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## Exemplary K-12 Superintendents and the Behaviors They Use to Create Personal and Organizational Meaning

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Exemplary K-12 Superintendents and the Behaviors They Use to Create Personal and  
Organizational Meaning

A Dissertation by

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Irvine, California

School of Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

March 2017

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Exemplary K-12 Superintendents and the Behaviors They Use to Create Personal and  
Organizational Meaning

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## ABSTRACT

### Exemplary K-12 Superintendents and the Behaviors They Use to Create Personal and Organizational Meaning

by Frances E. Hansell

**Purpose:** The purpose of this thematic, mixed-methods case study was to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary K-12 superintendents use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to determine the degree of importance to which followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning.

**Methodology:** This study was accomplished through interviews of exemplary K-12 superintendents in urban and suburban public school districts in Northern California and surveying followers in the organizations.

**Findings:** The findings from this research illustrate how exemplary K-12 superintendents use behaviors that include character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration to make personal and organizational meaning. By identifying and describing the behaviors K-12 superintendents use through the five domains, best practices may be able to be developed.

**Recommendations:** Further research is recommended by replicating this study with other principals and teachers to create meaning through the five domains. There is a need to conduct a study combining the results of this study with the peer researchers and to compare the results. Other recommendations include superintendents' description of

values that support character, followers' perceived leader behaviors that demonstrate character, the relationship between time spent with superintendents and followers' perceived meaning, and depth of meaning achieved by superintendent longevity.



## PREFACE

Following discussions and considerations regarding the opportunity to study meaning making in multiple types of organizations, four faculty researchers and 12 doctoral students discovered a common interest in exploring the ways exemplary leaders create personal and organizational meaning. This resulted in a thematic study conducted by a research team of 12 doctoral students. This mixed-methods investigation was designed with a focus on character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration that influences behaviors that K-12 superintendents used to make meaning for themselves and their organizations. Exemplary leaders were selected by the team from various public, profit, and nonprofit organizations to examine the behaviors these professionals used. Each researcher interviewed three highly successful professionals to determine what behaviors helped them to make meaning; the researcher then administered a survey to 12 followers of each leader to gain their perceptions about the leadership behaviors most important to creating meaning in their organization. To ensure thematic consistency, the team co-created the purpose statement, research questions, definitions, interview questions, survey, and study procedures.

Throughout the study, the term “peer researchers” is used to refer to the other researchers who conducted this thematic study. My fellow doctoral students and peer researchers studied exemplary leaders in the following fields: Barbara Bartels, presidents of private nonprofit universities in Southern California; Kimberly Chastain, CEOs of charter school organizations; Candice Flint, presidents or CEOs of nonprofits in Northern California; Stephanie A. Herrera, female CEOs of a private sector companies in Southern California; Sandra Hodge, CEOs of engineering technology organizations; Ed Jackson,

technology leaders in Northern California; Robert J. Mancuso, a managing partner in a consulting firm; Zachary Mercier, NCAA Division 1 and professional athletic extraordinary coaches; Sherri L. Prosser, healthcare CEOs in California; Jamel Thompson, K-12 superintendents in Southern California; Rose Nicole Villanueva, police chiefs in California and Utah; and I studied K-12 superintendents in Northern California.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This country is at a profound time in its evolution. It is manifesting a new reality—a new paradigm—a new potential for life on planet earth (Myss, 2006). In the postmodern, pluralistic world, there is a moral imperative for understanding how meaning impacts oneself and others in organizations. Leaders throughout the world are being asked to make sense of complexity in the workplace with unprecedented divergence of technology and demands on time and resources.

At the core of most definitions of leadership are two functions: “providing direction” and “exercising influence.” Each of these functions can be carried out in different ways, and such differences distinguish many models of leadership from one another. As Yukl (2002) noted,

Leadership influences the interpretation of events for followers, the choice of objectives for the group or organization, the organization of work activities to accomplish objectives, the motivation of followers to achieve the objectives, the maintenance of cooperative relationships, teamwork and the collaboration and cooperation from people outside the group or organization. (p. 3)

In today’s turbulent environment finding satisfaction is difficult. Everyone is trying to provide direction or influence in their lives. Never before has there been such a conscious need for spirituality in people’s personal and professional lives; they are psychologically distressed, emotionally possessed, and searching for meaning in their lives (Myss, 2006). With consequences for every decision a leader makes, it is vital to rethink purpose and behaviors used to create personal and organizational meaning. Over the past 20 years, numerous researchers have proposed different constructs or theories

suggesting that the work environment or organizational culture are important to satisfaction and organizational success (Cooperrider, 2012; Kotter, 2012; Senge, 2015; Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010).

Culture is a carrier of meaning. Cultures provide not only a shared view of “what is” but also of “why is.” One author who talks about “story” is Gardner (2005) in *5 Minds for the Future*. In this view, culture is about “the story” in which people in the organization are embedded and the values and rituals that reinforce that narrative. It also focuses attention on the importance of symbols and the need to understand them—including the idiosyncratic languages used in organizations—in order to understand culture. Kotter (2012) reinforced the idea that “ritual and culture powerfully influence human behavior, because it’s near invisibility makes it hard to address directly” (p. 156). Culture is inherently intangible, and a static definition of culture struggles to encapsulate the meaning and implications of its role in an organization. Likewise Deal and Peterson (2009) noted, “The invisible, taken-for-granted flow of beliefs and assumptions gives meaning to what people say and do (p. 6). The most positive cultures value staff members who help lead their own development, create well-defined improvement plans, organize study groups, and learn in a variety of ways. Deal and Peterson described that cultures celebrating, recognizing, and supporting staff learning bolster professional community in their book *Shaping School Culture: The Heart of Leadership*.

One way to define culture is simply as the overarching mentality of behavior within the context of a given group (e.g., an organization, business, country, etc.). Culture provides a guiding perspective on how individuals within that group should act, and what meaning can be derived from those actions (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

Expectation, traditions, values, ethics, vision, and mission can all both communicate and reinforce a given group culture. Above all else, culture must be shared internally; otherwise it loses its form (Boundless, 2015). It is this process of setting the culture of an organization that makes leadership so important. Deal and Peterson (1999) contended that “culture consists of the stable, underlying social meanings that shape belief and behavior over time” (p. 7). This remains an undeniable truth today in organizations that systemic change is not for the faint of heart but must be cultivated through the capacity of the people. McKee, Boyatzis, and Johnston (2008) described “the paradox of leading others in building meaning—they call—resonance and effectiveness—must begin with ourselves” (p. 37). They further contended that it is inspiration and relationships that are essential in “supporting the commitment to a hopeful, inspiring future—with people in your life and work” (McKee et al., 2008, p. 177). By focusing on relationships—“their partnership is an essential element touchstone” (McKee et al., 2008, p. 81).

According to Frankl (2006), the perception of meaning is “to become aware of what can be done about a given situation” (p. 144). In his book *Man’s Search for Meaning*, Frankl described the source of his strength to survive the Nazi extermination camps. He wrote about three sources for meaning: work, love, and courage. His insights are a reminder that in order to achieve self-fulfillment, it is personal choice that must drive people’s behaviors. In expressing the meaning of his life in one sentence, Frankl said, “The meaning of my life is to help others find the meaning of theirs” (p. 165). Many 20th-century spiritual leaders assert that personal meaning transcends the human spirit (Gandhi, Dalai Lama, Mother Teresa, Mandela, and Martin Luther King, Jr.). Mandela’s (2012) leadership in the apartheid movement in South Africa was focused on

the next generation and how to make a better life that “will be measured by the happiness and welfare of the children, at once the most vulnerable citizens and greatest of treasures” (p. 167). These leaders embody the concept of creating meaning for self and how it relates to the greater good of humanity across organizations.

Education is transforming from the industrialized era to the rapid change of the postmodern world (K. Robinson, 2015; Rogers, 2016; Van Deuren, Evert, & Lang, 2015). The role of the modern superintendent has become one of the most crucial and complex in navigating many elements to ensure the success of all stakeholders (Watkins, 2013). The analogy of an orchestra conductor comes to mind. Like a conductor, she guides a shared vision of exemplary performance, manages disparate components and constituents to ensure progress toward that goal, and serves as a model for inspired leadership. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that a consensus is coalescing around the five core responsibilities proposed by Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2006), who held the district leader responsible not only for managing organizational and environmental capacity and providing results-driven leadership but also for creating a values-driven culture, defining clear instructional focus, and ensuring accountability for results. Within all the responsibilities of the successful superintendent, the need to build a culture and environment that creates personal and professional meaning is paramount (Zenger & Folkman, 2009).

### **Background**

Many universal leadership theories have been studied throughout history with their origins dating back to Greek times. Since time began, leaders have yearned for meaning in their lives. Leadership, and the study of it, has roots in the beginning of

civilization (Maxwell, 2011). Egyptian rulers, Greek heroes, and biblical patriarchs all have one thing in common—leadership. From Plato (400 BC) and Aristotle (343 BC) to Mills (1850), reflections of moral and ethical purpose in leadership have been studied (Wren, 1995). Modern trends claim that servant leadership should be motivational, moral, and civil. Greenleaf (2002) asserted that “a new moral principle is emerging which holds that the only authority deserving one’s allegiance is that which is freely and knowingly granted by the leader in response to, and in proportion to, the clearly evident servant stature of the leader” (p. 11). There are many examples of worldwide leaders who have demonstrated extraordinary influence over time—Napoleon, Washington, Lincoln, Churchill, Sadat, Thatcher, and Theodore Roosevelt (Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Gardner & Laskin, 2011; Graham, 1991).

As the universal leadership theories have evolved over time, the organizational focus of the leader has been transformed (Manz & Sims, 2001). Early organizations with authoritarian leaders believed employees were intrinsically lazy and needed to be told the way to make work environments more conducive to increased productivity rates. Today, organizations are transforming into places where people are empowered, encouraged, and supported in their personal and professional growth throughout their careers. As the focus of leaders has changed over time, it has influenced and shaped the development and progression of leadership theory. Manz and Sims (2001) asserted, “It provides a road map for meeting vast challenges and opportunities in a way in which everyone can be involved and, in a very real sense, everyone can be a leader” (p. 5).

## **Historical Leadership**

The success of any organization depends in large part on the quality of interaction among leaders, teammates, and associates. What determines the quality of these interactions is tied closely in the perception that these people have of the leader's behavior in five areas: vision for the organization, relationships between the leader and team members, character of the leader, inspiration the leader provides, and wisdom of the leader. During the past 200 years, many authors have tried to define extraordinary leadership capacity and its effect on individuals and organizations. According to Carlyle's great man theory in the 1800s, the notion of charismatic, wise heroes was considered (Harter, 2008). This was followed by Margaret Mead's (1949) pioneering studies of culture and personality in trait theory. Next, the trend moved to a behavioral focus with behavioral theories through the 1960s. It was during this period that Graves (2005) and Frankl (2006) proposed their cornerstone ideals of trying to answer the question that life asks of us: What does it mean to be responsible for our existence?

Among the foundational building blocks of Frankl's (2006) existential analysis and logotherapy is the commitment to meaningful values and goals. In brief, Frankl identified three categories of values that, when actualized, provide sources of authentic meaning: creative values, that is "by doing or creating something"; experiential value, that is "by experiencing something or encountering someone"; and attitudinal values, that is "by choosing one's attitude toward suffering" (Frankl, 2006, p. 111). Actualizing such values is not only the quid pro quo of the human quest for meaning but also provides a useful point of reference for reflecting upon the search for meaning at work. This viewpoint is supported by multiple authors who state that universal needs, relationships,

and wisdom contribute to a synergy that leads to increased customer share and investor performance (Berg, Dutton, & Wrzesniewski, 2013; Grant, 2013; Mandela, 2012; Sandberg, 2013; Zenger & Folkman, 2009). Likewise contingency and transformational theories at the turn of the 20th century support ideas that subordinate, task, and/or group variables influence leader outcomes. Therefore the effectiveness of a given pattern of leader behaviors is contingent upon the demands imposed by a situation. Multiple authors affirm this theory (Bennis, 2007; Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson 2001; Kouzes & Posner, 1989).

Authentic and servant leadership theories in the 2000s support the claim that high moral purpose be a priority in the 21st century. Many studies support a trend toward self-awareness and honesty with followers built on positivity and truthful self-concepts promoting openness (Ariely, 2013; Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Raison, 2001; Wheatley, 2005). Research also reveals there are many theories and frameworks that attempt to explain leadership and its importance to the success of organizations. There are also different theorists and philosophers who explore the importance of finding meaning in life and work. While the literature provides insight into the individual leadership elements of vision, character, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration, there is an absence of a theoretical framework that explores all five holistically as a construct of what exemplary leaders do to create personal and professional meaning in organizations.

### **Meaning Makers**

The theoretical framework for the five domains of “meaning” explored in this research was first introduced by Dr. Keith Larick and Dr. Cindy Petersen (2015) in a series of conference presentations and lectures to school administrators in ACSA and to

doctoral students at Brandman University. This initial research and work by Dr. Larick and Dr. Petersen coupled with their leadership experience as school superintendents inspired the need to explore what exemplary leaders do to develop personal and organizational meaning leading to high achievement. The five domains of leadership explored in this research include character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration. The framework proposed by Larick and Petersen suggests that while each domain has merit, it is the interaction of the domains that support the making of meaning in organizations. In a 2015 ACSA State Conference presentation, Larick and Petersen proposed that leaders with character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration have the integral skills to create personal and organizational meaning. In recent presentations at Brandman University, Larick and Petersen (2016) further asserted that the creation of personal and organizational meaning is fundamental to leading innovation and transformational change.

Adam Grant (2013) at Wharton Business School suggested that there are three strategies that leaders should leverage when it comes to creating more meaningful work: (a) show your people how their work benefits others, (b) share how others appreciate your people's work, and (c) help people develop a deeper understanding of customer's problems and needs. People want to be part of something significant—something larger than life. They want to do important work and contribute and be appreciated. They want to grow, develop, and excel. They want to experience new things. They want to relate to other people they trust and respect. And perhaps most of all, they want to make a difference. Grant (2013) contended, "Originality is taking the road less traveled, championing a set of novel ideas that go against the grain but ultimately make things



better” (p. 3). In short, they want to create meaning in their own lives and strive toward a shared vision in making a positive impact on others. According to Daniel Pink (2006, 2012), author and expert on the nature of work, meaning and purpose are core motivators, alongside autonomy and mastery. Money alone is not enough to push a person to do his or her best. Instead, people are driven and inspired when they believe what they do serves importance beyond themselves. They long for this meaning.

Myers (2012), in her book *Take the Lead: Motivate, Inspire, and Bring out the Best in Yourself and Everyone Around You*, personifies important lessons in leadership. She asserted that it is in moments of passionate engagement that people rise to their greatest abilities and proudest accomplishments, bringing out the best in everyone. Leadership is a quality they nurture in themselves. Myers (2012) contended that it is a function of how individuals demonstrate the ability to engage in relational leadership that creates meaning. Researchers have found that leaders can help make people’s work more meaningful by acting with humility, giving them the freedom to make choices, opportunities for improvement and change, giving regular feedback, and ensuring that people can see things through from start to finish (Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010).

### **The Five Domains**

There is an abundance of research about the five domains—character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration. This study sought to research their use by exemplary leaders’ and how they create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers. Research affirms the power of each of the domains independently, but the research lacks cohesion for consideration of whether they bring collective meaning to leaders (Kotter, 2012; K. Robinson, 2006; Ruiz, 2013; Senge,

2006; Sinek, 2009). Similarly, followers are at the heart of the claim along with their perceptions of the importance of the five domains to create organizational meaning.

**Character.** In the international research conducted by Kouzes and Posner (2007) to identify the attributes people wanted most in leaders, they identified honest, forward-looking, competent, inspiring, and intelligent. Honesty refers to a facet of moral character and connotes positive and virtuous attributes. It was the number one priority for all people when identifying what they want in leaders. Other researchers have reached similar conclusions concerning character suggesting that this trait is important for leaders as they serve as a positive role model and guide their organization (Senge, 1990). For a historical example, Lincoln is remembered for his character as a leader and always being humble yet resolute with his words, “You were right and I was wrong” (Alvy & Robbins, 2010, p. 60).

**Vision.** A compelling organizational vision often attracts people when it is challenging and important. It touches the hunger for meaning that resides in everyone (Bennis & Goldsmith, 2010; Center for Organizational and Personal Excellence, 1998; Kotter, 2012; Kouzes and Posner, 2006, 2009, 2012; Pearce & Manz, 2005). Kotter (2012) described a laser-like focus, a need to change, and stating a clear target as effective vision. He stated, “My rule of thumb: If you cannot describe your vision to someone in five minutes and get their interest, you have more work to do in this phase of a transformative process” (Kotter, 2012, p. 80). Only in the last decade or so has management shifted to developing leaders—people who can create and communicate visions and strategies. Kotter called this “incubators of leadership” and contended that

“narrowly defined jobs, risk-averse cultures, and micromanaging bosses are the norm in far too many places” (p. 175).

Creating a shared vision and developing leaders is what exemplary leadership is all about. Kouzes and Posner (2006) supported this by saying, “What people really want to hear is not the leader’s vision. They want to hear about *their own* aspirations. They want to see themselves in the picture of the future that the leader is painting” (p. 108). The struggle remains for leaders to communicate an image of the future that draws others in—that speaks to what others see and feel. Getting followers excited about future possibilities requires deep understanding of yearnings, fears, joys, and sorrow. In short, “it really just calls for listening very, very closely to what other people want” (Kouzes & Posner, 2006, p. 112).

**Relationships.** One of the most profound experiences people can have in their lives is the connection they have with other human beings. Positive and supportive relationships will help them to feel healthier, happier, and more satisfied with their lives. Leaders are called upon to build relationships with diverse people. Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) contended that “globalization and equal hiring initiatives mean more and more of us work with people of different cultures, backgrounds, orientations, races, and life stages” (p. 104). Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) posited that optimistic leaders produce happier followers; they stated, “Soft changes translated into hard improvements in production and customer perceptions . . . she began talking about the importance of caring for each other” (p. 106). Optimistic leaders make caring relationships with people in their organizations.

Many authors support the idea that relationships are built upon a direct correlation between positive relationships in the workplace and the personal benefit they give. In fact in the book, *Influencer: The Power to Change Anything*, Patterson, Grenny, and Maxfield (2013) asserted, “Savvy influencers develop an influence strategy that offers social capital required to help make change inevitable” (p. 192). Likewise McKee et al. (2008) stated, “Leaders use their positive emotion to renew themselves and to create positive relationships and a healthy, vibrant environment” (p. 41). Consensus abounds on the importance of personal relationships, and Heifetz and Linsky (2002) saw it as a crucial factor in exemplary leadership. They noted, “One of the distinguishing qualities of successful people who lead in any field is the emphasis they place on personal relationships” (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p. 75).

**Wisdom.** Wisdom is deemed to come primarily from “internal sources,” meaning one’s own introspective thinking, analysis, and judgment. Wisdom is observing experiences and learning from them in a way that affects future decisions and behaviors. This work embodies the commitment to a manner of coexistence in which love, mutual respect, honesty, and social responsibility arise spontaneously from living instant after instant. Sternberg (1998) described this as “multiple elements form the backdrop for a theory of wisdom including aspects of knowledge, information processing, intellectual style, personality, motivation and environmental context” (p. 6). Developing wisdom requires that people shed their old constructs and replace them with more reliable models (R. Klein, 2009). In making complex decisions, people often judge their choice—postdecision—as having acted wisely or with wisdom. Organizational leaders are no

exception; when they do not act wisely, their organization suffers, as does the greater society.

Important factors in wisdom include believing that personal change is possible, seeing strengths and weaknesses as objectively as possible, and understanding the important qualities for building a high-performing organization. Wisdom comes from the knowledge that one can hone skills and forge interpersonal relationships. Understanding how wisdom can be attained is significant in maintaining an acceptable sense of fairness and equity for all people in the organization. Pfeffer (2010) was quite candid in his approach to wisdom when he stated, “The message is that you need to master the knowledge and skills necessary . . . in some circumstances, this may be good for the organization, but in virtually all circumstances, it is going to be good for you” (p. 225). He further stated, “So seek power as if your life depends on it. Because it does” (p. 236). Spano’s (2013) findings on wisdom and leadership indicated that people experience wisdom in one or more of the following domains: cognitive, affective, and reflective. She concluded that wisdom correlates to meaning making in leadership (Spano, 2013). Similarly Warm’s (2012) dissertation, *Leading Deeply: A Heroic Journey Toward Wisdom and Transformation*, evidences self-knowledge, meaning making, and giving something back to this world, ultimately wisdom. These scholars contended that developing leadership, wisdom, meaning, and purpose are part of a journey throughout life.

**Inspiration.** Without a doubt, multiple authors contended that inspiration is essential to driving change in organizations and supporting transitions to new beginnings (Anderson, 2015; Covey, 1990; Frankl, 2006; Kotter, 2012; Senge, 1990; Wilber, 2000;

Yukl, 2002). Research suggests that there is a correlation between the ability of leaders to be inspiring and their ability to get results. This implies that bringing out the greatness in teams and performance will yield results based on inspiration. Inspirational leaders are self-assured, confident, and more strongly convinced of the truth in what they are saying. Sir Ken Robinson rose to prominence with his TedTalk, *Do Schools Kill Creativity* (K. Robinson, 2006) and went on to write the book, *Finding Your Element: How to Discover Your Talents and Passions and Transform Your Life* (K. Robinson, 2013).

Being in one's element is about tapping into his or her natural energy and inspiring others to do the same honoring that person's most authentic self. Inspiration that relates creativity to intelligence in education, in business, and beyond can have a profound impact on creating meaning. In a collaborative effort, Collins and Hansen (2011) described the ability to radiate energy and competitive intensity to inspire others. Indeed Sinek (2009) believed a willingness to ask the question why inspires action. He contended, "It helps us understand why we do what we do" (Sinek, 2009, p. 38). He continued, "No matter the size of the organization, if we all take some responsibility to start with WHY and inspire others to do the same, then, together, we can change the world. And that's pretty inspiring" (Sinek, 2009, p. 225).

### **Personal Meaning**

Exemplary leaders who experience personal meaning are engaged, excellent, and dedicated to the pursuit of ethics (Bennis, 1984; Burns, 1978). An exemplary leader can be anyone who confronts what is in front of him or her and mobilizes others around him or her, and then, large-scale movements begin to change the way organizations operate. This country is now at a historical transition in which it is crucial that learning be placed

in the context of action, as a way of being in the world. The way of looking at the world has separated people from their bodies, emotions, moods, and the capacity to feel and sense. It is causing tremendous breakdowns in professional creativity and personal fulfillment. The capacity to learn helps individuals move their professional goals forward and evolve as people. There is a long tradition that goes back thousands of years in both the East and the West of self-mastery being designed to serve the greater good. Furthermore, Strozzi-Heckler (2007) contended that the culmination of pragmatic wisdom, skillful action, and grounded compassion—a self who is not driven by compulsion, fear, or self-interest, but acts for the greater good—exemplifies how “cultivating the self produces a leadership sensibility that contributes to the success of the individual and the entire enterprise” (p. 27).

Having clear insight about what one is good at, what is difficult, and what one needs to learn to be one’s best involves a “mindful awareness of who you currently are” (McKee et al., 2008, p. 47). These scholars agree that who people are is a combination of how they regularly act, their experiences, roles, and identity—dreams, values, and beliefs. Exploring actions helps them to see patterns over their entire life. Beginning a reflective process of seeing themselves how they really are brings awareness and meaning to people’s lives. McKee et al. (2008) stated, “This process is a powerful reminder of how you have grown and changed and how crucial it is to pay attention to the most important aspects of your life” (p. 114).

### **Organizational Meaning**

Sir Ken Robinson (2015) shared groundbreaking work on creativity in education in his book, *Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That’s Transforming*

*Education.* He causes his readers to rethink purpose and behaviors used to create personal and organizational meaning with a sense of urgency. Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) contended that organizational meaning occurs when innovative leaders adapt organizational structures to compete in today's unreliable market. Indeed a recent Gallup poll in 2013 canvassed more than a billion people in 60 countries and revealed that four out of five people said they were dissatisfied at work because they did not think they could bring all of themselves to their job.

Consequently, great leaders recognize and establish positive work environments that inspire employees, meet customer expectations, and give stakeholders confidence. Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) stated, "Humble leaders take the blame for mistakes and share credit for success" (p. 129). When leaders talk and act on their values inside and outside of the organization, employees and customers have more confidence in them. There is a sense of trust and integrity shared throughout the organization. This "clearinghouse for innovation" is Ulrich and Ulrich's contention that a positive work environment is rooted in how people treat each other from employee to customer interactions. This is supported by the work of Crowley (2011) who contended, "Long after you can remember the actual work or the targets you met along the way, what's sustained in your memory is the effect you had on people's lives. By this one measure, above all others, you'll know the true impact you had as a leader" (p. 137). Clemmer (1995) contended that organizational energy is created and released when people are emotionally and intellectually excited by vision and values. Kotter (2012) asserted, "There is no greater sense of meaning and purpose than encouraging others to leap into the future and who thus expand the leadership capacity in their organization—these people provide a profoundly important



service for the entire human community” (p. 194). The study of meaning is critical to all leaders and organizations. It is through creating a better understanding of meaning in the context of work that people become more productive and achieve satisfaction both personally and in organizations (Zenger, Folkman, & Edinger, 2010).

Subsequently the five domains—character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration—became increasingly important for exemplary leaders in creating meaning and navigating the complex business of leading others. Developing a personal and organizational purpose adds a richer sense of meaning to any improvement effort. It is meaning that satisfies a universal need to make a difference. Clemmer (1995) and many other scholars discussed strategies for organizational improvement along with personal transformation that propels self and organizations toward truly effective improvement. The ability to inspire and motivate is considered one of the most important traits of exemplary leaders, and research indicates a strong correlation between the abilities of leaders to be inspiring and achieve high performance.

### **K-12 Superintendent**

The facts and figures are well known: In the United States, each year more than 48 million children are enrolled in the public school system. More than 13,000 individuals are engaged as school system superintendents. K-12 superintendents have one of the most complex leadership roles in the United States and are charged with the responsibility of multi-million dollar budgets, understanding the infinite details of finance, dealing with politics, the board, unions, transportation, maintenance, and food services. In addition to this K-12 superintendents deal with many governance issues: developing a high-quality governance team through board planning and building

relationships; making change in a political setting; creating a culture of high achievement through human resource development; ensuring effective instruction, curriculum practices, assessment, and accountability; leading 21st century ability and innovation; being ethical and reflective in leadership; understanding the myriad of laws; and effective communications, community engagement, and public relations. They lead their school system's instructional programs with technology, build healthy relationships between their school system and other governmental agencies that serve the same geographic entity, and with the citizens who live in their school system, especially the parents of the children who are served by their schools, and manage the funding, functionality and operations of their school system (Frailey, 2016).

Representing their school system in local, statewide, and national arenas, the superintendent works at the center of a network of systems that operate in, and in relationship to, the school district. Critical to the success of the system is the leadership of the superintendent. The challenges are many for the superintendent to provide personal and organizational meaning amid the complexities of the job. The responsibilities with shrinking budgets, increasing demands on time and energy, and pressure from boards and stakeholders are minimizing the effectiveness of building a culture conducive to personal and organizational meaning. In a recent address to AASA's urban superintendent's academy, Alton Frailey issues a reminder of the main priority in this work: "It's about the kids." He went on to say, "If you want to serve children and fight for children, this is the place to be. . . . we need the leadership." The superintendent must make a commitment to all school children. This is not for the faint

of heart but is a reminder of superintendents' purpose and provides personal and organizational meaning to the district and community (Berry, 2015; Frailey, 2016).

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

This nation is in unprecedented times when organizations and businesses are experiencing rapid changes that impact the ability to innovate and create a culture of productivity. The multigenerational workforce produces exponential demands on leaders with new and emerging technologies, innovative learning/new skills, and choice in the global world (INC., 2012). Never has there been a more compelling reason to examine the behaviors K-12 superintendents use to create meaning for themselves and followers in the educational arena.

Workers at every level are experiencing increased tension and uncertainty in their jobs today. Maxwell (2011) called the highest and most difficult level of leadership "The Pinnacle." He said that it requires effort, skill, intentionality, and a high level of talent and stresses the importance for leaders to develop their followers to become leaders. High investment in people deepens relationships and strengthens loyalty that improves everybody's performance (Maxwell, 2011). Until each person finds meaning in the work, stress will continue to reduce individual and organizational capacity (Rothstein, Miller, & Smith, 1994). In education, superintendents are experiencing similar stress on the job, which reduces the capacity to lead. Increased demands on their ability to juggle school boards, staff unions, community, stakeholders, budget, student achievement, and so forth is creating tremendous stress and burnout.

As instructional leaders, superintendents are faced with tackling high-stakes advances in educational reform under The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; A. Klein,

2015). Common Core State Standards (CCSS), Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), and 21st century learning for college/career readiness are driving forces for academic competency throughout California's K-12 schools and places greater demands on teachers. Superintendents must start conversations and speak with clarity, confidence, and courage to all stakeholders in a culture that is adverse to conflict and yet demands constant communication (Abrams, 2009). California's superintendents need to contend with current legislation, new testing measures such as California Assessment Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP; California Department of Education [CDE], 2015), and new budget formulas with Local Control Funding Formulas (LCFF; CDE, 2013) while trying to build collective organizational meaning.

