop organizational efficiency by improving the use of the broad skills of their workforces" (p. 2).

Since the genesis of the organizational learning concept, researchers and theorists have debated about whether or not it is appropriate to anthropomorphize organizations by attributing to it human or personal characteristics such as those behaviors typically associated with learning (DiBella & Nevis, 1998; Sandelands & Stablein, 1987). Hedberg (1982) responds to this debate over organizations as learning entities:

> Although organizational learning occurs through individuals, it would be a mistake to conclude that organizational learning is nothing but the cumulative result of their members' learning. Organizations do not have

> brains, but they have cognitive systems and memories. As individuals develop their personalities, personal habits, and beliefs over time, organizations develop world-views and ideologies. Members come and go, and leadership changes, but organizations' memories preserve certain behaviors, mental maps, norms, and values over time. (p. 6)

Fiol & Lyles (1985) indicate that over time consensus has emerged to support the notion that organizations can learn. Furthermore, most not only subscribe to the ability of organizations to learn, but they also posit that organizations are constantly learning.

In case studies of organizations, it has been demonstrated that organizations are in a continual state of learning and that not all organizational learning is conscious or intentional (March & Olsen, 1979). Still others have elaborated on the continuous state of organizational learning, by suggesting that organizations "can incorrectly learn, and they can correctly learn that which is incorrect" (Huber, 1991, p. 89). Additionally, Wenger (1996) argues that

> We learn all the time, whether or not we see our learning, and whether or not we learn what is expected of us or what is good for us or our organizations. In a sense, we already have learning organizations. What is needed is not to create learning, but rather to create circumstances that makes learning empowering and productive. (p. 22)

Consensus appears to be present in the research literature on the innate learning that occurs in organizations (Fiol & Lyles, 1988). Furthermore, agreement is also emerging around the historically contentious issues surrounding the fundamental differences between individual and organizational learning.

Critical to the understanding of organizational learning is the fundamental distinction between individual learning and organizational learning. "Unlike individuals, organizations lack consciousness, but this does not mean that organizations cannot learn" (DiBella & Nevis, 1998, p. 26). A fundamental distinction can be made between the two, for learning in the organization can be characterized as the learning that becomes the property of some collective unit often described as, "organization mind" or "collective mind" (Sandelands & Stablein, 1987; Weick & Roberts, 1993). DiBella & Nevis (1998) elaborate on the distinction between individual and organizational learning:

> Organizational learning is a social process whereby some insight or knowledge, created either by an individual working alone or by a team becomes accessible to others. Organizational learning is not about how individuals, as individuals, learn in an organization, but about how individuals and work groups working with others learn from one another's experience. Organizational learning has distinctive meaning because it separates the learning of an individual from the patterned learning that occurs in a group. (p. 26)

Furthermore, Weick and Roberts (1993) refer to the power of collective mind and the power of organizational learning as compared to individual learning by saying "Without representation and subordination, comprehension reverts to one brain at a time. No matter how visionary or smart or forward-looking or aggressive that one brain may be, it is no match for conditions of interactive complexity" (p. 354). Moreover, the learning of individuals and the learning of organizations can be similarly described according to several critical dimensions.

Fiol and Lyles (1985) categorize organizational learning into either lower-level or higher-level learning. Likewise, Argyis and Schon (1978, 1996) characterize organizational learning as single-loop, double-loop, or deutero-learning. Both conceptual frameworks characterize learning that merely changes behavior or action as lower-level or single-loop learning. Learning that changes fundamental values, beliefs, and behaviors is characterized as either higher-level or double-loop learning. Argyis and Schon (1978 & 1996) extend their levels of learning to include yet a higher stage of learning, deutero-learning. Deutero-learning includes the processes or strategies employed to learn about learning. At this particular stage of learning, members of the organization are engaged in ongoing activities designed to assess individual and organizational learning processes. Peter Senge (1990) and Mark Dodgson (1991) have also examined the nature and qualities of learning in organizations and have characterized their findings into levels or stages.

According to Peter Senge (1990), many organizations tend to focus primarily on survival. Senge characterizes the learning necessary to simply maintain or survive as "adaptive learning," and the higher-level learning that enhances the organization's ability to create requires "generative learning." Senge suggests that in order for organizations to achieve a level of success beyond that of mere survival, learning strategies that are both adaptive and generative must be employed. Moreover, Dodgson (1993) connects the theoretical models of learning to organizational behavior by saying,

> Just as psychologists distinguish various 'levels' of learning, progressing from biological or adaptive learning, the 'learning organization' can be distinguished as one that moves beyond this 'natural' learning, and whose goals are to thrive by systematically using its learning to progress beyond mere adaptation. It is an organization which attempts to develop what psychologists see in individuals as higher level, constructive or generative mental functions, and is reflected in strategies and structures purposefully being developed to facilitate and coordinate learning in rapidly changing and conflictual circumstances. (p. 5)

Beyond an understanding of the definitions of organizational learning, its basic premises, and the levels of learning often present in organizations, it is important to examine the various components that comprise the organizational learning construct.

Some of the primary aspects of organizational learning as characterized by Daft and Huber (1987) and later extended by Huber (1991) are knowledge acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation, and organizational memory. The first component of Daft and Huber's framework is knowledge acquisition. Knowledge acquisition can be characterized as those activities or processes by which knowledge is obtained or brought into the organization. Secondly, organizational processes or activities whereby information is shared, leading to new knowledge and understandings is characterized as information distribution. The third component of this model is information interpretation, which includes the processes utilized in the organization to generate commonly understood interpretations from the information. In 1991, Huber extended this model by adding yet another component, organizational memory.

Organizations bring in knowledge and information in various ways and one such way is by grafting. Grafting is the hiring of an individual for some unique knowledge or expertise that is needed by the organization. Grafting is often accomplished in organizations through joint or collaborative ventures with other organizations (Huber, 1991; Lyles, 1988). It has been postulated that the use of grafting will increase (Drucker, 1988) for it is often more cost effective to import needed expertise than it is to retrain current employees (Simon, 1991).

Another strategy employed by organizations to bring information and knowledge into the organization has been described as vicarious learning.

Organizations learn vicariously by imitating other organizations (Huber, 1991). Often when seeking innovations or solutions to problems within organizations, management will adopt strategies that seem to work for other organizations. Some researchers have drawn attention to the use of vicarious learning strategies and have entertained the strategies as viable means for bringing learning into the organization (Huber, 1991; Lant & Mezias, 1992). However, still others have reported contradictory findings, indicating that vicarious learning is largely an ineffective learning or improvement strategy.

Mahajan, Sharma, and Bettis (1988) contend that vicarious approaches to organizational learning primarily occur within similar industries and in response to similar problems, yet it is a largely ineffective improvement strategy. "Change involves idiosyncratic knowledge of managerial culture and behavior in the particular firm. Consequently, the innovation must be designed uniquely for each firm" (p. 1199). Others have studied the proclivity of organizations to imitate other organizations, finding also that these kinds of efforts are largely inefficacious (Bourgeois & Eisenhardt, 1988; March, 1981).

The ability of an organization to learn through the effective acquisition and interpretation of information is often contingent upon the actions of individuals. For example, studies of organizational behavior have demonstrated that organizations often compensate for inadequate information through the informal use of boundary scanners (Tushman, 1979; Tushman & Katz, 1980; Tushman & Scanlan, 1981).

Boundary scanners are individuals who play an instrumental role in gathering pertinent information and assisting their particular unit in the assimilation and utilization of the information. Typically, boundary scanners are not well connected to other units or groups within their organization and, therefore, their effects are somewhat isolated only to their groups (Von Hippel, 1976).

Similar to boundary scanners, gatekeepers scan the internal and external environments to gather information needed by the organization. However, the research does make a clear distinction between the function of boundary scanners and that of gatekeepers. Unlike boundary scanners, gatekeepers are usually well connected both internally and externally; therefore, they are adept at facilitating the transfer of information and knowledge across units or groups within the organization and externally to groups outside the organization (Tushman & Katz, 1980; Tushman & Scanlan, 1981).

Research of organizational behavior has shown that managers are often effective boundary spanners and gatekeepers, linking their organizations with outsiders in a variety of ways. In fact, it has been reported that managers spend over half their verbal contact time in these roles, making external contacts with clients, suppliers, trade organizations, and with others (Dollinger, 1984; Kurke & Aldrich, 1983; Mintzberg, 1973; Starbuck & Milliken, 1988).

Similarly, Daft, Sormunsen, and Parks (1988), based upon their study of executives in high performing organizations, believe that executives are effective at

maintaining ‘information flexibility.’ They indicate that effective executives had a unique ability to adjust their scanning activities to focus on specific areas based upon the amount of uncertainty affecting it. Furthermore, their findings reveal that these successful executives value all sources of information, including those from personal and formal sources, as well as from internal and external means.

Similarly, Dollinger (1984) concludes from his study that boundary scanning and gatekeeping are critical functions of the manager and that these roles tend to produce significant and positive results. Additional research demonstrates that the use of individuals in special boundary and gatekeeper roles is an effective strategy for gathering and transmitting key information across organizational units, particularly in the innovation process. Furthermore, the research findings suggest that managers can effectively improve communication and innovation processes by concentrating efforts on the development of individuals as boundary scanners (Tushman, 1977).

The ability of an organization to effectively disseminate and interpret knowledge is dependent upon the communication techniques employed by all within the organization, especially the administrator or manager. Today, organizations function in highly complex environments where it is frequently necessary to process and sort significant amounts of complex, and often ambiguous, information. Weick (1979) indicates that organizations cannot function with excessive ambiguity, making it necessary for leaders and administrators to employ strategies to maintain appropriate levels of equivocality.

Research conducted of middle and upper-level managers reflect that effective managers are able to maintain acceptable levels of equivocality through the use of select forms of media uniquely designed to effectively communicate ambiguous information. Daft, Lengel, and Trevino (1987) argue that high performing managers are keenly aware of the relationship between media selection and message ambiguity. Consequently, these effective managers tend to select or prefer "rich" media for communications that are complex and "less rich" media for unequivocal communications. More importantly, research indicates that high performing managers seem to have developed an almost intuitive ability to appropriately match communication media with communication activities (Daft & Huber, 1987; Daft & Lengel, 1984; Daft, Lengel & Trevino, 1987).

The kinds of communication media used in an organization not only determine the degree of equivocality in the organization, but the media itself also conveys a message. Feldman and March (1981) argue that "information in organizations serve as signal and symbol" and that the "selection of media also may have strong symbolic overtones" (p. 229). For example, a manager may elect to personally deliver a particular message or piece of information to demonstrate personal interest or to indicate the importance of the information.

Organizations develop what Senge characterizes as "learning capability" through the careful attention of managers toward activities focused on such capability. The structures and processes Senge describes are those that facilitate the

effective acquisition of knowledge, the dissemination and interpretation of information, and the development and support of "organizational memory" (March & Simon, 1958). Huber (1991) characterizes organizational memory as information or knowledge that is stored for use in the future. Organizational memory is the mechanism by which organizations retain knowledge and learning.

Most students of organizations indicate that organizational memory is manifested in an organization's "mental and structural artifacts" (Starbuck & Hedberg, 1977; Walsh & Ungson, 1991). The "mental artifacts" refer to the memories of each individual within the organization, while the "structural artifacts" pertain to the formal written documents of an organization such as organizational charts and memoranda. It has been postulated that most of an organization's memory is stored in the memories of individuals within the organization, with a much smaller portion of memory being stored by way of formal documentation (Simon, 1991).

Since organizational memory is primarily stored in the memory of individuals within the organization, employee turnover is considered an "enemy" of long-term organizational memory (Carley, 1992; Simon, 1991). Contrary to traditional thinking, employee turnover has negative effects on organizational memory even when experienced personnel are hired to replace exiting employees. Managers can best prepare organizations to be less susceptible to turnover by ensuring that "external knowledge repositories," such as standard operating procedures, formal documents,

and computerized data bases exist in the organization (Argyris & Schon, 1996; Carley, 1992; Daft & Weick, 1984).

To enhance organizational memory and the overall effectiveness of the organization, it is critical that organizations be designed so that learning is a fundamental aspect of the daily lives of all within the organization. Ulrich, Glinow, and Jick (1993) indicate that capacity for change and readiness to effectively deal with competition is critical to organizational survival and can only effectively occur through attention to ensuring that the organizational culture and organizational structures are conducive to organizational learning.

Organizational culture can be described as the "shared meaning, patterns of belief, symbols, rituals, and myths that evolve over time and function as the glue that holds the organization together" (Zamanou & Glazer, 1994, p. 475). The power of organizational culture is significant for it has been intimated that the culture of an organization influences the attitudes and behaviors of its members, thus influencing the level of performance that the organization achieves (Marcoulides & Heck, 1993). Furthermore, research of organizational behavior has revealed that organizational culture can be constructed, modified, and managed so that it is aligned with organizational goals (Sashkin & Burke, 1990).

The culture of a learning organization has been described as one that "supports and rewards learning and innovation; promotes inquiry, dialogue, risk taking, and experimentation; allows mistakes to be shared and viewed as

opportunities for learning; and values the well-being of all employees" (Gephart, et. al., 1996, p. 4). Similarly, Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) recognize that in order for schools to become true learning communities, the cultures of these institutions must support and encourage reflection, collaboration, and shared purposes. The culture of schools "must be conducive to the formation of communities of practice that enable teachers to meet together to solve problems, consider new ideas, evaluate alternatives, and frame schoolwide goals" (p. 600). Furthermore, McGill and Slocum (1995), describe these aspects of a supportive learning culture as they might be manifested in observable organizational behavior:

> Everyone – management, employees, customers, and suppliers – sees opportunities to learn and grow. Groups engage in active dialogue and conversation, not discussions. These conversations are reflective, as opposed to argumentative, and they are guided by leaders who facilitate the building of strong relationships among key stakeholder groups. (p. 481)

Learning Communities The learning organization is built upon the fundamental concepts of what is known about organizational learning. The learning organization evolves from the convergence of the many varied features of organizational learning into a systemic approach to organizational life. According to Senge (1990), the learning organization is one that is "continually expanding its capacity to create its future" with the focus being to improve individual and organizational performance (p.

14). Senge and his colleagues (1994) characterize the learning organization as teams of people who work well together and produce high levels of organizational performance. Through working together toward the actuation of a shared vision, each individual member of the organization gains new knowledge and skills.

Sergiovanni (1994) in his book, *Building Community in Schools*, extends and deepens the notion of learning organizations to that of the learning community. According to Sergiovanni, the metaphor of schools as communities is powerful for communities are bound together through shared values and commitments, shared purpose, and professional, collegial relationships. Furthermore, the school as learning community is based upon the fundamental idea that the improvement of teaching and learning is motivated by the desire to improve individual and organizational performance; however, it is also motivated by the desire to improve for the sake of the profession itself.

Louis and Kruse (1995) reveal several structural conditions necessary to support the creation of schools as learning communities. They believe that the organizational conditions conducive to learning communities include committed time to discuss practice and solve problems, facilities designed to enable educators to be within close proximity to one another, definition of roles that provide for interdependence, implementation of communication structures and networks, and strategies for the development of teacher empowerment and school autonomy. Additionally, Louis and Kruse (1995) identify five characteristics that seem indicative

of the professional learning communities they studied. These five characteristics or dimensions include reflective dialogue, deprivatization of practice, collective focus on student learning, collaboration among members of the organization, and identification of shared values.

The Center for Research on the Context of Secondary School Teaching (1998) reveal findings consistent with those of Louis and Kruse:

> Schoolteachers' practice and careers were fundamentally tied up in the ethos of their professional community. Weak communities where traditional norms of individualism, conservatism and presentism operated by default were typical in our sample of schools. Most teachers work in settings characterized by professional isolation and a lack of shared sense of practice (p. 76).

In contrast, the researchers indicate that the successful schools display a strong sense of professional community. These schools establish norms of collegiality where new knowledge and understandings are created through debate and discussion. These schools are also democratic, egalitarian, and open social systems whereby relationships and dialogue cross boundaries in the organization. These successful organizations also create cultures where conscious effort is made to define the "we" and the "way-we-do-it-here" (p. 77).

Similar findings of the importance of building learning capability and professional community are reported by the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools (CORS). This research organization recently completed five major

research projects focused on the study of school improvement. These longitudinal studies were all designed around several major themes: authentic learning, equity, empowerment, professional community, and accountability. Newmann reports that across all five of the studies and all the schools involved, two primary characteristics were present in the successful schools. The first of these characteristics is the adults' concern for the "intellectual quality" of student learning, in contrast to a concern for techniques. The second of these characteristics is the extent to which the school had created a "professional community that harnesses and develops individual commitment and talent into a group effort that pushes for learning of high intellectual quality" (as cited in Brandt, 1995, p. 73).

The establishment of school community is derived only from serious attention to the nature and quality of workplace conditions and the structures and leadership necessary to create conditions conducive for learning and collaboration (Leithwood et. al., 1998; Little, 1982; Peterson, et. al., 1996). Little (1982) suggests that the conditions that appear to have the greatest influence in creating a successful school are based upon strong

> expectations for analysis, evaluation, and experimentation: a norm of continuous improvement. By celebrating the place of norms of collegiality and experimentation, we place the related matters of school improvement, receptivity to staff development, and instructional leadership squarely in an analysis of organizational setting: the school as workplace. (p. 339)

Like Sergiovanni, Little advocates changing the traditional metaphor of schools from the school as organization and workplace to the school as a professional learning community.

Sergiovanni (2000) speaks of a new construct for examining and improving school organizations. In this construct, he describes two distinct, yet critical aspects or "worlds" of effective schools, the lifeworld and the systemsworld. According to Sergiovanni (2000):

> leaders and their purposes, followers and their needs, and the unique traditions, rituals, and norms that define a school's culture compose the lifeworld. And the management designs and protocols, strategic and tactical actions, policies and procedures, and efficiency and accountability assurances compose the systemsworld. (p. ix)

While Sergiovanni (2000) speaks of the importance of and a balance between each of the qualities, he emphasizes that both aspects are necessary to achieve effectiveness in an organization and each are mutually supportive. Further, he emphasizes that the concept of community is the essence or the "heart" of an organization's "lifeworld" (2000, p. 59). It is the responsibility of leadership, particularly the superintendent, to achieve the balance that Sergiovanni describes between the "lifeworld" and the "systemsworld."