The pressure to have all stakeholders join the conversation about increasing student achievement is immense and the superintendent is the one to lead this challenge. LCFF represents a major shift in how California funds local school districts. Superintendents in California are faced with issues of equity and employing a student-focused formula that provides more funding to school districts based on numbers and concentration of high-need students/English learners and low-income and foster youth. The Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP; CDE, 2014) mandate aimed to support conditions of learning, pupil outcomes, and engagement. It must have stated goals, metrics in eight priority areas, and engage parents, staff, and community members to gather input (CDE, 2014). These increasing responsibilities continue to reflect an ongoing concern in education that superintendents in California need to be able to negotiate successfully with multiple stakeholders in a time of uncertainty. A core challenge for superintendents is in understanding that "success or failure emerges from

the accumulation of daily choices that propel you in productive directions or push you off a cliff” (Watkins, 2013, p. 229). It is imperative that the superintendent’s role becomes a priority in breaking the cycle predominantly driven by testing and accountability and maximizes potential for collaborative leadership. DeWitt (2017) posited, “Acknowledge potential of the people around you and honoring their voices. By being a leader who is both visionary and collaborative—one who works with all stakeholders to make a *shared* vision a reality. We are all in this together—it is time we start leading that way” (p. 186).

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this mixed-methods case study was to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary K-12 superintendents use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to determine the degree of importance to which followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration create personal and organizational meaning

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the behaviors that exemplary K-12 superintendents use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration?
2. To what degree do followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning?

## Significance of the Problem

Leaders have long articulated the close tie between a strong public education system and democracy itself (Chen, 2010; Dewey & Rogers, 2012; DuFour & Fullan, 2013; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002; Kay & Greenhill, 2013). As Fullan and Quinn (2016) stated, “The leader should establish a learning culture in which many people are expected to develop their leadership skills, help others do the same and develop and use other tools to systematically foster leadership in the system” (pp. 134-135). Today’s school superintendents lead increasingly complex organizations and work in demanding environments. An essential skill for successful superintendents is understanding and respecting the diverse, global workforce/workplace.

Cultural leadership challenges superintendents to understand and act on the important role a system’s culture has in achieving successful student learning outcomes for all districts, schools, and students. In their book *Personalizing 21st Century Education: A Framework for Student Success*, Domenech, Sherman, and Brown (2016) stated that “all learning is an active process of making meaning on the part of the learner” (p. 54). Superintendents understand the people in the district and community, the historical evolution of how things came to be, and how to connect with district traditions in order to move the district forward while supporting the district’s efforts to achieve individual and collective goals. Valuing the history, traditions, and norms of the district and community, a superintendent must be able to “re-culture” the district if needed, to align its culture with the district’s goals to improve student and adult learning outcomes, and to approach their work with adults and students with passion, meaning, and purpose. Zenger and Folkman (2009) and AASA (Frailey, 2016) continue to support the idea that

creating meaning is crucial for leaders and superintendents to lead effective organizations and school districts, raise student achievement, and support wellbeing for themselves and their followers.

Filling the gap in understanding will bring new knowledge to both superintendents and school boards. It will contribute to the work of ACSA, AASA, and the National School Boards Association (NSBA) as K-12 superintendents strive to: implement new research-based metrics designed for college/career/life readiness skills, and develop a growth mindset that empowers students to approach their future with confidence to achieve big dreams. Like the global economy, today's students are driven by ideas, design thinking, and innovation as a way to transfer the use of time, space, personal, and grouping structures. A McKinsey (Manyika et al., 2011) report posited that the lack of a customer-centric view severely limits the organizational ability to use any of these powerful big data levers to create new value. K-12 superintendents will also have to wrestle with the board on legal issues relating to their stance on intellectual property for data and how they will think about liability (Manyika et al., 2011). Meaningful system-wide reform is unlikely to be accomplished without paying attention to the complex bureaucracies of which schools are a part, and K-12 superintendents must accompany employees as they walk through the processes, step by step, helping them imagine ways that the process could be changed. Focusing relentlessly on relationships is the ultimate tool for influencing the performance of others. Leaders who get accountability right know that most people want to do great work (Pennington, 2015).

## Definitions of Terms

Following are definitions of terms relevant to the study. For alignment and clarity the following definitions are presented with the theoretical definition followed by the operational definition.

### Exemplary

**Theoretical definition.** Someone set apart from peers in a supreme manner, with suitable behaviors, principles, or intentions that can be copied (Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin, 2014).

**Operational definition.** Exemplary leaders are defined as leaders set apart from peers by exhibiting at least five of the following characteristics: (a) evidence of successful relationships with followers; (b) evidence of leading a successful organization; (c) a minimum of 5 years of experience in the profession; (d) articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings; (e) recognition by peers; (f) membership in professional association in their field.

### Meaning

**Theoretical definition.** Meaning is a sense of purpose as a fundamental need that leads to significance and value for self and others (Bennis, 1999; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Frankl, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2007; Pearson, 2015; Tredennick, 2004; Varnay, 2009; Yeoman, 2014).

**Operational definition.** Meaning is the result of leaders and followers coming together for the purpose of gathering information from experience and integrating it into a process that creates significance, value, and identity within themselves and the organization.



## **Character**

**Theoretical definition.** Character is the moral compass by which a person lives his or her life (Bass & Bass, 2008; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; T. Moore, 2008; Quick & Wright, 2011; Sankar, 2003).

**Operational definition.** Character is alignment of a value system, which promotes ethical thoughts and actions based on principles of concern for others through optimism and integrity while being reliable, transparent, and authentic.

## **Vision**

**Theoretical definition.** A bridge from the present to the future created by a collaborative mindset, adding meaning to the organization, sustaining higher levels of motivation, and withstanding challenges (Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2007; Landsberg, 2003; Mendez-Morse, 1993; Nanus, 1992).

**Operational definition.** Vision is foresight demonstrated by a compelling outlook of the future shared by leaders and followers who are engaged to create the future state.

## **Relationships**

**Theoretical definition.** Relationships are the bonds established between people through encouragement, compassion, and open communication that lead to feelings of respect, trust, and acceptance (Bermack, 2014; Frankl, 2006; George, 2003; George & Sims, 2007; Henderson, 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2007, 2009; Liborius, 2014; Mautz, 2015; McKee et al., 2008; Reina & Reina, 2006; Seligman, 2011; D. M. Smith, 2011; Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010).

**Operational definition.** Relationships are authentic connections between leaders and followers involved in a common purpose through listening, respect, and trust.

### **Wisdom**

**Theoretical definition.** Wisdom is the ability to utilize cognitive, affective, and reflective intelligences in unpredictable and unprecedented situations (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Kekes, 1983; Pfeffer, 2010; Spano, 2013; Sternberg, 1998).

**Operational definition.** Wisdom is the reflective integration of values, experience, knowledge, and compassion to accurately interpret and respond to complex, ambiguous, and often unclear situations.

### **Inspiration**

**Theoretical definition.** Inspiration is a source of contagious motivation that resonates from the heart and drives leaders and followers forward with confidence (Kouzes & Posner, 2007; I. H. Smith, 2014; Thrash & Elliot, 2003).

**Operational definition.** Inspiration is the heartfelt passion and energy that leaders exude through possibility thinking, enthusiasm, encouragement, and hope to create relevant, meaningful connections that empower.

### **Followers**

**Theoretical definition.** Followership is the role held by certain individuals in an organization, team, or group. Specifically, it is the capacity of an individual to actively follow a leader. Followers are the reciprocal social process of leadership. Specifically, followers play an active role in organization, group, and team successes and failures (Baker, 2007; Riggio, Chaleff, & Blumen-Lipman, 2006).

**Operational definition.** For purposes of this study, a follower is defined as a member of the leadership team who has responsibilities for managing different aspects of the organization. This group of followers could include chief information officer, assistant superintendents, chief financial officer, director of personnel services, coordinators, directors, administrators, sales managers, account managers, and principals.

### **Delimitations**

This study was delimited to three exemplary superintendents and 36 followers in K-12 schools in Northern California. The selection criteria identified executives/leaders as “exemplary” in their field. Due to the geographical proximity and availability, the researcher chose a convenience and purposeful sample. In addition, the study was delimited to followers who are members of the leadership team. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), “The geographical area was chosen as a convenience sample for the researcher due to proximity and availability” (p. 137).

### **Organization of the Study**

The study is organized into five chapters, references, and appendices. Chapter I provided an introduction to the topic of exemplary K-12 superintendents, the background information of character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration, meaning in leadership, and the theoretical and operational definitions utilized in the context of the study. The research questions guide the study. Chapter II presents an overview of current literature regarding leadership theory. Chapter III describes the research design and methodology of the study. This chapter includes an explanation of the population, sample, and data gathering as well as the procedures used to analyze collected data. Chapter IV presents, analyzes, and provides a discussion of the findings of the study.

Chapter V contains the summary, conclusions, and recommendations for action and further research.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A review of the literature was conducted to provide historical background and theoretical context for creating meaning in leadership and the five domains of meaning: character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration utilized by exemplary K-12 superintendents and their followers. The review is organized into six parts. Part I includes the introduction of the importance of meaning, theories of meaning, and how meaning is created in successful organizations. Part II provides an overview of leadership development and theories. Part III includes a description of followers and impact in organizations. Part IV introduces the impact on organizations and the five domains that create meaning. Part V describes the target population of K-12 exemplary superintendents, and Part VI provides a summary.

### **The Importance of Meaning**

Man's quest to seek meaning has been documented in literature from the seminal works of Aristotle and Socrates, through the 20th century works of Viktor Frankl (2006) and Abraham Maslow (1954). The search for meaning continues into the 21st century through the works of numerous authors including Martin Seligman (2011), Scott Mautz (2015), and James Kouzes and Barry Posner (2006, 2009, 2012, 2016). The literature supports the theoretical definition of meaning as a sense of purpose and a fundamental need, which leads to significance and value for self and others (Bennis, 1999; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Frankl, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2007; Pearson, 2015; Tredennick, 2004; Varnay, 2009; Yeoman, 2014). For the purpose of this study, the operational definition of meaning is the result of leaders and followers coming together for the purpose of gathering information from experience and integrating it into a process

that creates significance, value, and identity within themselves and the organization. People are searching for meaning in all aspects of their lives now more than ever. Without meaning or a reason why their work is important, employees will not be content to remain in unfulfilling jobs for long. Everyone, regardless of generation or gender, perform better when engaged, and become engaged in work when it has meaning (Amabile & Kramer, 2011; Bennis, 1999; Frankl, 2006; Hollis & Miller, 2012; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Mautz, 2015; T. Moore, 2008; Morrison, Burke, & Greene, 2007; Pearson, 2015; P. Smith, 2012; Yeoman, 2014).

Finding meaning in life is fundamental to human existence. It is what gives us purpose, direction, and fulfills essential needs as a person. Rath (2015) stated, “I have discovered that creating meaning is central not just to my existence but to that of every organization in society today” (p. 198). Seeking meaning in life is achieved by pursuing a goal greater than oneself. Seligman (2011) furthered this concept of seeking purpose in life from pursuing to “serving something that you believe is bigger than the self” (p. 16). Similarly Mautz (2015) contended, “We can find significance and fulfillment in the work itself depending on the impact it has on who and what is important to us and its congruence with who we are” (p. 11). The manifestation of what is considered to be greater or bigger than each of us is unique to each individual and is based on the perception of meaningfulness by the individual (Gill, 2012; Rath, 2015).

Multiple scholars assert that people develop a sense of purpose, significance, and identity through meaning; however, Dik, Byrne, and Steger (2013) and Cisek (2009) stated that significance and meaning are developed through empowerment. It is through belonging and empowerment that they develop a sense of value, identity, and meaning.

More recently Mautz (2015) described finding meaning *at work* by the sense of “connectedness and harmony [we experience] with our coworkers, leaders, and organization” (p. 11). Employees, particularly millennials, will seek out jobs that allow them to align their feelings of belonging and value with those of the organization. Research goes on to reflect that people work harder and more effectively for people they like and for those who make them feel good. In *The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Things*, Sir Ken Robinson (2009) asserted that those who love what they do continue to excel because they are in their element and they fundamentally love their position (p. 5). Experiences that create meaning can be positive or negative, and either filled with love, optimism, and hope, or filled with adversity and challenges. Mother Teresa said, “There is more hunger for love and appreciation in this world than for bread” (Beliefnet, n.d.). Literature posits that positive experiences that are hopeful, loving, and offer a sense of belonging, empowerment, and value provide meaning (Joyce, Nohria, & Roberson, 2004).

### **Theories of Meaning**

The concept of meaning has been around for centuries and dates back to the earliest philosophers (McCall, Kraut, & McCauley, 2014). Man has continued to search for meaning and how it applies to his or her life. Author Viktor Frankl (2006) believed that meaning is the driving force of motivation and what people are often searching for. In the absence of meaning there is no value or self-worth. Viktor Frankl, in his book *Man’s Search for Meaning*, wrote about his experiences as an inmate in a concentration camp during World War II. According to Frankl, how an inmate viewed and visualized his future affected his will to survive. Frankl’s (2006) theory called logotherapy

describes his ideas regarding meaning and the power that meaning has in creating purpose.

In the early part of the 20th century, comparatively little attention was explicitly devoted to discussing and accurately defining meaning. People are always searching for personal meaning because it is the root of who they are. Frankl (2006) stated, “Those who know how close the connection is between the state of mind of a man—his courage and hope, or lack of them—and the state of immunity of his body will understand that the sudden loss of hope and courage can have a deadly effect” (p. 75). With personal meaning, people are able to find their true self and what they stand for. If people choose to find personal meaning in their lives, they are able to do so as well as finding deep happiness. Kouzes and Posner (2006) contended, “The quest for leadership, therefore, is first an inner quest to discover who you are, and it’s through this process of self-examination that you find the awareness needed to lead” (p. 93). With that being said, many people are still searching and struggling to find personal meaning in their lives. People often make excuses for why they can’t find meaning in their personal lives. They feel “trapped in a difficult present” (Keith, 2003, p. 2). This phenomenon has endured through the ages from Aristotle to the current research by Kouzes and Posner (2016).

Equally important is the work of Aristotle with meaning and purpose of life. Aristotle contended that meaning is the whole aim of human existence. He also described doing lifelong activities that bring about the rational part of the soul as a life well lived (Kraut, 2014). Kraut (2014) further reported that Aristotle believed it is through virtuous activity that one finds meaning in life. Unlike Plato’s consideration of “end causes,” Aristotle claimed “truth” could be gained from experience. In his most



complete surviving statement on morality, *Magna Moralia*, Aristotle considered the natural desire to achieve happiness—human volition and moral obligation, value of friendship, and intellectual pursuit—as key indicators of how moral conduct contributes to the good life and provides meaning for all humans.

The search for meaning is universal as noted by Victor Frankl (2006) in one of the most powerful and enduring books of the last century, *Man's Search for Meaning*. While it is a search in which individuals must each actively participate, the leaders in their lives play a crucial role in helping them connect or reconnect to that sense of purpose, to what is meaningful, and help fuel their desire to not only survive but to thrive in all aspects of their lives. This sense of meaning in and out of work produces in Frankl's words the "why to live." According to Frankl (2006) the perception of meaning is "to become aware of what can be done about a given situation" (p. 144). Frankl described the source of his strength to survive the Nazi extermination camps. He wrote about three sources for meaning: work, love, and courage. In expressing the meaning of his life in one sentence, Frankl said, "The meaning of my life is to help others find the meaning of theirs" (p. 165).

Moreover the foundational building blocks of Frankl's (2006) existential analysis and logotherapy are the commitment to meaningful values, goals, and a synergy created from universal needs, relationships, and wisdom. In brief, Dr. Frankl identified categories of values that, when actualized, provide sources of authentic meaning: creative values, that is "by doing or creating something," experiential value that is "by choosing one's attitude toward suffering" (p. 111). Actualizing such values is not only the quid pro quo of the human quest for meaning but also provides a useful point of reference for

reflecting upon the search for meaning at work (Frankl, 2006). Multiple scholars discussed that the synergy created leads to increased customer share and investor performance (Berg et al., 2013; Grant, 2013; Sandberg, 2013).

Developing the concept of personal meaning, prominent psychologist Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (1990), as a positive psychology researcher, was particularly interested in studying happiness. Csikszentmihalyi created the experience sampling method (ESM), which was a procedure to measure people's feelings and thoughts as well as their activities throughout their daily lives. Through his research, he developed the theory of *flow*. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) asserted that "the most important step in emancipating oneself from social controls is the ability to find rewards in the events of each moment" (p. 19). The concept of flow was first developed by Csikszentmihalyi in 1975. He theorized that one cannot pursue happiness, rather it is a product of being in a state of flow. Flow is when a person is completely absorbed in an activity, so much so that the sense of time can be lost and creativity flourishes. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) contended that flow is achieved "when a culture succeeds in evolving a set of goals and values so compelling and so well matched to the skills of the population that its members are able to experience flow with continual frequency and intensity" (p. 81). It has often been described as "being in the zone" because it is an exceedingly engaged active mental state. Having opportunities to be challenged and overcoming those challenges with the skills a person possesses leads to enjoyment and happiness. Csikszentmihalyi and Le Fevre (1998) stated that people in flow report "feeling more active, alert, concentrated, happy, satisfied and creative" (p. 816). When opportunities are presented to use and even deepen

a person's skills, more enjoyment is experienced and more creativity results, leading to a sense of meaning (Csikszentmihalyi & Hunter, 2003).

Furthermore, meaning has been described as belonging, believing, and serving something bigger than oneself. According to Seligman (2011), meaning is one of the key elements in his well-being theory; the other elements are positive emotion, engagement, relationships, and achievement. Seligman described relationships as giving meaning and purpose to life, but he explained that there is no single element that defines well-being theory. Seligman further explained that to truly flourish, people need positive emotion, positive relationships, accomplishment, and meaning. Fostering meaning at work is key to personal significance and making work matter are found in Mautz's (2015) seven "markers of meaning" that create meaning in and out of work. He contended that the following seven essential markers of meaning will create meaning through direction, discovery, and devotion:

- (a) doing significant work that matters—has impact on self and organization;
- (b) personal opportunities to learn, grow, and influence;
- (c) working with a heightened sense of competency and self-esteem;
- (d) being in control and influencing decisions;
- (e) cultivating an authentic, caring culture;
- (f) master meaning-making leadership behaviors; and
- (g) being free from corrosive workplace behaviors. (Mautz, 2015, pp. 18-19)

Yale's Amy Wrzesniewski, a professor of organizational behavior, is quoted by Mautz as saying, "Humans are most deeply fulfilled and energized when work is congruent with our innermost direction—that is, when we are doing work that is deeply significant to us and others and, ideally, when it feels like what we were meant to do" (pp. 18-19).

## Meaning in Organizations

Maximizing meaning in the organization with a commitment to the cause is a complex issue. It balances empowerment and independence but involves employees in decision making that will lead to meaning making and maximize self-potential. Mautz (2015) stated, “You must also balance between the craving for independence and the higher-order needs of a greater purpose within which to serve and a broader community within which to belong” (p. 25). A leader’s greatest role is to create an environment where the business *and* employees can thrive. When people find meaning in their work and feel that it matters, they give their all. Mautz discussed what change management expert Jim Clemmer calls “management by whim.” He asserted that an abundance of clear, sound logic helps employees make sense of change (Mautz, 2015). According to Ulrich and Ulrich (2010), “When our organizations enact our highest values and embody our best aspirations, they inspire our best efforts” (p. 10). Therefore, employees must feel they have purpose and are valued by their leader to create individual and organizational meaning. Ulrich and Ulrich contended that when people find meaning in their work, they find meaning in life.

Finding meaning at work is in itself hard work and personal. Replacing deficit thinking with abundance thinking creates many questions. Ulrich and Ulrich’s (2010) work attempted to answer questions with clarity about identity and strengths, motivation and purpose, positive work settings, responding to challenges that engage, becoming resilient, and building sources of delight and civility in work routines. Kouzes and Posner (2006) examined critical categories all leaders must consider in order to leave a lasting impact: significance, relationships, aspirations, and courage. They contended that

leadership is hard work, and trade-offs between personal interests, love, respect, and those of the greater good will be challenged.

Likewise Kouzes and Posner (2006) stated that the quest for leadership and making meaning is “first an inner quest to discover who you are, and it’s through this process of self-examination that you find the awareness needed to lead” (p. 93).

Collaboration and teamwork are essential to getting extraordinary things done in today’s world. Kouzes and Posner further stated, “Exemplary leaders also have the confidence to turn themselves into followers, trusting that many others are also eager and competent to make a difference in the world” (p. 91). Personal recognition and group celebration create the spirit and momentum that can carry a team forward during tough challenges. Keeping the purpose as a focus is key to not losing sight of the mission. Further, Collins (2006) stated,

No matter what we achieve, if we don’t spend the vast majority of our time with people we love and respect we cannot possibly have a great life. But if we spend the vast majority of our time with people we love and respect—people we really enjoy being on the bus with and who will never disappoint us—then we will almost certainly have a great life, no matter where the bus goes. (p. 62)

Conversely, the idea that adversity can lead to meaning in life has been around for eons. Frankl (2006) agreed that meaning can be achieved even when faced with hopeless odds. In fact, many authors agree that adversity can often be the foundation of future success (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Mautz, 2015; Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010).

Furthermore Csikszentmihalyi (1990) pointed out that people who have suffered through difficulties still end up leading an enjoyable life. Mautz (2015) and Ulrich and

Ulrich (2010) explained that adversity is a useful tool for revealing strong character. However, in order to create meaning, exemplary leaders first need to have a deep self-awareness of who they are and why they do what they do. McKee et al. (2008) contended, “An important step toward becoming a resonant leader is to embrace your power, examine your assumptions about good leadership, and make some choices about *how* you lead” (p. 17). Once leaders understand what excites, motivates, and brings meaning to their lives, then they are in a position to help followers find significance and purpose in their work (Hacker & Roberts, 2004; Raz, 2015; Schuck & Rose, 2013; Sinek, 2009).

### **Leadership and Meaning**

Leaders develop their own self-awareness by understanding what is purposeful for them. They practice mindfulness as well as possess the ability to take a step back to self-reflect on their actions personally and professionally. When they find meaning at work, higher order needs are met. Mindfulness is being deeply aware of what is happening in the present and how it affects one’s emotions and thoughts. Kabut-Zinn (2012) stated, “The challenge for each of us is to find out *who* we are and to live our way into our calling. We do this by paying close attention to all aspects of life as they unfold in the present moment” (pp. 14-15). Exemplary leaders are simultaneously conscious of their actions while being observant of how they affect others. The understanding they gain by being present leads to creativity, thoughtful decision making, and open communication, which results in more engagement in their work. When leaders know how to be mindful and what motivates them and their purpose, they are able to lead others in developing

their own personal meaning in the workplace (Ghadi, Fernando, & Caputi, 2013; Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

The act of reflection also brings about a deep awareness of self. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) asserted that it is more desirable to contemplate encounters with others and events that happened than it is to be nonreflective. When leaders are present and self-reflective, they are able to create meaning for themselves, which, in turn, provides them with the knowledge of how to create meaning for others (Chopra, 2009). Exemplary leaders learn about their followers' strengths and skills. Additionally, they learn what others personally value and what motivates them. Once leaders are able to identify what is significant for followers, they are able to provide an environment that puts their talents to use in order for them to flourish. Avolio and Yammarino (2013) described this as the "collective concept" (p. 16). Leaders frame what the organization stands for by helping followers feel a greater sense of purpose. The message is followers are valued because their contributions matter and they impact the organization as a whole. When followers' values are aligned with the organization's values and purpose, they will find their work meaningful (Bennis, 1999; Buckingham & Coffman, 2014).

However, many leadership authors have also discussed the leader's desire to leave behind a legacy. For example, Kouzes and Posner (2012) described this as a "journey from success to significance" (p. 5). Mautz (2015) explained that engaging in the work of leaving a legacy provides purpose and direction to life. In order to leave a legacy behind, a leader must leave a foundation for others to continue on in their name. Sinek (2009) and Kouzes and Posner (2012) agreed that one of the ways to leave a legacy is to

share power with others. Kouzes and Posner (2006) claimed, “A legacy is the legacy of many” (p. 11).

### **Leadership Theories**

For centuries, legacies and leadership theories have been studied. During the past 200 years, many authors have tried to define exemplary leadership capacity. In the multicultural, global world, there is an increasing need for understanding self and others and bringing meaning to the work (Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2012; Mautz, 2015; Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). Leadership theories dating back to Aristotle consider decisions only being made by educated people evolving into modern trends claiming servant leadership that is motivational, moral, and civil (Bennis, 1999; Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Gardner & Laskin, 2011; Graham, 1991; Greenleaf, 2002).

According to a 19th-century idea, some theorists have argued that great leaders are born not made. Historian Thomas Carlyle studied the great man theory (Harter, 2008), and two guiding assumptions were that (a) great leaders are born possessing certain traits that enable them to rise and lead, and (b) great leaders can arise when the need for them is great. However, an opposing view by Herbert Spencer, a philosopher of the Victorian era, considered the theory to be unscientific. He advocated that before a “great man” can remake his society, that society has to make him (Spencer, 1873). Social evolution phenomenon is complex and Spencer theorized that in representing the capable leader as all important, the number and quality of followers cannot be ignored. Gordon Allport, a trait theorist, furthered Spencer’s ideas by positing that personality is made up of the traits (mental, physical, and social) one possesses. He contended that leaders are either born or made with certain qualities to excel in leadership roles (Allport, 2003).



John Locke in the 17th century believed that social order was the result of evolution. Two centuries later Herbert Spencer (1873) debated “survival of the fittest.” In the 1930s, Margaret Mead (1949) ushered into American intellectual circles a powerful “way of seeing” as she called it (n.p.). Mead brought a new perspective focusing on behaviors, not just mental, physical, and social characteristics. Mead’s consideration of the necessity for social inventions was a turning point in behavioral theory research with right conditions having access as a leader made, not born. Many contingency models of leadership were produced in the latter part of the 20th century. The Fiedler contingency model was created in 1958 by Fred Fiedler to study personality and characteristics of leaders. The model stated that there is not one best style of leadership (Fiedler, 1958). Hersey et al.’s (2001) situational theory and Blake and Mouton’s (2005) managerial grid model further contended that relationships and tasks are important in leadership. For over 2 decades, Blake and Mouton made comprehensive revisions to strategic insights for leadership behavior and its effect on organization productivity. Likewise, Hersey et al. (2001) concurred by stating “to effectively assess a person’s needs, a leader may have to break a job into smaller elements. As a rule, if assessing a person’s needs seem confusing, begin by breaking down the task” (p. 474). Blake and Mouton (2005) contended that the key is for leaders to mobilize human effort by utilizing creative energy to remain competitive in an era of innovation and change. One difference is that situational theory tends to focus on behaviors that a leader should adopt, whereas contingency theory includes contingent factors about leader capability within the situation.

During this transformation, an emphasis on situation and context modified with motivation and personal traits theories emerged. Greenleaf's (2002) seminal work on servant leadership in the latter part of the 20th century provokes thinking around the changing role of the manager "from one who drives results and motivation from the outside in, to one who is a servant leader—one who seeks to draw out, inspire, and develop the best and highest within people from the inside out" (p. 13). Using everyone's unique talents independently and interdependently achieves the shared vision. For leadership to endure, Greenleaf (2002) contended that "the essential quality that sets servant-leaders apart from others is that they live by their *conscience*—the inward moral sense of what is right and what is wrong" (p. 14). Greenleaf used the term "'islands of excellence in a sea of mediocrity'" to describe organizations as models for servant leadership, working to empower through a process of structures and systems to flourish" (p. 21). He asserted that this was an ethical imperative for all persons of good will to "sharpen and clarify their view of a more serving society they would like to live in and help build—if in no other way than by holding a deepened interest and concern about it—and speak to the conditions of others (Greenleaf, 2002, p. 26).

An emphasis on the "caring principle" exemplifies servant leadership that Conger and Kanungo (1998) posited in their editorial suggesting that servant leadership leads to a spiritual generative culture while transformational leadership leads to an empowered dynamic culture. Likewise, school districts dealing with rapid change and static environments with many different contexts demand different leadership styles. What can be agreed upon is that deeply compassionate leaders, who lead as "servants" are able to focus on their followers' needs in order

to help them become like servants themselves. Recognition that the role of the organization is to create people who can build a better tomorrow is prevalent in the minds of all educators in this volatile world. Many researchers echo the theme of emphasis on service to others (Greenleaf, 2002; Parris & Peachey, 2012; Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2004; Wheatley, 2005).

Burns (1978) stated that “a transformational leader recognizes and exploits an existing need or demand of a potential follower . . . (and) looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower” (p.4). Bass agreed with Burns in the 1990s that it is morally uplifting for followers to have leaders who are motivated by stressing collective interest. Bass and Riggio did further research with this premise in 2006 after Bass stressed the importance of global relevance at the turn of the century and interactions with others to create solid relationships that result in a high percentage trust to increase motivation (Grys, 2011). Kouzes and Posner (1989) quoted Derek Rupnow, business development manager at Broadcom, who said, “You develop trust and respect by building personal relationships as well as treating everyone with respect, and making sure to keep everyone up to speed on what’s going on” (p. 22). The world’s hunger for leadership has been growing for decades. Being a leader is challenging, exciting, and rewarding, and carries with it many responsibilities. Authentic leaders are needed now more than ever to adapt and embrace creative collaboration with followers. They are called to empathize with their followers’ pains, needs, and wants. What is emerging is the authenticity of leaders and their leadership. Northouse (2009) noted,

Effective leadership is intended influence that creates change for the greater good. Leadership uses positive means to achieve positive outcomes. Furthermore, people want leaders who listen to and understand their needs and who can relate to their circumstances. The challenge for each of us is to be prepared to lead when we are asked to be the leader. (p. 9)

The 21st century is challenging leaders to deconstruct and challenge assumptions of modern industrial leadership theories. Integral leadership theory from Graves (2005) and Wilber's (2000) work transcends this shortcoming and develops models that tap into all elements of human potential. Conversely, Jonathan Reams (2005) examined extensively the relationship of consciousness to leadership and suggested that there is a distinction between "an integrally informed approach to leadership and integral leadership" (p. 118). He agreed that there is common cognitive knowledge of the main aspects of integral theory, but at best it is just a beginning. What emerged for Reams was an ongoing inquiry of implications that he hoped would inspire inquiry of others as well. What guided his work were the questions around competing truths of various theories on leadership over the last century and how people can accomplish things together. This has far-reaching implications for personal and organizational meaning, the goal being "to see the complexity of thought emerging into a coherent whole" (Reams, 2005, p. 119).