Superintendent Leadership Research has demonstrated that the role and influence of the superintendent in successful school districts is significant. Like other organizations, school districts require strong leadership in order to successfully achieve organizational goals (Hart & Ogawa, 1987). Joseph Murphy and Philip Hallinger (1986) found in their comprehensive study of effective school districts that superintendents were indeed able to exert a significant degree of influence over the ability of the organization to achieve its goals.

Hannaway and Sproull (1978) conducted a study of the superintendency in which they did not specify that the superintendent must be able to demonstrate success in their school district. They found that in these schools the most typical influence felt from the superintendent was in areas other than those related to curriculum and instruction. In contrast, one of the more significant distinctions common to the superintendents of successful schools studied by Murphy and Hallinger (1986) is their instructional focus. These superintendents demonstrate by both their dialogue and action, their belief that student learning and quality instructional programs and practices are the most important functions of the school. Likewise, these superintendents' activities and behaviors are congruent with their focus for they spent most of their time in areas directly related to instruction (Murphy & Hallinger, 1986).

Murphy and Hallinger (1986) found in their study of superintendents of effective schools, that these superintendents actively monitor the implementation of

the curriculum and instructional practices. They also note that these superintendents work very closely in the supervision, support, and evaluation of the campus principals.

It has been demonstrated that successful superintendents greatly enhance the instructional effectiveness of a school district through the establishment of organizational structures that are tightly coordinated in the areas of curriculum and instruction (Murphy & Hallinger, 1986). LaRoque and Coleman (1986) in their study of high performing schools, found similar evidence of a strong district presence and coordination, particularly in the areas of curriculum and instruction. Superintendents are able to achieve this tightly coupled system, so indicative of effective school districts, through the collaborative development, implementation, and support of district-wide goals and through the frequent articulation of these goals (Floden, et. al., 1988).

Research of human behavior in organizations reveals the importance of the development of collaboratively developed purposes, beliefs, goals, and strategies. "It is only when there exists both intensity and consensus that strong cultures exist. Organizational members must come to know and share a common set of expectations and these must be consistently reinforced across the organization" (O'Reilly, 1989, p.319). Richard Beckhard (1997) also speaks of the value of understanding an organization's vision, mission, strategies, culture, and external environment. Beckhard indicates that when these aspects of an organization are comprehensively understood by everyone within the organization, then leadership can utilize this

understanding to assist others in the differentiation of necessary activities from those that are simply “traditions, preferences, and conveniences” (p. 332).

Senge (1990) refers to one of the greatest paradoxes of leadership in the learning organization. He indicates that leadership in learning organizations is both “collective and highly individual” (p. 360). When establishing goals for the organization, it is critical that adequate attention be given to the goals of each individual in the organization. Effective leaders build into their organizational cultures support for the critical organizational functions as well as support for the critical work needs of the individuals within the organization (Sashkin & Burke,1990). Fullan and Miles (1992) state that:

> to achieve collective power, we must develop personal power and assure that it is aligned with a shared vision for an ideal school (workplace). Effective work cultures will encourage their employees to develop themselves fully, assume ownership, and accept responsibility. Leaders help their subordinates develop the courage to take responsibility, to apply their full ability and skill, and to see that schools achieve greatness. (p.748)

In the effective organization, alignment exists between the needs of the organization and the needs of each individual within the organization.

The concept of vision has been written of prolifically in the literature. However, much of what has been written has been based primarily on rhetoric rather than on serious “data-grounded descriptions. It is clear that vision is more than an abstract concept” (Staessens & Vandeberghe, 1994, p. 198). Vision, or goal-

consensus, which is more than a compilation of written statements (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985), can be observed and measured as a function of the school's culture, activities, and decisions (Staessens & Vandeberghe, 1994). Furthermore, it is widely held that vision and goal consensus is a significant aspect of the successful organization. Susan Moore Johnson (1997) says that, "superintendents are expected to formulate educational visions that will inspire and guide constituents as they set out to improve their schools" (p. 84). In the districts Johnson studied, she found that where visions were clearly formulated and deliberately promoted, these visions were the most understood and the ones most strongly supported.

In studies of school improvement, vision as a core component of the school culture has repeatedly emerged as a fundamental theme (Bormann, 1983; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Pettigrew, 1979; Wilson & Corbett, 1983). Schein (1985) writes of culture as the deepest level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are held by the members of the organization, and they serve to define the organization's view of itself and its environment. These basic assumptions and beliefs, along with the symbolic activities of the organization, facilitate the development of shared meaning and values among the members of the organization, which in turn, produce commitments to "engage in coordinated, or organized, action" (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995, p. 134).

One of the most significant functions of the superintendent is to establish and to nurture an organizational culture that supports and sustains the vision of the organization and the goals of each individual within the organization (Hart & Ogawa, 1987; Norton, Webb, Dlugosh, & Sybouts, 1996). Most experts agree that leadership can play a significant role in the creation and management of an organization's culture. "The bottom line for leaders is that if they do not become conscious of the culture in which they are embedded, those cultures will manage them. Cultural understanding is desirable for all of us, but it is essential to leaders if they are to lead" (Schein,1992, p. 221). Sashkin & Burke (1990) indicate that one of the most important functions of a leader is to understand existing culture and then to construct, modify, and manage culture so that it is consistent with organizational goals. "If one wishes to distinguish leadership from management or administration, one can argue that leaders create and change cultures, while managers live within them" (Schein, 1992, p. 5).

Leaders of organizations wield substantial influence over the development of organizational cultures that support the goals of the organization. One of the most powerful mechanisms that leaders have for establishing and communicating their belief and vision for the organization is by those activities that they systematically devote time and attention. Members of the organization are actively observing what leaders notice or recognize and what the leader measures and controls (Schein,1992). In fact, if it is not obvious by way of formal and informal communication techniques what is important to leadership, the members of the organization "will spend an

inordinate amount of time and energy trying to decipher what a leader's behavior really reflects" (Schein,1992 , p. 231). In studies of the superintendency, it is noted that if superintendents did not frequently articulate their visions for the organization and what is important, that constituents will tend to conjure up their own interpretations of the organizational vision (Johnson, 1997).

The effective leader recognizes the importance of understanding organizational cultures and the value of employing strategies to develop strong cultures supportive of the organizational goals. Hamada (1994) indicates that the study of organizational cultures is a means of understanding the organization not as an "economic or political entity, but as a socio-cultural entity in a particular society within a particular historical context"(p. 21). The study of organizational cultures, by way of cultural description, provides significant insight into the organization so that cultural assumptions can be accurately identified that assist or hinder what the members of the organization are trying to accomplish (Schein, 1992).

Schein (1992) further describes the significant role of leadership in the establishment of strong cultures by the way in which leaders; (1) model desired behaviors and whether their behaviors are congruent with their message, (2) allocate resources, (3) recruit, select, support, promote, and remove staff, and (4) address critical incidents. Each of these functions or activities are mechanisms by which leaders are able to influence the development of organizational cultures that support the goals of the organization. A leader's actions, or perceived lack thereof, in any one of these areas connotes his or her beliefs and values to others in the organization.

Focused internal efforts to understand, develop, and monitor organizational culture are not sufficient to accurately ascertain the culture of the organization. It is necessary that leaders of organizations also evaluate external influences on the culture of the organization. Research conducted of organizations and schools has yielded information regarding the significant effort that organizations will exert to conform to broad normative standards that exist in the larger community. The research suggests that organizations are typically judged by individuals in the community by their adherence to "normative requirements" established by the community or by society in general (Ziolkowski & Willower, 1991). Thus, an indepth understanding of community norms or values is important to effectively establish an organizational culture that is in alignment or at least not contradictory to broad community held values.

If leaders in organizations of today desire to create cultures that are responsive, visionary, and successful, it will be necessary for them to examine and work within the organization in systemic and reflective ways. Peter Senge (1990) states that:

> Leaders can influence the culture and the individuals within an organization by focusing on four distinct levels: events, patterns of behavior, systemic structures, and a 'purpose story.' By and large leaders of our current institutions focus their attentions on events and patterns of behavior and under their influence, their organizations do likewise. That is why contemporary organizations are predominantly

> reactive, rarely generative. Leaders in learning organizations pay attention to all four areas, but focus primarily on purpose and systemic structure. And they 'teach' people throughout the organization likewise (p. 353).

The systemic structures are those elements of organizational design that facilitate the kind of behaviors, involvement, and learning that is desired in the organizations.

Leadership for Learning Communities Organizations are complex entities that are designed around specific structures, expectations, beliefs and values, and relationships. One critical piece of this complex enterprise is the role and influence of leadership in establishing the structures, policies, and expectations consistent with the characteristics of learning organizations.

Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) concur about the importance of leadership as reflected in their research findings of schools as learning communities. "A major task of district leadership is to encourage and sustain reflective communities of practice both within and among schools and to make resources available for teachers to use according to their needs and preferences" (p. 601). They also indicate that district administrators in effective schools foster learning and collaboration through a focus on professional development of staff and the creative redesign of school schedules, staffing patterns, and grouping arrangements to create dedicated blocks of time for teachers to work and learn together.

Similarly, Firestone and Bader (1992) believe that leadership plays a critical role in the development of professional communities of practice:

> In all three districts, superintendents were catalysts for change. They either created a context in which others could initiate programs to redesign teaching or were directly involved themselves. Just as important, they maintained appropriate pressure and direction on the process, keeping it moving when obstacles or inertia threatened to slow or stop it. (p. 216)

Furthermore, they indicate that the superintendents of these three schools exhibit "broad, substantive visions" for their schools as well as a focused commitment to curriculum and instruction.

In yet another study of effective schools, Leithwood et. al. (1998) examined the kinds of leadership practices that contributed to organizational learning and to the conditions that foster organizational learning. Specifically their synthesis of leadership practices resulted from a compilation of three studies conducted in educational organizations in the developmental stages of building learning community. They conclude that the leaders in these schools tend to be significantly focused on the development of "commitments and capacities" of all staff. These leaders also focus much of their attention on curriculum and instruction. However, the researchers note that these leaders tend not to focus on curriculum and instruction in the traditional sense, which emphasizes control, but in a manner that is significantly participatory.

Moreover, Leithwood et. al., (1998) indicate that there are "good theoretical reasons to expect that transformational leadership practices foster organizational learning" (p. 264). Leithwood and his colleagues report empirical evidence from three separate studies of educational leadership illustrating that the tenets of transformational leadership positively contribute to the establishment of learning capability in schools. The transformational leadership model described by Leithwood et. al. (1998) is comprised of eight leadership dimensions:

- identifies and articulates a shared vision of improvement,
- fosters acceptance of group goals,
- provides individualized support for staff members,
- stimulates organizational members to think reflectively and critically about their own practices,
- provides appropriate models of the practices and values considered central to the organization,
- holds high performance expectations,
- builds shared norms, and
- structures the organization to permit broad participation in decision making.

Similarly, Watkins and Marsick (1994) developed a research-based framework of leadership in the learning organization. Their framework includes the following seven leadership dimensions,

- provides for continuous learning,

- provides for strategic leadership,
- promotes inquiry and dialogue,
- encourages collaboration and team learning,
- creates embedded structures for capturing and sharing learning,
- empowers people toward a shared vision, and
- makes systemic connections.

In yet another study of educational organizations, Michael Fullan (2001) focused on the educational leadership necessary to manage radical change, yet create improvements that are sustainable over time. According to Fullan, educational organizations "must become learning organizations or they will fail to survive" (p. xi). The right kind of leadership is needed to guide educational organizations to become learning organizations. "Instead of looking for saviors, we should be calling for leadership that will challenge us to face problems for which there are no simple, painless solutions – problems that require us to learn new ways" (p. 3).

Fullan (2001) identified a number of characteristics of leadership that he found present in school organizations that had developed into learning communities. According to Fullan, there are fivc primary aspects of leadership in learning communities: moral purpose, understanding change, coherence making, knowledge creation and sharing, and relationship building.

1. Moral purpose – acting for the purpose of the greater good. These leaders work for the purpose of making a positive difference in the lives of

employees, students, and society in general. Moral purpose is typically accompanied by a compelling vision for the future along with a strong sense of urgency.

2. Understanding change – leaders who have a deep understanding of and "healthy respect" for the complexities of change will be more successful (p. 5). Fullan found in his study that these leaders provided leadership for others to confront problems that have never before been successfully addressed. These leaders demonstrated great courage and tenacity in spite of tremendous obstacles. Further, Fullan found that these leaders focused not on a great amount of innovation, but on focused, purposeful innovation.

3. Relationship building – leaders must be "consummate relationship builders" with diverse peoples and groups. "Effective leaders constantly foster purposeful interaction and problem solving, and are wary of easy consensus" (p. 5). Fullan points out, however, that relationships "are not ends in themselves. Relationships are powerful, which means they can also be powerfully wrong" (p. 67). Leadership has to ensure that relationships are focused on efforts that assist the organization in achieving desired results.

4. Knowledge creation and sharing – leaders in learning organizations are deeply committed to notions of continuous improvement through knowledge creation, reflective thinking, and inquiry. Fullan emphasized that learning requires social processing that can be achieved through collaboration and

dialogue. The learning organizations that Fullan studied implemented and supported knowledge sharing practices throughout the organization.

5. Coherence making – leaders can tolerate ambiguity, but are constantly seeking the right path forward through alignment of beliefs and actions. Coherence making strives to derive alignment in the critical patterns of interaction and action to effectively support the actuation of the district vision. The leaders included in Fullan's study worked to focus and align innovations to reduce redundancy and fragmentation. Coherence making is accomplished through the alignment of innovations, professional development, and the alignment of organizational culture to support implementation. Further, Fullan observed coherence in the leadership behaviors of the superintendents. These superintendents demonstrated alignment between their rhetoric and their actions.

Fullan indicates that each of the five characteristics of leadership for learning community are interrelated and dependent upon the other. In addition, he states that there is one more critical and overarching leadership characteristic in learning communities. This critical leadership behavior is a positive attitude or perspective. These leaders exude a positive orientation on the future and they demonstrate much hope and optimism. "Energetic-enthusiastic-hopeful leaders 'cause' greater moral purpose in themselves, bury themselves in change, naturally build relationships and knowledge, and seek coherence to consolidate moral purpose" (p. 7).

Sergiovanni (1989) also emphasizes the importance of leadership in the development of learning communities. According to Sergiovanni, transformative leadership in learning communities becomes "leadership as building," for this kind of leadership is concerned with developing and "arousing human potential, satisfying higher needs, and raising expectations of both leader and follower to motivate them both to higher levels of commitment and performance" (p. 215).

Leaders of learning communities are able to achieve the delicate and important balance between the learning needs of the organization and the learning needs of individuals within the organization (Gephart et. al., 1996; Sergiovanni, 1989). Furthermore, transformative leaders provide the support and encouragement necessary for organizational learning to occur by serving as a model for learning and by ensuring that the appropriate systems are in place to facilitate learning. These leaders encourage individuals to think creatively, they create systems to ensure the effective dissemination of knowledge and learning across the organization, they allocate appropriate resources to support learning, and they share leadership across all levels of the organization (Gephart, et. al., 1996; Ulrich, von Glinow, & Jick, 1993).

Leaders of learning community strive to develop leadership throughout the organization through a distributive leadership model. These leaders of learners demonstrate a commitment and a personal responsibility for the development of others and for the organization beyond their tenure. In other words, leaders of learning community concern themselves with leadership succession. "The ultimate leadership contribution is to develop leaders in the organization who can move the

organization even further after you have left" (Lewin & Regine, 2000, p. 220). Effective leadership then can be judged by "what leadership you produce in others" (Fullan, 2001, p. 137).

Wheatley and Kellner (1997) indicate that one of life's greatest imperatives is the propensity for individuals to search for community. "Life is systems-seeking; there is the need to be in relationship, to be connected to others" (p. 2). Therefore, it is a critical function of leadership to build learning capability by bringing people together. Ulrich, von Glinow, and Jick (1993) indicate that leaders can build learning capability through "building commitment to learning capability, making learning a visible and central element of the strategic intent, invest in learning, publicly talk about learning, measure, benchmark, and track learning, and create symbols of learning" (p. 59).

But information only becomes knowledge when it is socially processed (Brown & Duguid, 2000). Consequently, learning is a social activity and learning is enhanced in an environment of trust and mutual care. As Fullan (2001) states, in the successful organization "it is actually the relationships that make the difference" (p. 51). Leaders of learning community place great value on relationships and they strive to cultivate strong relationships throughout the organization and throughout the entire community.

Summary

Arguably, the learning communities construct holds great promise as an effective improvement strategy for educational systems. The studies of effective schools reported in this review demonstrate connections between school effectiveness and the components of organizational learning and the tenets of learning communities. The effective schools examined in the studies referred to in this review had developed strategies for knowledge acquisition, information dissemination, information interpretation, and organizational memory. Additionally, these schools had established organizational structures and organizational cultures that fostered and encouraged ongoing, professional collaboration to occur in a manner consistent with the learning communities' research.

The learning communities approach to organizational design, leadership, and overall organizational life is uniquely and significantly humane. Schools as learning communities are not only successful in providing an outstanding and meaningful education for children; these professional communities value all human beings for what they bring to the organization as people and as professionals. In these schools,

> Belonging together is defined by a shared sense of purpose, not by shared beliefs about specific behaviors. The call of that purpose attracts individuals, but does not require them to shed their uniqueness. Staying centered on what the work is together, rather than on single identities,

> transforms the tension of belonging and individuality into energetic and resilient communities. (Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1997, p. 6)

However, educators should employ caution before they begin to fully adopt and implement the learning communities' model.