Grounded in the work of Ken Wilber (2000) and Abraham Maslow (1954), integral theory seeks a level of integration that is true of leadership theory. Reams (2005) and Wilber (2000) described how integral theory is guided by the fundamental principle of wholeness that goes beyond the rational, analytical mode of knowing the world. In applying this concept to leadership theory, Ream (2005) considered the intersection of

consciousness with leadership as being controlled by human development. This exploration is venturing into areas such as consciousness, spirituality, and new scientific theories of leadership. Ream (2005) stated, “They have taken leadership theory into new territory and help to bridge between older views of leadership and an integral approach to leadership” (p. 126). He further described Putz and Raynor’s levels of self-development as being integral leadership strengths when a leader is “more adaptive to fundamental changes without threat to personal identity, better able to support the self-development of others, and understand oneself in a multi-paradigmatic way” (Ream, 2005, p. 129). The intent of integral theory is to contextualize the “truth” about everything. It correlates explanations from various fields in order to arrive at an integrative understanding focused on creating meaning.

### **Follower Theories**

While theory and research on leaders and leadership abound, follower theory has been given short shrift. Fortunately recent research pays attention to the role of followers in the leadership process. Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, and Carsten (2014) provided a systematic review of the follower literature. They identified two theoretical frameworks for the study of followers: (a) the leadership process and (b) reversing the lens. Uhl-Bien et al. defined follower theory as the study of the nature and impact of followers and following in the leadership process. They considered the role, behaviors, and outcomes of followers in relation to leaders.

According to management guru, Henry Mintzberg (2013), effective leaders develop the sense of community or shared purpose that is essential for cooperative effort in all organizations. Although leadership deals heavily with persuasion and inspiration,

Mintzberg contended that the leader also executes strategies into results and influences others to achieve organizational objectives. Buckingham and Coffman (2014) stated, “Initially Peter Drucker put management on the map. Leadership has since replaced it” (p. 1). However, in the debate about leadership, Mintzberg (2013) contended, is that we all need to understand management better.

Likewise, *Firms of Endearment; How World-Class Companies Profit From Passion and Purpose*, by Sisodia, Wolfe, and Sheth from The Clemmer Group, celebrates leaders who leverage their humanness by inspiring others to join them in making the world a better place. Sisodia et al. (2014) stated, “The message is clear: provided that sound management is in place *endearing companies tend to be enduring companies*” (p. 8). This world is entering an Age of Transcendence, as people increasingly search for higher meaning in their lives. Today’s successful organizations are delivering emotional, experiential, and social value. The Clemmer Group is about gaining “share of heart” aligning followers’ interests. It’s about building organizations that leave the world a better place (Sisodia et al., 2014).

However, Kouzes and Posner (2006) contended that followers want to hear their own aspirations realized and stated,

It’s about intimacy. It’s about familiarity. It’s about empathy. The kind of communication needed to enlist others in a common vision requires understanding constituents at a much deeper level than we normally find comfortable . . . it requires experiencing life as they experience it. (p. 112)

Kouzes and Posner (2016) concluded that leaders struggle with communicating the image of the future with their followers. They said, “The larger mission is what calls everyone,

forward. It gives significance to the hard work required to do anything extraordinary” (Kouzes & Posner, 2016, p. 93). Employees who find meaning at work make a difference. Bennis and Goldsmith (2010) stated,

Good leaders make people feel that they’re at the very heart of things, not at the periphery. Everyone feels that he or she makes a difference to the success of the organization. When that happens people feel centered and that gives their work meaning. (p. 12)

The meaning for followers may come from relationships, opportunities, the work environment, or the work itself. When followers find meaning, they want everyone in the organization to win (Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010).

Liborius (2014) considered leaders’ worthiness through building a workplace culture that allows followers to grow. High-performing organizations go to great lengths to capture, understand, and act upon insights from their followers. They take special measures to motivate and recognize employee performance. In fact, multiple authors share characteristics of effective teams and Harvey and Drolet (2006) noted that “no matter how it is accomplished, each team member must perceive that he or she is of worth, bringing something important to the progress of the team” (p. 19). The power of recognition is widely accepted as a powerful influence in organizations. It could be argued that not all actions deserve praise, but many do. Harvey and Drolet (2006) stated, “Praise builds esteem; praise builds people . . . praise builds that sense of worth and potency necessary to effective practice” (pp. 173-174). Likewise, Grenny, Patterson, Maxfield, McMillan, and Switzler (2013) contended, “Lead the way by praising and critiquing the presence of vital behaviors” (p. 183). This reminds us that “social

influence—the deeply felt desire to be accepted, respected, and connected to other human beings—really pulls at human heartstrings” (p. 183). It is suggested that tapping into the power of recognition can change just about anything (Grenny et al., 2013; Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010).

During the 20th century, multiple researchers discussed the courage of followers (Buckingham & Coffman, 2014; Cacioppe & Edwards, 2006; Chaleff, 2009). Chaleff (2009) contended that there are many factors leaders and followers are responsible for in attaining empowerment in organizations and suggests three elements to fully understand this dual concept:

First we must understand the sources of our power, whom we serve, and what tools we have to carry forward the group’s mission from our unique vantage point. Second, we must create a climate in which a leader’s strength can be magnified, so a leader can better serve the common purpose. And third, we must understand the seductiveness and pitfalls of the power of leadership. (p. 3)

Chaleff understood how leaders can encourage and nurture relationships with followers. Similarly, he believed that living true to self while making a real combination is a societal responsibility for followers to help shape and advance a team’s goals and an organization’s vision. Based on the book, *The Courageous Follower*, Ira Chaleff (2009) gave an absorbing portrayal of the many dimensions of courageous followers who demonstrated the courage to serve, the courage to assume responsibility, and the courage to challenge. In addition, Senge (2015) built on 2 decades of work describing these ideas as built on origins of power sharing and collaboration. Carsten and Uhl-Bien (2012) highlighted how followers engage in leadership behaviors while participating in teams



and developing ideas. In brief, exemplary leaders have courageous followers who trust them, share the vision, and make meaning in their work and lives.

### **The Five Domains of Meaning**

The five domains of meaning: character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration have all been mentioned in leadership research. The researcher ascertained K-12 superintendents' use of character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration in this study, and the degree of importance to which followers perceive the five domains create personal and organizational meaning. With a wealth of research about the five domains, there lacks evidence of a theoretical framework that explores all five holistically as a construct for creating meaning personally and within the organization. The five domains are discussed as well as how they relate to meaning.

**Character.** Theorists maintain that character is important for leaders to be true to everyone in the organization. A study of the world leaders over the past 150 years asserted that managers who possess strong character will create a better world for everyone, while shared leadership is generally vital to the social, moral, economic, and political fabrics of society. Bass and Bass (2008) contended, "Such shared leadership is now representative of many scholarly and practical ideas about organizational life in the 21st century, the age of information, when no one member of a group has all the expertise and experience to help the group reach its goals. The literature supports the theoretical definition of character as the moral compass by which a person lives his or her life. For the purpose of this study, the operational definition of character is aligned with a value system promoting ethical thoughts and actions based on principles of concern for others through optimism and integrity, while being reliable, transparent, and authentic. Leaders

must ensure that they, and their followers, make moral and rational decisions in addition to acting with a sense of responsibility and meaning (Bass & Bass, 2008; Cisek, 2009; T. Moore, 2008; Quick & Wright, 2011; Sankar, 2003; Williamson, 2009).

Indeed Bass and Bass (2008) found that moral examples have been set from Greek and Roman leaders, like Caesar, to Confucious and Lao-tzu's research, which speculates that ethical and moral leadership can increase effectiveness in followers. In effect, "your actions at work must align with your ethics in your daily life or you will be torn and not be able to work effectively" (T. Moore, 2008, p. 161). George and Sims (2007) asserted "by exploring the life-changing experiences leaders have had, we see how they made the transfer from 'I' to 'We'" (p. xxxiv). In school systems, K-12 superintendents are called upon to be present and use open communication and thoughtful decision making. They need to build on followers' strengths, value them, and allow their talents to flourish. Exemplary K-12 superintendents align themselves with their work and lead with optimism and a high level of trust.

A betrayal of trust is considered to be the single "unforgivable sin" as a character trait. Exemplary leaders learn from their mistakes and are not discouraged moving forward. They see them as learning opportunities. Northouse (2009) stated, "Skilled leaders are competent people who know the means and methods for carrying out their responsibilities" (p. 2). Leaders who lead from the heart have the greatest impact in organizations (Crowley, 2011; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Howard & Korver, 2008; McKee et al., 2008; Mautz, 2015). They lead by authentic example. Exemplary leaders who possess character lead with courage. Crowley (2011) concurred that being authentic and having the courage to "identify what leadership shortfalls most require addressing, will

greatly strengthen the relationship with employees. I grew more as a leader by acting on subordinate wisdom than from almost any other source” (p. 91).

Many scholars classify optimism as a character trait that manifests in hope, confidence, trust, and future orientation. It has been linked to resiliency, tranquility, and life satisfaction. It forges connections to the larger universe and provides meaning (Frankl, 2006; Mautz, 2015; Petersen & Seligman, 2004). Likewise, integrity, honesty, and trust must be present to have long-term success in an organization. Gardner (2008) stressed the importance of “work that is excellent, ethical, and engaging” (p. 127). Kouzes and Posner (2006) described this trust as listening, valuing others, being honest, and keeping commitments.

A transformational leader creates an organizational culture where personal development is encouraged; endeavor, innovation, and teamwork are valued and rewarded; where people are valued and respected as members of a team; and recognition and appreciation are part of the culture (Cutler, 2014; Harvey & Drolet, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2012). An exemplary leader has strong values, moral reasoning, and an identity manifesting in concern for others (Hannah & Avolio, 2011; Lord, Hannah, & Jennings, 2011). For Burns, to be transformational, the leader had to be “morally uplifting” (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999, p. 186). Harvey and Drolet (2006) emphasized trust through honesty and integrity in building a richer organizational climate (p. 23). Bennis and Nanus (1985) observed, “Leaders induced (stemming from their own self-regard) positive regard in their employees. And this turns out to be a pivotal factor in their capacity to lead” (p. 58).

**Vision.** Having a clear vision creates commitment to the organization and brings out passion in the people. Exemplary leaders are able to envision a positive future for themselves and their followers by building purpose and a guiding vision (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Leaders act upon this vision to make the desires of others become a reality. Multiple scholars contend that both leaders and followers have a much higher chance at success if what begins with an idea grows in intensity, creating excitement and passion, and ultimately becomes the organizational vision that all aspire to achieve. Landsberg (2003) stated, “For if a vision is to guide an organization, it must be a compelling story—one which portrays credible events: real people achieving a better tomorrow, in a way that the audience can emulate, and in a way that adds meaning to their lives” (p. 28). Cisek (2009) noted, “A leader’s greatest power is his or her personal vision and communication, by the example of his or her daily life” (p. 15). Finally, Bennis and Goldsmith (2010) asserted, “Good leaders make people feel that they’re at the very heart of things, not at the periphery. Everyone feels that he or she makes a difference to the success of the organization. When that happens people feel centered and that gives their work meaning” (p. 12).

All organizations including schools are run by people with ideas. Kouzes and Posner (2006) contended that followers want to be a part of a vision that embraces their own aspirations, allowing them to envision themselves as part of the organization’s future. They stated, “When visions are shared, they attract more people, sustain higher levels of motivation, and understand more challenges than those that are singular” (Kouzes & Posner, 2006, p. 104). Landsberg (2003) concurred stating, “The vision for an organization is unlikely to be effective if it is the brainchild of only one parent. As we

shall see, the vision usually serves its purpose better if it is developed collaboratively” (p. 28). It is vision that unites all within the organization and creates a compelling sense of direction to work toward a shared result and contributes to a culture of innovation (Hersey et al., 2001; Nanus, 1992; Sarros, Cooper, & Santora, 2008).

A truly effective vision with compelling perspective guides daily decision making. Multiple scholars describe that a vision created by an individual and handed to employees has high potential of not being effective. When sharing and creating a vision, leaders must also be able to anticipate developments, opportunities, changes, and finances (Kouzes & Posner, 2009, 2012; Landsberg, 2003; Levenson, 2012). Henderson (2011) asserted, “Commitment to clear, focused goals, and a vision on how to accomplish those goals is necessary for high performing teams and groups, and is a sought after objective of organizations” (p. 66). Another characteristic of an effective vision is concern for the future of the organization: “Exemplary leaders are forward-looking. They are able to envision the future, to gaze across the horizon and realize the greater opportunities to come” (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 104). Not only are exemplary leaders looking ahead, they analyze environments to determine if a change is needed to attain the vision. Maxwell (2008) contended, “One of the pitfalls that can stop potential leaders is the desire to focus on vision to the detriment of facing reality. But good leaders are both visionary and realistic” (p. 68). According to Mendez-Morse (1993), an organizational vision relates to the leaders’ and followers’ perception of the future of the organization. This is further supported by the work of John Kotter. In his book *Leading Change*, Kotter (2012) asserted that there was an urgent need for a vision that has “clarity of direction . . . so resources are freed to be put toward the transformation process” (p. 71).

Visions are created to portray the direction and serve as a means to guide the organization. Wagner and Dintersmith (2015) are optimistic about how the education system can make an impact on global affairs by changing education for each individual child. They posited that the work is not easy and inertia and mandates “gum up the works” but “local change can inspire a national movement” (p. 221). Exemplary K-12 superintendents display passion in all they do and make all followers matter. They are committed to results over time and provide clarity and direction for the organization. They foster a culture of innovation and collaboration based on clear, focused goals. Extensive research leads one to the conclusion that exemplary leaders do not impose their vision on their followers. Instead, exemplary leaders are able to draw inspiration by facilitating a vision that speaks to followers’ aspirations, hopes, and dreams. According to Kouzes and Posner (2016), “Leadership is not about selling *your* vision; it’s about articulating the people’s vision” (p. 91). In so doing, followers are more likely to put energy into the fulfillment of the vision.

Conger (1998) described not just creating a vision but conveying it to create meaning in an organization. He stated, “In summary, we see that it is not simply the act of creating a vision but rather the way in which the vision is conveyed that is critical to generating charismatic appeal for charismatic leaders who are ‘meaning makers’” (p. 92). According to Kotter (2012), “A good vision acknowledges that sacrifices will be necessary but makes clear that these sacrifices will yield particular benefits and personal satisfactions that are far superior to those available today—or tomorrow—without attempting to change” (p. 72). This is further supported by George and Sims (2007) who

described inspirational leadership as a test of *True North*. In his book of the same name, George said,

Every leader has to meet the bottom-line test . . . superior results over a sustained period of time are the ultimate mark of authentic leaders. At the end of the day, you can honestly say that you followed your *True North* and made a difference in the world through your leadership. (p. 199)

**Relationships.** Mandela (2012) described the importance for leaders to develop and maintain positive relationships, “The most powerful weapon is not violence but it is talking to people” (p. 24). Authors and experts on leadership have often cited the importance of building and maintaining relationships. For example, Mautz (2015) described the process of building and maintaining relationships as a leader’s most lasting accomplishment. Similarly, Heifetz and Linsky (2002) explained that placing importance on relationships is an attribute of any successful leader. To add, relationships have been described as the antecedent to positive results (Reina & Reina, 2006). Exemplary K-12 superintendents are respectful and empathize with their followers. They place an emphasis on motivating and recognizing followers who give an “extra degree” of effort. They promote positive, peer recognition throughout the organization and celebrate both professional growth and personal transformation as essential to effecting change. They lead the way to a healthier work environment by listening and building positive relationships. Additionally, Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) asserted that leaders benefit from engaging relationships that drive satisfaction at work (Cacioppe & Edwards, 2006; Conger & Riggio, 2006).

Moreover, the importance of building relationships has been heightened by globalization. While the literature is replete with examples of the importance of relationships, it has also been noted that relationships take work (D. M. Smith, 2011). The work of relationships begins with a leader developing authentic connections with followers. Kouzes and Posner (2012) contended that leaders need to have connections with followers to allow them to know their thoughts and feelings. They need to talk with their people, and in the same manner, relationships must be nurturing and intentional (Mautz, 2015). Similarly, building authentic relationships has been described as a journey that must explore passions and motivations (Moua, 2010). According to Ulrich and Ulrich (2010), one of the benefits of close relationships at work is the personal satisfaction the leader derives from the relationships. To add, relationships are said to be critical in creating conditions that allow for superior performance and personal connection to meaningful work. Additionally, relationships allow the leader to build a healthy environment through positive emotions (Mautz, 2015; McKee et al., 2008). Another positive implication of building relationships is that they are said to have a reciprocal nature; Kouzes and Posner (2012) declared, “If others know you genuinely care about them, they’re likely to care about you” (p. 288). It follows that trust is a biological reaction to the belief that someone has our well-being at heart and it is more than shared opinions when we care to develop a relationship with them. Sinek (2014) stated, “When we feel the *Circle of Safety* around us, we offer our blood, sweat and tears and do everything we can to see our leader’s vision come to life” (p. 67).

Leaders who use the whole spectrum of emotions to challenge people, generate excitement, and hold people accountable create an environment in which people are



optimistic about the future and will stretch to get there. When relationships are enacted and contributions to the organization's purpose are made, reaching the desired future seems possible. From this leaders can see that relationships and understanding how people help them learn and grow creates a fascinating set of guidelines for personal and professional development. In fact McKee et al. (2008) strongly suggested, "Significant professional growth without personal transformation is impossible" (p. 7). Multiple authors share this idea as necessary for effective change to take place and positive relationships to flourish (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Mautz, 2015; McKee et al., 2008).

Harvey and Drolet (2006) stated, "Relationships must be balanced with purpose, those organizations that propel commitment through joy are more productive than organizations dedicated solely to task" (p. 24). Mautz (2015) asserted that when people feel cared for in organizations, leaders can champion the right behaviors to maximize associated meaning that is congruent to values. When clarity is able to filter all the way through the organization and come to life in everything that comes out of it, effective relationships are achieved. Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) expanded, "When people come together to make ideas grow, ideas improve and the people find more meaning. What's more, research like that suggests good work relationships mean good business" (p. 106). Fritz's theory of leader-member-exchange (LMX) defines how high levels of LMX through trust, support, and influence provide more rewarding relationships among leaders and followers, therefore producing a stronger sense of production, commitment, and satisfaction in the workplace (Fritz, Lunde, Brown, & Banset, 2004).

Leaders develop connections with followers when they listen attentively, appreciate their efforts, provide support for personal growth, and acknowledge their

accomplishments, because this shows a deep sense of caring. Consequently, the connection they feel provides a sense of meaningfulness at all levels within the organization. Caring and connection create a work environment and an organizational culture that leads to people finding inherent meaning in what they do. If followers know that their leaders care about them, they are willing to work harder, striving to bring success to their organization (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; McKee et al., 2008; Raz, 2015; Zwilling, 2010). Revesncio (2015) revealed a 12% increase in productivity when followers are happy. Unhappiness and stress led to a decrease in productivity by approximately 34% (Revesncio, 2015). Therefore leaders are a vital element in building meaning and developing positive relationships in their organizations.

**Wisdom.** Wise people are able to intuitively respond to situations, but they also know when to be silent (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Kekes, 1983; Pfeffer, 2010; Spano, 2013; Sternberg, 1998). Wisdom is emphasized in Frankl's (2006) approach to "focusing on a person's future and other conscious decisions and actions, while stressing the importance of helping people reach new heights of personal meaning through self-transcendence . . . through wise decisions" (p. 164). Social perceptions and how people form judgments of others has been studied extensively and the element of wisdom compels everyone to consider the rate of change that is necessitating exemplary leaders and K-12 superintendents to become lifelong learners. Kotter (2012) posited, "As the rate of change increases, the willingness and ability to keep developing become central to career success for individuals and to economic success for organizations" (p. 186).

Based on the 21st century research by Harvard professor Kanter, Kaleidoscope Thinking is moving beyond the status quo and approaches situations and challenges from

new perspectives across industries. In so doing it brings back something new and creative—a new pattern with a new set of actions. Specific strategies include (a) lifelong learning, (b) regular visits around different functions of the organization, (c) trips to new places and new organizations, (d) discussions with critics and challengers, and (e) regularly challenging your own assumptions and encouraging others to do the same (Berman, 2015). Exemplary K-12 superintendents need to display emotional and political intelligence with short- and long-term benefit and support complex perspectives in their organizations while balancing learning and life. Likewise Bluck and Gluck (2013) presented a conceptual model of wisdom *MORE*. The four general resources that influence how life events will become integrated and reintegrated experiences in the life story are mastery, openness, reflectivity, emotion regulation, and empathy—in short, *MORE*. Their ultimate premise is, “If we understand better why and how wisdom develops, we may eventually find ways of making the wider world a little wiser” (Bluck & Gluck, 2013, p. 93).

By comparison, Robert J. Sternberg (1998) from Cornell University defined wisdom as the use of one’s intelligence, creativity, common sense, and knowledge. It is motivated by positive ethical values toward the achievement of meaning among (a) intrapersonal, (b) interpersonal, and (c) extrapersonal interests. It considers short- and long-term benefit in achieving meaning by adapting to, and shaping of, existing environments as well as selection of new environments. Developing wisdom requires that people shed their old constructs and replace them with more reliable models with the intent to create meaning (R. Klein, 2009). Therefore K-12 superintendents constantly

reflect on how they bring meaning to their work: they keep journals, seek feedback, attend colloquiums, and stay current on research in their fields.

Likewise Howard and Korver (2008) concurred with Sternberg (1998) and believed that ethics are an important part of wisdom and noted the following:

Instead of finding “good reasons” to compromise, we will find convincing reasons to take right action. We will think through our decisions skillfully and live more satisfying lives. When we reach the end of our lives, we will carry that much less burden, feel that much less remorse, and create that much more satisfaction from using ethics to make our lives better. (p. 154)

Furthermore, multiple authors add political intelligence as a source of wisdom (Clark-White, Harvey, & Kemper, 2007; Pfeffer, 2010). Pfeffer (2010) contended, “Not only can you survive, but you can even succeed if you learn the principles and the rules and are willing to implement them in your daily organizational life” (p. 236). A culmination of all senses, experiences, knowledge, and understanding of self and greater good is described by many researchers as culminating in wisdom that leads to meaning (Senge, 2015; Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010; Wilber & Campbell, 2014; Zenger & Folkman, 2009). By comparison, Neil (2014) discussed how wisdom training enhances productivity and creates meaning in organizations. Wisdom significantly predicted citizenship behavior directed at organizations. Likewise, a few other scholars support the connection of wisdom to productivity in creating organizational meaning (Moon, Van Dyne, & Wrobel, 2005; Riggio, Zhu, Reina, & Maroosis, 2010). Similarly wisdom enables decision making and meaning to effect movement in a positive direction—either for the organization or society at large (Spano, 2013; Warm, 2012). Further, there is agreement

that wisdom occurs in individuals who have greater cognition about more complex perspectives with deeper understanding of personal meaning (Neil, 2014; Riggio et al., 2010; Sternberg, 1998).

Throughout the passage of time, wisdom has been studied as part of religion and philosophy. Paul Baltes, founder of the Max Plank Institute for Human Development and original leader of the Berlin Wisdom Project until his death in 2006, was noted for his research on wisdom. The model describes how the acquisition of wisdom comes from efforts to establish “meaning,” achieving excellence in mind and virtue, creating meaning through life experiences, and achieving balance between personal and common good. Baltes and Staudinger (2000) stated that this model of wisdom incorporates the idea of fundamental pragmatics, which is an understanding of the human condition as well as the ability to recognize and construct meaning in life. In essence, knowing how to review past life experiences, give advice about present-day situations, and develop plans for the future are criteria evidenced in this model. One of the major findings from Baltes and Smith’s (2008) paradigm suggested that wise people show propensity to value others more than self, and a key aspect to wisdom is hiring people who can develop and effect organizational meaning. Azure’s (2004) framework for measuring wisdom considered essential elements for organizational leaders and how they create meaning: time perspective, reflective life experience, making sense of ambiguity, trade-off judgment, dealing with life pragmatics, psychological empathy, and emotional maturity. K-12 superintendents who increase their wisdom through these elements effectively coordinate the talent in their schools to achieve maximum results and create personal and organizational meaning.

Wisdom is a key domain in the transformational process—a prerequisite to becoming a leader and creating meaning. It is considered a domain that enables leaders to “lead deeply and make a difference through tapping into meaning and purpose” (Warm, 2012, p. iii). Wise leaders look to build social interactions that create potentially empowering environments and relationship development. This is essential for superintendents to include all stakeholders in the educational environment and give them a voice to be heard. Similarly exemplary K-12 superintendents demonstrate openness and empathy in social interactions and provide opportunities for followers to grow; in short, they are human with them. It results in actions that best serve the organization while cultivating human development toward excellence in the workplace. Wise leaders develop shared vision and meaning with their followers. Furthermore, wise leaders are able to pick up clues and meaning from interactions with followers allowing for a better understanding of their needs to create organizational meaning (McKenna, Rooney, & Boal, 2009).

**Inspiration.** Research suggests there is a correlation between the ability of leaders to be inspiring and their ability to achieve results. Inspiration brings out the greatness in teams, performance, and results. Inspiration serves as an important domain for many reasons. First, it elevates levels of positive affect and increases overall involvement of individuals in tasks (Kaufman, 2011; Raisor, 2011). Additionally, inspired individuals set goals and work diligently toward them. They find greater sense of purpose and overall meaning in life while being fulfilled with a sense of accomplishment. Lastly, inspiration improves well-being and overall healthy functioning

through increased positivity and life satisfaction (Thrash, Elliot, Maruskin, & Cassidy, 2010).

Accordingly, sources of inspiration play an important role. Individuals experience greater inspiration “if the inspirational content is concordant with individual meaning and values” (Jennings, 2012, p. vii). Chan (2010) reported that innovative breakthroughs are often inspired by past experience—things and ideas that one has interacted with in the world—but warns that past experiences can create tunnel vision when seeing the future through a rearview mirror. Sir Ken Robinson (2013) considered this “just the push you need, not only to ask, but also to answer the question, ‘What’s next?’” (p. 232). Passion and insight are important characteristics of inspiration. The ability for K-12 superintendents to be able to praise and critique, and invite followers’ in and make them feel good about their contributions, provides positivity and well-being in the organization. Exemplary K-12 superintendents motivate others and focus on objectives in a hopeful way. They develop coherence, communion, and agency in the workplace that supports real-world learning. Many scholars posit that leaders’ values and leadership styles are responsible for shaping the organizational culture (Chan, 2010; Crowley, 2011; Gallo, 2007; Jennings, 2012). Yet multiple researchers contend that certain characteristics of inspiration lead to better performance in the workplace. In fact, Gibson’s recent research on inspiration is leading current thought—from being inspired *by* something and being inspired *to* something both personally and in organizations (Gibson, Ivancevich, & Konopaske, 2012). The value of inspiration is key to designing jobs

to help employees connect their day-to-day actions with a higher purpose (e.g., coherence), engagement in a valued community (e.g., communion), a path toward growth and development (e.g., agency), leaders may be able to indirectly affect the inspiration employees experience related to certain job tasks. (I. H. Smith, 2014, p. 112)

Over the past 20 years, many theories have emerged to uncover the various layers of inspiration and its influence on organizations. In the early 1990s, Tobin R. Hart's (2014) research suggests that inspiration is a significant, distinct epistemic event that ordinary people experience and that inspiration can be cultivated, not willed. P. Smith's (2012) book, *Lead With a Story*, exemplifies crafting a business narrative that captivates, convinces, and inspires: "Help people appreciate the opportunity they have today as a gift and motivate them to perform like it's the last game of the state finals, with no 'next year' to fall back on" (p. 138). P. Smith contended, "There are countless things to distract people from their work. Keeping them motivated and focused on their objectives requires inspirational leadership" (p. 139). Following the research done by Thrash and Elliot at the turn of the century, I. H. Smith created the disruption model of inspiration in 2014, designed to measure how individuals are inspired to act. The model outlines potential actions that can influence the experience of inspiration. I. H. Smith (2014) concluded that "(a) inspiration disrupts the typical way of thinking; (b) perceptions are relevant to people's core motives; and (c) inspiration is perceived to be attainable" (p. 113). The inspirational leader exudes positive energy and enthusiasm about the future and inspires hope for his or her followers. This has positive effects on relationships and productivity in organizations. Kouzes and Posner (2006) stated, "What breakthrough



innovators and exemplary leaders understand is that *all* of us want a tomorrow that is better than today. The critical skill for leaders is discovering just what ‘new and improved’ means to others” (p. 113). Positive emotions contribute to a positive and thriving environment where individuals are engaged in extraordinary performance and clear visions are established (Gallo, 2007; Walumbwa, Christensen, & Muchiri, 2013; Zenger et al., 2010).

The rate of change in the business world is not going to slow down. If anything, it will continue to speed up over the next few decades. Without inspiration, critical information about quality remains dormant in people’s minds. Leaders who inspire are empowering their followers to manage work groups and create meaning in their work. Kotter (2012) noted,

As the rate of change increases, the willingness and ability to keep developing become central to career success for individuals and to economic success for organizations. Leaders grow to become unusually competent in advancing organizational transformation. They learn to be leaders. (p. 186)

Sir Ken Robinson (2013) expressed the effects of inspiration on meaning in life by saying, “*Finding your element* is about discovering what lies within you and, in doing so, transforming what lies before you. It will give you a deeper sense of who you really are and the life you could and maybe should live” (pp. 242-243). This inspiration will serve as a model for others to follow and K-12 superintendents need to make this a priority in developing the next generation of leaders. Inspiring others to serve thoroughly and authentically has a positive effect on meaning making. Additionally, inspirational leaders have passion for change and are role models in their organizations leading by example

(Kouzes & Posner, 2006). Inspiration provides followers with direction and motivation for problem solving, which promotes creativity and innovation and leads to meaning in their work (Kaufman, 2011). Crowley (2011) asserted, “Leaders who make a personal connection with employees inspire their highest achievement” (p. 79). Sustained innovation and ongoing follower achievement of team goals provide organizational results and enthusiasm. This leads to a higher sense of follower engagement, purpose, meaning, and overall life satisfaction (Mautz, 2015).

### **Intersection**

When the five domains of meaning—character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration—are interconnected, they support leaders and followers in creating personal and professional meaning throughout the organization. This sense of meaning in and out of work produce in Frankl’s words the why to live despite many challenging societal issues. Frankl (2006) stated,

Our answer must consist, not in talk and meditation, but in right action and in right conduct. Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfill the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual. (p. 77)

Now more than ever, leaders are called to build relationships and show character. There is a leadership shortage in the world. Zenger and Folkman’s (2009) work considers the ability to connect and be a resource for others to lead. Kouzes and Posner (2016) strongly contended that leadership is a relationship and “you have to network and make connections, building relationships with people” (p. 152).

Indeed, many centuries ago Aristotle wrote about “drafting a code” and being committed to ethical principles to prepare people for habit-forming behaviors. When the code describes the very best version of self, it is a reflection of principles (Howard & Korver, 2008). As individuals we must make a habit of using ethics as a lever. In taking the high road people learn to think and act more skillfully and live a more meaningful life. They owe it to the next generation to prepare them as future leaders and “the imperative is clear because we see the purpose of public education is to help create literate, participating, productive citizens to sustain and even enhance our democracy” (Domenech et al., 2016, p. xiii).

### **Personal Meaning**

People are born with a love of learning, but a fixed mindset can undo it. Think of a time when you were enjoying something—playing a sport, learning a new dance—then it became hard and you stopped. A fixed mindset accepts this as is and yet an example of a growth mindset would be to meet the challenge and keep going. Moreover, things in a person’s past often measure him or her, but learning from the experience rather than judging intelligence and personality forms a basis for continual renewal and growth. Carol Dweck (2006) in her pioneering work on “mindset” offers insights “with the threat of failure looming, students with the growth mindset mobilize their resources for learning. They told us they, too, sometimes felt overwhelmed, but their response was to dig in and do what it takes” (p. 58).

Likewise, understanding culture—who people are a part of, who are their friends and families, and where they come from—are all steps in appreciating the idea and values of this world and the people they surround themselves with that develops a growth

mindset and has a profound effect on who they are. Gladwell (2008) noted,

Living a long life depended on who we were—that is, our genes. It depended on the decisions we made—on what we chose to eat, and how much we chose to exercise, and how effectively we were treated by the medical system. No one was used to thinking about health in terms of *community*. (p. 10)

Indeed, finding personal meaning in one's life and fulfilling his or her potential is supported by many scholars. Howard Gardner (1998) in his book, *Extraordinary Minds*, concluded that exceptional individuals have a special talent for identifying their own strengths and weaknesses. As leaders both personally and professionally, people are called upon to analyze opportunities and problems from a broad perspective and to understand potential impacts their actions have on others. Moreover, doing things with an eye toward generating the best possible business results tomorrow, using the opportunities presented today is considered great strategic influence.

For the same reason Senge et al. (2004) described an “inner freedom” that comes from “an awakening awareness that I am free to do whatever I am required to contribute toward my destiny, less constrained by my past habits” (p. 223). Furthermore, personal meaning is also a call to service: “When you see what you're here for, the world begins to mirror your purpose in magical way—It's almost as if you suddenly find yourself on a stage in a play that was written expressively for you” (Senge et al., 2004, p. 114). Lastly, integrating one's past, present, and future into a cohesive, unified sense of self is a complex task that continues for a lifetime. People's ongoing examination of who they are in their full humanity, embracing all of their identities, creates the possibility of building alliances that may ultimately free everyone (Adams et al., 2013; Bandura, 1997).

## **Meaning Creates Successful Organizations**

Exemplary leaders know the benefits of building relationships and communicating with followers in caring, courageous, and disciplined ways. Zenger et al. (2010) contended that leadership is complex and made up of many components, and when done well, “it inspires and motivates to high performance” (p. 4). They further stated that touching hearts is important in leading others. Zenger et al. asserted that leaders can help make people’s work more meaningful by giving them the freedom to make choices, opportunities for variety and challenge, giving regular feedback, and ensuring that people can see things through from start to finish. Clearly the traits of character, relationships, and inspiration are important factors in creating meaning in organizations, according to Zenger et al. (2010), but there’s one factor that matters even more: the belief that what one does positively impacts others.

Professor Adam Grant at Wharton Business School concurred that there is a need to build relationships and suggested three strategies that leaders should leverage when it comes to creating more meaningful work: (a) show your people how their work benefits others (giver), (b) share how others appreciate your people’s work (taker), and (c) help your people develop a deeper understanding of your customer’s problems in order to help them (matcher). He stated,

It’s tempting to reserve the giver label for larger-than-life heroes such as Mother Teresa or Mahatma Ghandi, but being a giver doesn’t require extraordinary acts of sacrifice. It just involves acting on the interests of others, such as by giving help, providing mentoring, sharing credit, or making connections for others. (p. 5)

People want to be part of something significant: something larger than life. They want to do important work and contribute and be appreciated, and perhaps most of all, they want to make a difference. In short, they want to create meaning in their own lives and strive toward a shared vision in making a positive impact on others.

Specifically, Daniel Pink (2012), author and expert on the nature of work, considered meaning and purpose as core motivators, alongside autonomy and mastery. Money alone is not enough to push people to do their best. Instead, they are driven and inspired when they believe that what they are doing serves something important beyond themselves. People long for this meaning. Pink noted, in his TEDTalk on what motivates us to work harder, better, and with more satisfaction, that “more and more organizations want to have some kind of transcendent purpose” (n.p.). He further stated, “Partly because that’s the way to make coming to work better [for employees], and partly because that’s the way to get better talent” (n.p.). Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) contended that organizational meaning occurs when innovative leaders adapt organizational structures to compete in today’s unreliable market (see also Crowley, 2011; Zenger & Folkman, 2009). In fact, Mautz (2015) advised, “If you want to leave a legacy behind live in the service of others” (p. 75). While there is agreement between authors about certain aspects of legacy building and meaning making, there is also some disagreement. Mautz contended that lasting results are the clearest path to leaving a legacy and meaning in work. In contrast, Kouzes and Posner (2016) suggested that quality relationships decide the outcome of a legacy and successful organizations.

## **K-12 Superintendent**

The future of this 21st-century global world demands a moral imperative to create meaning for self and organizations. Exemplary K-12 superintendents need a sense of urgency with meaning in their work because the very future of today's children is at stake (V. J. M. Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; UNESCO, 2016). The role and responsibilities of the K-12 superintendents are complex. The organizational culture influences how decisions are made and carried out. The demands for superintendents being the instructional leader in the age of accountability with Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAP) are tremendous (CDE, 2014). As part of California's new Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF; CDE, 2013), school districts under the guidance of superintendents are required to develop, adopt, and annually update a 3-year LCAP. The McREL research team, led by Marzano et al. (2006), found a "statistically significant relationship (a positive correlation of .24) between district leadership and student achievement" (p. 1). Governance structures in the 21st century demand that superintendents and boards understand the power and immediacy of electronic media, the universal hunger to connect and belong in organizations, forward-thinking policy that will keep pace with the development of big data from multiple sources, increased push from federal, state, and local levels to support more science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education, and emergence of cross-sector domains, such as personal location and data.

Recent studies concur that there is a trend toward researching meaning in system-wide success. John Maxwell's (2013) *Five Levels of Leadership* culminates in people following the leader because of who he is and what he represents. Larick and Petersen

(2015) contended that exemplary leaders engage in “conversation and dialog” in “following breadcrumbs” to the future (n.p.). Certainly open sincere communication builds connection and gives followers hope. Equally important, K-12 superintendents represent their school system in local, statewide, and national arenas and work at the center of a network of systems that operate in, and in relationship to, the school district. Furthermore, Larick and Petersen contended that seeing things from a larger perspective and understanding self is a basic commitment to life as a superintendent. They asserted the importance of speaking the truth with wisdom and boldness from experience-based knowledge, and concurred with E. M. Forster saying, “either a life of courage, or it ceases to be life” (Larick & Petersen, 2015, n.p.).

Understanding how the five domains of meaning interact in the life of a K-12 superintendent in the 21st century demands a strengths-based approach to guide consensus infused with the five domains of meaning. It takes wisdom and relational skills to develop emotional intelligence and intuition to guide crucial decisions in leading groups with extreme ideologies and bringing them to utilize reflective thinking. Inspiring generational and perceptual differences of the board and management team is another key factor for superintendents in learning how to apply leadership styles to team build with leadership and governance teams that can be forward thinking. Creating a shared vision and displaying character that supports social justice is at the core of a superintendent’s work with multiple perspectives, attitudes, and values providing a powerful position for an agenda that supports all students with “liberty and justice for all.” Adams et al. (2013) stated, “We have to expose the social breakdown that produces conflict that separates human beings from hope and courage and discipline and risk-taking” (p. 627).



Leveraging these strengths builds relationships and provides an understanding of how to work effectively with staff, students, community leaders, cabinet, government leaders, and the board (Brown, 2010; K. Robinson, 2015; Sternke, 2011; Watkins, 2013). When exemplary K-12 superintendents lead by example they create personal and organizational meaning through the five domains and empower their followers to join them in envisioning the future through connections and an authentic desire for open communication and thoughtful decision making.

Furthermore, a recent blog entitled “A New Brand of Superintendents and Their Visions for 2015” (Berry, 2015) stated that there is a new brand of innovative school superintendents emerging who are “successful in improving their systems and student learning, and finding new ways to cultivate and utilize teachers as leaders” (para. 3). Likewise, the Waters Foundation works extensively with “Habits of a Systems Thinker” to better understand student learning and system structures. They are identifying the circular nature of complex cause-and-effect relationships (Waters Foundation, 2010). DeWitt (2017) concurred, “In this day and age of accountability, we need more leaders who will focus on the whole-child and champion the cause of a well-rounded education for all students, including those who are marginalized” (p. 181). He works extensively with renowned educator John Hattie who contends that educators must know the impact they are having on learning and enduring relationships that will keep them moving toward successful systems (DeWitt, 2017).

K-12 superintendents must be politically savvy and bound by an ethical system that supports achieving the ethics of excellence—high standards through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration. This is, to say the least, the foundation of

a democratic public education system. Margaret Wheatley (2005) described “conversational leadership” as crucial for a leader who can convene diverse people and viewpoints in the creative process of bringing forth intelligence. Similarly Van Deuren, Evert, and Lang (2015) stressed that superintendents must address key issues related to orienting school board members to the complex role of being a superintendent in guiding high-performing school systems, teacher compensation issues, and educational technology. Upon reflection, a K-12 superintendent must work hard to understand all circumstances, avoid self-judgment and self-abuse, and lift up the community doing what is right and true. The research is abundantly clear that nothing motivates a child more than when learning is valued by schools, families, and the community working together in partnership. These forms of involvement do not happen by accident or invitation, they happen by explicit, strategic intervention (Hattie, Masters, & Birch, 2015; Kentucky Association of School Administrators [KASA], 2015; Torkalson, 2016).

### **Summary**

The review of literature on leadership and meaning from Ancient Greece to current times shows a plethora of theories perpetuating the idea that leadership and meaning are important to individuals and organizations. Ulrich and Ulrich noted,

There is an increasing and pressing need for good and great leaders at all levels in organizations. Leaders who not only deliver results but also foster meaning.

Leadership agendas that include both fiscal and social responsibility, both solving existing problems while imaging new possibilities. (p. 263)

Leadership is a noble stewardship. Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) further stated,

“Organizations that succeed in helping employees find meaning in downturns often

create a cadre of resilient and motivated contributors who will be the problem solvers and innovators of future success” (p. 263). It is true that exemplary leaders including K-12 superintendents know the plan is never complete, and it takes everyone in the organization to commit to hard work, want plans to succeed, and be ready to act. True self-assessment is never finished. Exemplary leadership requires constant re-sharpening, refocusing, and never really being satisfied (Drucker et al., 2008).

Drawing on contemporary and historical examples, scholars are shattering the myth of traditional “heroic” leadership—and providing opportunities for exemplary leaders to lead their followers by creating meaning for themselves and in their organizations (Bass & Bass, 2008; Cisek, 2009; Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010; Zenger & Folkman, 2009). Becoming highly motivated, dynamic contributors at every level in organizations, based on the five domains of meaning—character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration—is a challenge indeed. The fast-paced world of 21st-century change and digital overload is immense for superintendents who must be a positive influence in the school community at all times to sustain a high-performing organization through meaning and purpose (Cisek, 2009; Frankl, 2006; Pink, 2006). In fact, studies have shown a direct connection between workplace satisfaction and increased productivity (W. Moore, 2014; Robbins, 2008).

The theoretical framework for the five domains of meaning presented in this study reflects the current body of research by Larick and Petersen (2016). They contended that the literature provides insight into the individual elements of the five domains of meaning, but there is an absence in the literature of a holistic construct of what exemplary leaders do to create personal and organizational meaning (Larick & Petersen, 2016).

People are more interested than ever in having work time matter. Mautz (2015) called this their greatest role and stated, “The truth is that work can be so much more for us . . . we can make work truly work for us, on so many levels, when it truly matters” (p. 234). In their book *Leadership on the Line*, Heifetz and Linsky (2002) asserted, “When you examine leadership, you need a holding environment . . . a space formed by a network of relationships within which people can tackle tough, sometimes divisive questions without flying apart” (p. 102). They further stated, “Meaning derives from finding ways, rather than any one particular way, to love, to contribute to the worldly enterprise, to enhance the quality of life for people and you” (p. 220). Moreover,

Experiencing leadership is a way of giving meaning to one’s life by contributing to the lives of others. At its best, leadership is a labor of love. Opportunities for these labors cross your path every day, though we appreciate through the scar tissue of our own experience that seizing those opportunities takes heart. (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p. 223)

Leveraging these five domains of meaning—character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration—addresses a gap in the literature as to how they collectively manifest in creating personal and organizational meaning. However, there is growing evidence that exemplary leaders including K-12 superintendents are ready to take on the awesome responsibility of leading the next generation in creating personal and organizational meaning that has far-reaching consequences for tomorrow’s leaders (Domenech et al., 2016; Larick & Petersen, 2016; Zenger & Folkman, 2009).

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

### **Overview**

Chapter III introduces the educational research defined by James McMillan and Sally Schumacher (2010) as “evidence-based inquiry that uses systematically gathered empirical data” (p. 17). The mixed-methods case study examines how superintendents create personal and organizational meaning in K-12 public schools through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration. This chapter begins with the purpose and research questions studied and examines the rationale for using the research design, population, sample, instrumentation, and data collection, including interviews, surveys, and systematic procedures employed. Additionally, this chapter includes the limitations of the study and concludes with a summary of the overall methodology used in the research study.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this mixed-methods case study was to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary K-12 superintendents use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to determine the degree of importance to which followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration create personal and organizational meaning

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the behaviors that exemplary K-12 superintendents use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration?

2. To what degree do followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning?

### **Research Design**

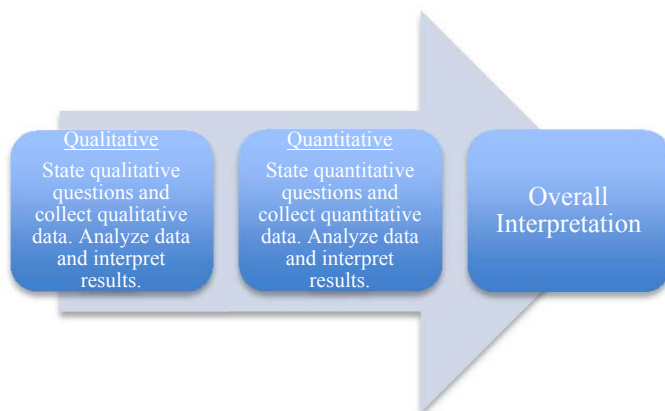
The research design used in this study to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary K-12 superintendents use to create personal and organizational meaning was a mixed-methods case study. The use of mixed-methods research design combines quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a more thorough investigation. Roberts (2010) contended, “Qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single study complement each other by providing results with greater breadth and depth” (p. 145). Qualitative inquiry provides opportunity for deep insight into how the exemplary superintendents used the five domains—character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration to create personal and organizational meaning through scripted interviews. Quantitative inquiry collects survey data from followers about their perceptions of how leaders used the five domains to create meaning. Roberts (2010) stated, “Large amounts of data are summarized to reach generalizations based on statistical projections in quantitative inquiry” (p. 143).

The mixed-methods exploratory design gathers the qualitative data first and a quantitative phase follows. According to Creswell (2003), “Results from two types of data produce a more complete understanding” (p. 79). Creswell (2003) further contended,

The purpose of the exploratory design is to generalize qualitative findings based on a few individuals to a larger sample gathered during the quantitative phase.

The researcher interprets to what extent the quantitative results generalize or expand on the initial qualitative findings. (p. 87)

Creswell (2005) defined a case study as an in-depth exploration of data to support specific cases for study in a specific time and place. Patten (2012) concurred stating, “In a case study, the emphasis is on obtaining thorough knowledge of an individual” (p. 9). Case studies describe the contextual analysis of a limited number of events and their relationships (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1.* Mixed-methods design.

### **Qualitative Research Design**

Qualitative inquiry includes a description and interpretation of the case being studied. Data come from fieldwork and observations of interactions (Patton, 2015). For this study, qualitative research was conducted with three exemplary K-12 superintendents through scripted face-to-face open-ended interviews. The qualitative researcher focuses on organizational processes looking at the essential character of something. By exploring three K-12 exemplary superintendents’ perspectives in great depth, qualitative understanding is achieved (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The data were collected through scripted open-ended interviews to better explain how the superintendents used

the five domains of character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration to create meaning for themselves and their followers. Patton (2015) stated, “The themes, patterns, understandings, and insights that emerge from fieldwork and subsequent analysis are the fruit of qualitative inquiry” (p. 14). Creswell (2005) described how themes are then coded to form descriptions in the data. The idea of the coding process is to make sense of the data, examine codes for overlap or redundancy, and collapse them into broad themes (Creswell, 2005).

### **Quantitative Research Design**

In quantitative research, there is an emphasis on producing data that can be easily reduced to numbers. This study used SurveyMonkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>), an electronic survey with multiple questions, to gather responses from 36 followers about their perceptions of how exemplary K-12 superintendents used the five domains to create meaning in their organizations. Patten (2012) stated, “Quantitative researchers are able to work with large samples because objective measures such as anonymous, objective questionnaires are easy to administer in a short amount of time” (p. 19). Quantitative research allows the researcher to better understand the degree of importance to which followers’ perceived character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration were used in creating meaning personal and organizational meaning.

### **Method Rationale**

The mixed-methods case study was a collaborative effort by 12 peer researchers across numerous fields including nonprofit universities, charter schools, nonprofit organizations, K-12 public schools, private sector companies, technology firms, automotive organizations, NCAA Division 1 athletic organizations, healthcare



organizations, and police departments. Each of the 12 researchers used the same mixed-methods case study method in order to study the breadth and depth of exemplary leadership through both qualitative and quantitative methods. Further research into possible correlations of obtained data gathered by all researchers is made possible by methodology consistency. With the mixed-methods case study determined as the most appropriate approach for this study, the peer researchers used a qualitative scripted interview with three exemplary leaders and a quantitative survey given to 36 followers. This researcher's goal was to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary K-12 superintendents use to create personal and organizational meaning. This mixed-methods case study was designed to address the gap in research specifically addressing how the five domains are used collectively to create meaning.

### **Population**

A population is a group that conforms to specific criteria with the intent to generalize results (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The population is the group that researchers are ultimately interested in. Creswell (2003) stated that a population is “a group of individuals who comprise the same characteristics” (p. 644). In California, there are 526 elementary districts, 77 high school districts, and 343 unified districts, for a total of 946 superintendents. As the chief executive officer, a superintendent reports to an elected board of education. Superintendents are responsible for every element of the school district's operation including human resources, development of the district budget, business services, implementation of state and federal programs including the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP), maintenance and operations, food services, health and safety, community relations, intercollegiate athletic programs, working with parents

and stakeholders and maintaining an organizational culture that promotes creativity and high achievement (Frailey, 2016).

### **Target Population**

A target population for a study is the entire set of individuals chosen from the overall population for which the study makes inferences based on the data. According to Creswell (2003), “The target population is the actual list of sampling units from which the sample is selected” (p. 393). The target population defines the population to which the findings of a survey are supposed to be generalized, and it is important that target populations are clearly identified for the purposes of research study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). With 946 school superintendents in California, it was not feasible to use such a large population due to time, geography, and monetary restraints. In order to identify a manageable population, a target population was identified. In this study the population was narrowed to 25 exemplary superintendents who are members of the Northern California Superintendents Organization. The target population for this study considered that exemplary superintendents met five of the following six criteria: (a) evidence of successful relationships with followers; (b) evidence of leading a successful organization; (c) a minimum of 5 years of experience in the profession; (d) articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings; (e) recognition by peers; (f) membership in professional association in their field.

### **Sample**

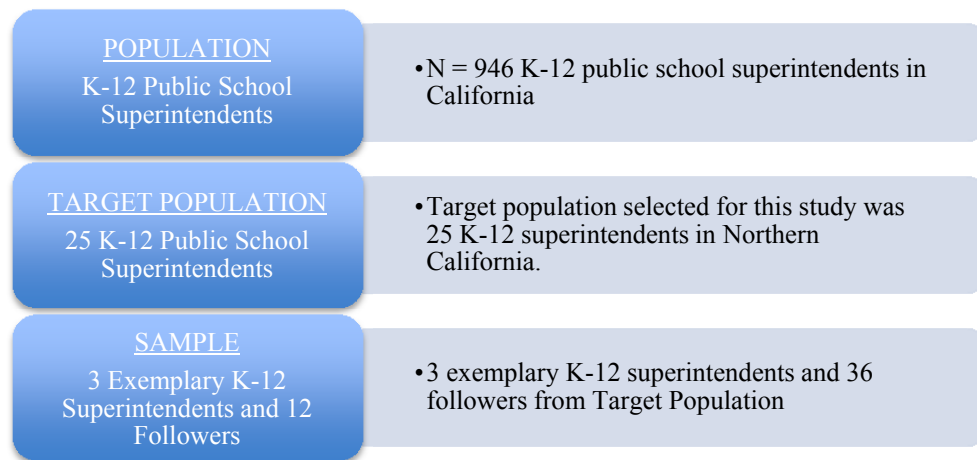
A sample is defined as “a subgroup of the target population that the researcher plans to study for generalizing about the target population” (Creswell, 2005, p. 146).

Purposeful and convenience sampling were chosen for this study for efficiency, accessibility of subjects, and selecting subjects with certain characteristics. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), “Select a sample that is representative of the population or that includes subjects with needed characteristics” (p. 138). Purposeful sampling (also called purposive sampling) makes possible generalization to similar subjects. Purposeful sampling in this mixed-methods case study was chosen as the method of sample selection based on the criteria used for exemplary leaders.

Convenience sampling (also called available sampling) assumes high participation rate, is less time consuming, and has ease of administration. Creswell (2005) stated, “In convenience sampling the researcher selects participants because they are willing and available to be studied” (p. 149). It provides ease of accessibility and proximity for the researcher and supports mixed-method studies by including both qualitative and quantitative research. Patten (2012) stated that “the characteristics of the sample probably are the characteristics of the population . . . inferring from a sample to a more generalized population” (p. 45).

An expert panel is often used to identify sample participants when special knowledge and experience in the particular field is required. For purposes of this study, two expert panel members who have extensive experience as superintendents and are retired members of the superintendents’ organization were selected to make nominations of potential superintendent participants. The expert panel ranked 25 K-12 superintendents based on criteria, and five superintendents were selected from the list that received the lowest aggregate scores (1 the highest score). The researcher selected the top three exemplary K-12 superintendents for participation in the study. By interviewing

K-12 exemplary superintendents, the intent was to identify and explain the behaviors used to create meaning for themselves and their organizations (see Figure 2). Patton (2015) stated, “The greater the amount of useable data obtained from each person, the fewer the number of participants” (p. 311).



*Figure 2.* Population, target population, and sample.

An application for Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval of Research Protocol to the BUIRB was submitted and approved (Appendix A: IRB Approval). IRB is responsible for approving human subjects research and “ensures that appropriate ethical and legal guidelines are followed” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 125). The National Institutes of Health (NIH) web-based training course “Protecting Human Research Participants” was completed by this researcher in July 2015 (Appendix B: NIH Certification). The application defined the purpose of the study, the participants, research methods, and data collection procedures. The application specified any possible risks to the participants and how these risks would be addressed (Creswell, 2005). Upon approval of IRB, the potential participants were contacted to request their involvement in this study. The expert panel provided the researcher with five K-12 superintendents from

the 25 potential participants. The researcher then selected the top three K-12 superintendents to interview. Face-to-face interviews were scheduled based on participant availability and accessibility. The process for contacting sample participants was reviewed as follows:

1. Potential participants were first contacted via phone at their office to request their involvement in this study (Appendix C: Introduction Letter—Leaders). They were given an explanation of the purpose and benefits of the study, possible risks of the study, anonymity associated with being involved in the study, and any questions were answered. Once the subjects agreed to participate in the study, they received the informed consent form (Appendix D: Informed Consent Form).
2. Once approval was received to conduct the research, participants were contacted and interviews were determined on availability of the participant. An appointment was scheduled for 30-60 minutes, and the participant was notified that he or she would be receiving the following via e-mail in advance of the meeting: (a) informed consent form (to be signed at the time of the interview), (b) invitation letter (Appendix E: Invitation Letter—Leaders), (c) script questions for review (Appendix F: Scripted Interview Questions), and (d) research participant’s bill of rights (Appendix G: Bill of Rights). Interviews were conducted at the place and time arranged for the convenience of the participant. The interviews were recorded on a digital device (Appendix H: Audio release) by the researcher and transcribed.

The three exemplary K-12 superintendents selected 12 followers to complete the voluntary survey. They notified them via e-mail that the researcher would be following up with an introduction letter. Followers received an introduction letter requesting their

involvement in the online survey (Appendix I: Introduction Letter—Followers). Once subjects agreed to participate in the survey, they received an invitation letter (Appendix J: Invitation Letter—Followers). Surveys with informed consent were then sent to followers via e-mail, with a window of time for completion (Appendix K: Survey). All participants retained anonymity.

### **Instrumentation**

This study utilized the mixed-methods case study instrumentation. The researcher used both qualitative and quantitative data analysis. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), “Mixed method studies combine qualitative and quantitative paradigms in meaningful ways. It is a convergence of philosophy, viewpoints, traditions, methods, and conclusions” (p. 396). The peer researchers, in partnership with faculty, developed an interview guide for the qualitative interviews. Scripted interview questions were developed to accommodate all fields of inquiry from a pilot survey administered by this researcher and one other peer researcher. A SurveyMonkey tool was created in partnership with Dr. James Cox, peer researchers, and faculty for the quantitative data collection. In the publication *Your Opinion Please! How to Build the Best Questionnaires in the Field of Education*, Dr. James Cox and Dr. Keni Cox (2008) provided direction for creating a quality survey instrument.

### **Qualitative Instrumentation**

To add reliability, the interviews were based on the literature review, the synthesis matrix, and the scripted interview questions. The strengths of using open-ended face-to-face interviews are flexibility, adaptability, ability to probe, clarify, use nonverbal behavior, high response rate, can be used with nonreaders, relatively unobtrusive, and

reliable for low-inference observations (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The standardized open-ended interview is extremely structured in terms of the wording of the questions. Participants are always asked identical questions, but the questions are worded so that responses are open ended. The interview questions were developed and revised by faculty and the 12 peer researchers. Four teams of three researchers worked with one faculty member to develop behaviors for exemplary leaders based on the five domains: character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration. The teams then collaborated to design interview questions based on agreed-upon behaviors. Many collaborative discussions were held with faculty and peer researchers to choose the final questions to be used for the interviews.

Each peer researcher did a pilot-test interview to determine if any flaws, limitations, or other weaknesses needed revision prior to implementation of the study. Participants who had similar positions to those who were in the actual study were selected for the pilot interview. The intent of the pilot interview was to practice getting detailed information and asking probing questions as a means of follow up. An expert observed the pilot-test interview and provided feedback regarding body language and other behaviors that may have indicated researcher bias. In addition, interview participants completed an evaluation form to assess their observations about the interview. All evaluations were sent to faculty members for their review. Questions were modified based on feedback and redistributed to peer researchers for review and approval. The final qualitative interview questions were used to conduct interviews with the three exemplary leaders. During the interview, the researcher took notes and recorded the interview and responses were transcribed.

## **Quantitative Instrumentation**

The quantitative portion of the study involved administering a close-ended survey via SurveyMonkey to 36 followers working directly with three exemplary K-12 superintendents (see Appendix K: Survey). The survey had standard questions and procedures, time for subjects to think about responses, and anonymity for respondents (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The survey was developed by four faculty, an instrumentation expert, and 12 peer researchers. The peer researchers worked in groups of three with one faculty member to develop behaviors for exemplary leaders based on the five domains: character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration. The teams then collaborated to design survey questions based on agreed-upon behaviors. Many collaborative discussions were held with faculty, peer researchers, and an instrumentation expert, to choose the final questions.