The research findings of learning communities in educational settings reported in this review are derived from only a limited number of studies, with most of these derived from studies of individual school sites. In addition, the leadership behaviors described as supportive of learning communities are derived primarily from studies of principals. Consequently, much continues to remain unknown about the antecedents of learning communities and the leadership behaviors necessary for professional learning communities to emerge.

Most of the studies included in this review allude to the importance of the superintendent in the development of learning communities; however, none of these studies included the role of the superintendent as its primary foci. Consequently, the role of the superintendent in engaging the entire district in systemic efforts to create professional learning communities warrants focused attention. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to thoroughly explore and describe the dynamics of this important leadership role in districts that are emerging learning communities.

Chapter III

Methodology

Introduction

The function of research is not necessarily to map and to conquer the world, but to sophisticate the beholding of it.
-Robert Stake

In chapter III, I present the methodology and research design used to investigate the leadership behaviors of the selected superintendents as they worked to build learning communities. The first section of this chapter includes information specific to the research design. The second section summarizes the research strategy employed to conduct this study. The third section describes the criteria and selection process that will be used to select the study participants. The fourth section of this chapter details the procedures that were followed for data collection. Section five delineates the processes used for data analysis. The last section of this chapter, section six, details the efforts made to ensure trustworthiness of the study.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was selected for this study. Merriam (1998) suggests that qualitative research is based upon a fundamental view that reality is constructed by the interactions of individuals with their social environment. According to Merriam (1998):

> Qualitative research assumes that there are multiple realities – that the world is not an objective thing out there but a function of personal interaction and perception. It is a highly subjective phenomenon in need of interpreting rather than measuring. (p. 17)

Thus, the emphasis of qualitative research is on understanding the meanings that individuals have constructed from their experiences.

One of the primary strengths of the qualitative approach is that it "stresses the importance of context, setting, and the participants' frames of reference" (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 44). The research of learning communities and the influence that superintendents have over building organizational learning capability is uniquely based upon the context and the quality and nature of human interactions in school districts. Consequently, this particular research design seems to provide the most appropriate fit with the goals and foci of this study.

The qualitative approach to research design employs the notion of “human as instrument,” for it is based upon a recognition and appreciation for the reciprocal influence that researcher and respondents have on each other (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 39). Consequently, I serve as the primary research instrument, engaging in dialogue with practitioners in their own contexts so as to illuminate the richness of their unique experiences in promoting a new way of organizational life, the learning community.

Because qualitative research is based upon a fundamental premise that all research is context or environment dependent, findings from this study cannot be

generalized reasonably to other superintendents and other school districts. Erlandson et. al. (1993) stresses a central tenet of qualitative research by indicating, "No two social settings are sufficiently similar to allow simplistic, sweeping generalizations from one to another" (p. 13). Therefore, methods have been employed in this study to allow for transferability to other school districts and other superintendents if readers find the context similar and applicable to their own or other contexts.

This inability to effectively generalize findings from qualitative research to other contexts is perceived as a primary weakness of the qualitative approach (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Erlandson et. al., (1993) respond to this criticism by saying,

> To get to the relevant matters of human activity, the researcher must be involved in that activity. The dangers of bias and reactivity are great; the dangers of being insulated from relevant data are greater. The researcher must find ways to control biases that do not inhibit the flow of pertinent information. Relevance cannot be sacrificed for the sake of rigor. (p. 15)

Effectively designed and executed qualitative studies include strategies to ensure the trustworthiness and soundness of the research findings. I am aware of the importance of ensuring quality in the research design and implementation. Therefore, research strategies such as triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and audit trails have been included in the research design.

Research Study

The primary research strategy employed in this study is that of the case study. "The case study allows for thick description that puts the reader vicariously into the context and allows him or her to interact with the data presented" (Erlandson, et.al., 1993, p. 40). The case study is a research strategy that emphasizes "the power of observation, openness to what the world has to teach, and inductive analysis to make sense out of the world's lessons" (Patton, 1990, p. 139).

The strength of the case study approach is in the ability of the researcher to explore complex issues and phenomenon within “its real-life context” (Yin, 1994, p. 13) and the ability to present the research findings through the “holistic description” of the context and the actors involved (Merriam, 1998). In addition, the case study enjoys a long tradition and history in the educational literature. Consequently, this form of research design is common and widely accepted in the educational research community (Merriam, 1998).

The issues associated with the development of learning capability and the creation of learning communities are complex and not easily assessed through a simple survey or checklist. For example, it has been reported in the research that the leader’s ability to identify and articulate a vision of improvement for the organization is critical to the development of a learning community. The abilities of the leader to express and create support and commitment for a vision can best be ascertained through the utilization of research techniques such as case studies that are designed to get beneath the obvious.

Furthermore, the case study design allows for the holistic analysis and portrayal of complex events and relationships such as those associated with the creation of learning communities. Sergiovanni (1994) and Wheatley and Kellner (1997) emphasize the importance of bringing people together by creating an organizational culture that supports the building of relationships, the ongoing engagement in reflective dialogue, and the development of shared values and purposes. The complex aspects of learning communities described by these individuals can be most appropriately studied through the use of case study design for case studies uniquely allow for the use of multiple techniques of data collection and analysis.

One of the most critical and most difficult issues in the design of case studies is in the definition of the unit of analysis. Consensus does exist in the research community over the importance of defining the boundaries of the analysis for without this delimiting, the case study can become unmanageable (Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). The units of analysis for this study will be the individual superintendents identified for participation in the study. Yin (1993) indicates that it is common for case studies to have more than one unit of analysis; however, the focus should remain on the primary unit of study. The degree and receptivity of the implementation of strategies to build learning communities are significantly embedded in the overall dynamics of the school districts that the selected superintendents represent. Consequently, the organizations or the school districts of the selected superintendents will serve as sub-units of analysis for this study.

Participant Selection

The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership perspectives and behaviors of superintendents in developing learning communities. To ascertain the complexities and richness of organizational learning and the superintendents' actions and behaviors that influence the development of learning community, two superintendents were selected for participation in this study. "In qualitative research, a single case or small non-random sample is selected precisely because the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find what is generally true of the many" (Merriam, 1998, p. 208).

The superintendents selected for participation in this multi-case study were selected using a purposeful sampling strategy. Patton (1990) describes the logic for using purposeful sampling strategies by evincing that the "logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (Patton, 1990, p. 169).

For this study, a particular kind of purposeful sampling technique was employed, intensity case sampling. Intensity cases are those that provide unusually rich information or are special in some way, but with less emphasis on extremes (Mertens, 1998). The logic behind the use of intensity sampling strategies is that these kinds of samples consist of information-rich cases that characterize the particular phenomenon of interest (Patton, 1990). "Intensity sampling involves some prior information and considerable judgment. The researcher must do some

exploratory work to determine the nature of the variation in the situation under study" (Patton, 1990, p. 172).

The first phase of the selection process included the examination of statewide performance data, such as the 1998 Snapshot, 1997 Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) reports, and the 1998 AEIS preliminary reports to identify successful, high performing school districts. Superintendents from districts that had achieved high levels of student performance for all students and all student groups comprised the preliminary list of qualifying superintendents.

The development of strong organizational culture and the creation of organizations that can be characterized as learning communities is difficult to accomplish, particularly in large, fasting-growing districts. In districts such as these, the organization experiences rapid change and a constant influx of new employees. The constant change in context and staff create challenges to leaders who desire to create shared vision, purpose, and commitments. Consequently, the superintendents chosen for this study were selected from large, rapidly growing school districts. The intent of this selection was to determine the superintendent leadership necessary to create learning community in educational organizations that experience substantial and constant change.

In addition, the availability of resources to create systems and structures to support and sustain over time the tenets of learning community, was thought to be a contributing factor. Therefore, one superintendent was selected from a district considered to be “property-poor” and the other was selected from a district

characterized as “budget-balanced” or wealthy as defined by the Texas Education Agency.

An informal checklist was developed that included aspects of organizational design, structure, and characteristics commonly associated with learning organizations. Experienced practitioners in education service centers and other educational associations across the state were asked to informally identify superintendents with whom they have worked who epitomize the characteristics of a transformational leader and who actively support learning in their district. These recommendations were then applied to the preliminary checklist and from the comparison of these two lists, two superintendents were selected for participation in this study.

The selected superintendents were contacted in person or by telephone to invite them to participate in the study. The initial contact was followed with a formal letter of introduction, a copy of the dissertation abstract, a copy of the interview protocols, and any other information requested.

Other key individuals having pertinent knowledge or direct experience in working with the chosen superintendents were selected for interview. Board members, central office administrators, principals, and lead teachers were interviewed to determine their perceptions and experiences regarding the role of the superintendent in developing learning capability and in creating learning communities. The names of the superintendents, their school districts, and all individuals who participated in the study have been changed to protect their privacy.

Data Collection

The superintendents selected for study were interviewed in person on at least two occasions, with follow-up conversation via the telephone. In addition, I spent approximately five days in each of the selected districts interviewing the selected superintendents and other key individuals. Other informants, such as those specified in the section pertaining to participant selection, were interviewed as needed throughout the study.

The interviews were semi-structured, "elite interviews" (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 83). The primary purpose of interviews is to “enter into the other person’s perspective” (Merriam, 1998, p. 72). The interviews were used to further establish a "thick description" of these superintendents and their leadership behaviors that have significantly influenced the development of learning capability and the creation of emerging learning communities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 359). The interviews with the selected superintendents served to establish their commitment to the development of learning communities in their districts. Additionally, the interviews demonstrated the superintendents’ visions for their districts as learning communities, their learning expectations for all within the system, the strategies they have employed to develop and support learning capability, and the results they have achieved through these efforts. Interviews with other key individuals in the school districts served to triangulate other data generated during the scope of the study.

The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership perspectives and behaviors of superintendents in developing learning community. The primary source of data was semi-structured interviews conducted in the school district. In the Oak Tree ISD, the superintendent, two members of the Board of Trustees, six central office administrators, six principals, four teachers, members of the local Council of PTA's Executive Committee, and one community member were interviewed over the course of five days. In the Cypress ISD, the superintendent, three members of the Board of Trustees, four central office administrators, five principals, and two teachers were interviewed. In addition, both superintendents were shadowed throughout the course of the five days and for an additional one full day, including during an evening meeting of the Board of Trustees where field notes were used to record events and interactions.

The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed, compared to field notes and district artifacts, and then coded using the software FolioViews along with some manual coding. During the data analysis, codes were identified and categorized according to prevailing themes.

The interview protocol was developed from the salient characteristics of learning communities and of the leadership knowledge and skills necessary to achieve the learning organization as identified in the research literature. To identify the organizational structures, policies, and practices conducive to organizational learning, used the theoretical model first designed by Daft and Huber (1989) and later extended by Huber (1991) as a basis to examine the school districts' learning capability.

The leadership behaviors of the selected superintendents was examined using a leadership model that has been associated with leading change and with creating learning communities, *A Framework for Leadership*. Michael Fullan (2001) developed this framework following his comprehensive study of successful superintendents in organizations that he characterizes as learning communities.

With the permission of the superintendents, selected memoranda, local district policies and procedures, district planning documents, and district student performance data were collected, reviewed, and analyzed for evidence of the superintendents' influence in the development of professional learning communities. The analysis of these documents served to illustrate the implementation of policies, procedures, and structures to support improvement and learning processes throughout the district.

Data Analysis

Merriam (1998) describes data analysis as a "process of making sense out of data" (p. 192). The researcher "made sense" of the significant amounts of data generated by the careful organization and interpretation of all data. The study data, including taped interviews, field notes, memos, district artifacts and observation records, were transcribed and compiled for use during the analysis process. The compiled data was analyzed using the constant comparison method of data analysis (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). This particular strategy of data analysis employs a systematic process of coding and analysis that occurs simultaneously. The process

allowed for the continual analysis and reflection on the data so as to ensure that the emerging data guided the process of the study (Glasser & Strauss, 1967).

The primary method of coding used for this study is that of open coding. "Open coding is the part of the analysis that pertains specifically to the naming and categorizing of phenomena through close examination of the data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 62). As data are analyzed, "chunks" of pertinent information are labeled using the informants' own terminology. Open coding is best accomplished by asking questions about the data and making comparisons between incidents. As the data are studied, they are grouped and labeled to form categories or themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Throughout the coding and analyzation process, I employed Folio Views, a reputable computer software program, as well as some hand coding to assist in the organization and the manipulation of the data.

Consistent with the constant comparison method of data analysis, I analyzed information throughout the entire study. The interpretations from this analysis enabled me to monitor and adjust strategies and techniques on an ongoing basis to allow for the reduction of data to the most salient of issues (Marshall & Rossman, 1997). This constant comparison of data ensures that the information generated is comprehensive and thoroughly descriptive of the issues surrounding the study. Through the constant analysis of this data, emergent categories were identified and labeled using what Patton (1990) describes as “indigenous concepts,” or the participants’ own terminology (p. 390). All pertinent data were chunked and assigned to the appropriate categories. Following the analysis of each case, cross case analysis

was conducted to identify categories and themes that emerged from each of the two cases. As major categories and themes were identified, these were then categorized according to Michael Fullan's (2001) *Framework for Leadership*. The *Framework for Leadership* was used to focus the analysis and to make sense of the data.

Inductive data analysis is the method of choice for this method is more likely to identify and describe the multiple realities to be found in those data so that transferability to other contexts or to other superintendents can be achieved (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, true transferability is contingent upon those who would apply the information or research to another context (Erlandson et. al., 1993).

A final report was prepared to accurately portray the experiences of the practicing superintendents who participated in this study. Included in the report were the research findings and detailed descriptions of the superintendents and their school districts with the intent being to capture the unique experiences and contextual variables for each of the superintendents (Merriam, 1998).

Study Integrity

It is well documented in the literature that quality research projects include strategies to ensure the "goodness," or quality of the study. In qualitative study design, trustworthiness techniques are employed so that the reader or consumer of the research can have confidence in the quality of the research findings (Merriam, 1998).

Triangulation is a procedure used to establish the fact that the criterion of validity has been met. The fieldworker makes inferences about the data,

> claiming that a particular set of data supports a particular definition, theme, assertion, hypothesis, claim, etc. Triangulation is a means of checking the integrity of the inferences one draws. (Schwandt, 1997, p. 163).

Further, this approach is a proven research method that has a "long and distinguished history" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 306).

Furthermore, triangulation of information is necessary to establish trustworthiness, and it is achieved though the use of a variety of sources, both “human and non-human” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 268). Member checking is a sociological term that pertains to the solicitation of feedback from the respondents to verify the constructions that are developing from the data collection and analysis (Mertens, 1998). The use of member checks enhances the ability of the researcher to accurately portray the perspectives of the participants and to eliminate the influence of research biases. In this particular study, I established formal and informal feedback loops with the study participants so frequent opportunities were provided for participants to clarify their perspectives. Supporting documentation generated from other interviews, the analysis of district documents, and researcher observation were used to substantiate or triangulate information shared during the interviews.

An audit-trail has been maintained throughout the study. An audit-trail is the maintenance of all documentation and records that are applicable to the study (Mertens, 1998). For the duration of the study and for an additional four years, all

copies of transcribed tapes, consent forms, surveys, and other supporting or pertinent documentation will be secured.

The selected superintendents were provided information regarding the purpose and nature of the study. The superintendents and all other participants were informed of their rights as a part of the study and were asked to sign a consent form indicating that they understand their rights as participants. Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicate that participants consent is important when the inquiry is guided by non-positivistic paradigms. The consent form included a description of the study and specific information regarding the rights of all those involved, including specifications regarding the participant's right to pull out of the study at any time.

Chapter IV

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership perspectives and behaviors of superintendents in developing learning community. In this chapter, I present the results of the study, presented in two distinct sections - one for each of the two individual leaders who participated in this study. Within each of the these sections or individual case studies, descriptive information is provided regarding the contextual environment, the leader of the educational organization, and research findings specific to each of the cases.

The Case of James Hall

The Oak Tree Independent School District in located in a large, rapidly growing metropolitan area in the state of Texas. Encompassing an area of approximately 60 square miles, the Oak Tree ISD is primarily comprised of residential areas and, therefore, very little industry can be evidenced throughout the area. The student body is the Oak Tree ISD serves more than 32,000 students at 42 campuses from five different communities. The student body is 17.9 percent African American, 19.8 percent Hispanic, 57.8 percent white, 3.9 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.6 percent Native American, and 29.1 percent economically disadvantaged.

The Oak Tree ISD has implemented an aggressive building program to accommodate its rapid growth. In the last ten years, twelve new schools have been built and many more are currently in the planning stages. The Oak Tree ISD school

community is proud of its schools and it has repeatedly demonstrated its support by passing every bond referendum issued with the most recent bond of $122.8 million receiving a record approval rate of 90 percent.

In accordance with funding formulas established by the Texas Education Agency, the Oak Tree ISD is considered a “property poor” school district and, as a result, they receive additional assistance from the state. This designation relates to the low property wealth of the school district that results in a diminished capacity of the school district to generate local tax revenue. The school district has a taxable value per each student of $135,705 and spends approximately $5048 annually in total operating expenditures per student.

As one respondent indicated, “we’re unique in that we do have limited resources, but, on the outside, you may not see that. We have been able to squeeze every penny from every dollar.” (LH 101) Despite challenges to the Oak Tree ISD related to school finance, this school district and its larger community has risen to the challenge by employing creative planning and problem solving and by forging new and innovative partnerships with the local community.

The Oak Tree ISD has developed one such unique partnership with the city of Oak Tree. By demonstrating the collaborative spirit that exists all throughout this community, the Oak Tree ISD and the City of Oak Tree cooperatively planned city parks and schools adjacent to one another, enabling the schools and the city to share recreation facilities. This innovative partnership prompted the selection of Oak Tree as one of 30 finalists in the 1995 All-American City competition.