Survey questions were developed from the literature review. A data bank of questions was compiled and teams chose five questions and two alternate questions for faculty and instrumentation expert to develop for the initial survey. Revisions were brought back to the peer researchers, faculty, and expert, and the final survey was then developed and deployed for pilot testing. Doing a pilot survey helps to reveal any ambiguities with questions. Cox and Cox (2008) stated, “Make no assumptions and keep it simple” (p. 23). Another key element is performing an alignment check. Cross-referencing guiding questions with questionnaire items supports the researcher in developing a matrix to identify errors and omissions clearly. Cox and Cox (2008) further stated, “Lack of alignment can result in omissions in data, as well as the collection of unneeded information” (p. 35).



## **Field Testing**

A field test of the online survey was given twice, in a 7-day period to five participants by this researcher and one other peer researcher. Creswell (2005) stated, “The researcher administers the test at two different times to the same participants at a sufficient time interval” (p. 162). A test for reliability was included to ensure stability with scores over time. Roberts (2010) reported on a dissertation student obtaining feedback from field testing an online survey instrument and noted,

The web-based survey was administered to participants, who after completing the survey on-line, were asked to provide feedback on access to and navigation within the survey, clarity of instructions, and general observations. Results and feedback supported the validity and clarity of survey and data collection method. (pp. 154-155).

Participants chosen were followers of exemplary leaders with similar characteristics of the population to be studied but would be exempt from participating in the study.

Confidentiality was maintained and responses sent to an evaluator for collection via software application—SurveyMonkey. The peer researchers provided a questionnaire to participants to assess the quality of the survey. This information was shared with faculty and the instrument expert for evaluation and revisions were made to the instrument. The survey was checked for validity, reliability, and clarity before final release by faculty and the instrumentation expert. The final survey was used to conduct the study by all peer researchers with 36 followers of exemplary leaders.

## **Validity**

Validity in research refers to how accurately a study answers the study question or the strength of the study conclusions. Validity, as defined by Roberts (2010), “is the degree to which your instrument truly measures what it purports to measure” (p. 151). For outcome measures, such as surveys or tests, validity refers to the *accuracy* of measurement. In essence, validity refers to how well the assessment tool actually measures the underlying outcome of interest so that one can ensure that the findings of the study are true.

### **Content Validity**

All thematic teams worked to come up with criteria for reliability and the literature review was used to create the survey. Content validity is when a researcher must depend upon the appropriate construction of the instruments to ensure that the elements of the construct are measuring the research questions adequately (Patton, 2015). Creswell (2005) stated, “Researchers evaluate content validity by examining the plan used in constructing the instrument and they examine the information about the objectives and level of difficulty of the questions” (p. 164). A study must have content validity to ensure that misrepresentations are not made and so that conclusions can be drawn based on data collected.

### **Criterion Validity**

Criterion-related validity “determines whether the scores from an instrument are a good predictor of some outcome they are expected to predict” (Creswell, 2005, p. 165). Thematic team members worked to gain consensus in the field-test phase and feedback was provided for peer researchers in partnership with Brandman faculty to establish a

definition of exemplary leaders who had to demonstrate at least five of the six criteria established for selection in the study.

### **Reliability**

A goal of good research is to have reliable measures of outcomes. Test-retest reliability refers to the degree to which test results are consistent over time. In order to measure this, the test administrator must first give the same test to the same individuals on two occasions and correlate the scores. Creswell (2005) said, “Reliability means that scores from an instrument are stable and consistent” (p. 162). In addition, the more reliable the scores, the more valid they will be. Patton (2015) stated, “Qualitative inquiry, because the human being is the instrument of data collection, requires that the investigator carefully reflect on, deal with, and report potential sources of bias and error” (p. 58). By using an interview script and scripted questions during interviews, the researcher in this study was able to reliably interpret the data from the exemplary K-12 superintendents chosen for this study. In addition, the superintendents had the opportunity to check their transcribed interviews for accuracy, which further validated reliability of the data. Multiple scholars assert that reliability is more likely to achieve consistency in data collection, data analysis, and results (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 2015; Roberts, 2010).

In this study, one version of the instrument was administered one time and the peer researchers observed behaviors of the participants. Scores are reliable and accurate as participants’ scores are internally consistent across all items on the instrument (Creswell, 2005). This translates to how K-12 superintendents and other exemplary leaders use the five domains to create meaning in their organizations. Peer researchers

read one other peer interview and coded it to establish reliability. Furthermore, the strategy ensures that interviewees felt comfortable with the accuracy of their statements and no misrepresentation was made (Creswell, 2007).

### **Data Collection**

Collecting data is a careful study of who will be selected for study, obtaining permission to study them, and gathering information by asking people questions and observing their behaviors. Many decisions go into creating a good collection data procedure—where will the study take place, who will participate, how will permission be obtained, and what data to gather and how to collect it (Creswell, 2005). Confidentiality of participants was maintained throughout the process with numbers being the only identifying factor (e.g. Respondent 1, Respondent 2, etc.). Direct quotes were used in the study, but no identifying facts were included in the quotes. Data collection did not commence until after permission from Brandman University Institutional Review Board (BUIRB; see Appendix A: IRB Approval) and completion of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) web-based training course protecting all participants' privacy throughout the study (see Appendix B: NIH Certification). Informed consent documentation was collected by the researcher and stored in locked files throughout the process.

Demographic information is recorded in Chapter IV, Results of the Study.

### **Qualitative Data Collection**

Qualitative data were collected through a peer-designed and professionally reviewed interview guide of questions. Those who responded to the e-mail were sent an invitation letter (see Appendix E: Invitation Letter) and contact was made via phone call to further explain the research study and answer any questions. Interviews were

conducted in a face-to-face setting, and the researcher asked a series of scripted, open-ended questions. Before the interviews began, the informed consent form (see Appendix D: Consent Form) was read and signed, and the research participant's bill of rights (see Appendix G: Bill of Rights) was read, discussed, and provided to each participant. Participants were also provided the audio recording release form to be signed (see Appendix H: Audio Release Form).

The qualitative data consisted of audio recorded, transcribed, anecdotal interviews from scripted interview questions with three exemplary K-12 superintendents based on the research questions in the study (see Appendix F: Interview Questions). Semi-structured interviews maintained consistency across participants, and open-ended questions were guided by the research problem. For this study, scripted questions were open ended and follow-up probing questions were given to elicit further details pertinent to the five domains being investigated. Interviews were recorded using digital devices and notes taken by the researcher. Statements were transcribed and coded for emergent themes.

The purpose of the qualitative data is to attend to “possible interpretations and verifications of the emergent findings” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, pp. 229-330). This also helps the researcher notice nonverbal cues that can enhance the results of the interview experience. Patton further stated that the purpose of each interview is to “record as fully and fairly as possible that particular interviewee’s perspective” (p. 471). Interviews were transcribed using the following steps: (a) interviews were transcribed, (b) interviews were coded, (c) themes identified, and (d) comprehensive thematic descriptions were developed for interpretation.

## **Quantitative Data Collection**

Quantitative data were collected through a peer-designed and professionally reviewed instrument that was administered to 36 followers in the three exemplary superintendents' organizations. Participants who responded to the e-mail were sent an invitation letter (see Appendix J: Invitation Letter). The surveys were distributed electronically through the computer-generated software program called SurveyMonkey. All survey data were collected and all survey questions and data were protected with a password-protected account. Participants had to read and acknowledge the purpose and conditions of the study before they could open the survey.

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is essential for interpretations to answers to research questions in the study. Creswell (2005) stated, "Analysis consists of 'taking the data apart' to determine individual responses and then 'putting it together' to summarize it" (Creswell, 2005, p. 10). In this mixed-methods case study, both qualitative and quantitative research data were collected and analyzed. Qualitative data were collected through face-to-face interviews and quantitative data were collected through an online survey. The qualitative data were collected from exemplary leaders and transcribed, followed by the survey to followers to collect the quantitative data. Upon completion of both methods of research, the data were then examined to investigate the findings of the study.

## **Qualitative Analysis**

Data coding is the process that allows data to tell the story by suggesting codes to give a sense of the whole picture. Qualitative data were gathered from face-to-face interviews in order to code the data and audio recordings. The data were organized and

prepared with audio recordings being transcribed by the researcher. These transcriptions were shared with the interviewees to review for accuracy, allowing the opportunity for feedback to ensure that the interview was accurately transcribed. Data were formatted for coding to facilitate efficiency in working with mounds of data. Codes were then transcribed and compared for duplication and overlapping descriptions. The data coding process for this study involved three primary steps:

1. Data were coded.
2. The codes were scanned for frequencies. More specifically, in support of the theoretical framework used in this study, the researcher reviewed the five domains of character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration and the frequencies of their associated descriptive words.
3. The codes were scanned for themes.

As more data were collected, refinement occurred and more codes were added. Patton (2015) stated, “When researchers define a set of tentative codes, they use these codes to compare, sort, and synthesize large amounts of data” (p. 110). Visual representations were developed to organize assembly of information such as tables and charts, which assist in the analysis.

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

The quantitative data were requested from 34 followers via online SurveyMonkey. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the quantitative results obtained from the survey. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) contended, “The use of descriptive statistics is the most fundamental way to summarize data, and it is indispensable in interpreting the results of quantitative research” (p. 149). It provides the

researcher with the ability to analyze the data and transform numbers or observations into descriptions that characterize the data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patten, 2012). Descriptive statistics therefore provide simple summaries about the measures used to answer the research question: “To what degree do followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning?”

Quantitative research done online via SurveyMonkey virtually eliminates the risk of error. Another benefit of online surveys is the availability of immediate and continuous review. In this study, followers were presented with the questions on the survey and their choices were displayed in tables to clarify the content. When open-ended comments were requested, the researcher was faced with clustering and summarizing the responses. Together with simple graphics analysis, descriptive statistics (mean and frequency) is the fundamental way to present data and to interpret the results in a quantitative research study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

### **Limitations**

All studies have some limitations. Being open and honest about the limitations supports how others may determine the degree to which they affect the study (Roberts, 2010). Furthermore it helps in identifying the extent to which the findings can or cannot be generalized to other people and situations. Roberts (2010) supported this idea saying, “Limitations are usually areas over which you have no control. They are features of your study that you know may negatively affect the results of your ability to generalize” (p. 162).



## **Time and Distance**

Time and distance are features of this study that may impact difficulty and access results based on ability to generalize. Distance is no guarantee of objectivity (Patton, 2015). Additionally, there is no control over scheduling when participants can do the interviews. K-12 superintendents are extremely busy people with multiple priorities all the time. Keeping interviews to 30-60 minutes minimizes the amount of time that needs to be given to the study. Northern California limits the scope of statewide response and allows access for face-to-face interviews. Online surveys maximize the use of time that respondents can give to completion via e-mail.

## **Researcher as Instrument of Study**

In qualitative studies, the integrity and credibility of the researcher is of the utmost importance. According to Pezella, Pettigrew, and Miller (2012), “The phrase *researcher-as-instrument* refers to the researcher as an active respondent in the research process” (p. 167). Confirming and disconfirming evidence means being true to multiple perspectives as they emerge and reducing observer bias (Patton, 2015). As an immigrant, a National Board Certified Teacher, and an administrative educator for almost a decade, it was important for the researcher to be open and honest about the lens she brought to the study.

## **Sample Size**

There is a small sample size established by the peer researchers. However, due to the small sample size of three exemplary K-12 superintendents in Northern California, there is limited scope that could be considered as a limitation for generalizing to the total population.

## **Summary**

The procedures for collecting, analyzing, and linking both research types in this case study provided an integrated emphasis to each form of data. Creswell (2008) believed, “The combination of both quantitative and qualitative research in mixed methods provides a better understanding of the research problem than any one data alone” (p. 52). The purpose and research questions were addressed and examined using data collection and analysis. Through the combined efforts of the peer researchers in this thematic study, the outcomes and findings of creating personal and organizational meaning may yield information that can be replicated in future studies and generalized to the larger population and extend across industries. These outcomes and findings are discussed in Chapter IV.

## CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

### **Overview**

This mixed-methods case study explored how exemplary K-12 superintendents use character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration to create personal and professional meaning in their organizations and identified emerging themes and patterns. This study also explored the degree of importance to which followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration create personal and organizational meaning. In this chapter, the purpose and research questions are stated, along with the research methods and data collection procedures. This chapter also describes the population and sample as well as demographic data. A presentation and analysis of the data are presented in this chapter. A summary of the information is offered at the end of the chapter.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this mixed-methods case study was to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary K-12 superintendents use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to determine the degree of importance to which followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration create personal and organizational meaning.

## **Research Questions**

1. What are the behaviors that exemplary K-12 superintendents use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration?
2. To what degree do followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning?

## **Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures**

The research method used in this thematic study was a mixed-methods case study that utilized personal interviews via scripted questions with K-12 superintendents in Northern California and online surveys with followers in the organizations. The primary data collection was anecdotal data from scripted interview questions. Three separate interviews with active sitting superintendents were conducted. The interviews were recorded with a digital recording device and the recordings were transcribed and coded. The secondary data collection method was online surveys from SurveyMonkey with administrator-level followers in the organizations. Surveys were gathered via e-mail and protected with a password-protected account.

### **Interview Data Collection**

Interviews were conducted in a face-to-face setting, and the researcher asked a series of scripted, open-ended questions. Before the interviews began, the informed consent form (see Appendix D: Consent Form) was read and signed, and the research participant's bill of rights (see Appendix G: Bill of Rights) was read, discussed, and provided to each participant. Participants were also provided the audio-recording release

form to be signed (see Appendix H: Audio Release Form). The qualitative data consisted of audio-recorded, transcribed, anecdotal interviews from scripted interview questions with three exemplary K-12 superintendents based on the research questions in the study (see Appendix F: Interview Questions). For this study, scripted questions were open ended and follow-up probing questions were given to elicit further details pertinent to the five domains being investigated. Interviews were recorded using digital devices and notes taken by the researcher. Statements were transcribed and coded for emergent themes. Patton (2015) stated that the purpose of each interview is to “record as fully and fairly as possible that particular interviewee’s perspective” (p. 471). Interviews were transcribed using the following steps: (a) interviews were transcribed, (b) data were coded, and (c) codes were scanned for themes.

### **Survey Data Collection**

Surveys were conducted using SurveyMonkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>), an electronic survey with multiple questions, to gather responses from 36 followers about their perceptions of how exemplary leaders used the five domains to create meaning in their organizations. Thirty-four followers responded; survey results were collected from followers and revealed how they perceived exemplary leaders used the five domains to create meaning. An introduction was given to the followers to support their understanding that the success of any organization may depend in large part on the quality of interactions among the leader, team members, and associates. What determines the quality of these interactions is tied closely to the perception that these people have of the leader’s behaviors in five areas: character of the leader, vision for the organization, relationships between the leader and team members, wisdom of the leader,

and inspiration the leader provides. To answer Research Question 2, descriptive statistics were used to calculate the mean in order to indicate general tendencies in the data (Creswell, 2005).

### **Population**

The population for this mixed-methods case study was superintendents in California who met specific criteria for exemplary leaders with the intent to generalize the results. The population is the group that researchers are ultimately interested in. Creswell (2003) stated that a population is “a group of individuals who comprise the same characteristics” (p. 644). As the chief executive officer, a superintendent reports to an elected board of education. Superintendents are responsible for every element of the school district’s operation. A target population for a study is the entire set of individuals chosen from the overall population for which the study makes inferences based on the data. In this study, the population was narrowed to 25 exemplary superintendents who are members of the Northern California Superintendents Organization. The target population for this study considered that exemplary superintendents met five of the following six criteria: (a) evidence of successful relationships with followers; (b) evidence of leading a successful organization; (c) a minimum of 5 years of experience in the profession; (d) articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings; (e) recognition by peers; and (f) membership in professional association in their field. Table 1 represents criteria selection for the exemplary K-12 superintendents chosen for this study.

Table 1

*Criteria Selection for Exemplary K-12 Superintendents*

Criteria	Superintendent 1	Superintendent 2	Superintendent 3
Evidence of successful relationships with followers	X	X	X
Evidence of leading a successful organization	X	X	X
A minimum of 5 years of experience in profession	X	X	X
Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings	X	X	X
Recognition by peers	X	X	X
Membership in professional associations in field	X	X	X

**Sample**

A sample is defined as “a subgroup of the target population that the researcher plans to study for generalizing about the target population” (Creswell, 2005, p. 146). An expert panel was used to identify sample participants as special knowledge and experience in the particular field were required. For purposes of this study, two expert panel members who have extensive experience as superintendents and are retired members of the superintendents’ organization were selected to make nominations of potential superintendent participants. The expert panel ranked 25 K-12 superintendents based on criteria, and five superintendents were selected from the list. This researcher selected the top three exemplary K-12 superintendents for participation in the study.

Face-to-face interviews with exemplary K-12 superintendents were scheduled based on participant availability and accessibility. Followers in the organization

volunteered to participate in an online survey via SurveyMonkey to record their perceptions of how exemplary K-12 superintendents create organizational meaning.

### **Demographic Data**

The exemplary superintendents interviewed in this mixed-methods case study met all six of the selection criteria. Their selection was made by an expert panel who narrowed it down to five exemplary superintendents in Northern California and the top three were chosen to take part in this study. Followers were asked to supply demographic information to be used only to assist in understanding the results of the inquiry. They each entered a code provided to them by this researcher who asked them to complete the survey. Table 2 represents the demographic information of the 34 followers who completed the survey.

Table 2

*Demographic Information of Followers*

Respondents	Gender	Age in years		Years in organization		Years with current leader	
		No.	Age	No.	Years	No.	Years
34	25 female	0	20-30	12	0-5	11	0-2
	9 male	5	31-40	3	6-10	13	3-5
		7	41-50	13	11-20	7	6-10
		19	51-60	6	21+	3	11+
		3	61+				

### **Presentation and Analysis of Data**

The findings presented in this chapter were obtained using scripted questions posed during face-to-face interviews with three exemplary superintendents and triangulation of these accounts with data from followers' online responses to the Survey of Leadership Behaviors That Contribute to Personal and Organizational Meaning. The findings in this chapter are reported, based on their relationship to the research questions.



## **Interview Process and Procedures**

Each participant was asked the same general script questions for each of the five domains of character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration, and probing questions were used as necessary. All questions asked were from the Script Questions in Appendix F. The interviews were recorded with a digital voice-recording device and notes taken by the researcher. These audio-recorded statements were then transcribed and coded for emergent themes. The identities of the participants were kept confidential by using a unique identifying number, for example, Superintendent 1, Superintendent 2, Superintendent 3, and so forth. These transcriptions were shared with the interviewees to review for accuracy, allowing the opportunity for feedback to ensure that the interview was accurately transcribed. Data were formatted for coding to facilitate efficiency in working with mounds of data. Codes were then transcribed and compared for duplication and overlapping descriptions. The data coding process for this study involved three primary steps:

1. Data were coded.
2. The codes were scanned for frequencies. More specifically, in support of the theoretical framework used in this study, the researcher reviewed the five variables of character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration and the frequencies of their associated descriptive words.
3. The codes were scanned for themes.

## **Data by Research Questions**

### **Results for Research Question 1**

*What are the behaviors that exemplary K-12 superintendents use to create*

*personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration?*

This research question asked what behaviors exemplary superintendents use within the five domains to create meaning. All three (100%) superintendents reported the interplay of character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration in creating personal and organizational meaning. All of the superintendents were asked, “Here are five leadership behaviors that research suggests are necessary in an exemplary leader. Looking at these, would you agree that these are all important?” Each superintendent affirmed the question and chose character as the most important trait. However, all three superintendents stated that the interplay of the five domains was important in creating meaning. Table 3 represents the interplay of the five domains through the codes ranging from most frequent to least frequent. It is interesting to note that all superintendents rated character as the number one domain in providing meaning in organizations but the interplay of vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration was universal as well. Even though the data might suggest individual differences with the domains, Superintendent 1 rated the code *core, ethics, sound decision making, and proactive* at 19% and Superintendents 2 and 3 rated the same code with 3% and 9% respectively. In a holistic sense, when looking at all the character codes, all superintendents rated character above 20%. Depending on the code being considered, all superintendents talked about the ebb and flow of the domains depending on particular circumstances at any given time in the complex world of being a superintendent. In responding to the question about what leadership behaviors are important, Superintendent 1 said,

Well they are all important, but character stands out the most. Without character the other ones do not mean as much. Your character—integrity, openness, being authentic is so important. Your character says who you are as a leader and your honesty is so important.

Superintendent 2 said, “I think all five are important. Under character what I was thinking was the only thing missing is *courage*. I think this separates the good leaders from the great leaders . . . maybe that is a part of character.” Likewise Superintendent 3 said,

Character is one that I think is critical for a leader to be successful in leading the organization because you can exhibit the other four behaviors; however, over time if you don’t have character then you will not have a lasting impact in the organization. However, if you only have character and don’t have the others, you won’t be successful either.

Gardner (2008) described how “Lincoln elected to suspend his own personal respect for individuals of all races in order to fulfill his ethical place as the elected leader of a nation” (p. 145).

Table 4 shows the interplay of the five domains by the three exemplary K-12 superintendents and the percentage they attribute to each domain. It is interesting to note that under the character domain, some codes were only mentioned once by individual superintendents, yet collectively they concurred that character was the foundational domain in creating meaning. Even though the data might suggest individual differences with the domains, Superintendent 1 rated the code *core, ethics, sound decision making, and proactive* at 19% and Superintendents 2 and 3 rated the same code with 3% and 9%

Table 3

*Interplay of the Five Domains With Collective Exemplary K-12 Superintendents' Codes and Code Frequency*

Domains	Codes	Code frequency
Vision	Collaboration and communication	36
Vision	Shared vision	34
Character	Core ethics, sound decision making, and proactive	33
Vision	Strategic focus	29
Relationships	Build relationships with all stakeholders	21
Character	Fortitude and courage	20
Character	Integrity, openness, and authenticity	20
Character	Honesty and transparency	17
Character	Clear, consistent and trustworthy	16
Relationships	Open dialogue with trust	16
Wisdom	Vulnerability, compassion and forgiveness	14
Relationships	Listen	13
Wisdom	Care	13
Character	Walk the talk	12
Wisdom	Integrates complex decision making with doing the right thing in multiple settings	12
Relationships	People matter	12
Inspiration	Intentionality and positive affirmations	10
Inspiration	Hope, optimism, and enthusiasm	10
Inspiration	Autonomy and adaptability	9
Vision	Coherence	9
Relationships	Difficult conversations build trust	8
Vision	Collaboration and professional development	7
Inspiration	Symbolic, public recognition and awards	4
Vision	Team "buy-in"	2

respectively. Superintendent 1 rated the *walk the talk* code *only once* and Superintendent 2 rated the *clear, consistent, and trustworthy* code only once. In a holistic sense, when looking at all the character codes, all superintendents rated character above 20% and two superintendents rated character above 40%. The superintendents described how they have a responsibility to be the best they can be every day and it comes back to who they are at their very core, but without vision and wisdom to continue the work, character alone is not enough.

Table 4

*Interplay of the Five Domains by Exemplary K-12 Superintendents as a Percentage*

Domains	Superintendent 1	Superintendent 2	Superintendent 3
Character	43%	21%	45%
Vision	16%	40%	30%
Relationships	14%	14%	14%
Wisdom	16%	12%	6%
Inspiration	12%	13%	6%

Table 5 follows the interplay of the five domains evidenced by all superintendents in the top 10 most frequent codes. Character and relationships appear in all codes. The three superintendents spoke about certain behaviors being more important at times than others, depending on circumstances, but no matter what, character was a foundational domain in creating meaning. Six of the codes were found in all five domains. When asked a probing question to better understand why superintendents felt the way they did about these domains, the responses showed an overwhelming response of being ethical, transparent, and consistent as key behaviors for exemplary superintendents to possess. Superintendent 1 said,

Being transparent is very important. Knowing your core and being centered about critical things is crucial. Consistency is important. You have to know your core because your ethics will be tested. Your fortitude will also be tested. You need to be consistent and open with everyone to build trust. You must listen to your staff and to the board. You sometimes make decisions that are difficult to live with but it comes back to your core and what is right and then it is easy to make the decision. Then people understand who you are and begin to count on you to do the right thing.

Table 5

*Interplay of the Five Domains Within the Top 10 Codes*

Top 10 overall codes	Frequency	Domains
Collaboration and communication	36	Character/relationships/vision/wisdom/inspiration
Shared vision	34	Character/vision/relationships/wisdom/inspiration
Core, ethics, moral integrity, sound decision making, and proactive	33	Character/vision/relationships/wisdom/inspiration
Strategic focus	29	Character/vision/relationships/wisdom
Builds relationships with all stakeholders	21	Character/vision/relationships/wisdom
Fortitude and courage	20	Character/vision/relationships/wisdom/inspiration
Integrity, openness, and authenticity	20	Character/vision/relationships/wisdom/inspiration
Honesty and transparency	17	Character/vision/relationships/inspiration
Open dialogue and trust	15	Character/relationships/wisdom
Clear, consistent, and trustworthy	13	Character/vision/relationships/wisdom/inspiration

Superintendent 3 said,

There are a couple of things . . . one is . . . all leadership is at some point about the individual leader. If people do not feel they can have trust in that leader regardless if they agree or disagree with [his or her] opinions or decisions but that

they can't have trust or motivation, then that is disruptive and can erode a culture, erode the work the leader is doing. So for that piece it can really get in the way, if it is missing, of the other pieces being done. However, you can't solely rely on character. I have worked with leaders who have exemplary character; however, they may lack some of the others and that has impeded their ability to be a leader.

**Themes.** The operational definition of meaning as defined by the peer researchers is the result of leaders and followers coming together for the purpose of gathering information from experience and integrating it into a process that creates significance, value, and identity within themselves and the organization. Table 6 described 10 themes that developed from the codes under each domain. Exemplary K-12 superintendents used these themes to lead their organizations by personal example related to behaviors that create meaning in their organizations. The themes were (a) always do the right thing (*character*), (b) keep your word (*character*), (c) demonstrates future thinking through conversations and actions (*vision*), (d) engages team members and communicates with optimism (*vision*), (e) promotes team members to serve the common purpose (*relationships*), (f) communicates care and creates an environment of trust (*relationships*), (g) takes bold action that is right for the organization (*wisdom*), (h) shows concern for others and integrates personal and organizational values (*wisdom*), (i) generates enthusiasm and hope (*inspiration*), and (j) leads innovation with confidence and recognition for risk taking (*inspiration*).

Wisdom comes through all the themes and through collective experience, intellect, and knowledge. All three superintendents described how being true to self is the only way to lead an organization by doing the right thing and being true to their

Table 6

*Themes, Related Codes, and Code Frequency Under the Five Domains of Meaning*

Domains	Themes	Codes	Code frequency
Character	(a) Always do the right thing (b) Keep your word	Core ethics, sound decision making, and proactive Fortitude and courage Clear, consistent, and trustworthy Integrity, openness, and authenticity Honesty and transparency Vulnerability, compassion, and forgiveness Walk the talk	132
Vision	(c) Demonstrates future thinking through conversations and actions (d) Engages team members and communicates with optimism	Collaboration and communication Strategic focus Shared vision	99
Relationships	(e) Promotes team to serve common purpose (f) Communicates care and creates an environment of trust	Open dialogue and trust Care Listen Intentionality and positive affirmations Build relationships with all stakeholders People matter	85
Wisdom	(g) Takes bold action that is right for the organization (h) Shows concern for others and integrates personal and organizational values	Integrates complex decisions with doing the right thing in multiple settings	12
Inspiration	(i) Generates enthusiasm and hope (j) Leads innovation with confidence and recognition for risk taking	Hope, optimism, and enthusiasm Autonomy and adaptability	19



word. Superintendent 1 said, “People look to the leader to make decisions. Being clear, consistent, proactive, and it is always about doing what is right for kids and providing guidance to make it happen.” Superintendent 2 said, “We have an ongoing conversation about inquiry based learning and effective instructional strategies. We keep having the conversation and we have to get models of where it is working. Teachers must go see what/how they are doing it effectively and share it with other teachers. Superintendent 3 described the ambiguity in running a large school district and constantly dealing with situations. Superintendent 3 said,

I think it’s a great question in the sense that one of the roles of the leader is to reframe a situation or to provide a context for it. That’s a very critical piece and I have watched other leaders do that. It’s an opportunity to really use collaborative conversations to really ensure that we link explicit actions to our most needy students. Wisdom comes from hard work, preparing yourself and the organization to take advantage of opportunities versus being able to define future things [across all five domains].

There were many references made by all superintendents about wisdom being connected to character and inspiration being connected to vision reducing the percentage significantly for these two domains. In answering Interview Question 5 about inspiration, participants shared many characteristics of vision in their responses, and to a lesser degree, character and relationships. Likewise in answering Interview Question 6 about wisdom, participants shared many characteristics of character and vision in their responses, and to a lesser degree, relationships and inspiration. Interview Question 5 asked, “As stated on the card, an inspirational leader empowers staff by exuding

enthusiasm, encouragement, and hope. Is this something that you consciously think about as a leader?” With a positive response, the follow-up question asked, “Tell me some things that you do to inspire your staff to be all they can be?” Superintendent 1 said, “Having high expectations that are clear and specific . . . it’s done in an informal way but with guidance and support. Affirmations and being hopeful are all ways I try to inspire staff.” Superintendent 2 said,

I don’t do it enough. In a big setting, I try to think about it and say it publicly at an event. . . . I tend to be like that. But in these weekly meetings I need to consciously do it, recognize the day-to-day things. I think that sometimes just the hallway conversations, where I see someone to say some encouraging thing. When we have our big meeting with all the principals we tend to highlight a few principals that have done something well. Although I am not very regular about it . . . thank-you cards help.

Superintendent 3 said,

I do agree that . . . an aside here . . . enthusiasm, encouragement, and hope are critical because as a leader, if you don’t believe we can accomplish what we are setting out to, things can improve . . . even if they are great but can be better, then it is hard for people to believe that. I am very conscious . . . and especially in a very public role . . . if you are sitting at the board meeting and you have a furrowed brow, people can interpret that or any type of things you need to be conscious of . . . visual cues, verbal cues, not just what you say and do but what you don’t say and do. You don’t have to be the most charismatic speaker like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., or you don’t have to have that but you can exhibit

enthusiasm in a multitude of ways. You can be hopeful and it's really putting out that we can do this and we either haven't figured it out yet but we will . . . the power of yet . . . or students haven't learned this yet but it is not a terminal piece. It is a very key piece because it helps people in believing that what they do matters . . . and it's contributing and it's possible. That's what makes people want to do their best. It also excites people about coming in to do whatever it is they do in the organization every day. If they think it is contributing to moving forward, it's that hope that's very, very important. If you don't believe that, then you really need to question why you are doing what you are doing in the organization. So it has to be authentic because people will know when it's not. It's critical that this is a continuing message in the organization.

Inquiring about wisdom was the focus of Interview Question 6, "Can you describe a time when your organization faced a very complex or unclear situation?" With a positive response, the follow-up question asked, "What did you do or what strategies did you put in place to clarify the situation so that progress was possible?" Superintendent 1 said, "It is always about doing what is right for kids and providing guidance to make it happen." Superintendent 2 said,

So one of the conversations we have each year is . . . to accomplish the first two goals . . . college/career ready and equitable access . . . we have an ongoing conversation about inquiry based learning and effective instructional strategies.

Superintendent 3 said, "It's an opportunity to really use that as a way to have collaborative conversations to really ensure that we link explicit actions to our most needy students." Superintendent 3 continued, "Wisdom can be contextual. Wisdom

comes from hard work, preparing yourself and your organization to take advantage of opportunities versus being able to define future things.” Superintendent 2 said, “Well I think vision, relationships, and character . . . I guess wisdom is in there . . . I think human beings are complex. I don’t think you can do just one . . . I think wisdom is underneath character.”

The data evidenced character as the domain with the highest number of codes (132). Although wisdom was the domain with the lowest number of codes (12) it was referenced within the character and relationship domains frequently throughout the interviews with all superintendents and perhaps the greatest wisdom of all comes in knowing one’s actions do affect others. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) contended, “Experiencing leadership is a way of giving meaning to one’s life by contributing to the lives of others” (p. 223). Figure 5 shows the breakdown of all five domains by code frequency and how the behaviors influence exemplary K-12 superintendent leadership in creating personal and organizational meaning.

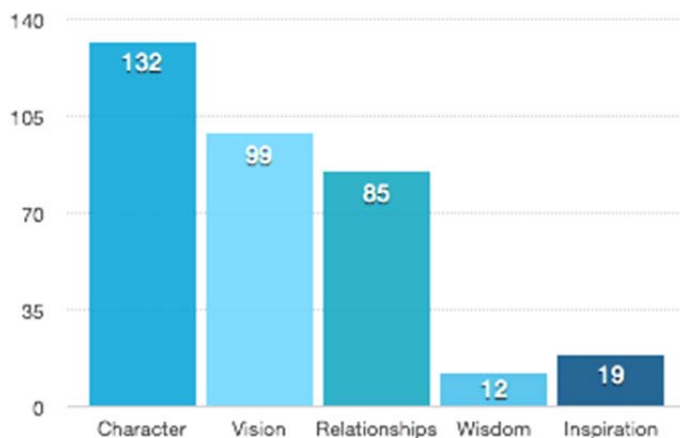


Figure 3. Leadership code frequencies by domain to create meaning.

**Character themes.** Two themes emerged within the character domain: “Always do the right thing” and “keep your word.” The three exemplary K-12 superintendents described how they attend to their core belief and values. They also described the moral imperative to always keep your word and follow through with commitments to be considered trustworthy in the organization. Kouzes and Posner (2016) believed one must “clarify by finding your voice and affirming shared values and foster collaboration by building trust” (p. 26).

The superintendents described behaviors of integrity, openness, and authenticity as paramount to making meaning in organizations. Being willing to show vulnerability, compassion, and forgiveness, as well as being honest and transparent were considered important codes in developing true character. Walking the talk was referenced as being important to the domain of character and was asserted by Howard and Korver (2008) in considering an ethical code to guide decisions in work and life. They contended, “Doing the work to tell the whole truth means that we care enough about others to put the effort in, to face up to our fears, and to take an emotional risk” (Howard & Korver, 2008, p. 117).

**Vision themes.** Two themes emerged within the vision domain: “Demonstrates future thinking through conversations and actions” and “engages team members and communicates with optimism.” The codes within these two themes that all superintendents collectively related to vision were collaboration, communication, and strategic focus. Being able to demonstrate and communicate future thinking in a positive way through a collaborative effort is considered to be a fundamental theme in enhancing purposeful actions in organizations. DeWitt (2017) discussed the importance of

collaboration in his book *Collaborative Leadership: Six Influences That Matter Most*, and asserted, “In order to lead effectively and positively impact our school communities, we need to find our voices and stand out as leaders who invite collaboration rather than compliance” (p. 13).

Shared vision was clearly communicated during the interviews as an important element of sustaining momentum with transformational change and all three exemplary superintendents evidenced a compelling need to create professional learning communities that meet regularly to explain the vision to transform lives. Superintendent 1 said, “Everyone has to feel that they have a part in the vision. You have to work with your staff and communicate with them on strategic goals.” Superintendent 2 said, “We ask how do we get better at all these things? I didn’t create the vision in this district but all I did was enhance the vision that was already here to make it . . . like real.” Similarly Superintendent 3 stated, “Well first of all it’s not my vision. It’s the district’s vision . . . the board’s vision. There was a simple thing I heard it was . . . just *simplify and repeat*.” Sinek’s (2014) groundbreaking work on the why of work in his book, *Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don’t*, contended, “If the leaders of organizations give their people something to believe in . . . the people will give everything they’ve got to solve the problem. And in the process, they may even change an industry or the world” (p. 212). He further contended that this is what gives true meaning to leaders’ work: “Only after we have committed ourselves to that vision can we look back at our lives and say to ourselves that the work we did mattered” (Sinek, 2014, p. 212).

**Relationships themes.** Literature abounds with the themes of how important it is to “promote team members to serve the common purpose” and “communicate care for others in an environment of trust.” Building relationships is paramount to the success of organizations. All superintendents described the need for open dialogue and trust, the ability to care and listen to all stakeholders in the school district community and to practice intentionality with positive affirmations. Superintendent 1 said, Building relationships where people matter is important . . . listening and having an open mind and being honest . . . public recognition is important in building relationships and little recognitions along the way make people feel they matter. Superintendent 2 said, “We meet with [the] cabinet . . . part of it is we go through what they are working on so that we can all hear each other . . . and if there is anything we can help each other with we can offer it up.” Superintendent 3 said, “One of the biggest roles is to develop capacity and a coaching role with my executive team members and to model that throughout the organization. It is to create the culture of not just ‘I’ that provides that.” Mautz (2015) called this “relaxed intensity” and contended that leaders who excel at meaning making demonstrate a “strong desire to win that fuels the sense of being on a united, winning team and imbues people’s work with a greater sense of purpose” (p. 184).

The overwhelming evidence from the interviews affirmed the importance of building relationships with all stakeholders and that all people matter. There were 85 code references and the evidence was clear that relationships are crucial in building capacity. Superintendent 1 said, “I listened to staff when they said they wanted training. The board may have other priorities, but I was able to tell them that staff felt an urgency

to have professional development sooner rather than later and they listened.”

Superintendent 3 said, “Being personally out as a leader in the organization is critical.

The other way is making sure that it’s authentic conversations and it’s also ensuring that we have a lot of regular feedback loops.” Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) supported this evidence by asserting, “Great leaders help employees build skills for professional friendships between people and among teams” (p. 103).

**Wisdom themes.** As previously stated, much of wisdom can be found in the other domains of meaning. However, two distinct themes that emerged within wisdom were “takes bold action that is right for the organization,” and “shows concern for others and integrates personal and organizational values.” Exemplary superintendents understand that all students deserve a 21st century educational experience that has high expectations and they are wise in knowing that “it is always about doing what is right for kids and providing guidance to make it happen” (Superintendent 1). There are often conflicting philosophies among staff about which strategies to use with curriculum and instruction and a wise exemplary superintendent chooses a college/career ready focus for all students as a worthy goal. Superintendent 2 said,

Some people think that students need to learn all fundamentals first before they can be taught inquiry based learning and effective instructional strategies, so when students aren’t at grade level, there’s a belief system that they need to learn the skills to read well before they can do higher order thinking. And then there are other people who think if you teach them higher order thinking, they will learn to read because you want them to. So we have two camps in our system . . . I think we need to do both. We have to get models of where that is working . . .



teachers who are doing both and then go see what/how they're doing and how we can explain that to other teachers.

Superintendent 3 affirmed the idea that all students deserve the superintendent's attention and said,

We are worried about these new standards and accountability systems coming into public education . . . it's an opportunity to look at how we are really looking at how students think and know, and can demonstrate. It's a way to have collaborative conversations to really ensure that we link explicit actions to our most needy students . . . have sustained dialogue throughout the community and give a context to lessen confusion, anxiety, or misdirection.

Domenech et al. (2016) concurred, "This will need to be a team effort in which a differentiated staffing approach will be helpful" (p. 7).

**Inspiration themes.** All superintendents described the interplay of inspiration through character, vision, and relationship domains of meaning. The themes related to wisdom were "generates enthusiasm and hope" and "leads innovation with confidence and recognition for risk taking." The related behaviors of autonomy and adaptability, hope, optimism and enthusiasm within the inspiration domain were frequently referenced within the wisdom domain as well. The peer researchers' definition of inspiration defines the need for exemplary leaders to be a source of contagious motivation that drives the organization forward with confidence and heart and all the descriptors were evidenced in the interviews. These things are necessary to effect change and transform organizations and are driven by exemplary leaders. Superintendent 1 said, "Without character you can't have inspiration." This was in response to Question 7, which asked, "Are there

absolute ‘musts’ that you believe are essential behaviors for an exemplary leader to have?” Superintendent 3 also engaged in conversation about inspiration: “Character is critical or your people won’t believe the inspiration.” He further stated, “All of the domains are musts, it is just in what balance they are. The absence of any of them will have a flawed leader.”

Mark Crowley (2011) contended that leaders must inspire the heart and encourage people. He reflected on inspiration: “Words that expressed belief in me and my ability to succeed had an enormously beneficial effort when the task at hand seemed too big and imposing . . . these feelings are universal” (p. 130). Crowley (2011) supported the participants in his belief that character and encouraging from the heart “breathe life into the hopes and dreams of people and encouragement inspires people to try new approaches and to persist in the face of a daunting task” (p. 131).

## **Results for Research Question 2**

*To what degree do followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning?*

This research question asked what behaviors followers perceived the exemplary leaders used within the five domains to create meaning. For purposes of this study and survey, meaning is defined as the result of leaders and followers coming together for the purpose of gathering information from experience and integrating it into a process that creates significance, value, and identity within themselves and the organization. The behaviors this research suggests that leaders used to create personal and organizational meaning were listed on the survey for followers to assess the importance of the leadership

behavior in developing meaning in the organization. In addition, the mean scores are reported. Patten (2012) stated, “The most frequently used average is the mean, which is the balance point in a distribution” (p. 117).

**The five domains.** The Survey of Leadership Behaviors That Contribute to Personal and Organizational Meaning was given to followers of exemplary leaders and yielded an overall score for each of the domains of meaning. The scale, and each of the behaviors it measured, ranged from 1 to 6, with 6 being *critically important* in the organization an absolute must; its absence would severely inhibit the leader’s effectiveness and the overall health of the organizational culture; and 1 being *not important* in the organization; its absence would have no effect upon the leader’s overall effectiveness nor the organization’s culture. All survey respondents perceived the interplay of the five domains important for exemplary leaders in creating personal and organizational meaning. The survey results indicated that leader behaviors do have a significant impact on followers’ perceptions of what it means to be an exemplary leader in the organization. The scores indicated that most followers believe exemplary leaders should “behave in an ethical manner when dealing with others” (character). Most followers’ perceptions also found the need for exemplary leaders’ “behavior to reflect organizational vision when making decisions” (vision). Overwhelmingly, followers believed that “creating an environment of trust among leaders and team members in the organization” was important (relationships). Similarly they believed “inspiring team members in a way that generates enthusiasm within team members” (inspiration) and “taking action by doing the ‘right thing’ in a variety of organizational settings creates meaning” (wisdom).

Table 7 illustrates the degree of perceived importance that followers placed on the five domains of meaning used by their exemplary leaders. Overall, character was found to be the most important domain with the highest percentage in the *very important* and *critically important* categories with 146 respondents (85.9%) and the highest mean score of 5.3. In looking at the *critically important* category, the data changed to 89 respondents (52.4%); however, it still remained the highest percentage domain. The second domain of vision was perceived as *very important* and *critically important* by 142 respondents (84%) and a mean score of 5.1. Similarly, the *critically important* category evidenced 55 respondents (32.5%), and placed it behind relationships when looking at this category alone. The third domain was relationships with the second highest mean score of 5.2 and 138 respondents at 81.2%, in the *very important* and *critically important* categories. It placed second when looking at the *critically important* category (78 respondents, 45.9%). Inspiration received a score of 77.1% by 131 respondents with a mean score of 4.9 in both the *very important* and *critically important* categories. In the *critically important* category, the inspiration data evidenced 45 respondents at 26.5%. The lowest overall score was the wisdom domain (231 respondents, 68%), also with the lowest mean score of 4.8. It is important to note that wisdom was the only domain that had 10 questions asked of followers as opposed to five in the other domains. In the *critically important* category, the data evidenced 90 respondents at 26.5%, the same percentage as inspiration but with half the number of questions asked. Overwhelmingly character, vision, and relationships, as perceived by the followers, evidenced a higher degree of importance than inspiration and wisdom, although already noted, they interplay through the other domains.

Table 7

*Leadership Survey of Followers' Perceived Degree of Importance About How Exemplary Leaders Use Each Domain to Create Meaning*

Domains of meaning (total # of answers)	Not important		Marginally important		Somewhat important		Important		Very important		Critically important		Mean
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Character (170)	0	0.0%	2	1.2%	4	2.4%	18	10.6%	57	33.5%	89	52.4%	5.3
Vision (169)	0	0.0%	2	1.2%	2	1.2%	23	13.6%	87	51.5%	55	32.5%	5.1
Relationships (170)	0	0.0%	2	1.2%	7	4.1%	23	13.5%	60	35.3%	78	45.9%	5.2
Wisdom (340)	0	0.0%	1	0.3%	26	7.6%	82	24.1%	141	41.5%	90	26.5%	4.8
Inspiration (170)	2	1.2%	1	0.6%	8	4.7%	28	16.5%	86	50.6%	45	26.5%	4.9

*Note.* Degree of importance by number, % of responses, plus mean.

**Character behaviors.** Table 8 shows the degree to which followers perceived exemplary leaders use character behaviors to create organizational meaning. Of the five domains that the survey measures, character is one that followers perceived as most important of all. Followers were asked five questions about behaviors that related to character on the survey and they ranked the answers from a score of 1 (*not important*) to 6 (*critically important*). The behavior with the highest degree of importance as perceived by the followers was “behaving in an ethical manner when dealing with others” in the *very important* and *critically important* categories (32 respondents, 94.2%), with the highest mean score of 5.76. The following behaviors: “Actively listens when communicating with others” (32 respondents, 94.1%) and “actions with others show that he/she can be trusted” received the same score (32 respondents, 94.1%), each with a mean of 5.62 and 5.44 respectively. Actively listening was more significant as *critically important* at 73.5% as opposed to actions showing trust at 52.9%. This also explains the higher mean score with 25 respondents as opposed to 18. The least perceived character behavior ranked as *very important* and *critically important* by followers was “responds to challenging situations with optimism” (24 respondents, 70.6%), with the lowest mean score of 4.91. The remaining character behavior was “actions show concern for the well-being of others” (26 respondents, 76.5%), and a mean score of 4.94. When looking at the *critically important* category, the data changed to 10 respondents at 29.4%.

However, it is worth noting in the *critically important* category, character had a score of 52.4%. The overall character score from followers in the *important*, *very important*, and *critically important* range was 96.5%, which indicated how important followers perceived character behaviors were in creating personal and organizational

Table 8

*Importance of Leadership Behaviors for Developing Character in the Organization*

Character behaviors	Not important		Marginally important		Somewhat important		Very important		Critically important		Mean		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%			
1. Behaves in an ethical manner when dealing with others.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	5.9%	4	11.8%	28	82.4%	5.76
2. Actively listens when communicating with others.	0	0.0%	1	2.9%	0	0.0%	1	2.9%	7	20.6%	25	73.5%	5.62
3. Responds to challenging situations with optimism.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	2.9%	9	26.5%	16	47.1%	8	23.5%	4.91
4. Actions with others show that he/she can be trusted.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	2.9%	1	2.9%	14	41.2%	18	52.9%	5.44
5. Actions show concern for the well-being of others.	0	0.0%	1	2.9%	2	5.9%	5	14.7%	16	47.1%	10	29.4%	4.94
Overall degree of importance	0	0.0%	2	1.2%	3	2.4%	22	10.6%	57	33.5%	89	52.4%	

*Note.* Degree of importance by number, % of responses, and mean.

meaning by the exemplary leaders in their organizations. Followers did not rank any *not important* scores and only two respondents indicated *marginally important* scores for “actively listens” (2.9%) and “actions show well-being for others” (2.9%).

**Vision behaviors.** Table 9 shows the degree to which followers’ perceived exemplary leaders use vision behaviors to create organizational meaning. Vision was another domain that followers perceived as important in creating meaning in organizations. “Behaviors that reflect organizational vision when making decisions” were *very important* and *critically important* (30 respondents, 88.2%), with the highest mean score of 5.26. In the area of *critically important*, data reported 13 respondents at 38.2%. The vision behavior, “engages team members in creating a vision for the future,” evidenced 29 respondents at 85.3% with a mean score of 5.00. The least perceived vision behavior ranked *very important* and *critically important* by followers was “promotes innovation that aligns with the organization’s vision” (27 respondents, 81.8%), with a mean score of 5.03. “Demonstrates thinking toward the future through conversations and actions” reported scores of 28 respondents at 82.3% and a mean score of 5.12. The last vision behavior was “communicates the organization’s vision in a way in which team members’ support it,” evidenced by 28 respondents at 82.4% in the *very important* and *critically important* categories.

It is worth noting that the overall score for vision was 32%, and it may not be perceived as *critically important* in isolation from the other domains. However, the overall vision score from followers in the *important*, *very important*, and *critically important* combined categories was 165 respondents at 97.6%, which was a higher percentage than the overall perceived score for character and relationships. This



Table 9

*Importance of Leadership Behaviors for Developing Vision in the Organization*

Vision behaviors	Not important		Marginally important		Somewhat important		Important		Very important		Critically important	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. Communicates organization's vision in a way in which team members support it.	0	0.0%	1	2.9%	0	0.00%	5	14.7%	14	41.2%	14	41.2%
2. Engages team members in creating a vision for the future.	0	0.0%	1	2.9%	2	5.9%	2	5.9%	20	58.8%	9	26.5%
3. Behavior reflects organizational vision when making decisions.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.00%	4	11.8%	17	50.0%	13	38.2%
4. Promotes innovation that aligns with the organization's vision.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	6	18.2%	18	54.5%	9	27.3%
5. Demonstrates thinking toward the future through conversations and actions.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.00%	6	17.6%	18	52.9%	10	29.4%
Overall degree of importance	0	0.0%	2	1.2%	2	1.2%	23	13.6%	87	51.5%	55	32.5%

*Note.* Degree of importance by number, % of responses, and mean.

indicates the highest domain score when these three categories are considered and accounts for followers' placing a high degree of importance on the perception of vision behaviors to be used by exemplary K-12 superintendents in creating personal and professional meaning. No scores were recorded in the *not important* category and only two in the *marginally* and *somewhat important* categories (1.2% respectively).

**Relationship behaviors.** Table 10 shows the degree to which followers perceived that exemplary leaders use relationship behaviors to create organizational meaning. Followers also perceived relationships as important to creating meaning in organizations. The behavior of “creates an environment of trust among leaders and team members in the organization” was reported with the highest scores of 31 respondents at 91.2% within *very important and critically important* categories and the highest mean score of 5.56. The data remained significant with 24 respondents at 70.6% in just the *critically important* category. The following relationship behavior, “continuously promotes our team’s moving together as one unit to serve a common purpose,” also scored high (29 respondents, 85.3%, and a mean score of 5.29).

In the *critically important* category, this vision behavior reported 17 respondents at 50.0%. The relationship behavior with the lowest degree of importance as perceived by the followers was “behaves in a way that shows he/she cares about the team members” (23 respondents, 67.6%, and a mean score of 5.21). The lowest mean score of 4.91 was attributed to the behavior “communicates in a clear and meaningful way.” The behavior, “encourages team members to share leadership when performing tasks,” evidenced scores of 27 respondents at 79.4%, and a mean score of 5.06. The overall relationships score

Table 10

*Importance of Leadership Behaviors for Developing Relationships in the Organization*

Relationship behaviors	Not important		Marginally important		Somewhat important		Important		Very important		Critically important		Mean
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
1. Continuously promotes our team's moving together as one unit to serve a common purpose.	0	0.0%	1	2.9%	0	0.0%	4	11.8%	12	35.3%	17	50.0%	5.29
2. Creates an environment of trust among leaders and team members in the organization.	0	0.0%	1	2.9%	0	0.0%	2	5.9%	7	20.6%	24	70.6%	5.56
3. Behaves in a way that shows she/he cares about the team members.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	5.9%	9	26.5%	13	38.2%	10	29.4%	5.21
4. Communicates in a clear, meaningful way.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	2.9%	5	14.7%	14	41.2%	14	41.2%	4.91
5. Encourages team members to share leadership when performing tasks.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	4	11.8%	3	8.8%	14	41.2%	13	38.2%	5.06
Overall degree of importance	0	0.0%	2	1.2%	7	4.1%	23	13.5%	60	35.3%	78	45.9%	

*Note.* Degree of importance by number, % of responses, and mean.

from followers in the *important*, *very important*, and *critically important* combined categories was 94.7%, placing it behind both inspiration and character respectively.

No scores were reported in the *not important* category and only two in the *marginally important* category (1.2%). Seven respondents at 4.1% scored in the *somewhat important* category in three behavior categories. The overall relationships score in the *critically important* category that followers perceived about exemplary leaders was higher than the scores of wisdom, inspiration and vision but lower than the score of character in creating personal and professional meaning.

**Wisdom.** Table 11 shows the degree to which followers perceived that exemplary leaders use wisdom behaviors to create organizational meaning. Followers perceived wisdom as important to creating meaning in organizations. This was the only domain with 10 items on the survey. The overall degree of importance (231 respondents, 68%) was significantly lower than the domains of inspiration, character, and relationships in the *very important* and *critically important* categories. Similarly, *important*, *very important*, and *critically important* categories evidenced 313 respondents at 92.1%. The behavior, “when working with teams and team members, continuously keeps the overall goals of the organization as part of conversations,” was scored in the *very important* and *critically important* categories at 85.3%, with a mean score of 5.26. When *important* was added, the score reached 34 followers at 100% indicating followers’ maximum degree of importance for exemplary leaders to use this behavior as significant to creating meaning in their organizations.

The following wisdom behavior, “takes action by doing the ‘right thing’ in a variety of organizational settings,” also scored high (28 respondents, 82.3%) with a

Table 11

*Importance of Leadership Behaviors for Developing Wisdom in the Organization*

Wisdom behaviors	Not important		Marginally important		Somewhat important		Important		Very important		Critically important		Mean
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
1. When working with teams and team members, continuously keeps the overall goals of the organization as part of the conversations.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	5	14.7%	15	44.1%	14	41.2%	5.26
2. Evaluates the quality of decision making by discussing similarities of past situations with team members.	0	0.0%	0	2.9%	3	8.8%	16	47.1%	11	32.4%	3	8.8%	4.35
3. Demonstrates compassion toward team members.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	5.9%	6	17.6%	13	38.2%	13	38.2%	5.09
4. Behavior reflects an understanding of life's complexities.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	5.9%	10	29.4%	15	44.1%	7	20.6%	4.79
5. Integrates personal values with organizational values when interacting with team members.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	5	14.7%	6	17.6%	18	52.9%	5	14.7%	4.68

*(table continues)*

Table 11 (continued)

Wisdom behaviors	Not important		Marginally important		Somewhat important		Important		Very important		Critically important	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
6. Brings personal knowledge to the table when responding to complex situations within the organization.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	3	8.8%	8	23.5%	16	47.1%	7	20.6%
7. Takes action by doing the “right thing” in a variety of organizational settings.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	6	17.6%	13	38.2%	15	44.1%
8. Displays expertise when working in a variety of situations within the organization.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	4	11.8%	8	23.5%	13	38.2%	9	26.5%
9. Considers past experiences when responding to complex situations within the organization	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	5	14.7%	10	29.4%	11	32.4%	8	23.5%
10. Shows concern for others.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	5.9%	7	20.6%	16	47.1%	9	26.5%
Total	0	0.0%	1	0.3%	26	7.6%	82	24.1%	141	41.5%	90	26.5%

Note. Degree of importance by number, % of responses, and mean.

similar mean score of 5.26, in the *very important* and *critically important* categories. When *important* was added to this behavior, the score reached 34 followers at 99.9%. The similar mean score indicates that both behaviors are ranked high by followers and “considered an absolute must in the organization.” The least perceived wisdom behavior of *very important* and *critically important* by followers was “elevates the quality of decision making by discussing similarities of past situations with team members” (14 respondents, 41.2%, and a mean score of 4.35). This indicated that followers do not put much importance on exemplary leaders’ past practice. This was reaffirmed with the behavior, “considers past experiences when responding to complex situations within the organization,” in the *very important* and *critically important* categories (19 respondents, 55.9%, with a mean score of 4.65). Other behaviors included “demonstrates compassion toward team members” (13 respondents, 38.2%) ranked at the *critically important* category, with a mean score of 5.09. The remaining wisdom behaviors all had mean scores below 5.0 and no more than nine respondents scoring higher than 26.5%. There were no reported scores ranked *not important* in any wisdom behaviors, only one (0.3%) in the *marginally important* category and 26 respondents at 7.6% in the *somewhat important* category.

**Inspiration.** Table 12 shows the degree to which followers perceived that exemplary leaders use inspiration behaviors to create organizational meaning. The fifth domain that the Leadership Behaviors Survey measured was inspiration. The behavior, “works with team members in a way that generates enthusiasm within teams,” was considered the highest priority of inspiration in *very important* and *critically important* categories (30 respondents, 88.3%, and a mean score of 5.18). In just the *critically*

Table 12

*Importance of Leadership Behaviors for Developing Inspiration in the Organization*

Inspiration behaviors	Not important		Marginally important		Somewhat important		Important		Very important		Critically important		Mean
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
1. Works with team members in a way that generates enthusiasm within teams.	1	2.9%	0	0.0%	1	2.9%	2	5.9%	16	47.1%	14	41.2%	5.18
2. Recognizes achievements of teams and team members.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	3	8.8%	3	8.8%	21	61.8%	7	20.6%	4.94
3. Encourages team members to innovate in order to advance the organization's leading edge.	0	0.0%	1	2.9%	1	2.9%	7	20.6%	16	47.1%	9	26.5%	4.91
4. Engages in activities that build confidence among team members.	1	2.9%	0	0.0%	1	2.9%	7	20.6%	17	50.0%	8	23.5%	4.85
5. Empowers team members to take reasonable risks when problem solving.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	5.9%	9	26.5%	16	47.1%	7	20.6%	4.82
Overall degree of importance	2	1.2%	1	0.6%	8	4.7%	28	16.5%	86	50.6%	45	26.5%	

*Note.* Degree of importance by number, % of responses, and mean.



*important* category, the scores for this inspiration behavior were 14 respondents at 41.2%. The following behavior, “recognizes achievements of teams and team members” in the *very important and critically important* categories evidenced 28 respondents at 82.4% with a mean of 4.94. However, in just the *critically important* category, the score dropped to seven respondents at 20.6%. Other behaviors, “encourages team members to innovate in order to advance the organization’s leading edge” (nine respondents, 26.5%), “engages in activities that build confidence among team members” (eight respondents, 23.5%) and “empowers team members to take reasonable risks when problem solving” (seven respondents, 20.6%), were in the *critically important* category. All produced mean scores on or below 4.91.

This was the first domain that had some behaviors reported in the *not important* category. The behavior, “works with team members in way that generates enthusiasm within teams,” was considered *not important* and *somewhat important* by two respondents at 2.9% respectively, and yet received the highest scores by 32 followers at 94.2% who ranked it *important* to *critically important*. A second behavior, “engages in activities that builds confidence among team members,” was also reported as *not important* and *somewhat important* by two respondents (2.9% and 2.9% respectively) and had a rating of 32 respondents at 94.1% for the *important* to *critically important* categories. A third behavior, “encourages team members to innovate to advance the organization’s leading edge,” evidenced *marginally* and *somewhat important* scores by two respondents at 2.9% respectively. This was in stark contrast to the 32 respondents at 94.2% for *important* to *critically important* categories. The last behavior, “empowers

team members to take reasonable risks when problem solving,” had two respondents at 5.9% in the *somewhat important* category.

### **Summary**

This chapter focused on the data and findings regarding the two research questions used to guide this study. In summary, exemplary K-12 superintendents reported that all five domains of character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration were important in guiding behaviors that create personal and organizational meaning. Followers also ranked, by degree of importance, the behaviors within the domains of meaning they perceived exemplary leaders use to create meaning in their organizations.