The Oak Tree ISD is known for its innovative educational practices and the individual who has led these visionary efforts is the superintendent of schools for the Oak Tree Independent School District, Dr. James Hall. Dr. Hall served as the superintendent of this school district for fifteen years prior to his retirement in July of 2001. A superintendent with over twenty-three years of experience as a superintendent, Dr. Hall also served as superintendent in another Texas district for eight years. Prior to becoming a school superintendent, Dr. Hall also served as a secondary classroom teacher, assistant principal, principal, and administrative assistant to the superintendent.

Dr. Hall expresses a deep affection for teaching and the classroom. He still considers himself a teacher and expects all leaders in the school district to remain close to the true essence of the profession of education – the classroom. "I love teaching. I still do. I think that the effective school administrator needs to remain in love with the classroom" (JH 32).

Dr. Hall was selected to participate in this study for the commitment he expresses for establishing educational organizations of continual improvement and where strong relationships are the foundation of the learning of all within the system – learning community. Through Dr. Hall's leadership and direction, the focus of this administrative team is on improving the overall quality of the organization and on how people feel about their work. This leadership team focuses on efforts to fully engage individuals in learning and to invite ownership towards the goals of the organization, including the improvement of student performance (KS field notes).

The focus of this administrative team has been evident in the development of a collaboratively developed long-range plan, the creation of core values, and a district mission statement (JR 341; KA 194; KS field notes). The core values include the following statements; we value all children, we value all employees; and we value continuous learning and improvement. The mission of the Oak Tree ISD is as follows.

> So that they may develop into lifelong learners and enjoy lives with meaningful options, our mission is to enable all children and youth in our community to:
>
> - acquire a foundation of knowledge and employ the tools of learning,
> - develop and apply the skills to think and solve problems, and
> - cultivate and practice attitudes that enhance cooperative and productive living in a free society.

Moral Purpose

Moral purpose is about the fundamental goals or purpose of the organization, as well as, the quality of organizational life. It is not only about what the organization is trying to accomplish, but it is also about how individuals go about accomplishing the work. According to Fullan (2001), "moral purpose means acting with the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of employees, customers, and society as a whole" (p. 3). Further, he states that moral purpose appears natural,

however, true moral purpose in organizations cannot occur without strong, visionary leadership to cultivate it. "To achieve moral purpose is to forge interaction – and even mutual purpose – across groups" (p. 25).

In order to successfully lead a large organization in a dynamic environment of change requires an intense focus on the future – a visionary. Dr. Hall is considered by individuals within the school district and throughout the community of Oak Tree as such a visionary (JB 112; JR 343; KA 128, 678; LH 156). As one principal stated, "Dr. Hall is the most visionary person that I have ever known or ever worked with" (JR 33). Dr. Hall's vision for the Oak Tree ISD comes:

> first from his concern for all children. He really looks at one child at a time. He'll often say that I want for that child exactly what I want for my own grandchild. He just wants success for all of them. He really does. (JP 116)

His concern and interest in the educational and overall well-being of children in the community of Oak Tree serves to guide the creation of the district vision and to focus the day to day work of the organization (CT 136; KC 29; JB 112). Serving to focus the individual and collective efforts of all within the organization, Dr. Hall's vision for the Oak Tree ISD is considered "far-sighted and futuristic" while, at the same time, "anchored and rooted to sound practice" (JR 59).

Dr. Hall is considered by individuals within the organization as "good at forward thinking" (CT 149) and overall as a "great visionary" (KA 709). Dr. Hall is also action-oriented and goes about the actuation of that vision (CT 104) through his own work and the work of others who look to him for leadership and through the

relationships with others within the school organization and with the entire community.

> But more than being a visionary, it's his articulation of the vision and his sharing of the vision with everyone that is truly unique. It's sort of like throwing a rock – it ripples to the next level in the organization. (KA 709)

To "forge mutual moral purpose," Dr. Hall actively communicates with all within the school community and throughout the larger community of Oak Tree. A primary focus of his conversations with people is around the primary purpose and work of the organization. These conversations are purposeful for Dr. Hall realizes that he has a responsibility to not only promote the work of the Oak Tree ISD, but he must also invite others to embrace and commit to the goals of the organization. "You get excellence from commitment, not compliance" (JH 531). Further, Dr. Hall stated, "People desire to be a part of something bigger than ourselves. We want to be part of something that is meaningful to us" (JH 529).

Through Dr. Hall's leadership, the Oak Tree ISD is certain about its moral purpose – the teaching and learning of children. This moral purpose is appropriately conveyed in the school district motto, "Shaping Tomorrow Today" (KS field notes). Many throughout the Oak Tree community have embraced this motto and have demonstrated their commitment to the vision and the work of the organization.

Understanding Change

The vision and goals of the organization cannot be accomplished without thoughtfully engaging the organization in purposeful innovation and improvement.

> Moral purpose without an understanding of change will lead to moral martyrdom. Leaders who combine a commitment to moral purpose with a healthy respect for the complexities of the change process not only will be more successful but also will unearth deeper moral purpose. (Fullan, 2001, p. 5)

Dr. Hall and his leadership team employ systems thinking to ascertain the impact of change and innovation on all aspects of the organization. According to Dr. Hall, "To effectively manage change and organizational improvement, we focus not only on relationships between people, but also on relationships between various aspects or components of the organization" (KS field notes).

Dr. Hall emphasizes with his leadership team the need to understand the complexities of change, the impact of change on organizations and the impact that change has on people (JR 76). All campus and district leaders are provided professional developed designed to assist them in learning more about the change process (KS field notes).

> Dr. Hall says that we must be prepared to do things differently as your public changes and as your population changes or as the perception of schools changes. You've got to be able to respond to your environment and he says

that we will not be able to do this effectively if we do not continue to learn. (LH 235)

Numerous training sessions about understanding the change process are provided by leaders throughout the district and these include discussion groups, book studies, and simulation activities through the utilization of new software applications (KS field notes).

According to Dr. Hall, "there's a culture in every organization. It just depends on whether or not you want to influence it or not. We mobilize our improvement or change initiatives primarily through the cultivation of our organizational culture" (KS field notes). As the district grows and as they add new teachers and staff, it has become critical for organizational mores to become more overt and for the administrative team to communicate clearly the vision, the goals and the expectations of the organization. Consequently, culture building is taken seriously in this organization and concerted effort is directed towards establishing and supporting an organizational culture that is conducive to continuous improvement and learning for all. As Dr. Hall states, "We pay a lot of attention to assumptions and our beliefs, our values, and those things that are culture-building. We don't leave the development of culture to chance" (JH 486).

For the last several years, Dr. Hall has worked hard to maintain the culture of the organization, despite rapid growth and change in personnel. Dr. Hall expresses concern about the variation that can occur when new people are brought into the organization. While he recognizes that new ideas can breathe life into an

organization, Dr. Hall also believes that in order to protect the organizational culture and alignment, care must also be given to ensuring that all understand district expectations.

One strategy Dr. Hall uses to maintain the culture that they have established is to ensure that the vision, goals and values of the organization are clearly communicated to individuals new to the organization and individuals are encouraged to contribute their talents to this greater cause. For example, at new teacher inservice for the past several years, Dr. Hall stresses in his comments to this group that

> we hire you not to make the decision about what it is that you're going to teach, but how you're going to teach. We hired you because of your talent as a teacher. So we want you to feel free to exercise your talent, however, our prescribed curriculum is non-negotiable. (KA 692)

Dr. Hall believes that he and his team must work fervently to solicit support and endorsement from all within the organization whether it is from a first year teacher, a custodian, or a member of the Board of Trustees. Dr. Hall states that "he believes that the best way to help people understand and accept change is to be clear about your purpose, provide many kinds of opportunities to learn and challenge current thinking, and to provide continual support, recognition, and encouragement" (JH 344).

Consequently, Dr. Hall, along with his leadership team, strives to sustain the organizational culture and seek to develop shared commitment towards the vision and goals of the organization. As one respondent states:

> To recreate a sense of team and to keep that sense of family, we have to do some things around culture and tradition every year. So even though we're growing, we're real serious about maintaining that sense of family and that people know that this is what we're about. (KA 208)

It is apparent that, despite the size and growth rates of this school district, the results of the efforts of the district leadership to build an organizational culture of care and support have proven successful. Participants stress the positive, supportive environment and the feeling of family that exists in the Oak Tree ISD (LH 98; JB 372; JP 87; KS field notes).

Relationship Building

Relationship building relates to the purposeful facilitation of interactions and the development of commitments between people within the organization. According to Fullan (2001), relationship building is one of the most critical functions of leadership. "Leaders must be consummate relationship builders with diverse people and groups. Effective leaders constantly foster purposeful interaction and problem solving, and are wary of easy consensus" (p. 5).

Dr. Hall feels that organizational culture and the success of an organization is based upon the strength of relationships between people and he has focused great time and attention on developing and nurturing strong relationships with people throughout the organization and throughout the entire community.

> I believe that the source of strength for leadership is dependent on relationships. I think that the relationships that I have with people within the organization, the Board, and the community are a source of strength for me, so I work on those and I cultivate them. (JH 515)

Dr. Hall cultivates these relationships by first establishing strong avenues of two-way communication. Numerous respondents referenced Dr. Hall's open style of communication and his apparent desire to listen and respond to individuals and groups throughout the school district and the community (CT 302; JB 227, 419; JR 148).

> He is always open to hearing what we have to say about things, and we're pretty critical at times. And so I think our norm is, if you think it, say it. And we put this norm up and I think that we really do that. But we do it in a very tactful and a very caring kind of way because our focus is on kids. (KC 127)

A teacher who holds a leadership position on the Oak Tree Education Association described Dr. Hall's receptive and sincere demeanor in the following manner.

> He is always responsive. But I was shocked at the openness that he would give to us. And I really, truly believe that he would give that to anybody in the district. I don't think it was because of my position. I really truly believe that if a teacher called up and said, could I see Dr. Hall, they would say come right over. I do believe that. (JB 171)

Dr. Hall demonstrates a great deal of genuine care and concern for people within the school district and across the entire community (LH 178). "He listens very well. He

listens to the good new and he listens to the bad news. And he does something about it" (KA 105).

Active communication is critical to establishing strong relationships with others. According to Dr. Hall,

> one can't assume that people are going to be there when you need them. You have to demonstrate your care and concern for individuals, organizations, and the community on an ongoing basis. You can't use relationships as a fire escape – only in an emergency or when you need them. You have to thoughtfully engage people in the work and help all to become and feel a vital part of all the work, both the challenges and the successes. (KS field notes)

Because of this focus on developing strong relationships where individuals and groups of individuals feel compelled to embrace and support the work of the organization, Dr. Hall has forged many new and innovative partnerships throughout the community of Oak Tree.

A point of pride with many interviewed (CT 51; JB 305; JR 162, 177; JT 254; KA 80), the school district has established over twenty different partnerships with the city from crossing guards to the neighborhood parks program (JH 122).

> He has a very open relationship with the people in the city government and with the business leaders. I don't think that we would be able to accomplish the things that we do accomplish as a property-poor district if he didn't have the relationships that he has built over the years. (JR 161).

Dr. Hall also speaks with great pride about their partnerships. "I'm very, very proud of the partnerships that we have with the community in general, the Chamber of Commerce, the city, and with various segments of our community" (JH 610). The relationships that have been established throughout the community are considered a vital part of their organization and a key component of their success (KS field notes).

Many respondents consider Dr. Hall to be a collaborative leader, one that prefers to work with others in an environment of collaboration, collegiality and teamwork rather than alone (KS field notes). Accordingly, Dr. Hall believes that the wise leader surrounds himself or herself with talented people (KS field notes). In keeping with this tenet, Dr. Hall has established a strong team (CT 107; JR 112, 353; KC 106; KP 118; LH 207).

> I think that he has built a strong team and we all, on his team, feel so comfortable with one another that we know if one of us for some reason falls short, or somebody gets sick or something just happens, someone else just steps in and takes the load. We are all a true team and work together and that is because of James Hall's leadership. (KC 111)

Dr. Hall maximizes the talent of his team and develops leadership throughout the organization by utilizing collaborative structures and patterns of interactions to explore new ways of thinking and in response to issues or problems. Dr. Hall meets regularly with individuals and groups throughout the organization and throughout the community. As he interacts with these groups, he demonstrates an openness and a

sensitivity to others that encourages people to openly express their opinions and ideas (KS field notes). "He values our input, as we value his" (LH 207).

Strengthening relationships is a daily focus for this leadership team, so when problems or contentious arise individuals and groups within the organization and across the community feel compelled to assist. When problems or issues arise, he provides the focus by emphasizing that leaders should view problems as opportunities and should always look "for a path forward" (JB 110; JR 275; KA 171). Dr. Hall believes that when issues arise, it is the responsibility of the leadership team to establish perspective. He is described by others within the district as "skilled in reframing issues" (LH 156) and "calm in a crisis" (LH 214). He and his team provide the perspective by "managing the crisis and not letting the issue or crisis manage us" (JR 279).

In 1996, the Oak Tree ISD was required to conduct a rollback election. Often such elections create long-term turmoil and fragmentation in a community. Due to Dr. Hall's leadership and the strong relationships he had cultivated throughout the community, this was not to be the case for the Oak Tree ISD. Dr. Hall responded to the issue by encouraging and facilitating community dialogue. "Dr. Hall felt that, as an educator, he just needed to go educate the public, to talk with members of the community" (CT 176).

In response to this issue, Dr. Hall, along with his entire administrative team and the members of the Board of Trustees, held several hundred small gatherings of people all throughout the community, "community coffees," to talk about the issues

and to “educate the public” (CT 185). In addition, open forums were held all across the district. At a typical election in the Oak Tree ISD, approximately four to five thousand voters typically participate. The rollback election and the swelling of community of support that resulted from the meaningful engagement of the community prompted over 20,000 people to participate in the election with a positive result for the school district (KS field notes).

Many respondents brought up this time, a time when people were worried and concerned about the school district and the community. Several respondents expressed how much that their respect for Dr. Hall and his leadership grew as he responded to this issue (CT 221; JB 189; KS field notes). As one individual commented, “That was the time when my respect for him tripled because of the way he dealt with the issue. He’s a great problem solver. If I were in a major crisis, I would want him on my team” (JR 287). Dr. Hall expressed that he is certain that the success they experienced with this potentially catastrophic issue had much to do with the relationships that they had nurtured over the years. Mutual trust and respect had already been established with people throughout the community, so people were willing to listen and to engage in open dialogue about the issue.

Many of the individuals interviewed spoke of their deep commitment to the Oak Tree ISD and their deep affection for those within the school community. Dr. Hall engages individuals within the school organization and throughout the entire community in new and more meaningful ways creating a profound sense of commitment and ownership for the work of this organization. Individuals describe

the feeling in this organization like that of a family (JB 371; JP 87; KA 59; KC 84; LH 98; KS field notes). "We foster a family atmosphere and environment, a culture that cares about each other as human beings" (JH 359). In addition, several commented that there is no other school district where they would rather be. "We have many good, exemplary teachers. They could go and get maybe more money somewhere else, but they don't want to" (JB 468).

Knowledge Creation and Sharing

Knowledge creation and sharing relates to the ability of organizations to create and share new knowledge and then to use this new knowledge to fundamentally influence practice. Furthermore, knowledge creation and sharing refers to the structures and expectations that have been developed throughout an organization Leaders must work to create contexts, settings, and cultures that are conducive to learning and to sharing learning (Brown & Duguid, 2000; Fullan, 2001).

The vision, the focus and the passion demonstrated by this leader, is founded upon his strong love of learning. Dr. Hall is personally motivated to learn, but as the leader of an organization charged with serving the needs of children, his personal desire has become compulsion. As one respondent so aptly states:

> I think he is one of those persons who has that internal drive and need to know and improve and do things in a better and different way. But he is influenced by a lot reading and personal knowledge, and so I think it's his gathering of all

> the diverse knowledge that helps him to formulate a lot of his opinions and beliefs. (JR 91)

Described by many of the respondents as a learner (CT 102; JR 39, 69; KA 99), Dr. James Hall demonstrates a "quest and zest" for learning (JR 74). "He believes in public education and he believes in learning. Furthermore, he believes that you should never stop learning" (JB 330). The expectation for learning extends beyond Dr. Hall's own personal pursuit of knowledge – this is an expectation he has for all within the organization, an expectation that has become a way of life in Oak Tree ISD. "It's not the kids that have got to be the first learners. We've got to be the first learners" (JH 389). As one member of the Board of Trustees stated about the emphasis on learning in Oak Tree ISD:

> I think that's very pervasive throughout the entire district in that not only do we want our kids to be lifelong learners, but we want to be lifelong learners too. We want our teachers to be lifelong learners and our administrators. (CT 61)

According to Dr. Hall, learning is a major aspect of organizational life in Oak Tree ISD (KS field notes). This vital activity is so much a part of their culture that it is not seen as a separate activity, but as a key aspect of everyday life. Learning as a way of life has been consciously developed in the Oak Tree ISD by Dr. Hall through his words, his actions, and his overall influence.

> From day one, he has talked about leaders are readers…He finds so many different ways to model leadership himself. So, I think that people see him on

> the campuses and throughout the organization, as being very much a learner and they really appreciate that about him. (JR 124)

In the annual self-evaluation that Dr. Hall provides to the members of the Board of Trustees, Dr. Hall models this expectation for learning. Dr. Hall includes in this document a list of books and articles he has read and a list of activities he has participated in for professional growth. He further includes a narrative that demonstrates how these experiences have influenced his thinking and his decision-making (KS field notes).

Dr. Hall often uses questioning techniques to explore new ways of thinking about issues and to learn and to acquire new knowledge. Individuals within the organization perceive that his use of questioning techniques have improved intellection in their school district.

> Dr. Hall has always had a real high level of thought and always pushed you as the person that worked with him to a higher level of thought. He has a real drive for quality and excellence and he is very good about pushing us to not only consider new things, but also to consider data and the research out there. And, he's constantly asking questions, like what data do we have to support this or that. (JR 39)

Whether it is asking questions or encouraging individuals to learn, Dr. Hall's ultimate purpose is to increase human capacity so as to improve the overall organization and, ultimately, to improve student learning.

Dr. Hall believes that the human element is the foundation of any organization and, most certainly, the foundation for people-intense organizations such as educational organizations. "He really values people, and he sees all that they can do" (KC 32). This belief in the value of people has driven many of the major district initiatives.

> It is the foundation of all our improvement efforts and it is one of the things that he has been so strong about from the day he came, that our value and our greatest resource lies in our people. And if we don't develop that resource, then we have missed an opportunity to reach our potential, our greatest potential. (JR 192)

In order to maximize human potential, Dr. Hall provides leadership for the implementation of comprehensive systems and structures to support the development of people. "It always comes right back to people are your most important resource. And, if you're about developing children, it just makes sense to develop your people" (JH 399). "So, we are going to support the learning of everybody" (JH 327).

Individuals spoke of Dr. Hall's emphasis on learning, continuous improvement, and building individual and collective capacity.

> "He emphasizes the value of people and the potential in people. He is always looking at ways of improving, of constantly improving, looking at the potential of a child and how can we maximize that potential; looking at the potential of a teacher, of an administrator, of a parent, a business person, a community person. He'll ask, how can we help them to be all that they can

> be? How can we help them maximize their talents and provide a climate, an arena for success? (KP 76)
>
> He is always providing that motivation to be better than you are. And he's willing to, he always emphasizes the willingness on his part and on the part of the district to do whatever it takes to help our job, for us to be effective in our job as teachers. So he's willing to do whatever it's going to take to bring ourselves up to be a better teacher and to be more effective. (JB 221)

Dr. Hall expects all within the organization to prepare for the future, to learn and grow, and to think creatively. He also believes that the leadership of the school district has a responsibility to unleash this talent by providing the structures and the environment - the organizational culture, where conducive, supportive conditions exist along with the high expectations. The combination of high expectations with a supportive environment engenders individuals to successful action.

According to Dr. Hall, "Belief must connect to the action. For example, if you say staff development in the learning of our people is a critical piece, then you've got to continually look for opportunities to make that happen or to allow it to happen" (JH 298). Under the leadership and direction of Dr. Hall, the Oak Tree ISD has "made it happen." Well-honed support structures have been put in place to connect their beliefs to action and to sustain innovation and improvements over time.

A well-articulated and coordinated structure for improvement has been established and followed for the past ten years in the Oak Tree Independent School

District. Entitled STEP for staff development, technology, effective schools research, and performance standards, the process has served to focus the energies of all within the system towards organizational improvement (KA 185). The tenets convey four key areas that the superintendent and his leadership team believe are critical for improved student performance. The first of the four areas is focused on staff development for Dr. Hall considers professional development to be a foundation for organizational success. "The reason we put staff development at the bottom is that we believe what we must do first is develop our people." (JH, 231) It is a responsibility of organizational leadership to facilitate the development of systems and structures for organizational improvement.

> The first learner in this school district should be the superintendent of schools. The first learner in the school should be the principal. The first learner in the classroom should be the teacher. Some of these things, you need to say them, but then you need to do them. A lot of people say them, but they just don't get it done. So what we (leaders) have to do then is design ways to make it easy to be a learner and then provide support for their learning. (JH 254)

Structures have been established in the Oak Tree ISD that serve to formalize and support the attainment of district goals, including district expectations for learning. These structures are designed to enable people within the organization to accomplish their personal and professional goals under the support and direction of district staff and through unique partnerships with the community. As Dr. Hall states, "We say that we must take care of our people first in terms of learning. And if we develop them, then they are better able to help

the student be the learner they need to be"(JH 408). In keeping with this core value, the district provides structures for learning through an extensive program of professional development for all of its employees. In fact, one teacher stated that "I've seen our training and staff development grow tremendously to the point where I feel pretty confident in what I do" (JB 413).

The Oak Tree ISD has a reputation across the state for providing high quality professional development that goes well beyond the traditional model. "It's about studying and learning together. We use all different mediums for that. And we use videos, study groups, dialogue groups and action research to learn together" (JR 232). A large group of teachers, *Teachers Nurturing Teachers*, along with the leadership team, guides the direction of this comprehensive program of learning. After having identified the core knowledge and skills needed for various roles throughout the organization, they implemented *Pay for Knowledge*, which is a system for providing employees compensation for attending critical training. In December of 2001, the Oak Tree ISD was one of only three district wide programs in the nation to receive accommodation from the U.S. Department of Education through the National Award for Outstanding Professional Development Program (KS field notes).

The Oak Tree ISD expects all teachers to complete a masters program within ten years of employment and this expectation is clearly articulated through district policy. "All professional personnel employed by the Oak Tree ISD are required to have a master's degree at the end of ten (10) years of employment. Professional personnel with master's degrees will meet their requirements by completing three (3)

hours of college level credit during each five-year (5) period" (Oak Tree ISD Policies and Procedures, 528). While the expectation is high, the district provides support for helping teachers fulfill this requirement. Under the leadership of Dr. Hall, the Oak Tree ISD has developed a unique partnership between the school district and a local university. As Dr. Hall stated, "We model and reflect the value of continuous learning" (JH 249). Therefore, they reflect this value by expecting all to learn, creating structures to enable individuals and groups to learn, and they provide the resources to support such effort. The Oak Tree ISD provides the monetary resources for teachers within the district to get their masters and doctoral degrees through cohort groups and provides paid sabbaticals to enable teachers and administrators to participate in extended research and study (Oak Tree ISD Policies and Procedures, 523).

An essential part of the organizational culture in the Oak Tree ISD is their focus on learning (KS field notes). Other aspects of their culture are the rituals and symbols used to recognize contributions to the youth of their community. As one principal indicates, Dr Hall "celebrates in our successes" (JP 360). Dr. Hall establishes an environment where celebrations and recognition are a vital part of the organization. An example of many ways that individuals and groups are recognized is the Oak Tree ISD Apple Corps. The Apple Corp is a select group of teachers who are recognized every month for excellence in teaching. "These teachers exemplify the quality of education in Oak Tree ISD's commitment to shaping tomorrow today" (KS field notes). Every month, three teachers are selected from a pool of teachers

nominated by their peers to become a part of the prestigious Apple Corp. The selected teachers enjoy a special lunch with Dr. Hall and are recognized at the monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees where each selected teacher's story is told.

At the end of his career as a superintendent, Dr. Hall's focus has been on supporting and encouraging others and with the recognition of the contribution of others for Oak Tree children. Therefore, it seems most appropriate that at the end of his career as a superintendent, the Oak Tree school community has now recognized Dr. Hall's profound and significant contribution to the children of Oak Tree by naming their newest high school, that opened in August of 2001, James Hall High School. "The greatest honor that I have received professionally is that the Board approved the naming of the fifth high school after me. And so, I'm still overwhelmed by that and I certainly am very proud of that" (JH 638).

Coherence-Making

Coherence making refers to the ability of leadership within an organization to create focus and alignment in thought and action despite rapid change. Organizational coherence is achieved through the use of data to create precision in the decision making process and activities associated with knowledge building and sharing. Further, organizational coherence involves the creation of "shared commitment to ideas and paths of action" (Fullan, 2001, p. 118).

Under the leadership of Dr. Hall, consensus has been established about the focus, direction, and goals of the organization. In addition, structures and systems

have been established to ensure that the organizational beliefs and goals are supported through actual practice. An emphasis of Dr. Hall's leadership has been on the alignment of individual and collective action towards collaboratively developed goals of the organization. Dr. Hall creates this alignment in thought and action by creating many opportunities for leaders throughout the district to engage in dialogue about critical issues. Leadership retreats are held several times throughout the year where research and literature are discussed and pondered and where critical decisions are made.

Dr. Hall is serious that all within the district live what they believe and that all that they say and do is directed at improving learning for staff and students (JR 320; JT 99). To further assist in creating coherency in what is espoused and in individual action, Dr. Hall led the leadership team in discussions to identify the core values and core purpose of the organization. In other words, what is the organization about and what does it stand for? And, why does the organization exist? These discussions led to the development of a collaboratively developed long-range plan, the creation of core values, and a district mission statement (JR 341; KA 194; KS field notes). In addition, the district has worked hard to create curriculum documents that are designed to ensure quality and equity in student learning across the district through the implementation of an aligned written, taught and tested curriculum (JR 301; KA 619; LH 300).

Enthusiasm, Hope and Energy

Michael Fullan (2001) found in his study of leaders of learning communities that these leaders possessed what he has labeled the "energy-enthusiasm-hopefulness constellation" (p. 7). He found that these leaders demonstrated a contagious sense of optimism and enthusiasm for the work. Dr. Hall demonstrates this constellation in his words and in his actions.

Numerous respondents describe Dr. Hall as a mentor and as a source of inspiration and encouragement.

> He has been very much an advisor and someone who has mentored me and saw some potential in me that I probably didn't see in myself. And he certainly helped me to focus my advanced degrees in learning and mentored me all along with that. He has been very much of an inspiration to me. (JR 45)

One individual in the district emotionally relayed that without Dr. Hall's suggestion and encouragement, she would not be a principal today.

> I was a good teacher and never really aspired to anything else because I knew I didn't fit the model for a school administrator. I have a different personality and people sometimes see me as weird or odd. Dr. Hall suggested to me that I needed to think about pursuing the principalship. Dr. Hall saw something in me that I didn't see in myself. (KS field notes)

Dr. Hall sees developing others and leadership succession as a personal and professional responsibility (JH 324; KA 63). "I think that one of the most exciting

things about this position is the ability to see new people come along and grow and develop as leaders. I think that the next generation is going to be in good hands" (JH 562). Dr. Hall expects other leaders throughout the district to also cultivate and develop potential in others. He believes this is the responsibility of all leaders.

> One of the main criteria I use to promote a person from one administrative position to another is how well they have developed the people that report to them. And if there is no obvious growth in the people that are reporting to you, then we're probably not going to give you more responsibility. And I think the same thing applies to me. If the people that report to me aren't growing and developing, then there's something wrong here. (JH 573)

Dr. Hall actively supports individuals within the organization, identifies strengths in others and he takes seriously the cultivation of people within the organization (JB 298; JR 193). Further, he also mentors, supports and encourages young leaders across the state. Dr. Hall chaired a state committee to develop a statewide mentoring program for new and aspiring superintendents. He was asked to lead this committee because of his obvious love of public education and his deep convictions about learning and preparing leadership for the future (KS field notes).

Student Academic Outcomes

The passion and commitment for the work of the organization was apparent in both individual and collective behavior and action in the Oak Tree ISD. The true strength of the Oak Tree ISD as a learning community is attested in the results they

have attained from creating this kind of focus on community, learning, and continuous improvement. The results that have been demonstrated are organizational alignment, extensive community partnerships, improved communications and involvement, and improved student performance.

As a result of many of the improvement efforts implemented in the Oak Tree ISD, student performance has improved. The following chart demonstrates student performance trends in the Oak Tree ISD on the state assessment, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). In addition, the chart includes data illustrating student demographic changes over the past five years.

Table 1.1 Oak Tree ISD student performance (percent passing) and student demographics over the past five years.

TAAS Reading	**1997**	**1998**	**1999**	**2000**	**2001**
All Students	85.8	90.2	90.2	91.7	91.8
African American	76.1	81.7	83.3	87.2	86.9
Hispanic	82.8	85.2	87.6	86.1	85.5
White	87.8	92.6	92.0	93.9	95.0
Eco. Dis.	76.4	83.5	83.4	84.7	84.4
TAAS Mathematics					
All Students	79.4	85.1	87.5	90.0	92.0
African American	63.4	72.9	78.6	82.8	87.2
Hispanic	71.7	79.8	83.5	86.0	87.5
White	83.1	88.1	90.0	92.5	94.5
Eco. Dis.	68.4	76.6	80.7	82.3	86.5
TAAS Writing					
All Students	86.8	86.6	90.5	91.9	90.3
African American	78.9	77.5	87.3	87.1	88.1
Hispanic	81.5	82.3	85.5	87.8	83.7
White	88.8	88.7	92.2	93.7	92.7
Eco. Dis.	78.6	79.5	82.9	85.7	83.5
Drop-Out Rate					
All Students	1.3	1.2	0.9	0.7	0.6
African American	1.2	0.7	0.9	0.6	0.7
Hispanic	1.4	1.4	1.3	0.4	0.7
White	1.3	1.2	0.8	0.8	0.6
Eco. Dis.	1.4	1.1	1.1	0.5	0.6
Attendance Rate (not reported on most current year)					
All Students	95.0	95.1	95.5	95.9	
District Demographics					
African American	11.8	13.4	14.9	16.4	17.9
Hispanic	13.5	14.3	15.3	17.2	19.8
White	70.6	68.2	65.5	62.0	57.8
Eco. Dis	26.9	27.7	28.0	29.0	29.1
*Other	4.1	4.1	4.3	4.4	4.5

*Asian/Pacific Islander and Native American

The data reflected in the above chart demonstrates that the Oak Tree ISD has improved and/or sustained over time the performance of all students and all student groups in all areas tested by the state on the TAAS tests. The most dramatic gains in student performance were evidenced by African American students whose performance gains ranged from 9.2 percentage points in writing to 23.8 percentage points in mathematics. Likewise, the performance of Hispanic students has improved with the increase ranging from 2.2 percentage points in reading to 15.8 percentage points in mathematics. Over the past five years, the district has gone from being classified as an acceptable district to a recognized district according to the state's accountability system.

The improvements that have been realized in student performance have much to do with the efforts made by this superintendent to align people and systems and to improve teaching and learning throughout the organization. Furthermore, the strong relationships and partnerships with individuals and organizations throughout the larger community that this superintendent has developed have created the appropriate context and support for the organization to accomplish its mission.

Summary

When respondents were asked to characterize Dr. Hall's leadership, most emphasized his vision, his commitment to continuous improvement through learning, his strong communication style, and his demonstration of care and support for others. While they tended his emphasize his interrelational styles of leading, several also

made reference to his business savvy (CT 347; LH 102; JT 354; JR 77). Dr. Hall spoke with pride regarding the financial condition of the school district. He said that they have plenty in reserve and they have a strong infrastructure with well-designed and up-to-date facilities and a strong maintenance program.

> But that's a management baseline. This is not the thing that you strive for. What you strive for is the success of kids and the success of your people, but I think again you've got to take care of those management needs so the really important work can continue. (JH 618)

Dr. Hall is a natural leader whose sincerity and compassion for the profession of education is contagious. As one member of the Board of Trustees so aptly states, "the most significant part of his leadership is his ability to just be wise" (CT 382). The wise leadership of this superintendent has served to create an organizational culture where shared commitments to the goals of the organization and to one another have been well established. Furthermore, it is under Dr. Hall's leadership that structures have been created to support the beliefs in actual practice and to ensure that learning and improvement is sustained over time.

Leadership often implies influence - influence over shared vision, values, beliefs, and actions of all within the school community. Discussion of leadership often includes some discussion of followship and the willingness of individuals within the organization to embrace the vision, and to demonstrate commitment (Sergiovanni, 2000). Dr. Hall's leadership and his integrity both as a person and as a professional have served to create such in the Oak Tree ISD.

The leadership of Dr. James Hall is unique and extraordinary. The unique nature of his leadership has to do with the high degree of alignment between what Dr. Hall espouses to be true and right about people, learning and organizations, and his actions and work. Dr. Hall indicates that he feels strongly that belief should connect to action. "If you say something is important then you've got to continually look for opportunities to make that happen or to allow it to happen" (JH 298).

Dr. Hall has created an environment in the Oak Tree ISD where all are deeply committed to the work of the organization. He has provided the vision for the future, established a culture of continuous improvement and learning, and created comprehensive systems and structures designed to facilitate thoughtful change and to support and sustain progress and innovation over time. The Oak Tree ISD has all the characteristics of a learning community and this leader demonstrates all the characteristics of a leader of learning community.

Sergiovanni (2000) states that true learning community can be characterized as a community of people bound by mind and heart. As one respondent stated, "The learning community that we have here, it's greatly undergirded by him and his thought" (JR, 99). The Oak Tree ISD, under the leadership of Dr. James Hall, has developed strong, purposeful, and collective "mind and heart"- a learning community.

The Case of Ann Garrett

The Cypress Independent School District is located in northeast Texas. The district encompasses a geographical area of approximately 53 square miles. Comprised of 36 different schools, the Cypress ISD serves children living in six different cities. The school district is a compilation of many diverse areas. Many of the areas of the school district appear industrial in nature while others are obviously residential areas, some of which appear to be affluent while others appear to be somewhat improvished. At present, this fast growing educational organization serves over 24,000 students of which 10.6 percent are African American, 33.9 percent are Hispanic, 41.8 are white, 13.0 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.6 percent are Native American, and 36.0 percent are economically disadvantaged.

Unlike the Oak Tree ISD, the Cypress Independent School District is classified according to the Texas Education Agency and the state funding formulas as a Chapter 41 or "property wealthy – budget balance" school district. The school district has a local tax base that equates to $480,273 taxable value per student. The school district annually spends approximately $6328 in total operating expenditures for every student they educate.

While on the surface it may appear that this school district has all the resources necessary to fund all the services and support that they need, this school district, like so many others, struggles financially. They must send millions of dollars back to the state every year in response to the state's funding formulas that are designed to equalize funding. Consequently, the local community generates ninety-

two percent of the money it takes to support the school district with only 7 percent coming from the state of Texas.

An individual absolutely dedicated to the profession of education and one skilled in managing the challenges that come with the position, Dr. Garrett has held numerous campus level and district level positions in school districts across Texas. She has been a classroom teacher, district coordinator for special education programs, an elementary principal, assistant superintendent for instruction/curriculum, and superintendent. Dr. Garrett holds the unique distinction of also having served as a Board member for another Texas school district.