In the scripted interviews, all three exemplary K-12 superintendents expressed the interplay of the domains of wisdom and inspiration through character, vision, and relationships. One leader expressed a need to be more conscious about inspiring staff, and another expressed a need for reflection that leads to wisdom. The researcher discovered that codes related to character and vision, were described more than codes in the other domains across all interviews and were rated with a frequency of 132 and 99 respectively, under character themes of “always do the right thing” and “keep your word,” and vision themes of “demonstrates future thinking through conversations and actions” and “engages team members and communicates with optimism.” The codes related to relationships were rated with a frequency of 85 under the relationship themes of “promotes team members to serve the common purpose” and “communicates care and creates an environment of trust.”

The codes related to wisdom were rated with a frequency of 12 under the wisdom themes “takes bold action that is right for the organization” and “shows concern for

others and integrates personal and organizational values.” Martin Luther King, Jr. (1953) once said, “Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly” (n.p.). It is the human element of nurture and care that comes from wisdom and is important for creating meaning in educational organizations. Thus wisdom has a ripple effect with far-reaching implications across all domains of meaning even though its rating individually does not appear that strong. Likewise, the codes related to inspiration were rated with a frequency of 19 under the inspiration themes “generates enthusiasm and hope” and “leads innovation with confidence and recognition for risk taking.” Exemplary K-12 superintendents know they must describe a compelling image of what the future will look like by inspiring their followers. They are called to model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. In short, they must empower all. It is through the codes of hope, optimism, enthusiasm, autonomy, and adaptability that exemplary leaders will inspire others.

Exemplary K-12 superintendents employ character, model the vision, build relationships, inspire, and have the wisdom to lead from behind. Wisdom comes in understanding that one’s words matter and how leaders represent to their followers in organizations and in the larger community makes everyone proud. In *Collaborative Leadership*, Peter DeWitt (2017) described Michael Jordan and Wayne Gretzky in their pursuit of meaning as “still having off days where self-regulation feedback was necessary” (p. 127). DeWitt reminded his readers that “everyone should be taking the time to learn from one another and expect to get as much as we give” (p. 163). No matter how experienced exemplary K-12 superintendents are, they keep improving, maintaining moral integrity, envisioning the future, sustaining relationships, inspiring others, and

using their collective experience and knowledge together as wisdom in creating personal and organizational meaning. Followers perceived a higher degree of importance with inspiration when rated in the *very important* and *critically important* categories at 88.3% slightly higher than relationships (85.3%) and wisdom (85.3%). Inspiration further supports the need to deliver a message of hope to followers and that may be one of the most important opportunities facing K-12 superintendents and their organizations today.

Table 13 reports followers' perceived degree of importance on related behaviors that leaders use within each domain. Survey results for the most important behavior noted by followers in each of the five domains scored as *very important* and *critically important* are provided. Exemplary K-12 superintendents and their followers found character to be the most important domain in creating personal and organizational meaning. Clearly there was alignment between what leaders wanted to do and related behaviors that followers perceived as important through character in creating meaning. Data from the exemplary K-12 superintendents described behaviors related to character in 38% of the codes. The behavior related to character with the highest rating on the followers' Survey of Leadership Behaviors That Contribute to Personal and Professional Meaning was "behaves in an ethical manner when dealing with others" at 94.2% overall. This aligns with the leader's code of core, ethics, moral integrity, sound decision making and proactive. Although it is not a perfect match with what exemplary leaders' want to do and followers' perceptions of related behaviors in the character domain, it creates an interesting comparison.

Table 13

Most Important Behavior per Domain Perceived by Followers as Very Important and Critically Important

Domain	Behavior	Very important	Critically important	Overall score
Character	Behaves in ethical manner when dealing with others	11.8%	82.4%	94.2%
Vision	Behavior reflects organizational vision in making decisions	50.0%	38.2%	88.2%
Relationships	Creates environment of trust among leaders and team in organization	35.3%	50.0%	85.3%
Wisdom	When working with teams, keeps overall goals of the organization as part of conversation	44.1%	41.2%	85.3%
Inspiration	Works in a way that generates enthusiasm in teams	47.1%	44.2%	88.3%

After character, exemplary K-12 superintendents rated more importance on vision, followers rated more importance on relationships, and both leaders and followers considered the interplay of wisdom and inspiration within the first three domains. Another interesting comparison was made between the followers’ perceived leader behavior related to vision, “behavior reflects organizational vision in making decisions” at 88.2% overall, and the leaders’ code of shared vision. Similarly the followers’ perceived behavior related to relationships, “creates an environment of trust among leaders and teams in organizations” at 85.3% overall, aligns with the leaders’ code of clear, consistent, and trustworthy. However, it was important to note that the most important perceived behavior related to inspiration, “works in a way that generates enthusiasm in teams,” was rated at 88.3%, second only to the most important perceived character behavior. The leaders’ code of enthusiasm aligns with this related behavior. It is also important to note that the most important behavior related to wisdom at 85.3%

overall, “when working with teams, keeps overall goals of the organization as part of the conversation,” aligns with the leaders’ code of strategic focus.

Chapter V contains a more detailed discussion of these findings. The chapter also explores unexpected findings, conclusions, implications for action, recommendations for further research, and closing remarks and reflections.

## CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter V begins with an overview of the research study, restating the purpose statement, research questions, methods, population, and sample. The chapter then describes the major findings, unexpected findings, conclusions from the findings, implications for action, recommendations for further research, and concluding remarks and reflections.

### **Summary**

#### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this mixed-methods case study was to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary K-12 superintendents use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to determine the degree of importance to which followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration, create personal and organizational meaning.

#### **Research Questions**

1. What are the behaviors that exemplary K-12 superintendents use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration?
2. To what degree do followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning?

## **Methodology**

The methodology used for this study was mixed methods. Face-to-face interviews with K-12 superintendents were conducted during the qualitative phase of the study. The interviews were conducted using scripted questions developed by the peer researchers. The interviews were used to identify and describe the behaviors exemplary K-12 superintendents use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers. Three exemplary K-12 superintendents were interviewed. The researcher and another peer researcher conducted a field test, with feedback about the questions, interview procedures, and techniques. Results were shared with the thematic team. Once the field test was completed, the researcher conducted the actual interviews. For the quantitative part of the study, the researcher used an electronic survey developed by the peer researchers entitled Survey of Leadership Behaviors That Contribute to Personal and Organizational Meaning. The survey was given to 36 followers in the exemplary K-12 superintendents' districts. The survey asked close-ended questions to determine the degree to which followers perceived the behaviors related to the five domains helped create personal and organizational meaning. Of the 36 followers who were invited to participate, 34 participants completed the survey.

## **Population**

A population is a group that conforms to specific criteria with the intent to generalize results (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The population is the group that researchers are ultimately interested in. Creswell (2003) stated that a population is “a group of individuals who comprise the same characteristics” (p. 644). In California, there are 526 elementary districts, 77 high school districts, and 343 unified districts with a total



of 946 superintendents. As the chief executive officer, a superintendent reports to an elected board of education. Superintendents are responsible for every element of the school district's operation including human resources, development of the district budget, business services, implementation of state and federal programs including the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP), maintenance and operations, food services, health and safety, community relations, intercollegiate athletic programs, working with parents and stakeholders, and maintaining an organizational culture that promotes creativity and high achievement (Frailey, 2016).

### **Target Population**

A target population for a study is the entire set of individuals chosen from the overall population for which the study makes inferences based on the data. According to Creswell (2003), "The target population is the actual list of sampling units from which the sample is selected" (p. 393). The target population defines the population to which the findings of a survey are supposed to be generalized, and it is important that target populations are clearly identified for the purposes of research study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). With 946 school superintendents in California, it was not feasible to use such a large population due to time, geography, and monetary restraints. In order to identify a manageable population, a target population was identified. In this study, the population was narrowed to 25 exemplary superintendents who are members of the Northern California Superintendents Organization. The target population for this study considered that exemplary superintendents met five of the following six criteria: (a) evidence of successful relationships with followers; (b) evidence of leading a successful organization; (c) a minimum of 5 years of experience in the profession;

(d) articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings; (e) recognition by peers; and (f) membership in professional association in their field.

### **Sample**

A sample is defined as “a subgroup of the target population that the researcher plans to study for generalizing about the target population” (Creswell, 2005, p. 146). Purposeful and convenience sampling were chosen for this study for efficiency, accessibility of subjects, and selecting subjects with certain characteristics. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), “Select a sample that is representative of the population or that includes subjects with needed characteristics” (p. 138). Purposeful sampling (also called purposive sampling) makes possible generalization to similar subjects. Purposeful sampling in this mixed-methods case study was chosen as the method of sample selection based on the criteria used for exemplary leaders. Convenience sampling (also called available sampling) assumes a high participation rate, is less time consuming, and has ease of administration. Creswell (2005) stated, “In convenience sampling the researcher selects participants because they are willing and available to be studied” (p. 149). It provides ease of accessibility and proximity for the researcher and supports mixed-methods studies by including both qualitative and quantitative research.

An expert panel was used to identify K-12 superintendents with special knowledge and experience in K-12 education. For purposes of this study, two expert panel members who had extensive experience as superintendents and are retired members of the superintendents’ organization were selected to make nominations of potential

superintendent participants. The expert panel ranked 25 K-12 superintendents based on criteria, and five superintendents were selected from the list that received the lowest aggregate scores (1 was the highest score). This researcher selected the top three exemplary K-12 superintendents for participation in the study. By interviewing K-12 exemplary superintendents, the intent was to identify and explain the behaviors used to create meaning for themselves and their organizations (see Figure 2). Patton (2015) stated, “The greater the amount of useable data obtained from each person, the fewer the number of participants” (p. 311).

### **Major Findings**

The central purpose of this mixed-methods study was to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary K-12 superintendents use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to determine the degree of importance to which followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration create personal and organizational meaning. A summary of the major findings is presented with respect to the two research questions.

#### **Research Question 1**

*What are the behaviors that exemplary K-12 superintendents use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration?*

In answering this question, qualitative data were collected through face-to-face interviews with three exemplary K-12 superintendents through a peer-designed and

professionally reviewed interview of scripted open-ended, guided questions. Exemplary leaders were asked about the behaviors they use to create meaning through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration. Interviews were recorded using digital devices and statements transcribed and coded for emergent themes. All five domains of meaning explored in this study were integral parts of creating personal and organizational meaning.

**Finding 1. Interplay of domains.** All three exemplary K-12 superintendents reported the interplay of character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration in creating personal and organizational meaning. Human beings are complex beings who rely on each one of the domains given different circumstances at different times in leadership. In response to what behaviors an exemplary leader must have, one leader even stated that without character a person cannot have inspiration. Another example of the interplay of the five domains was the consideration of leaders who possess vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration, but not character, and the overwhelming response seemed to indicate that a long-lasting impact is not likely to happen. Similarly, if only character is evident, success is not likely. The dependence and interaction of the five domains are imperative to the success of K-12 superintendents in creating meaning in the organization.

**Finding 2. Character.** Exemplary K-12 superintendents use character to create personal and organizational meaning by living their life with a moral compass. Collectively the three exemplary superintendents chose character as the overwhelming domain in creating personal and organizational meaning. Overall, character was rated at 38%. The codes of core, ethics, moral integrity, sound decision making, being proactive,

honesty, transparency, openness and authenticity were considered behaviors that exemplary superintendents possess. Exemplary K-12 superintendents use character behaviors to create personal and organizational meaning with the most frequency and value of all the five domains, according to both leaders and followers.

The alignment of openness, transparency, and authenticity that promotes ethical thoughts and actions is the very definition of how exemplary K-12 superintendents use character. The themes of “always do the right thing” and “keep your word” speak to the fact that exemplary K-12 superintendents use this ability to be sound decision makers who lead with a moral compass in order to maintain moral integrity. Followers perceive exemplary leaders behaving in an ethical manner with others as critically important at 82.4%. This aligned with exemplary leaders’ codes of being ethical with core beliefs, honesty, and transparency. Kouzes and Posner (2016) in their book, *Learning Leadership: The Five Fundamentals of Becoming an Exemplary Leader*, attested that a person must believe in him or herself. They further discussed “reality checks” and the “mirror tests” as examples of how exemplary leaders are made not born, and it all starts with the “belief that provides the commitment and sustained effort needed to become a better leader over time” (Kouzes & Posner, 2016, p. 43).

**Finding 3. Vision.** Exemplary K-12 superintendents use vision to create personal and organizational meaning by bridging from the present to the future with a collaborative effort. Exemplary superintendents communicate, engage followers, promote innovation, and demonstrate thinking toward the future. Overall, vision was rated at 29%. By engaging team members in creating a vision, exemplary K-12 superintendents bridge the gap from the present to the future by promoting innovation

and demonstrating thinking through conversations and actions. The collective codes of *collaboration, communication, strategic focus, and shared vision* were evidenced in the exemplary K-12 superintendent interviews with a frequency of 99.

Peter DeWitt (2017) asserted, “In order to lead effectively and positively impact our school communities, we need to find our voices and stand out as leaders who invite collaboration” (p. 13). Further, exemplary K-12 superintendents use the theme “engages team members and communicates with optimism” and the interplay of this theme permeates across all domains of meaning. The followers concurred with an overall vision score of 97.6% in combined *important, very important, and critically important* categories overwhelmingly higher than the overall perceived scores for character and relationships. It is important to note that followers placed a high degree of importance on the perceived behavior that reflects organizational vision when making decisions. Exemplary superintendents create professional learning communities that meet regularly to stay focused on promoting innovation and forward-thinking actions in alignment with the vision. Simon Sinek (2009) in his book, *Start With Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*, reminds his readers that “leadership requires two things: a vision of the world that does not exist and the ability to communicate it” (p. 228).

**Finding 4. Relationships.** Exemplary K-12 superintendents use relationships to create personal and organizational meaning by building bonds with people through encouragement and open communication leading to trust. Relationships are built on trust, and if people feel they do not have trust in the leader, it can disrupt the culture and erode the work being done. Overall, relationships were rated at 25%. Creating open dialogue, caring, listening, intentionality, and giving positive affirmations with stakeholders are all

considered important behaviors in maintaining relationships. Multiple authors (Bass & Bass, 2008; Clemmer, 1995; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Mautz, 2015; Quick & Wright, 2011; Senge, 2006) agreed on the importance of trust and capacity building in organizations and concurred that without it, the organization will not be successful. In transforming an organization, trust is earned through integrity (character) and competence (vision), the goal being for exemplary K-12 superintendents to combine trustworthiness and empathy for followers to build relationships and make meaning in the organization. Exemplary K-12 superintendents establish relationships with followers through encouragement, compassion, and open communication leading to respect, trust, and acceptance (Bermack, 2014; Frankl, 2006; Mautz, 2015; Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). Literature abounds with the themes of how important it is to have meaningful relationships in creating an environment of trust in the organization. Mautz (2015) talked about “relaxed intensity” and contended that exemplary leaders “fuel the sense of being on a united, winning team and imbues people’s work with a greater sense of purpose” (p. 184).

During the interviews, the exemplary K-12 superintendents each expressed the need for people to matter in the organization, the need for open dialogue and trust, and the ability to care and listen to all stakeholders in the school district community and to practice intentionality with positive affirmations. Superintendent 1 said, “Building relationships where people matter is important. They want to do work that matters.” Superintendent 2 shared, “We go through what people are working on so we can all hear each other,” and Superintendent 3 said, “Making sure we have lots of authentic conversations and ensuring we have lots of feedback loops.” They also expressed having

an open mind and being honest with followers. Further, one of the biggest roles for exemplary leaders is to develop capacity in others and model that throughout the organization. This was referenced in all the interviews and aligned to followers' related behavior, which "continuously promotes our team's moving together as one unit to serve a common purpose" (97.1%) in *important*, *very important*, and *critically important* categories by 33 respondents. The theme of "communicates care and creates an environment of trust" attests to the importance of relationships in building capacity in organizations. Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) contended, "Great leaders help employees build skills for professional friendships between people and among teams" (p. 103). Exemplary K-12 superintendents are very aware of the need to listen, receive regular feedback, and have authentic conversations with followers. In one interview, an exemplary leader said he was compelled to tell the board that staff felt a sense of urgency to have professional development sooner rather than later and they listened. Likewise followers perceived relationships as integral for exemplary leaders to create meaning in organizations. They placed a high degree of importance on "creating an environment of trust among leaders and team members in the organization" at 91.2% in *very* and *critically important* categories. This related behavior for relationships also had the highest mean of 5.26.

**Finding 5. Wisdom.** Exemplary K-12 superintendents use wisdom to create personal and organizational meaning through their ability to reflect and respond to ambiguous situations. Exemplary K-12 superintendents placed less importance on the domain of wisdom (3%) in creating meaning. However, it is important to note that this domain was embedded within character, vision, and relationships so the individual rating



appears less important than it truly is. Wisdom comes from doing what is right, it comes from hard work, preparing oneself and the organization, and taking advantage of opportunities. Exemplary K-12 superintendents use a reflective integration of values and experience in order to interpret and respond to ambiguity through wisdom in leading their organizations. So much of wisdom interplays with the other domains of meaning. Themes for wisdom were “takes bold action that is right for the organization” and “shows concern for others and integrates personal and organizational values.” Similarly, the followers perceived exemplary leaders as the ones who must “take action by doing the ‘right thing’ in a variety of organizational settings” (99.9%) in *important to critically important* categories.

**Finding 6. Inspiration.** Exemplary K-12 superintendents use inspiration to create personal and organizational meaning by motivating with confidence from the heart. Exemplary K-12 superintendents inspire followers to look to future possibilities with passion, confidence, and positive energy in creating personal and organizational meaning. Inspiration alone is not enough to transform lives through 21st century skills, but it does inspire lifelong learning. Developing personal and organizational leadership empowers others to reach high levels of performance. Exemplary K-12 superintendents know that in the current climate of increased accountability and heightened awareness of academic engagement in the schools, the ability to generate enthusiasm and hope inspires leaders to innovate with confidence and recognize risk taking.

Mark Crowley (2011) described inspiring organizations with leaders who build a culture of genuine, sincere recognition and encouragement. He insightfully conveyed the power of inspiration, “By encouraging employees, you positively affect their hearts and

thereby inspire greater performance” (p. 131). All exemplary K-12 superintendents evidenced the interplay of inspiration through the domains of character, vision, and relationships. There is a need for exemplary leaders to be hopeful, optimistic in generating enthusiasm and to develop autonomy and adaptability in transforming organizations to drive them forward. Inspiration can be found in simple things that may not seem that important in the moment yet can have long-lasting impact and meaning for people in the organization.

### **Research Question 2**

*To what degree do followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning?*

In answering this question, quantitative data were collected from followers of the exemplary leaders through the online Survey of Leadership Behaviors that Contribute to Personal and Organizational Meaning. Followers were asked to measure and rate each domain behavior from 1 to 6, with 6 being *critically important*, and 1 being *not important* in the organization. The number of followers, percentages of responses, and the mean were calculated to establish the overall results of the survey by each of the five domains of meaning and related behaviors.

**Finding 1. Character.** Followers placed the highest degree of importance on character in how they perceived exemplary leaders create organizational meaning. Followers perceived character as *very important*, and *critically important* at 85.9% with 146 responses. The character behavior with the highest degree of importance perceived by followers as *very important* and *critically important* at 94.2% was “behaving in an

ethical manner when dealing with others.” Gardner (2008) reminded his readers, “Those young persons who evince genuine respect toward others are most likely to become ethical workers and responsible citizens” (p. 143). The character behavior with the lowest degree of importance was “responds to challenging situations with optimism,” yet still at a convincing 70.6%.

**Finding 2. Vision.** The behaviors related to vision in the Leadership Behavior Survey proved it was critically important to followers that exemplary K-12 superintendents communicate the organization’s vision. Followers perceived vision behaviors as *very important* and *critically important* with 142 respondents at 84%. The vision behavior with the highest mean score of 5.26 and 88.2% in the *very important and critically important* categories was “behavior reflects organizational vision when making decisions” with 27 respondents. This aligns with the vision codes of “collaboration and communication” and “shared vision.” Kotter (2012) stated, “The real power of a vision is unleashed only when most of those involved in an enterprise or activity have a common understanding of its goals and direction” (p. 87).

**Finding 3. Relationships.** Followers perceived that the highest degree of importance on relationships behavior “creates an environment of trust among leaders and team members in the organization” at 70.6% (*critically important*). This was 50% more than at the *very important* and *critically important* categories (20.6%); 138 respondents perceived relationships as *very important* and *critically important* at 81.2%. This supports a high degree of importance on the overall relationships domain as perceived by followers at 45.9% (*critically important*), second only to character. Ulrich and Ulrich

(2010) stated, “Great leaders help employees build skills for professional friendships between people and among teams” (p. 103).

**Finding 4. Wisdom.** Followers perceived that the highest degree of importance on wisdom behavior “takes action by doing the “right thing” in a variety of organizational settings at 44.1% by 15 respondents (*critically important*). Two wisdom behaviors that had the highest mean at 5.26 were “when working with teams and team members, continuously keeps the overall goals of the organization as part of the conversation” and “takes action by doing the *right thing* in a variety of organizational settings.” They received ratings of 85.3% and 88.3% respectively in the *very important and critically important categories*. It is important to note that wisdom was the only domain with 10 questions asked of followers as opposed to five in the other four domains. Followers perceived wisdom overall as *critically important* at 26.5%, a much lesser degree than how they perceived exemplary leaders create organizational meaning through the domains of character, vision, and relationships. Exemplary leaders placed less importance on wisdom but acknowledged the interplay through other domains of meaning. However, it is important to note that the theme of “taking bold action that is right for the organization” is in alignment with the followers’ perception of the importance of this behavior. Pfeffer (2010) reminded his readers that there is wisdom in knowing that “success requires effort and hard work as well as persistence” (p. 43).

**Finding 5. Inspiration.** The followers concurred with exemplary leaders in how they perceived the importance of many behaviors related to inspiration. Followers perceived the highest importance on inspiration behavior “works with team members in a way that generates enthusiasm within teams” in the *very important to critically important*

categories at 94.2%. The following related behavior of inspiration, “recognizes achievements of teams and team members,” was ranked at 94.1%. The third related behavior to inspiration, “encourages team members to innovate to advance the organization’s leading edge,” evidenced 94.2% in the same three categories. Clearly, the evidence contends that followers want to engage in activities that build confidence and empower them to take reasonable risks when problem solving. Followers want to be recognized and encouraged by exemplary leaders who exude enthusiasm, give hope, and generate possibility thinking. In short “this is what it means to serve: improving another’s life and, in turn, improving the world. That’s the lifeblood of service and the final secret to moving others” (Pink, 2012, p. 219).

### **Unexpected Findings**

There were two unexpected findings from this research. The first unexpected finding was that vision ranked second only to character. The second unexpected finding was that inspiration was not ranked highly by either leaders or followers in how they perceive personal and organizational meaning is created. One unexpected finding was exemplary K-12 superintendents’ high importance on vision as the second domain in creating personal and organizational meaning. A second unexpected finding was that inspiration was not rated with high degree of importance by followers or exemplary leaders.

The first unexpected finding was exemplary leaders ranking vision as the second most important domain in creating meaning. This was contrary to much of the literature review that supports building relationships as important domains in creating meaning (Mautz, 2015; Senge, 2006). It was unexpected also in comparison that followers

perceived relationships as more important than vision in how leaders create organizational meaning.

The second unexpected finding was that inspiration was not rated with high degree of importance by followers or exemplary leaders. Inspiration is considered an essential domain for personal and organizational meaning, yet the exemplary leaders spoke to the element of inspiration in only 5% of total coding derived from interview data. Although Sinek (2009) reminded his readers, “Those who are able to inspire give people a sense of purpose or belonging that has little to do with any external incentive or benefit to be gained” (p. 6), it is important to note that this research found that inspiration alone will not create organizational meaning. However, when inspiration interplays within character, vision, and relationships, followers and leaders agree it is important in creating personal and organizational meaning.

### **Conclusions**

Several conclusions may be drawn from the literature and findings of this study that demonstrate how exemplary K-12 superintendents use the five domains of character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration in guiding behaviors that create personal and organizational meaning.

#### **Conclusion 1. Interplay of Domains**

The five domains of meaning provide significant purpose leading to value to everyone in organizations. The research suggests that it is the interconnection of character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration that creates personal and organizational meaning for leaders and followers. Now more than ever, leaders are called to build relationships and show character. Learning from past experiences takes

wisdom to keep going with a sense of continual renewal and growth. Doing things with an eye toward generating the best possible business results tomorrow, using the opportunities presented today, is considered great strategic influence and takes vision to accomplish. Exemplary leaders understand and integrate the complexities of past, present, and future into a cohesive, unified sense of self that lasts a lifetime. Leaders know the benefits of building relationships and communicating with followers in caring, courageous, and disciplined ways. Clearly the behaviors of character, relationships, and inspiration are important factors in creating meaning in organizations, but the belief that what one does positively impacts others may be what Zenger et al. (2010) considered matters the most. It can be concluded that exemplary leaders are driven and inspired by serving organizations beyond themselves. Leaders are called to adapt organizational structures to compete in today's unreliable market and understand that quality relationships decide the outcome of creating personal and organizational meaning.

## **Conclusion 2. Character**

Exemplary K-12 superintendents exhibit character as a critical component of leadership leading to the development of personal and organizational meaning. It is a critical component of leadership. In the international research conducted by Kouzes and Posner (2007), they identified honesty as an attribute people wanted most in a leader. Moral examples have been set from Greek and Roman times and speculate that ethical and moral leadership can increase effectiveness in followers. In effect, "your actions at work must align with your ethics in your daily life or you will be torn and not be able to work effectively" (T. Moore, 2008, p. 161). Openness, transparency, and authenticity in exemplary K-12 superintendents align with followers' perceptions of exemplary leaders

behaving in an ethical way at 92.4%. It can be concluded that always doing the right thing and keeping your word makes for sound decision making with moral integrity and is critical in creating meaning.

### **Conclusion 3. Vision**

The research concluded that exemplary leaders create a shared vision and are able to envision a positive future for themselves and their followers by building purpose, a guiding vision, and action (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). By bridging from the present to the future, exemplary leaders know it is critical to communicate, engage followers, and demonstrate thinking toward the future. Kouzes and Posner (2006) contended that followers want to be a part of a vision that embraces their own aspirations, allowing them to envision themselves as part of the organization's future. It can be concluded that vision unites all and creates a compelling sense of direction to work toward a shared result and continue to a culture of innovation (Sarros et al., 2008).

### **Conclusion 4. Relationships**

The research and the literature concluded that exemplary leaders establish relationships with followers through encouragement, compassion, and open communication leading to respect, trust, and acceptance (Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). Relationships are considered critical in creating conditions that allow for superior performance and connection in creating personal and organizational meaning. Building and maintaining relationships produces positive outcomes with trust and capacity building as the foundation of effective relationships. Likewise transforming the organization involves trust through integrity and competence and builds relationships that are reciprocal in nature. Mautz (2015) described this as the leader's most lasting



accomplishment. Exemplary leaders develop relationships and understand how people help them learn and grow in creating meaning. It can be concluded that people want to do work that matters and exemplary leaders understand to continuously promote the team's moving together to serve a common purpose through encouragement and care for the team.

### **Conclusion 5. Wisdom**

Based on the findings of the study and the literature review, exemplary K-12 superintendents utilize wisdom as the reflective integration of values, experience, knowledge, and compassion in responding to ambiguity in organizations. Taking bold action to do what is right for the organization reflects an understanding of life's complexities in creating personal and organizational meaning. Followers rated the behavior "takes action by doing the *right thing* in a variety of organizational settings" at 99.9% in two categories confirming the high importance of this wisdom behavior. Followers gave maximum importance to "continuously keeping the overall goals of the organization as part of the conversation" at 100% in three categories. It can be concluded in life that understanding the human condition and having the ability to recognize and construct meaning in life takes wisdom. It is in valuing others more than oneself that organizational meaning takes effect. Exemplary K-12 superintendents increase their wisdom through reflection of the above elements and coordinate the talent in their schools to achieve maximum results in creating personal and organizational meaning.

### **Conclusion 6. Inspiration**

The research concludes that exemplary K-12 superintendents create personal and organizational meaning by inspiring followers forward with confidence from the heart.

Passion with an energetic view of future possibilities will inspire followers and support personal and organizational meaning. Through the research and review of the literature, it can be concluded that inspiration is considered a domain that integrates the ability of leaders to be inspiring and achieve results. Inspiration is the heartfelt passion that leaders exude through hope and encouragement to create meaningful connections that empower others forward with confidence. Inspiration improves well-being and overall healthy functioning through positivity and life satisfaction. Sir Ken Robinson (2013) considered “just the push you need, not only to ask, but also to answer the question, ‘What’s next?’” (p.232). Inspiration alone will not transform lives, but it will empower others to be lifelong learners. Mark Crowley (2011) described this as building a culture of sincere recognition and encouragement. Exemplary leaders know there is a need to be hopeful, optimistic, and generate enthusiasm by empowering followers to be risk takers when problem solving. The inspiration behavior “works in a way that generates enthusiasm in teams” rated by followers as the second overall highest importance at 88.3% in two categories evidences the priority inspiration provides. It has positive effects on relationships and productivity in organizations. Kouzes and Posner (2006) stated, “Exemplary leaders understand that *all* of us want a tomorrow that is better than today” (p. 113). It can be concluded that inspirational leaders have passion for change and are role models who lead by example and provide followers with direction and motivation.

### **Implications for Action**

Organizations flourish when the interplay of the five domains is in direct alignment with behaviors exemplary leaders use to create meaning. In general, research affirms the influence of each domain independently. This study gives credence to the

five domains bringing collective meaning to exemplary leaders in transforming organizations and implications for action.