Dr. Garrett has served as a superintendent for over twelve years. She served as superintendent in two other districts prior to becoming the superintendent of the Cypress Independent School District (ISD) in August of 1997. Dr. Garrett has received numerous distinctions and honors for her leadership. She is particularly proud of a recent honor she received in the fall of 2000 when she was selected as the Texas Association of School Board's (TASB) 2000 Texas Superintendent of the Year at its annual conference. Dr. Garrett was nominated by the Cypress ISD Board of Trustees for this distinction. They stated in the application that Dr. Garrett has, "rekindled the spirit of our six communities and our entire educational team (Texas School Business, 2000, p. 10).

Dr. Garrett was selected to participate in this study for the commitment she has expressed for establishing educational organizations of continual improvement and where strong relationships are the foundation of the learning of all within the

system. Dr. Garrett has expressed commitment to the tenets of learning community and has further expressed her desire to create such an organization in the Cypress ISD. "The vision I have for this district is that we will have a learning community" (AG 88). Additionally, Dr. Garrett has distinguished herself as leader of leaders and is considered by her community and by her peers across the state and nation as an extraordinary and successful leader.

Moral Purpose

According to Fullan (2001), "moral purpose means acting with the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of employees, customers, and society as a whole" (p. 3). Fundamentally, moral purpose relates to an organizational vision or organizational goals that are both compelling and utilitarian in nature. Fullan (2001) states that moral purpose appears natural, however, true moral purpose in organizations cannot occur without strong, visionary leadership to cultivate it. "To achieve moral purpose is to forge interaction – and even mutual purpose – across groups" (p. 25).

An orientation or focus on the future was evident in Dr. Garrett's leadership. Many of the individuals very quickly used the term visionary to describe characteristics of her leadership (NS 223; SM 152; BB 9; CC 126; JT 299). As one CFB ISD board member states, "Dr. Garrett is a visionary leader. Her approach includes just the right blend of heart and mind" (Texas School Business, 2000, p. 10).

The well-being of the students of the Cypress ISD is at the heart of Dr. Garrett's vision.

Dr. Garrett is most decisive about the overall purpose and the primary work of the Cypress ISD and that is to serve children and to "create optimum learning opportunities for every child" (AG 248). Commitment towards this important work – the education of all children - was most evident in conversations with individuals throughout the district (JB 78; JS 141; JT 154; KC 125; NS 223). As one respondent states about Dr. Garrett's vision for the children of Cypress ISD, "She's very much interested that we effectively prepare kids for the world. And that we have a vision of the world not how it is right now, but how we think it might be years ahead" (JB 122). Dr. Garrett speaks often of the need for leaders to think into the future and to be mindful that we are preparing children for a world that we have never experienced (KS field notes).

> I think the other big thing is a vision that she definitely has brought to the district, student achievement is what it's all about. We will push hard, but we'll do it for the right reasons because we care about children. And, we are going to do it in a climate of care and concern. We care about these kids and they're going to have to be out there in the real world and when they get through Cypress ISD, we want to be able to say they've gotten a good education, they are well-equipped. If so, we've completed our mission. (SM 194)

While she pushes all to think differently and futuristically about their work and their goals for the organization, Dr. Garrett realizes that it requires conversation and dialogue to breed commitment for the vision (AG 248).

Dr. Garrett indicates that it has been her priority to communicate and solicit commitment for her vision for the Cypress. She garners commitment by actively communicating her vision, the rationale for the vision, and openly inviting all to be a part of a collaborative effort to attain the vision (KC 93, 136). Further, Dr. Garrett actively communicates these along with a sense of optimism and enthusiasm that generates both individual and collective support (CC 100; JS 164; KC 103).

Several respondents indicated the vision and goal-focused perspective that Dr. Garrett has brought to the district was needed and has served to create a renewed sense of unity and purposefulness for the organization (JS 103; KC 217). "We had gotten where we were all little islands and she has really brought us together. We now have more of a common goal." (KC 217) One respondent spoke of the goal focus and the momentum that Dr. Garrett has created in the district.

> I would say we're more focused than we were before. We have some definite goals and everyone in the organization knows what those goals are. But we have a feeling that we're moving forward. We have a leader at the helm. She's directing the charge and we'll get there. (SM 317)

A strong moral purpose and a renewed focus has been established by Dr. Garrett through dialogue with leaders within the organization and through strengthened communication with communities throughout the larger school community.

Understanding Change

Fullan (2001) stresses that is not enough for leaders to have strong moral purpose; they must also have a deep understanding of the complexities of change and its impact on organizations. "Leading in a culture of change means creating a culture of change. It means that leaders must produce the capacity to seek, critically assess, and selectively incorporate new ideas and practices – all the time, inside the organization as well as outside it" (Fullan, 2001, p. 44).

Dr. Garrett enjoys a challenge and she enjoys change, however, she has had to learn that not all people embrace change in a similar fashion. "I have learned that people have different comfort zones with change. I have learned to approach change in a sensible manner. Also, I now realize that you must get ownership at the very beginning" (KS field notes). As the superintendent in the Cypress ISD, Dr. Garrett led this organization into change by beginning the process of "reculturing" the organization, by opening up lines of communication and by initiating dialogue about the future (KS field notes).

Many of the initial conversations with individuals within the organization and throughout the larger community of Cypress ISD have been about the recognition that they exist in an environment where rapid change is the norm (CC 76; EC 246; JS 415). As one principal states, "She's talked a lot about change and the changing demographics and the future and that we need to create a learning community for the future" (KC 164). According to Dr. Garrett, "We need to learn to change quickly and

to learn ahead of the change so we don't have to stop at any one point to retool ourselves" (AG 96).

Dr. Garrett believes that a feeling of ownership for the vision and the work is critical to organizational success. "I believe it motivates people to be part of the action, to be part of or the authors of change" (AG 223). Therefore, she focuses much time and energy on activities designed to create an organizational culture conducive to change and to engage individuals throughout the entire community in conversation about their hopes and dreams for the school district.

Dr. Garrett has actively worked to mold and fashion a district culture that is caring, respectful, collaborative, creative, and one where people feel valued and where they desire to learn and grow (AG 257). To create the kind of environment where individuals willingly engage and commit to the goals of the organization, Dr. Garrett concentrates on the improvement of communication within the district and throughout the community.

Many of the individuals made reference to Dr. Garrett's approach to communication. Dr. Garrett extends "an open invitation to the public to join us. She has brought the district more into the public eye, not just for the parents who have students in the schools, but for the entire community" (NS 485). Described as an open and honest communicator (NS 169; JS 122; SM 136; JS 293) who "reaches out to community members" (SM 299), Dr. Garrett cares enough and she has the courage to be honest with people (JS 84; NS 158). One respondent characterizes Dr. Garrett's

communication and its impact on others by stating, “She responds to people honestly and genuinely and they can see that. And they, in turn, respond to her” (SM 171).

Thoughtful and purposeful conversations held throughout the district have led to the implementation of new programs and approaches. New models for professional development have been implemented for teachers and administrators (JB 102). New and innovative approaches have been created for moving the district forward in the utilization of technology to enhance learning and efficiency (BB 208; EC 345; JS 396). The district’s reading programs have been evaluated and a new direction has been established as a result of these assessments. “She has put into place some significant interventions for early literacy and for reading overall and at the expense of some sacred cows in the district” (JS 229). In addition, high school academies have been implemented to ensure that the unique skills, talents, and interests of students are supported (JB 284). As one respondent commented, “the academies are one of the things that has created a lot of community support and energy directed in a positive way towards the district” (JS 398). These and other innovations have been implemented to move the district towards the actuation of the vision while great care has also been given to ensure that the change is timely and manageable. Dr. Garrett strives to innovate to improve effectiveness and efficiency, but “she’s not innovative just to be innovative, but she truly looks for new and better ways to do things” (CC 105).

Cognizant of the fact that change is difficult for many people, Dr. Garrett has taken great care to ensure that celebrations occur on a regular basis to recognize

contributions throughout the district. Numerous respondents mentioned an appreciation for the attention that Dr. Garrett pays to validating and recognizing individuals for their work (JS 170; SM 283; KS field notes). Dr. Garrett "builds us up" (KC 360). "She verbalizes her appreciation and respect. And it's very genuine. She plans and builds in things along the way to celebrate. She looks for opportunities to demonstrate her appreciation" (JS 170). Described as a hands-on leader, Dr. Garrett has actively participated in celebration activities that have served to set a tone, such as skits that were conducted at convocation or serving Thanksgiving dinner to all the staff (BB 231; NS 398, 407; SM 232).

Relationship Building

Relationship building is a critical function of leadership for relationships within and throughout the community create webs of meaning that connect individuals to the work of the organization (Sergiovanni, 2000). According to Fullan (2001), "collaborative cultures, which by definition have close relationships, are indeed powerful" (p. 67). Fullan acknowledges that the true power of relationships in an organization comes from developing and utilizing these relationships for the benefit the organization.

Dr. Garrett makes relationship building a priority (BB 132, 231; JB 103). Realizing that she must commit time to developing relationships, Dr. Garrett strives to make herself accessible to all within the school district and the community. "I find that with Ann, if there is anybody in the district who has a need, her door's always

open" (NS 202). Likewise, a school principal remarked about Dr. Garrett's accessibility by saying "She certainly has made herself available to us. I think her accessibility is extremely unusual for a superintendent. I mean, she's accessible to us. There's no doubt about it" (SM 222). As a result of this superintendent's open style of communication, her visibility and accessibility, and her focus on relationship building, one principal stated that "she's building trust with the communities, like she's built trust with us" (JB 270).

The trust that has been established by this superintendent is evidenced in the passage of a bond in the fall of 1998. Prior to Dr. Garrett's appointment to the superintendency, in the spring of 1997, the school district had previously held a bond election that was unsuccessful. Many believed the bond failed due to feelings of dissatisfaction with the school district in some of communities it serves. The failed bond served only to exacerbate the strife in the school community (KS field notes).

Dr. Garrett made a personal commitment to rekindle or reestablish community unity by working with all communities and hearing their desires and dreams for the school district. By actively seeking the commitment of all, particularly those who had previously felt disenchanted with the school district, Dr. Garrett "within a very short time had soothed the waters" (NS 71) and "healed the community" (SM 323).

Dr. Garrett facilitated many informal and formal meetings throughout all communities served by the organization for the purpose of forging new relationships and creating shared ownership for the work of the organization. Dr. Garrett's work to engage the community in new and purposeful ways laid the groundwork for a

successful bond election in the fall of 1998. In fact, the bond election was approved with eighty-eight percent of the voters voting favorably, resulting in "the highest approval rate we have ever had" (NS 322). In addition, this bond, in the amount of $198.6 million, was the highest bond package ever passed for the Cypress ISD. The passage of the bond was cited by numerous respondents as one of the significant outcomes achieved as a result of Dr. Garrett's leadership (BB 304; CC 374; JB 282; JS 190; NS 322). As one respondent indicates, "Our bond is one of the most obvious outcomes since Ann came. That alone is an incredible outcome for it will have years and years and years of lasting effects" (JS 396). The passage of the bond was a success for the funds were so desperately needed for new facilities and technology. The passage of the bond demonstrates more than an understanding of the need for these funds, the passage of the bond demonstrates a new sense of trust between the school district and the communities it serves (CC 374; JB 282; KC 241) signaling that "once again the community has confidence in us" (EC 143).

Knowledge Creation and Sharing

Knowledge creation and sharing refers to the expectations and structures that have been instituted in an organization to facilitate the creation of new knowledge and the use of this knowledge to inform practice. Fullan (2001) states that "the role of leadership is to 'cause' greater capacity in the organization in order to get better results" (p. 65). Further he states that leaders "must name knowledge sharing as a

core value and then establish mechanisms and procedures that embody the value in action" (p. 88).

A future-oriented and visionary leader, Dr. Garrett's vision for her organization is greatly influenced by an informed perspective created through extensive reading and study of pertinent organizational and educational theory. A self-professed learner, Dr. Garrett demonstrates a sheer passion for learning (AG 133; NS 75; JS 155; JB 100). As one respondent described, "One of the things that struck me about Ann, is her continual drive to improve herself. I see a woman who is a reader and a thinker." (SM 186) Others described Dr. Garrett as a very studious, curious, and inquisitive person who actively seeks knowledge through reading, questioning, and brainstorming with others (EC 314; NC 137).

While Dr. Garrett demonstrates a natural propensity and drive for learning and knowledge building, Dr. Garrett believes that all leaders must continually seek new knowledge and to challenge current mental models. She expects all leaders to be learners (CC 358; EC 234). As one respondent stated about Dr. Garrett's expectation about leaders as learners, "She very much believes that we all should be continuous learners and that we all need to be reading and learning and growing and sharing and challenging ourselves and pushing for that learning" (JS 147).

In order to provide new structures to facilitate learning, professional development in the Cypress ISD has been restructured to support the learning needs of all within the organization. As Dr. Garrett indicated, "our learning has to be focused" (AG 254). To facilitate this new focus on learning, a new model of

professional development was implemented, “Foundations of Learning.” *Foundations of Learning* includes new techniques for learning that go beyond the traditional models and includes opportunities for individuals and groups to participate in action research, book studies, and study groups (AG 187; CC 248; EC 209; JB 197; KC 182; SM 234). As one respondent indicates, the new structure for professional development includes varied opportunities designed specifically for the learning needs of leaders, an area that “had been missing” (JS 238). A leader who is dedicated to the fervent pursuit of learning, Dr. Garrett creates shared purpose and commitment by engaging all within the organization in new structures for professional development where dialogue is emphasized.

According to Dr. Garrett, the stakes are high in public education, the lives of children are in the balance, so they must succeed (KS field notes). Consequently, her expectations for all are great, everyone must learn, they must contribute, and they must work hard.

> I know that she has high expectations for me and I know that I must perform. I know that. But I also know that she’s going to be there to help me. I also know that if I make a mistake, I can tell her and she will understand. And I know that if, whatever reason, she decides that this is not the position for me, she’ll handle that with concern for my dignity. And what more could you ask for from a superintendent? It doesn’t get any better than that. (SM 157)

While Dr. Garrett holds high expectations for all within the system, she has similar expectations for herself. “She never asks more of the people she works with than

she's willing to give" (JS 171). Dr. Garrett demonstrates great confidence in the ability and the commitment of all within the organization. Dr. Garrett has sought to establish a sound balance between pressure and support through the creation of an organizational culture and structures conducive to learning and risk-taking.

Coherence Making

Coherence making refers to ability of leaders to create alignment, focus, and purposefulness in their organization. Coherence making includes the use of data to inform decision-making, efforts made to achieve alignment in individual thought and action, and innovation that is purposeful and thoughtful. According to Fullan (2001), "Effective leaders tolerate enough ambiguity to keep the creative juices flowing, but along the way, they seek coherence. Coherence making is a perennial pursuit" (p. 6). In addition, coherence making includes the alignment of leadership word and deed.

Dr. Garrett brought a new focus to the district and created momentum for organizational improvement (BB 264; CC 378; KC 217; SM 317). As one administrator stated, "She kind of got us off dead center and gave direction to some different departments to start moving" (CC 210). Very soon after Dr. Garrett came into the district, she energized the organization by actively engaging all within the school community in conversation and dialogue for the purpose of creating shared focus and alignment in thought and action.

> She has the skills to bring people together. I mean, it was just, we were lots of little islands. And in just a short time, she's really been able to pull that

> together and focus us in a direction where we all have a common goal, I think, and we're speaking a common language and we're moving forward. (KC 80)

Under the direction and leadership of Dr. Garrett, conversations and dialogue are leading to purposeful innovation and overall organizational alignment.

Dr. Garrett also works to create alignment in actual practice in the classrooms throughout the district. The implementation of strategies for improving the teaching and learning process has been a priority of this superintendent. Dr. Garrett provided the leadership for the development of district curriculum documents designed to ensure that all students are receiving high quality learning experiences despite where they attend school and, furthermore, to ensure that student learning is coherent and that it builds over time (JS 254; JT 223; KC 125).

> The implementation of, the pushing for a comprehensive written curriculum as quickly as we had it was really her timeline and she would have liked it sooner. And it did get done. We would be still waiting a couple of years for that if she hadn't pushed for that. (JS 254)

Dr. Garrett has provided leadership for the development and implementation of new district curriculum documents. As a result of their curriculum work, they have developed many impressive, high-quality curriculum documents that are now being used as models for such work by school districts across the state.

The implementation of these curriculum documents has served to aid in the development of organizational coherency and organizational integrity. Dr. Garrett conducts ongoing conversations with campus administrators about their role. She

emphasizes in these discussions her expectations that principals serve as instructional leaders. Her expectations are supported with extensive training and with the formalization of these expectations in district regulations.

Administrators across the district are trained extensively on techniques for monitoring curriculum implementation and for engaging teachers in inquiry and reflective practice. They are expected to apply their learning by increasing their time spent guiding learning at their campuses. Campus administrators are expected to spend at least forty percent of every school day in classrooms engaged in activities commonly associated with that of an instructional leader (JS 258; KS field notes). With the implementation of the new district curriculum and the support of this implementation by campus administrators, "High school teachers, middle school teachers, and elementary school teachers are now all working in one direction" (NS 113).

Dr. Garrett employs innovative and collaborative planning processes to ready the organization for the future. Prior to Dr. Garrett's tenure, the school district was employing a strategic planning model. Dr. Garrett began a new process for long range planning, including the development of a new mission and goals. The district's mission is "To provide an integrated educational program of quality, equity, challenge, and innovation to every student." The following goals were created in 1997 and have been refined over the past four years.

- Recognition of Cypress ISD as an Exemplary District

- Integration of technology in learning
- Infusion of the district curriculum into every classroom
- Safest schools in the USA

Dr. Garrett has also begun educating the administrative team and the Board of Trustees to a new way of planning called scenario planning. Using this process, they identified key aspects of their organization that have a profound influence over the work of the organization. For example, two of the issues they identified were school funding and growth and changing student demographics. They then took each of the identified issues and researched these extensively. From this study, they identified potential scenarios for the future and commensurate strategies for each projected possibility.

It is the belief of this superintendent that understanding and applying systems thinking and creating alignment in thought and action is a fundamental aspect of effective leadership (BB 62; CC 378; EC 350; JS 105, 268). Dr. Garrett models the beliefs, the values, the work ethic, and the focus on learning that she expects of others (JS 155, 171; JT 528; SM 186). "Her comments and her answers to questions are very consistent with her behaviors. Also, her communication with teachers, principals, and other groups is always the same message" (JB 142).

Enthusiasm, Hope and Energy

Effective leaders of rapidly changing organizations tend to exude a sense of enthusiasm and hope and they demonstrate a sense of vitality and energy. According to Fullan (2001), these successful leaders convey a sense of optimism that is infectious. He states that "energetic, enthusiastic, and hopeful leaders 'cause' greater moral purpose in themselves, bury themselves in change, naturally build relationships and knowledge, and seek coherence to consolidate moral purpose" (p 7).

When respondents were asked to describe Dr. Garrett's leadership, most seemed to emphasize her vision, her passion for learning, her strong communication skills, and her support for others. Many also indicated that Dr. Garrett is a source of inspiration and encouragement for them (CC 84; EC 143; JB 319; JS 75, 171; NS 421). A principal commented on the inspiration she provides by stating, "I think she inspires all kinds of individuals to follow because they feel like they're on a winning team because she makes us feel that we are" (JS 198).

Dr. Garrett is concerned about leadership succession so she accepts responsibility for encouraging individuals and for helping them to identify and maximize areas of strength (AG 178; SM 140). "She sees potential in others that they perhaps were not aware of" (NS 265) and "she is always expressing belief in our abilities and talents. This helps you to believe it also" (SM 341). Dr. Garrett indicates that she is very optimistic about the future of public education. "There are many young leaders out there who have great ideas and who I believe are ready to take us into the future" (KS field notes). Dr. Garrett is working to develop and

promote many of these new leaders in her school district and in other districts throughout the state.

Most respondents, when asked about Dr. Garrett's leadership, tended to focus on the human relation aspects her leadership, however, many also mentioned her business acumen. Individuals stated that Dr. Garrett is a very wise and politically astute leader who understands and can convey the intricacies of managing a large organization (CC 106; JT 494; NS 360). Several also stated that Dr. Garrett "does her homework," she prepares herself well for issues (BB 222; CC 65; EC 368; JS 319; NS 362; JT 146). One principal commented that she was impressed with Dr. Garrett and her high level of energy by saying "she is a very hard worker. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. She is relentless. She is a resilient woman" (SM 152, 355).

Student Academic Results

The results of this superintendent's leadership are evident in many of the major changes that have occurred in this district over the past couple of years. Under the leadership of Dr. Garrett, communication has been strengthened, curriculum and instruction has been aligned, and new models of professional development have been implemented. This work, along with many other major initiatives, has served to improve student performance and created strong relationships based upon mutual trust, respect, and care.

The following chart depicts student performance trends for students in the Cypress ISD. The data reported include student performance on the state assessments, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) tests reported as percent passing. In addition, the chart demonstrates changes in student demographics for the Cypress ISD over the past five years.

Table 2.1 Cypress ISD student performance (percent passing) and student demographics over the past five years.

TAAS Reading	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
All Students	91.1	92.5	93.0	92.0	92.2
African American	82.4	87.4	86.2	89.5	87.6
Hispanic	80.0	82.6	84.6	82.2	85.7
White	95.9	96.6	97.3	97.2	97.0
Eco. Dis.	79.7	82.7	85.0	82.6	84.1
TAAS Mathematics					
All Students	87.1	88.3	91.0	90.7	93.1
African American	70.7	76.9	78.9	85.7	88.4
Hispanic	73.7	76.9	82.8	82.2	87.7
White	92.7	93.1	95.4	95.4	96.7
Eco. Dis.	74.4	77.3	82.9	82.7	87.2
TAAS Writing					
All Students	92.0	90.9	91.3	92.6	91.6
African American	84.5	83.4	86.9	89.9	88.9
Hispanic	81.5	81.0	81.0	84.8	86.2
White	96.8	95.7	95.1	97.0	95.1
Eco. Dis.	80.1	79.8	82.3	84.9	84.8
Drop-Out Rate					
All Students	1.7	0.8	1.0	1.0	0.8
African American	2.0	1.1	1.7	0.9	0.7
Hispanic	3.7	1.6	2.2	1.7	1.6
White	1.1	0.6	0.5	0.7	0.5
Eco. Dis.	1.4	0.5	1.3	0.6	0.8
Attendance Rate (current year is not reported)					
All Students	96.0	95.9	96.1	96.2	
District Demographics					
African American	8.5	8.8	9.3	10.0	10.6
Hispanic	25.2	26.8	28.9	31.1	33.9
White	53.9	51.4	48.2	45.3	41.8
Eco. Dis.	28.9	33.1	28.5	31.3	36.0
*Other	12.4	13.0	13.6	13.6	13.7

*Asian/Pacific Islander and Native American

The data reflected in the above chart demonstrate that student performance for all students and all student groups has improved over time. The most significant gains in student performance has been demonstrated in mathematics with African American students increasing their performance on this test by 18.4 percentage points, the Hispanic students increasing their performance by 14.0 percentage points and the economically disadvantaged students increasing percent passing by 12.8 points.

Despite increasing expectations for student performance and despite changing demographics, the Cypress Independent School District has risen to the challenge by improving performance of all students on all sections of the TAAS tests and by reducing the drop-out rate of all student groups. In the fall of 1999, the Cypress ISD met their goal of being distinguished as a Recognized school district according to the state's accountability system. They have now increased this goal to having over ninety percent of all students passing the TAAS tests.

Summary

A new and positive vision for the Cypress ISD has been established in this community by Dr. Garrett. Because of Dr. Garrett's leadership, skepticism and anger has been replaced with a sense of unity and ownership for the organization. Without exception, every individual interviewed expressed relief and appreciation for the healing that has occurred in the community. Dr. Garrett has actively invited all to express their hopes and dreams for their children and for their school district and she has used these desires to frame a new shared vision for the Cypress ISD.

Dr. Garrett has also initiated organizational alignment through the comprehensive analysis of various systems and programs and has used these assessments to guide the implementation of numerous district initiatives. Further, she and her leadership team have worked to create coherence and alignment between people, eliminating fragmentation, redundancy and conflicting innovations. "We are now moving together" (NS 36).

New structures and expectations for learning have been created in the Cypress ISD. Dr. Garrett is a learner and she expects all to learn. Fullan (2001) states that "organizations must name knowledge sharing as a core value and then establish mechanisms and procedures that embody the value in action" (p. 88). New expectations have been created for leaders as learners and a new program of professional development has been created and implemented to support learning across the organization.

Dr. Garrett has created an organizational environment that demonstrates concern for children and for all within the school community and where a new sense of optimism exists about the future of their district and the future of the children they serve. As one of the respondents said, Dr. Ann Garrett has "brought hope to the district. She communicated, in a very positive way, that we can do this together – we can accomplish our goals" (JB 319). Working together, they have already attained many of the goals that they have established. A positive future exists for the youth of this school community due to the work and dedication of this superintendent and her leadership team.

Chapter V

There are always vacancies: there are always roads not taken, vistas not acknowledged. The search must be ongoing; the end can never be quite known.
- Maxine Greene

The school organization is a complex and intricate system of people designed around specific structures, expectations, beliefs and values, and relationships. As these dynamic organizations become increasingly more complex, the challenge for educational leaders is to create an impetus for the convergence of individual roles and job functions, diverse talents and skills, and varying beliefs and values around the fundamental purpose of schools – the education of *all* children.

So, one might ask, how might the superintendent of a large, diverse school district create such convergence? How does this important educational leader create an environment where shared visions and dreams, shared purposes and commitments, and focused and aligned efforts are actualized to create high student performance for all learners – learning community? The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership perspectives and behaviors of superintendents in developing learning community.

In this chapter, I present a summary of what is currently known about leadership in learning communities, as well as, a summary of the methodology utilized for this study. Further, the research findings and conclusions are presented followed by the implications for further research and practice.

Overview of the Literature

Studies of successful educational organizations from across the country have demonstrated that the learning communities design appears to hold great promise for the fundamental improvement of learning and organizational life in schools. The results of these studies have led many to recommend the restructuring of schools around the tenets of the learning community (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Hord, 1997; Leithwood, et. al, 1998; McLaughlin, 1998). However, the "landscape" of research on the professional learning community and its associated topics, such as organizational learning and learning organizations, is scarcely populated (Huber, 1991; Tsang, 1997). Only a limited number of empirical studies examining this topic have been conducted in educational contexts, with most of these focused at the school level and on the leadership behaviors of the principal (Leithwood, et. al., 1998).

Most studies of learning communities allude to the importance of the superintendent in the creation of organizations focused on organizational improvement through the application of strategies and the development of characteristics associated with learning community (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Firestone & Bader, 1992; Leithwood, et. Al., 1998). However, the research community is relatively devoid of studies of learning community where the role of the superintendent is the primary focus. Consequently, the role of the superintendent in engaging the entire district in systemic efforts to create learning community "warrants more research energy" (Leithwood, et. al., 1998, p. 269).

The research literature demonstrates that certain leadership behaviors tend to contribute positively to organizational learning and to the conditions that promote learning community. Leaders of learning communities concern themselves with the development of "commitments and capacities" of all within the organization (Leithwood et. al., 1998). The commitments referred to by Leithwood and his associates are developed around shared vision and unity of purpose. Firestone and Bader (1992) found in their study of communities of practice that superintendents of these kinds of organizations exhibit "broad, substantive visions" for their organizations and that they were catalysts for change. Further, they found that these superintendents also maintained the "appropriate pressure and direction" on achieving the visions (p. 216).

Other research has also demonstrated that superintendents of learning communities successfully engage all within the community on the primary purpose of educational organizations - student learning. These superintendents primarily focus on issues associated with curriculum and instruction (LaRoque & Coleman, 1986; Leithwood et. al., 1998; Murphy & Hallinger, 1986). However, it was noted that these superintendents did not focus on curriculum and instruction in the traditional sense, but instead in ways considered inclusive and participatory.

In other studies of superintendent leadership in learning communities, it has been shown that these superintendents facilitate organizational learning by serving as a model of learning and by creating structures and systems and allocating resources that support learning. Further, these superintendents also encourage creative thinking

and knowledge creation and they practice shared or distributive leadership (Gephart et. al., 1996; Ulrich, von Glinow, & Jick, 1993). "The ultimate leadership contribution is to develop leaders in the organization who can move the organization even further after you have left" (Lewin & Regine, 2000, p. 220). Leaders of learning community judge themselves by the leadership produced in others (Fullan, 2001). When leaders model and reflect the values and practices indicative of leaders of learning community they "improve the performance of the organization while simultaneously developing new leadership all the time. In this sense, organizational performance and leadership development are one and the same" (Fullan, 2001, p. 132).

Louis et. al. (1996) characterize learning communities as places where collaboration and "deprivation of practice" is a organizational norm. In these kinds of communities, professional interaction, collaboration, and dialogue is a normal and even expected aspect of day to day life. In learning communities "members of the school community are committed to thinking, growing, and inquiring and where learning is an attitude as well as an activity, a way of life as well as a process" (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 59).

Further, Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) stress that one of the key functions and tasks of the superintendent in creating learning community is to foster learning and collaboration through professional development and the use of creative structures to enable collaboration to occur. In addition, the superintendent of schools must make the necessary resources available in order for the critical aspects of

learning community to ever be realized and sustained over time (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Firestone & Bader, 1992; Leithwood et. al., 1998).

The research of school organizations as learning communities reveals significant results from these improvement efforts. The Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools (CORS) report that the successful, high performing schools they studied developed structures for "harnassing and developing individual commitment and talent into a group effort that pushes for learning of high intellectual quality" for all within the school community (Brandt, 1995, p. 73). Furthermore, leaders in learning community are catalysts for change. They provide leadership for the implementation of programs that improve the quality of teaching and learning and they provided appropriate pressure, direction, and optimism to stay the course when obstacles are encountered (Firestone & Bader, 1992).

Leadership in learning community creates synergy through aligned purpose and thoughtful action. According to Sergiovanni (1994), communities are collections of people who come together through sharing common commitments, ideas, and values. Further, Sergiovanni (2000) suggests that shared purpose and meaning are necessary for creating learning community for community is created through collective mind and heart.

In summary, the research literature posits that leadership for learning community is like a conductor of an orchestra. Like the conductor, the leaders of learning community are knowledgeable about their practice, they create and sustain focus for all within the organization towards the accomplishment of organizational

goals, and they create synergy between people and their work through the development of strong collegial relationships. In other words, leaders in learning communities, like conductors, create harmony in thought and behavior. This study contributes additional research to the field of educational administration related to the role of leadership in creating learning communities. Furthermore, the results of this study provide findings specifically related to the role of the superintendent, a critical leadership role that has been lacking in empirical research.

Overview of the Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership perspectives and behaviors of superintendents in developing learning community. The following research questions were designed to focus and guide the study.

1. What leadership perspectives and behaviors did these superintendents use to promote the development of learning community in their school districts?
    a.) What expectations were developed within these school districts?
    b.) What student academic outcomes were evident in these school districts?

This qualitative study was conducted using a multiple case study (Yin, 1994). Superintendents were selected for participation using a purposeful sampling strategy,

specifically intensity sampling. The successful superintendents were selected from school districts that are large, complex organizations that are experiencing significant change. One of the selected superintendents has been in his district for thirteen years and has worked for many years to establish a learning community. The other selected superintendent has been in her district for only a few years and is beginning the process of creating an organization that can be characterized as a learning community. Further, the superintendents were selected from districts that differ in the resources that are available to support innovation and learning. The two superintendents selected have both espoused support for the tenets of learning community and have expressed that the creation of such organizations is a focus of their leadership.

The research was collected over a period of several days in each of the participating districts with follow-up interviews held with the superintendents over the telephone. Several different methodologies were utilized to collect data. Semi-structured "elite interviews" were conducted with the participating superintendents, select board members, central office administrators, campus principals, and lead teachers (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 83). Other data collection methods such as observation, document analysis, and field notes were employed to ensure the triangulation of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Furthermore, an elaborate audit-trail was maintained throughout the course of the study.

The data compiled during the course of the study was analyzed using open coding and the constant comparison method of data analysis (Glasser & Strauss,

1967). As the data were studied, "chunks" of pertinent data were labeled using the informants' own terminology. The data were then grouped and labeled to form categories or themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The themes were then compared and categorized according to Fullan's (2001) *Framework for Leadership*, the theoretical model that was employed to focus the analysis and to facilitate an understanding of the data.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership perspectives and behaviors of superintendents in developing learning community. The results of this study indicate that although both school districts have attained district goals, including improved student performance, there are some differences in the leadership behaviors employed by the participating superintendents as they worked to create learning community. Following are some distinctions regarding the leadership of the superintendents using Fullan's (2001) *Framework for Leadership* in learning communities.

Moral purpose

Moral purpose refers to the overall purpose of the organization and with what the organization is trying to accomplish. In educational organizations, moral purpose relates to the primary function of these organizations – the learning of all children. Most often, leaders of learning community create a commitment to a moral purpose

through the articulation of a vision descriptive of a preferred future (Fullan 2001; Johnson, 1997; Senge, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1994; Staessens & Vandeberghe, 1994). The development of shared vision and values among the members of the organization produce individual and collective commitments to "engage in coordinated, or organized, action" (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995, p. 134).

A well-defined purpose and a shared organizational vision are critical to creating shared moral purpose and for providing a focus for all within the system. The superintendents who participated in this study are individually considered visionaries and they focus great time and attention on developing shared visions and a collective focus on student learning.

In the Oak Tree ISD, Dr. Hall has established significant consensus around the district vision. He has led the collaborative development of district mission, the identification of core values, and the development of a long-range plan for organizational improvement. These statements clearly convey across the organization and throughout the community that student learning is their priority. These documents also reveal their belief that gains in student learning are best accomplished when everyone within the school community is engaged in learning and improvement.

As Fullan (2001) suggests "moral purpose is to forge interaction – and even mutual purpose – across groups" (p. 25). Dr. Hall has provided the leadership for the creation of shared focus and purpose throughout the organization and throughout the larger community through the development of new relationships forged out of shared

purpose. Individuals with the Oak Tree ISD school community expressed deep personal commitment for one another and for the overall goals of the organization. Many of the individuals described all within the school organization as "family."

In the Cypress ISD, Dr. Garrett has also provided the leadership for achieving shared moral purpose. Dr. Garrett has challenged individuals within the district and throughout the entire community to commit to "creating optimum learning opportunities for every child" and for creating an organization that effectively prepares children, not for today, but for the future.

Dr. Garrett has created a new sense of purpose and focus for the district. She has fully engaged the community in purposeful dialogue about their hopes and dreams for their children and has encouraged and facilitated the convergence of these hopes and dreams into a shared vision for the school district. Many who had expressed doubts about the school district in the past, have now demonstrated support for the school district and for the new direction of the organization and for the work that is being done.

Understanding change

Leaders in learning communities serve as catalysts for purposeful change (Firestone & Bader, 1992; Fullan, 2001). Leaders in organizations that can be characterized as learning communities provide leadership for challenging conventional thinking, for the implementation of programs to improve the quality of

teaching and learning, and they provide the appropriate pressure, direction, support, and optimism throughout the implementation process (Firestone & Bader, 1992).

In the Oak Tree ISD, Dr. Hall demonstrates understanding of the complexities associated with change. He prepared his organization for a world of change by creating an environment where it is safe to explore new thinking, to innovate, and to make mistakes. Dr. Hall emphasizes that "he believes that the best way to help people understand and accept change is to be clear about your purpose, provide many kinds of opportunities to learn and challenge current thinking, and to provide continual support, recognition, and encouragement" (JH 344). In addition, Dr. Hall demonstrates resolve when things became difficult and he provides a positive orientation for the organization – a feeling that they will overcome. While he works to ready the organization for change and while leading the district straight into the change, Dr. Hall also serves as a steadying force. So despite any difficulties they may experience, he brings a sense of calm and purposefulness to the organization.