### **Implication 1. Feedback Assessments**

Based on the findings of the study of the literature review, it is recommended that exemplary K-12 superintendents participate in a 360-degree assessment to gather feedback and identify their strengths and weaknesses in particular as related to the five domains and their related behaviors. This will allow members at all levels of the organization, including the organization's board of directors, to share their experiences and observations regarding the leader. Being equipped with this information, leaders can assess the behaviors they use, including what behaviors to continue, what behaviors need to be strengthened, and what behaviors need to be developed. Leaders will assess the results of such a survey with the perspective of a growth mindset to determine areas for personal development and improvement. Regular feedback should be received from surveys from followers and the larger community to maintain transparency and sustain coherence in programs aligned to the vision. Self-reflection is a high priority for exemplary superintendents as they commit to ongoing evaluation of the organization's beliefs.

### **Implication 2. Coaching**

It is critical for K-12 superintendents to hire a coach or mentor to assist in the use of the assessments to develop areas of strength and improve areas of weakness. The training and provision of coaches and mentors should be a high priority of educational leadership agencies such as the Association of California School Administrators, the National Association of School Superintendents, and AASA–The School Superintendents

Association. Superintendents and their coach will analyze ongoing feedback of followers and create action plans to ensure that their personal leadership behaviors align with perceptions of the followers. Coaches will provide regular feedback, resources, and support as necessary to assist superintendents in their development as leaders who make meaning and their use of the elements of character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration.

### **Implication 3. Professional Associations**

Membership in the professional organizations noted above (ACSA, NASS, and AASA) should be universally included within the contract of every K-12 superintendent to foster leadership, collaboration, and contribution. It is critical for K-12 superintendents to influence and inspire policymakers, educators, and professional development consultants by attending, presenting, and learning alongside their peers at professional conferences (ACSA, AASA, and NASS). This ensures that superintendents model professionalism and continue to develop strong moral character, shared vision, build relationships, inspire, and use wisdom in leading the organization. Platforms such as digital learning and social media are additional ways to meet this through expanded networks and collaboration globally with exemplary leaders in education and across industries. LinkedIn, Twitter, and various web-based platforms are also 21st century methods for transforming how superintendents connect and communicate to innovate and use best practices in leading their schools.

### **Implication 4. Personal and Professional Development**

Exemplary K-12 superintendents should continue their own personal development to lead their organizations through behaviors related to the five domains of meaning. By

starting a professional reading club with board and cabinet members, exemplary leaders can model best practices by reading current literature on the importance of meaning in the workplace and how it relates to the mission of the organization. Scott Mautz (2015) described this as his sixth marker of meaning—devotion—and states that “feeling connection with and confidence in leadership and the mission leads to a greater good” (p. 16). Exemplary superintendents must value a culture of learning and support professional development through doctoral programs to empower dream building with confidence among followers. Throughout this study, there are numerous examples of how to create meaning through behaviors related to the character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration that are considered critically important by followers in the organizations. It is clear from the research that productivity and job performance are directly related to positive models emanating from an inspiring leader who encourages followers to be leaders of meaning.

#### **Implication 5. Creating a Professional Learning Community**

The leadership, co-creation, and support of professional learning communities (PLCs) should be a requirement for all K-12 superintendents. Superintendents take bold actions to close gaps for underserved students by prioritizing levels of staff training based on student achievement data and analysis. Exemplary leaders model PLCs in their meetings with all stakeholders as a way to inspire followers, bring people together around a shared vision, recognize people’s contributions, and to validate risk taking.

## **Recommendations for Further Research**

Based on this study, the following recommendations are made to further exemplary leadership in creating personal and organizational meaning through related behaviors of character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration.

### **Recommendation 1**

Conduct a mixed-methods case study to replicate using principals and teacher followers and the behaviors principals use to create personal and organizational meaning through the five domains.

### **Recommendation 2**

Conduct a phenomenological case study to describe how superintendents identify, describe, and live their values that support character.

### **Recommendation 3**

Conduct a qualitative study to develop an understanding to identify leader behaviors followers observe that show character. Interviews are given with followers in organizations across industries.

### **Recommendation 4**

Conduct a quantitative study to understand the relationship between the time followers have worked with the leader and the perceived level of personal and organizational meaning achieved. The questionnaire used would include demographic data as to number of years followers have worked with the leader.

### **Recommendation 5**

Conduct a longitudinal study to identify if longevity of the number of years one superintendent spends in an organization increases depth of personal and organizational

meaning through the five domains. Superintendent years are measured by the following rating 1–5, 6–10, 11–15, and 16+ years.

### **Concluding Remarks and Reflections**

A review of the literature, interviews with exemplary leaders, and a survey with followers evidenced a plethora of leadership theories and data on the success of leaders throughout time. As indicated throughout this study, multiple authors asserted the individual benefit of character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration in creating personal and organizational meaning. Similarly, meaning and its impact on organizations has been well researched since time began, and yet in a rapidly changing world, there is still much to learn about how the five domains can improve leaders' and followers' work in organizations. Personal and organizational meaning is becoming just as important today as it has always been. Perhaps the biggest factor of all is the influence meaning has on the next generation and how well it is prepared to succeed with the five domains into the future. As I reflect on my role as a leader and learner, I am reminded by a quote from Yukl (2002) that providing direction and exercising influence for others are two functions of leadership: "Leadership influences the interpretation of events for followers" (p. 3).

Conducting the research was transformative for me personally and professionally. Seeing how exemplary K-12 superintendents lead the way and engage their followers in meaningful ways begins with an ability to exercise influence with moral integrity. As an educator and administrator spanning nearly three decades, I can attest to the need for ethics and core values, shared vision and collaborative effort in education throughout the K-12 system. The moral imperative is values first with priorities flowing to an inspiring, passionate vision, with stakeholder capacity and relationships wrapped in a clear and

consistent message that has forward momentum. When each of the five domains of meaning is interwoven and interchangeable in a dynamic way, the organization flourishes. If one is driven to thrive in the future, then sustaining success requires clarity of purpose and creating meaning from the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration. Taking action today will promote a better tomorrow and provide exemplary K-12 superintendents with continued insight into what all students will need in the future.

Leadership qualities are timeless. Looking back in history at the exemplary leaders who led successful organizations, leaders see common behaviors from the five domains of meaning. However, there has been a fundamental shift in the realization that the 21st century is similar to the past in many ways, but also extremely different. This nation is at a time of volatility, complexity, and transformation. The need to be empowered and decisive is ever present. The exponentially, accelerating speed and magnitude of change is not just related to the digital age. Unprecedented shifts in population decline, migration to cities, climate change, localized currencies, decentralized learning, and many other drivers of change are radically changing the landscape of education and people's daily lives.

Consistency becomes a luxury in a world of discontinuity and disruption. People only have to search the web for recent articles on the important skills that exemplary leaders need to succeed and they will find many proven qualities driving results. However, leaders must now view them in alignment with the five domains of meaning in this constantly changing world. They must effectively promote a culture of openness, transparency, and dealing with ambiguity. They must build and sustain collaboration.



They must delegate critical tasks to ensure a thriving organization. Finally, leaders must build adaptive and resilient teams to ensure that innovation and a leading edge are maximized. Exemplary K-12 superintendents who use the five domains of meaning to reach long-term goals in education understand the complexity of today's unknowns. It is through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration that exemplary leaders will lead others into the brave new world of the 22nd century to leverage constant change around them.

Likewise, the ability for exemplary leaders to inspire others in a volatile world is what broadens followers' perceptions of what future possibilities can be. To all those who serve in education, may the students remain at the heart of what leaders do and may leaders continue to believe in the capacity to make changes in 21st century education for all students, all needs, all the time. With the wisdom of the past and the inspiration of things yet to come, I have an opportunity to create meaning through the five domains and celebrate my heartfelt desire to intentionally create a better world for everyone. The time to start is now.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

IRB Approval



BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

IRB Application Action – Approval

Date: 11.22.16

Name of Investigator/Researcher: Frances E. Hansell

Faculty or Student ID Number: B00465401

Title of Research Project: Exemplary K-12 Superintendents and the Behaviors They Use to Create Personal and Organizational Meaning.

Project Type: [checked] New [ ] Continuation [ ] Resubmission

Category that applies to your research:

- [checked] Doctoral Dissertation EdD
[ ] DNP Clinical Project
[ ] Masters' Thesis
[ ] Course Project
[ ] Faculty Professional/Academic Research
[ ] Other:

Funded: [checked] No [ ] Yes (Funding Agency; Type of Funding; Grant Number)

Project Duration (cannot exceed 1 year): 6 months

Principal Investigator's Address: 4659 Quigg Drive # 736 Santa Rosa CA 95409

Email Address: fhansell@mail.brandman.edu Telephone Number: 707-495-2615

Faculty Advisor/Sponsor/Chair Name: Dr. Cindy Petersen (Chair)

Email Address: cpetersen@brandman.edu Telephone Number: 916-286-5103

Category of Review:

[ ] Exempt Review [checked] Expedited Review [ ] Standard Review

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I have completed the NIH Certification and included a copy with this proposal
<input type="checkbox"/>	NIH Certificate currently on file in the office of the IRB Chair or Department Office

Signature of Principal Investigator: Fran Hansell Digitally signed by Fran Hansell  
DN: cn=Fran Hansell, o=Brandman University,  
ou=ES.D., email=hansell@mail.brandman.edu,  
c=US  
Date: 2016.11.22 13:35:20 -0800 Date: 11.22.16

Signature of Faculty Advisor/  
Sponsor/Dissertation Chair: Cindy Petersen Digitally signed by Cindy Petersen  
DN: cn=Cindy Petersen, o=Brandman  
University, ou=Adjunct Faculty,  
email=cpetersen@brandman.edu, c=US  
Date: 2016.11.22 14:13:43 -0800 Date: 11.22.16

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
IRB APPLICATION ACTION – APPROVAL  
COMPLETED BY BUIRB

IRB ACTION/APPROVAL

Name of Investigator/Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

- Returned without review. Insufficient detail to adequately assess risks, protections and benefits.
  - Approved/Certified as Exempt form IRB Review.
  - Approved as submitted.
  - Approved, contingent on minor revisions (see attached)
  - Requires significant modifications of the protocol before approval. Research must resubmit with modifications (see attached)
  - Researcher must contact IRB member and discuss revisions to research proposal and protocol.
- Level of Risk:  No Risk  Minimal Risk  More than Minimal Risk

IRB Comments:

\_\_\_\_\_

Digitally signed by Michael Moodian  
DN: cn=Michael Moodian, o=Brandman University, ou,  
email=moodian@brandman.edu, c=US  
Date: 2016.12.02 14:25:38 -0700

IRB Reviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Digitally signed by Doug DeVore  
DN: cn=Doug DeVore, o=Brandman University, ou=EDOL,  
email=dvovore@brandman.edu, c=US  
Date: 2016.12.02 14:24:53 -0700

BUIRB Chair: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: **December 2, 2016**

REVISED IRB Application  Approved  Returned

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

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

BUIRB Chair: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX B

**NIH Certification**



## APPENDIX C

### Introduction Letter—Leaders

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

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

We are a group of graduate students in the Doctorate of Education in Organizational Leadership Program in the School of Education at Brandman University, who are conducting a study on how leaders create meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration. You are also encouraged to ask any questions that will help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. Further you may be assured that the researchers are not in any way affiliated with the \_\_\_\_\_ (organization). Following the interview and with your assistance, I would also like to send a short Survey Monkey to 12 of your followers to assess their performance of the meaning instilled with the organization once the interview process is finished.

We are asking your assistance in the Research Study by participating in an interview which will take 30-60 minutes, will be audio taped and will be set up for a time convenient for you. If you agree to participate in an interview, you may be assured that it will be completely confidential. No names will be attached to any notes or records from the interview. All information will remain in locked files accessible only to the researchers. No employer, supervisor, or agency, will have access to the interview information. You will be free to stop the interview and withdraw from the study at any time.

The research director, **Frances E. Hansell**, is available at [fhansell@mail.brandman.edu](mailto:fhansell@mail.brandman.edu) or **(707) 495-2615**, to answer any questions you may have. Your participation would be greatly valued and appreciated.

Sincerely,

Frances E. Hansell, M.S. Ed.  
Doctoral Candidate, Ed.D.,  
[fhansell@mail.brandman.edu](mailto:fhansell@mail.brandman.edu)



## APPENDIX D

### Informed Consent

**INFORMATION ABOUT:** The behaviors of exemplary leaders related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration to help create personal and organizational meaning.

**RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR:** Frances E. Hansell, M.S. Ed.

**PURPOSE OF STUDY:** You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Frances E. Hansell, M.S. Ed., a doctoral student from the School of Education at Brandman University. The purpose of this study is to identify and describe the behaviors that leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration. Your participation in this study is voluntary and will include an interview with the identified student researcher and audio recorded. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes to complete and will be scheduled at a time and location of your convenience. The interview questions will pertain to your perceptions and your responses will be confidential. Each participant will have an identifying code and names will not be used in data analysis. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only.

**I understand that:**

- a) The researcher will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes safe-guarded in a locked file drawer or password protected digital file to which the researcher will have sole access.
- b) My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide to not participate in the study and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer particular questions during the interview if I so choose. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time.
- c) I am willing to have a third party in the room solely as a feedback observer for the investigator to receive feedback on her interviewing skills.
- d) If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact **Frances E. Hansell** at [fhansell@mail.brandman.edu](mailto:fhansell@mail.brandman.edu) or by phone at **707.495.2615**; or **Dr. Cindy Petersen (Advisor)** at [cpetersen@brandman.edu](mailto:cpetersen@brandman.edu)
- e) No information that identifies you will be released without your separate consent and all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, you will be informed and consent re-obtained. There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research.
- f) If I have questions, comments, or concerns about the study of the informed consent process, I may write or call the office of the **Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.**

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the “Research Participant’s Bill of Rights.” I have read the above and understand and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

Signature of Participant or Responsible Party

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

Signature of Principal Investigator

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

## APPENDIX E

### Invitation Letter—Leaders

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

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

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Brandman University. The main investigator of this study is Frances E. Hansell, Doctoral Candidate in Brandman University's Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program. You were chosen to participate because you fit the criteria of K-12 superintendent. Approximately 12 leaders will be enrolled in this study. Participation should require about two hours of your time and is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. You are also encouraged to ask any questions that will help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. Further you may be assured that the researchers are not in any way affiliated with the \_\_\_\_\_ (organization). Following the interview and with your assistance, I would also like to send a short Survey Monkey to 12 of your followers to assess their performance of the meaning instilled with the organization once the interview process is finished.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this thematic, mixed method case study is to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary K-12 superintendents use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration. In addition, it is the purpose of this study to determine the degree of importance to which followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning. Results from the study will be summarized in a doctoral dissertation.

**PROCEDURES:** If you decide to participate in the study, you will be invited to participate in a one-to-one interview and asked a series of questions designed to allow you to share your experience as a K-12 superintendent and how you use character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration to create meaning. The interview will be audio-recorded for transcription purposes.

**RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS:** There are no known major risks to your participation in this research study. The interview will be at a time and place convenient for you and may be rescheduled, since the nature of your organization involves dynamically changing environments. Some interview questions may cause mild emotional discomfort if sharing your experience involves significant personal involvement.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS:** There are no major benefits to you for your participation, nonetheless a potential benefit may be that you will have an opportunity to identify future

best practices of utilizing character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration to create meaning for other K-12 superintendents. The information from this study is intended to inform researchers, policymakers, and educators of the practices that are necessary to further the research on meaning making.

**ANONYMITY:** Records of information that you provide for the research study and any personal information you provide will not be linked in any way. It will not be possible to identify you as the person who provided any specific information for the study. You are encouraged to ask any questions, at any time, that will help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. For any questions please contact the principle investigator, **Frances E. Hansell, at (707) 495-2615 or e-mail at [fhansell@mail.brandman.edu](mailto:fhansell@mail.brandman.edu)**. If you have any further questions or concerns about this study or your rights as a study participant, you may write or call the **Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641**.

Sincerely,

Frances E. Hansell, M.S. Ed.,  
Doctoral Candidate, Ed.D.,  
[fhansell@mail.brandman.edu](mailto:fhansell@mail.brandman.edu)

APPENDIX F

**Scripted Interview Questions**

**Interview Questions**

1. “Here are five leadership behaviors that research suggests are necessary in an exemplary leader. Looking at these, would you agree that these are all important?”

**VISION:** The leader exhibits foresight with a compelling outlook of the future.

**RELATIONSHIPS:** The leader communicates a common purpose through listening, respect, trust, and acknowledgement of one another.

**CHARACTER:** The leader displays a moral compass of ethics and integrity while being reliable, transparent, and authentic.

**INSPIRATION:** The leader empowers followers by exuding enthusiasm, encouragement, and hope.

**WISDOM:** The leader accurately interprets and responds to complex, ambiguous, and often unclear situations

<p>If “Yes”</p> <p>“Realizing that they are all important, do any jump out as being absolutely essential?”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">V            R            C            I            W</p> <p><i>If any selected:</i> “What is about those you selected that would place them a bit above the others?”</p>	<p>If “No”... “not really”... or they hedge</p> <p>“Which of them do you believe do not fit into the group of important behaviors?”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">V            R            C            I            W</p> <p>“Why do you think it/they do not belong in this group of important behaviors?”</p>
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2. *“You indicated that establishing a vision for your organization was important. Are there things that you recall having done to develop vision for yourself and your organization?”*
  - “Are there some that seemed to work better than others?”
  - “Why do you think they (it) worked as well as they (it) did?”
  - “Were there any unintended outcomes, positive or negative, from the use of that particular strategy?”
  - How do you ensure that your team buys into your vision?
3. *“You indicated in question 1 that establishing relationships by being a good listener and establishing trust among your team members is important. Are there specific things you have done to develop relationships among the members of your organization?”*
  - “Are there some that seemed to work better than others?”
  - “Why do you think they (it) worked as well as they (it) did?”
  - “Were there any unintended outcomes, positive or negative, from the use of that particular strategy?”
4. *“If you take a look at the card, one of the five important leadership behaviors is character and leading with a moral compass. This includes integrity...reliability...authenticity What behaviors do you look for in your peers or employees that demonstrate their character?”*
  - “What kinds of things do you do to demonstrate your character as the leader of your organization?”
  - “How do you communicate the importance of these behaviors to your staff members?”
  - “Are there challenges that you face as you deal with these issues on a daily basis?”
  - “Are there any unintended outcomes, positive or negative, from the use of a particular strategy?”
5. *“As stated on the card, an inspirational leader empowers staff by exuding enthusiasm, encouragement, and hope. Is this something that you consciously think about as a leader? Tell me about some of the things you do to inspire your staff to be all they can be.”*
6. *“Can you describe a time when your organization faced a very complex or unclear situation?”*

If yes..

“What did you do or what strategies did you put in place to clarify the situation so that progress was possible?”

If no..

“If a situation like this did arise, how do you think you would you go about clarifying the situation to put your staff’s mind at ease and feel ready to go?”

7. *“Of all the things we have spoken about today – vision, relationships, character, inspiration and wisdom - are there absolute ‘musts!’ that you believe are **essential** behaviors for an exemplary leader to have?”*

**If yes: “What are those behaviors and why do you believe they are so critical?”**

## APPENDIX G

### Bill of Rights



#### BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

##### Research Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.



APPENDIX H

**Audio Release**

**RESEARCH STUDY TITLE:** Exemplary K-12 Superintendents and the Behaviors They Use to Create Personal and Organizational Meaning

**BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY**  
**16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD**  
**IRVINE, CA 92618**

**RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR:** Frances E. Hansell M.S. Ed.

I authorize Frances E. Hansell, M.S. Ed., Brandman University Doctoral Candidate, to record my voice. I give Brandman University, and all persons or entities associated with this study, permission or authority to use this recording for activities associated with this research study.

I understand that the recording will be used for transcription purposes and the identifier-redacted information obtained during the interview may be published in a journal or presented at meetings and/or presentations. I will be consulted about the use of the audio recordings for any purpose other than those listed above. Additionally, I waive any rights and royalties or other compensation arising from or related to the use of information obtained from the recording.

By signing this form, I acknowledge that I have completely read and fully understand the above release and agree to the outlined terms. I hereby release any and all claims against any person or organization utilizing this material.

Date:

Signature of Participant or Responsible Party

Date:

Signature of Investigator – Frances E. Hansell M.S. Ed.

## APPENDIX I

### Introduction Letter—Followers

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

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

We are a group of graduate students in the Doctorate of Education in Organizational Leadership Program in the School of Education at Brandman University, who are conducting a study on how leaders create meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration to achieve breakthrough results.

We are asking your assistance in the research study by participating in a survey via SurveyMonkey which will take 15-20 minutes. You are being surveyed on perceptions of how your leader creates meaning through character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration for followers in the organization. If you agree to participate, you may be assured that it will be completely confidential. You will remain anonymous throughout the survey. No employer, supervisor, or agency, will have access to the survey information. You will be free to stop the survey and withdraw from the study at any time. I will be contacting you via email to ensure that the survey will be completed in the window of time specified.

The research director, **Frances E. Hansell**, is available at **[fhansell@mail.brandman.edu](mailto:fhansell@mail.brandman.edu)** or **(707) 495-2615**, to answer any questions you may have. Your participation would be greatly valued and appreciated.

Sincerely,

Frances E. Hansell, M.S. Ed.  
Doctoral Candidate, Ed.D.,  
[fhansell@mail.brandman.edu](mailto:fhansell@mail.brandman.edu)

## APPENDIX J

### Invitation Letter—Followers

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

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

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Brandman University. The main investigator of this study is Frances E. Hansell, Doctoral Candidate in Brandman University's Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program. You were chosen to participate because you fit the criteria of follower to a K-12 superintendent. Approximately 12 leaders will be enrolled in this study. Participation should require about 20 minutes of your time and is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. All information will remain confidential.

The survey will take less than 10 minutes. Please complete the survey ASAP (before \_\_\_\_\_ if possible) by clicking the following survey monkey link and then entering code **FH16** where prompted. It is important to enter **FH16** exactly as indicated here (with caps). Again, the survey will take less than 10 minutes to complete. Your support is greatly appreciated.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BrandDiss>

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this thematic, mixed method case study is to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary K-12 superintendents use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration. In addition, it is the purpose of this study to determine the degree of importance to which followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning. Results from the study will be summarized in a doctoral dissertation.

**PROCEDURES:** If you decide to participate in the study, you will be invited to complete a survey online via SurveyMonkey. You will be asked a series of questions designed to allow you to share as a follower to the K-12 superintendent your perception of how character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration is used by your leader to create meaning. The survey will be confidential and your responses will be coded to create patterns and themes for the study.

**RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS:** There are no known major risks to your participation in this research study. The survey may be taken at a time convenient for you, since the nature of your organization involves dynamically changing environments. Some survey questions may cause mild emotional discomfort if sharing your experience involves significant personal involvement.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS:** There are no major benefits to you for your participation, nonetheless a potential benefit may be that you will have an opportunity to identify future best practices of utilizing character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration to create meaning for other K-12 superintendents and their followers. The information from this study is intended to inform researchers, policymakers, and educators of the practices that are necessary to further the research on meaning making.

**ANONYMITY:** Records of information that you provide for the research study and any personal information you provide will not be linked in any way. It will not be possible to identify you as the person who provided any specific information for the study. You are encouraged to ask any questions, at any time, that will help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. For any questions please contact the principle investigator, **Frances E. Hansell, at [fhansell@mail.brandman.edu](mailto:fhansell@mail.brandman.edu) or (707) 495-2615.** If you have any further questions or concerns about this study or your rights as a study participant, you may write or call the **Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.**

Sincerely,

Frances E. Hansell, M.S. Ed.,  
Doctoral Candidate, Ed.D.,  
[fhansell@mail.brandman.edu](mailto:fhansell@mail.brandman.edu)

## APPENDIX K

### Survey

# Survey of Leadership Behaviors That Contribute to Personal and Organizational Meaning

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**Introduction:** The success of any organization may depend in large part on the quality of interactions among the leader and the team members and associates. What determines the quality of these interactions is tied closely to the perception that these people have of the leader's behaviors in five areas: *vision for the organization; relationships between the leader and team members; character of the leader; inspiration the leader provides; wisdom of the leader.*

Completing this survey will take approximately 10 minutes. Please choose to become a part of this important undertaking.

**It is important to read the following consent information carefully and click the agree box to continue. The survey will not open until you agree.**

In the Informed Consent language below, "Student" refers to the researcher who requested you complete the survey.

### INFORMED CONSENT

**INFORMATION ABOUT:** The degree of importance regarding a leader's behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning.

**Student:** Frances E. Hansell, M.S. Ed.

THE FOLLOWING WILL BE INCLUDED IN THE ELECTRONIC SURVEY:

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Frances E. Hansell M.S. Ed., a doctoral student from the School of Education at Brandman University. *The purpose of study is to identify and describe the behaviors that leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration.*

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in this electronic survey, you can withdraw at any time.

The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Your responses will be confidential. The survey questions will pertain to your perceptions.

Each participant will use a three-digit code for identification purposes. The researcher will keep the identifying codes safe-guarded in a locked file drawer to which the researcher will have sole access. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only.

No information that identifies you will be released without your separate consent and all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, you will be so informed and consent re-obtained. There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research.

I understand that the Investigator will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes and research materials in a locked file drawer that is available only to the researcher. I understand that I may refuse to participate in or I may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the Investigator may stop the study at any time. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641. If you have any questions about completing this survey or any aspects of this research, please contact the student at fhansell@mail.brandman.edu or 707-495-2615 or the faculty advisor Dr. Cindy Petersen 916-275-0512.

**ELECTRONIC CONSENT:** Please select your choice below.

Clicking on the “agree” button indicates that you have read the informed consent form and the information in this document and that you voluntarily agree to participate.

If you do not wish to participate in this electronic survey, you may decline participation by clicking on the “disagree” button.

The survey will not open for responses unless you agree to participate.

**AGREE:** I acknowledge receipt of the complete Informed Consent packet and “Bill of Rights.” I have read the materials and give my consent to participate in the study.

**DISAGREE:** I do not wish to participate in this electronic survey

Please enter the code provided to you by the researcher.

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## **LEADERSHIP SURVEY**

**Part 1 Directions:** For purposes of this study and survey, meaning is defined as the result of leaders and followers coming together for the purpose of gathering information from experience and integrating it into a process which creates significance, value and identity within themselves and the organization.

Listed below are behaviors that research suggest that leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning. Using the following descriptions, which one comes the closest

to your feelings about the importance of the leadership behavior in developing meaning in your organization.

1 = Not important in our organization; it's absence would have no effect upon the leader's overall effectiveness nor our organization's culture.

2 = Marginally important to have but not necessary in our organization; its absence would have little effect upon the leader's effectiveness or the cultural health of our organization.

3 = Somewhat important for a leader in our organization; this is a leadership behavior that would have a positive effect upon how we function and would contribute in some positive ways to our organizational culture.

4 = Important for a leader in our organization; this is a leadership behavior that is good for the organization and its absence in the leader would be a definite deterrent in the organization's overall effectiveness as well as culture.

5 = Very important for a leader in our organization; would contribute significantly to our overall effectiveness and enhance our organizational culture in some very positive ways.

6 = Critically important in our organization; an absolute must; its absence would severely inhibit the leader's effectiveness and the overall health of our organizational culture.

LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Continuously promotes our team's moving together as one unit to serve a common purpose. (relationships)						
2. Creates an environment of trust among leaders and team members in the organization. (relationships)						
3. Behaves in a way that shows she/he cares about the team members. (relationships)						
4. Communicates in a clear, meaningful way. (relationships)						
5. Encourages team members to share leadership when performing tasks. (relationships)						
6. Behaves in an ethical manner when dealing with others. (character)						
7. Actively listens when communicating with others. (character)						
8. Responds to challenging situations with optimism. (character)						
9. Actions with others shows that he/she can be trusted. (character)						
10. Actions show concern for the well-being of others. (character)						
11. Works with team members in a way that generates enthusiasm within teams. (inspiration)						
12. Recognizes and honors achievements of teams and team members. (inspiration)						
13. Encourages team members to innovate in order to advance the organization's leading edge. (inspiration)						
14. Engages in activities that build confidence among team members. (inspiration)						
15. Empowers team members to take reasonable risks when problem solving. (inspiration)						
16. Demonstrates thinking toward the future through conversations and actions. (vision)						
17. Communicates the organization's vision in a way in team members enthusiastically. (vision)						
18. Engages team members in creating a vision for the future. (vision)						
19. Behavior reflects organizational vision when making decisions. (vision)						
20. Promotes innovation that aligns with the organization's vision. (vision)						
21. Elevates the quality of decision making by discussing similarities of past situations with team members. (wisdom)						
22. Demonstrates compassion with team members. (wisdom)						
23. Behavior reflects an understanding of life's complexities. (wisdom)						
24. Integrates personal values with organizational values in decision making. (wisdom)						
25. Brings personal knowledge to the table when responding to complex situations within the organization. (wisdom)						
26. Considers past experiences when responding to complex situations within the organization. (wisdom)						
27. Displays expertise when working in a variety of situations within the organization. (wisdom)						
28. Shows concern for others in a variety of organizational settings. (wisdom)						
29. When working with teams and team members, continuously keeps the overall goals of the organization as part of conversations. (wisdom)						
30. Takes action by doing the "right thing" in a variety of organizational settings. (wisdom)						



**Part 2 Directions:** Please supply the following information. The information will be used only to assist in understanding the results of this inquiry.  
Enter the code provided to you by the person who asked you to complete this survey.

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1. Your gender:      Female            Male
  
2. Your age category:      20-30    31-40    41-50    51-60    61 or over
  
3. Your time with the organization:    0- 5 yrs.    6-10 yrs.    11-20 yrs.    21 years or over.
  
4. Your time with the current leader:      0-2 yrs.    3-5 yrs.    6-10 yrs.    11 yrs. or over.

**Thank you for your time. It is very much appreciated**