Dr. Garrett also appears to understand the dynamics of change. She frequently talks about the world of change and what leaders must do to prepare themselves to successfully lead and navigate others through complexities associated with change. "We as leaders must learn to change quickly. We must learn from what we did yesterday and use that knowledge to get better and better" (AG 97). Further, Dr. Garrett guides the preparation and the contemplation of change through dialogue about research and expert commentary. Dr. Garrett facilitates dialogue about critical issues and book studies with administrators throughout the district throughout the

year during their regularly scheduled meetings and also during their yearly administrative retreats (KS field notes). Dr. Garrett uses books and writings from the fields of education and business to focus and expand thinking about organizational change.

As Fullan suggests, "leading in a culture of change means producing the capacity to seek, critically assess, and selectively incorporate new ideas and practices – all the time, inside the organization as well as outside it" (p. 44). Both participating superintendents speak often of the future and they encourage others to think beyond the present moment. They encourage such thinking through dialogue about books, through the application of collaborative problem-solving techniques, and through the utilization of focused and interactive models of professional development for formal and informal leaders throughout the organization. These superintendents have created organizations where participants feel a sense of urgency and agency. They understand the need to challenge current mental models just to survive in a radically changing world, while at the same time, they feel a sense of efficacy – it is within their collective power to effect and manage change.

Relationship building

Communities are created through the development of relationships and commitments between people within the organization and throughout the larger school community (Sergiovanni, 1994). Individuals naturally seek community and connections to others and it is through the development of relationships with others

that these connections are developed (Wheatley & Kellner, 1997). Consequently, relationship building is a natural, yet critical function of organizational leadership (Fullan, 2001).

Both Dr. Hall and Dr. Garrett believe that relationships are the foundation of strong, effective organizations. Consequently, they both direct significant time and energy to the development of healthy relationships where the primary goal of the organization, the education of children, is the strengthening agent.

Dr. Hall believes that relationship building should be an ongoing activity of leaders. He says that relationships are founded upon shared experiences and leaders should ensure that most of these shared experiences are positive ones. "Relationships cannot be used as fire escapes, only to be called upon during crisis. Relationships are built over time" (KS field notes). Dr. Hall has developed strong relationships with individuals throughout the organization and throughout the entire community as evidenced with the many unique and innovative partnerships that have been established with the city of Oak Tree and with businesses throughout the community. These unique relationships between the school district and the community has led to the selection of the community of Oak Tree ISD as one of 30 finalists in the 1995 All-American City competition.

In the Oak Tree ISD, Dr. Hall has created more than just a collaborative environment, he has created a culture, expectations, and structures for interaction that appeared communal in nature. The individuals within this district demonstrated more than just collegiality, they demonstrated care for one another and passion and

commitment towards the work, the mission, and the goals of the organization. Numerous individuals described the sense of family that has been cultivated in this organization.

Dr. Garrett became the superintendent in the Cypress ISD after a failed bond issue threatened the cohesiveness of the communities the school district serves and, without the needed bond revenue, the infrastructure of the school district was compromised. Dr. Garrett led the school district through the crisis by healing wounded relationships and forging new and different relationships. She spent a great deal of time listening to the needs of the various communities and to their hopes and dreams for their children. She listened deeply, then persuaded each community to join together. Over time and with the successful passage of the most recent bond, Dr. Garrett has proven herself to the school district and to its larger community for relationships built upon strong trust and mutual respect and care have been established. As one respondent indicates, "the community certainly has a high regard and respect for the things they've seen done" (JS 415).

The superintendents participating in this study demonstrate a great degree of transport about the meaningful engagement of all within the school district and all within the larger school community in the work of their organizations. Both participating superintendents engage their communities in collaboratively developing new and creative commitments and solutions for their organizations. In both districts, events transpired that put the leadership of these superintendents to the test. In the Oak Tree ISD, a rollback election challenged the resolve of the entire community. In

the Cypress ISD, a failed bond issue threatened community unity and the long-term support for the critical work of this school district. Both superintendents engaged their communities in the resolution of these issues, serving only to strengthen relationships between the school districts and their communities.

Knowledge creation and sharing

According to Leithwood and his colleagues (1998), leaders of learning communities concern themselves with the development of individual and collective capacities. These leaders develop expectations and structures to encourage the creation of new knowledge, the exploration of new ideas, and the sharing of ideas with others (Fullan, 2001; Louis et. al., 1996). Furthermore, Ulrich, von Glinow, and Jick (1993) stress that leaders of learning community make learning a visible and central element of the organization, they invest in learning, publicly talk about learning, and they create symbols of learning. In learning communities, learning is a fundamental aspect of organizational life (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Sergiovanni, 2000).

Both Dr. Hall and Dr.Garrett epitomize the characteristics of lifelong learners. Both demonstrate a profound zest for learning and for the acquisition of new knowledge which sets them apart from the average leader. Fullan (2001) says that "one of life's greatest ironies" is that educational organizations are "in the business of teaching and learning, yet they are terrible at learning from each other" (p. 92). These superintendents work to ensure that learning is created and shared throughout the

organization and throughout the profession. While learning is a critical aspect of their own beings, Dr. Hall and Dr. Garrett expect all leaders to be learners and to model the importance of learning for others.

In the Oak Tree ISD, learning is a core value of the organization and, likewise, structures have been established to clearly articulate expectations for learning and to support the acquisition of new knowledge. A comprehensive professional development program is provided where non-traditional methods of delivery are used to actively engage learners in reflective thinking about practice. In addition, district policy requires a masters degree within ten years of employment and, through a partnership with an area university, the district provides the monetary support and the structure for complying with this requirement. Further, the district has established cohort masters and doctoral programs that are subsidized by the school district, including paid sabbaticals for teachers and administrators to conduct research (Oak Tree Administrative Regulation 523 & 528). Both programs have been designed collaboratively by the school district and a local university to ensure that the learning is relevant to the nuances of teaching in Oak Tree ISD. As a result of this initiative, the Oak Tree ISD has one of the highest percentages in the state of employees with advanced degrees (KS field notes). In addition, the Oak Tree ISD received recognition in 2001 from the United States Department of Education as a Distinguished School District for its innovative and quality professional development programs. In the history of this award, the Oak Tree ISD is one of only two school districts in the nation to have received this distinction.

Dr. Hall holds everyone accountable for learning. He also holds himself accountable for learning and supporting the learning and growth of others. During his annual evaluation with the Board of Trustees, Dr. Hall presents the results of a self-evaluation that he conducts. In this report, he includes a description of the professional growth opportunities for which he has taken advantage. Furthermore, he provides members of the Board a list of books and critical articles that he has studied throughout the year along with a short synopsis of the readings. He provides the Board with an explanation of how these experiences have influenced his thinking and his leadership.

Under the direction and leadership of Dr. Garrett, the Cypress ISD has begun developing new structures for the support of learning throughout the district. Dr. Garrett has restructured professional development in the Cypress ISD. New, non-traditional models of professional development that are more focused on organizational needs are being implemented. Professional development now emphasizes inquiry, dialogue, and reflective practice. Also, new structures and expectations for the professional development of leaders have been implemented. Administrative retreats are held several times per year and a new program of professional development designed specifically for the unique learning needs of leaders of learners has been implemented. Dr. Garrett also serves as a model for learning. Whenever she has the opportunity, Dr. Garrett references her own personal learning and talks about books and articles that have influenced her thinking.

Coherence making

Coherence making relates to the ability of leadership to create structure and focus for the organization. Research has demonstrated that effective superintendents tended to create tightly coupled systems, particularly in areas related to curriculum and instruction (LaRoque & Coleman, 1986; Murphy & Hallinger, 1986). The alignment of work within the organization through the articulation of vision, goals, and values of the organization and through the thoughtful implementation of programs assist individuals throughout the organization to align their own individual work and decision-making (Beckhard, 1997; Fullan 2001).

Both Dr. Hall and Dr. Garrett are systems thinkers and they strive to create systems and processes that are complimentary and supportive of the organizational goals. Both have developed shared vision and unity of purpose through dialogue and relationship building. In addition, they have employed comprehensive planning processes and curriculum alignment to create organizational coherence and to reduce redundancy and fragmentation.

Fullan (2001) describes coherency making as those efforts of leaders to create order and structure out of complex systems. In other words, coherency making is another way of thinking about systems. It is about creating logical paths from divergent work towards the actuation of organizational goals. Both Dr. Hall and Dr. Garrett are expert systems thinkers and they have worked to develop this kind of thinking throughout their organizations. They encourage leaders to use data to guide

and inform decision-making and to analyze issues and dilemmas to create new solutions.

The term coherence refers to logical interconnection, congruity, and consistency. Coherency building also applies to the leadership behaviors of these superintendents for it refers to the alignment of the leadership rhetoric and leadership action or behaviors. Both superintendents demonstrate passion and commitment for education and they worked to develop similar passion and commitment in others for the work. While they have worked to create unity of purpose through shared visions and commitments, they have also created new systems and structures to support these ideals in actual practice. Both superintendents demonstrate high leadership coherence for they work to develop and implement systems and structures to support what has been communicated as important.

Enthusiasm, Hope & Energy

Fullan (2001) found in his study of effective leaders of learning community, that these leaders demonstrated a hopeful and optimistic attitude that tended to be infectious. "Effective leaders make people feel that even the most difficult problems can be tackled productively. They are always hopeful – conveying a sense of optimism and an attitude of never giving up in the pursuit of highly valued goals" (Fullan, 2001, p. 7). Both leaders, Dr. Hall and Dr. Garrett, were described by respondents as enthusiastic and hopeful leaders. They exude high levels of energy and seem to enjoy their work. In fact, the word inspiring was used to describe both of

these leaders because of their positive outlook even when addressing issues or obstacles that one might consider formidable.

The participating superintendents concern themselves with building strong collegial and caring relationships and with developing shared values and commitments throughout the organizations. Further, both superintendents also created structures and systems to support the actualization of district ideals as characterized in district visions, beliefs, and goals.

Conclusions

This study has revealed the critical importance of leadership in the creation of learning community. School districts as learning communities require visionary superintendents who have the leadership skills for communicating the vision and for creating willingness on the part of others to commit to the vision and overall goals of the organization. Superintendents of learning community value and promote collaborative structures that engage people in new and innovative ways in the work of the organization.

Community building is created through the development of shared commitments. These commitments are developed through creating a shared sense of purpose among individuals within the organization and throughout the entire community. Community building is only created through a focus on relationship building. As architects of community building in educational organizations,

superintendents must bring people together through the purposeful creation of connections and commitments between people and the goals of the organization.

Leaders of learning community serve as a model of learning and they convey the expectation that learning is fundamental to individual and organizational improvement. In addition, leaders of learning community create organizations where learning is perceived as a core value. These leaders provide individual and organizational support and they facilitate intellectual stimulation through dialogue and comprehensive professional development programs. These leaders develop structures and policies to support learning and the sharing of new knowledge across the organization and to sustain learning and improvements over time.

Furthermore, I have learned that to lead the development of organizations as learning communities, leaders must have strong interpersonal skills. To create learning community, superintendents must be active listeners, reflective thinkers, and they must practice strong communication skills to develop the mutual trust and respect that is necessary to ensure that individuals feel safe to challenge current mental models and to develop new and innovative solutions to traditional problems.

I have also learned through this study the importance of high leadership coherence or alignment to the overall integrity of the organization. I found that leaders of learning community demonstrate high degrees of alignment between what they say and what they do. In other words, the behaviors and actions of leaders of learning community are consistent with their message. In order to demonstrate high leadership alignment or coherency, leaders must practice reflective thinking to

critically assess their own behaviors. Leaders of learning community model the leadership behavior that they expect of others.

This study has further revealed that leaders of learning communities employ systems thinking as a means of organizational improvement. These leaders demonstrate a keen awareness of how all aspects of the organization work together to achieve organizational results. These leaders initiate change and organizational improvement through the application of systems thinking and through the implementation of thoughtful, purposeful innovation.

Finally, I learned that organizations can achieve their goals and improve student performance as they work to create learning community. The goal of creating learning community may be one that is never completely actualized for it is uncertain how one would measure the accomplishment of this goal. However, simply the act of striving to create learning community appears to improve the overall quality of organizational life, ultimately leading to the accomplishment of other worthwhile and meaningful goals. As a consequence of working to create learning community, individual and collective effort is improved and demonstrable improvements in student performance are attained.

Fundamentally, learning community has to do with personal and professional commitments. Learning community is evidenced in the overall quality of organizational life and with how people feel about each other and about their work. Furthermore, learning community provides the culture and the environment that encourages people to fully maximize their skills and talents, giving them the freedom

to explore new ideas and new solutions which ultimately leads to significant and sustainable improvements in student learning and in the attainment of organizational goals.

Implications

A combination of unique and interrelated factors has contributed to the success of these superintendents. While they often differed in leadership style and on their approaches to issues, this study revealed that they both focused great time and attention on aspects of both the "systemsworld" and the "lifeworld" (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 15). Both superintendents demonstrate a strong business acumen by ensuring that the day to day business of the organization was managed in such a way that the focus of the school district could remain on what is most important – teaching and learning. These superintendents both provide a strong balance between the systemsworld and the lifeworld, and while they care for the systemsworld, their focus is primarily on the human elements of the organization, the lifeworld.

This research demonstrates that management skills are necessary skills for superintendents, but to create learning community requires a focus on interrelational skills such as communication skills and relationship building. As Bennis and O'Toole (2000) have emphasized, the development of "soft leadership skills" are absolutely critical to effective leadership today. The "soft skills" they describe include the ability to communicate with others, to actively listen, to develop

leadership in others, to create shared commitment and energize others towards a shared goal, and to demonstrate respect for followers (p. 175).

One implication of this research is that leaders of learning organizations must have well-honed "soft leadership skills" and they must employ these skills in order to effectively develop trust and shared purpose. Traditional superintendent preparatory programs tend to focus on the development of management skills with little, if any, exploration of the skills needed to successfully engage individuals in collective efforts for organizational improvement through the creation of organizations as learning communities. Preparatory programs and professional development experiences for superintendents need to expand to include the study and application of skills associated with leading aspects of the "lifeworld" and the fundamental principles of learning community.

A second implication that can be drawn from this research relates to the allocation and mobilization of resources to support learning community. The Oak Tree ISD and the Cypress ISD have very different capabilities in regards to the capacity of the districts to secure resources to support innovation. According to calculations provided by the state of Texas, the Oak Tree ISD is considered a "property-poor" school district, while the Cypress ISD is considered "budget-balanced" or "property wealthy" school district.

The Oak Tree ISD, despite having limited resources, has created profound and comprehensive structures to support collective and individual learning. The school district provides support for learning through *Pay for Knowledge* and the costs of

masters and doctoral degrees is subsidized for district employees. A great degree of alignment exists between what the leadership of the school district states is most important and with the initiatives that are monetarily supported. Consequently, school districts with limited resources can also create learning community through skillfully and thoughtfully leveraging district resources. Superintendents need to be provided opportunities through preparatory programs and professional development experiences to study how districts with limited resources are able to leverage resources to support ongoing learning experiences that are critical aspect of learning communities.

Needed Research

To date, a paucity of empirical research exists regarding the role of the superintendent. Consequently, additional research is needed to assist in developing new and better understandings of this critical leadership role. In addition, more research is needed to ameliorate understanding of the role of superintendents in creating learning community – organizations where people are bound together through shared goals and values and where learning is a fundamental aspect of organizational life.

Successful leaders concern themselves with the future of the organizations they lead – a future beyond their leadership. Further exploration or study is needed to examine the sustainability of learning community over time and beyond the tenure of any one superintendent. This research would need to include consideration of the

strategies employed by leaders to create sustainability, including strategies for mobilizing the appropriate resources. In addition, the research needs to include an analysis of the impact of superintendent tenure over organizational culture, innovation, and the ability of organizations to maintain the characteristics of learning community over time.

The superintendents participating in this study were obviously of different genders. Observations of these leaders revealed differences in their leadership styles and in their interactions with others, differences that may have to do with their gender. Future research into superintendent leadership in school districts as learning communities needs to include the examination of theoretical models of leadership in learning communities to establish correlations, if any, between these leadership frameworks and gender.

Conclusion

Why is community important? The term community is powerful for it has to do with the interdependence that exists across groups and the responsibility the group feels for all within the community. Community is a place where relationships are nurtured, sustained, and viewed as the foundation and strength of the organization. Leadership is critical in establishing the cultures, structures, and the expectations for the creation of learning community. The superintendents who participated in this study concerned themselves with the development of organizations as learning communities where shared commitments and shared hopes and dreams are realized

through working and learning together. In these school districts, the educational organization became a venue for community building – a place where people learn together, where commitments and ideas are shared, and where new solutions are explored.

This study has demonstrated that organizations can achieve their goals and improve student performance through working to develop organizations that can be characterized as a learning community. One of the more important distinctions about learning community is that it has much to do with personal and professional commitments. Learning community is about the overall quality of organizational life and about how people feel about each other and about their work. Furthermore, learning communities provide the culture and the environment that encourages people to think creatively, giving them the freedom to explore new ideas and new solutions.

These superintendents can be characterized as architects of organizations, building a foundation of strong relationships and shared learning, a foundation that will serve to sustain the organization over time. Ernest Boyer (1995) captures so well the learning communities being created by these gifted leaders.

> But community doesn't just happen, even in a small school. To become a true community the institution must be organized around people….What we are really talking about is the culture of the school, the vision that is shared, the way people relate to one another…Simply stated, the school becomes a community for learning when it is a purposeful place; a communicative place, a just place, a disciplined place, a caring place, and a celebrative place. (p. 17)

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Vita

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