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Conversational Leadership: A Phenomenological Study of Exemplary Elementary Superintendents and the Behaviors They Practice in Leading Their Organizations

A Dissertation by

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Brandman University

Irvine, California

School of Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

January 2018

Committee in charge:

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BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY

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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

The dissertation of Kristin Brogan-Baranski is approved.

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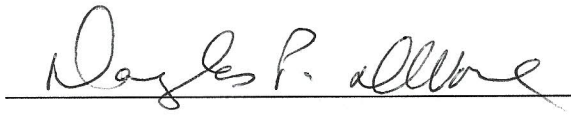 , Committee Member

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January 2018

Conversational Leadership: A Phenomenological Study of Exemplary Elementary Superintendents and the Behaviors They Practice in Leading Their Organizations

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I finished my master's degree in 1997, and fast forward 20 years, I'm finally done with the degree I always wanted to complete. Like all others before me, it took many people to help me get to this finish line. To my husband, Mike, I know I have kept us hopping for many years. I can't thank you enough for always sticking by me regardless of the newest escapade. You don't need to call me Dr. Baranski unless you really want to (please, just once). I know this program wasn't easy on you and the family, but I so appreciate your helping me get through it. I love you, and now you get your wife back. To my children, Erik, Kate, and Keira, I wanted you to see what hard work looks like during a time in your life when you would remember it. I hope I didn't take too much time away from you and our family. I tried ***really*** hard to balance family, work, and school. Remember, you only need to call me Doctor Mom once. I love you, and now you get your mom back. To my mom, Noreen, and dad, Kern, for creating conditions early in my life that supported my love of learning. I know you made sacrifices for both Nate and me so that we could grow up in an excellent educational system. I can't thank you enough. I love you, and now you need to move to California so we can really spend time together. To Bonnie and Don, my mother- and father-in-law, thank you for raising a son who would be tolerant of a woman who loves change and challenges. Also, thank you for making all those extra holiday meals during the past 3 years of my program. I told you you'd get a shout out for this! I love you, and now you get your daughter-in-law back. To Michelle and Robert, Mike's sister and brother-in-law, thank you for understanding as I sat and wrote papers during our family get-togethers. I love you, and now you get your sister-in-law back.

To my Brandman University family, what an adventure this has been. To my fellow San Diego Delta doctoral candidate team, what a diverse group of people we are! Our diversity certainly worked to our advantage as we competed against other cohorts (and won!). I am so proud of my San Diego Delta team, Tiffany, Cathy, Gina, Wayne, Robert, Manny, and Eric, and I can't wait to call you all doctors. To Dr. Lisbeth Johnson, my cohort mentor and a member of my dissertation committee, we have known each other for nearly 20 years. I remember when you were finishing your doctorate, and now you have helped me in attaining mine. You inspired and pushed me like only you know how, and my dissertation benefitted from your "eagle eye." I'll be forever grateful to you. To my other fellow Delta doctoral candidates, my thematic dissertation team members, especially Lisa and Jennifer, thank you for being on my accountability team. Your focus, drive, and quest for perfection was exactly what I needed. When we created our first timeline together and I doubted we could meet the Chapter II timeline, you said we could, AND we did! I have so enjoyed working with you. To Dr. Doug DeVore, one of my dissertation committee members, thank you for interviewing me for the program back in 2015. I enjoyed our talk then, enjoyed my classwork with you during the program, and have greatly appreciated the feedback you provided on my dissertation. I respect you so much. To Dr. Patricia Clark White, what an honor it has been to be your student and on your thematic dissertation team. I have admired you from the start of this program and felt like I won the lottery when I was placed on your team. You have expertly guided me, and my dissertation is what it is today because of you. Thank you from the bottom (or all) of my heart.

To my work family in Santee School District, so many of you have been my cheerleaders throughout my work in the district and as I've challenged myself in a new position while finishing my doctorate. I've enjoyed your mistakes in calling me Dr. Baranski too early, but now it's official. I hope my research makes you proud and that you see my research implemented on a daily basis in interaction with you all. Thank you to the Santee School District Board of Education, Barbara, Dianne, Dustin, Ken, and Elana, for trusting in me as superintendent of our amazing school district and for supporting me in completing this program. Thank you to my administrative team, Lisa, Stephanie, Tim, and Karl, and our site and district administrators. You were often completing surveys for me or helping me think through content for a course. I can't thank you all enough. Thank you also to our curriculum resource team, Tiffani, Jennifer, Kristen, Stacy, and Dan, for all your work on the transformational change project. I hope you learned as much as I did in the process. I was so proud of our work together.

I end this acknowledgement with the last stanza from my favorite poem, *The Road Not Taken,* by my favorite poet, Robert Frost. I know I've gained many rewards for taking a slightly different path than others would be comfortable taking.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference

—Robert Frost, 1916

ABSTRACT

Conversational Leadership: A Phenomenological Study of Exemplary Elementary Superintendents and the Behaviors They Practice in Leading Their Organizations

by Kristin Brogan-Baranski

Purpose: The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to describe the behaviors that exemplary elementary superintendents practice to lead their organizations through conversation using Groysberg and Slind's (2012b) 4 elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality.

Methodology: The phenomenological qualitative inquiry method was used to describe the behaviors of 10 exemplary elementary superintendents in Southern California and their perspectives of lived events related to conversational leadership. The study combined semistructured interviews using an interview guide, observations, and artifact collection. These qualitative tools helped the researcher gain insight on study participants' conversational leadership behaviors defined in the study's purpose. The researcher analyzed data collected with the assistance of NVivo software to reveal patterns and sort these patterns into categories.

Findings: Examination of study participant interviews, observations, and artifacts resulted in 23 themes and 361 frequencies among the 4 elements of conversational literacy. Ten key findings were identified based on the frequency of references by study participants.

Conclusions: The 10 key findings were summarized as 4 conclusions, one for each conversational leadership element. Superintendents in this study stressed the importance of listening to stakeholders and using honest communication for building intimate,

trusting relationships with stakeholders; creating cultures of nonjudgmental, open dialogue for increased two-way, interactive communication opportunities; including stakeholders through asking questions and creating common messages about organizational content; and creating clarity of organizational purpose through continuous messaging of the organization's goals and direction.

Recommendations: Further research of leaders in private business and superintendents in geographic areas outside Southern California should be conducted.

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PREFACE

Following discussions and considerations regarding the opportunity to study Groysberg and Slind's (2012b) conversational leadership in multiple types of organizations, four faculty researchers and 12 doctoral students discovered a common interest in exploring the ways exemplary leaders practice conversational leadership using the four elements of intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. This resulted in a thematic study conducted by a research team of 12 doctoral students.

This phenomenological research was designed with a focus on the behaviors of top executives in elementary education as they practice to lead their organizations through conversation. Exemplary leaders were selected by the team from various public, for-profit, and nonprofit organizations to examine the behaviors these professionals used. Each researcher interviewed 10 highly successful professionals to describe how they led their organizations through conversation using each of the four elements outlined in *Talk, Inc.* by authors Groysberg and Slind (2012b). To ensure thematic consistency, the team cocreated the purpose statement, research questions, definitions, interview questions, and study procedures. The team agreed that for the purpose of increased validity, data collection would involve method triangulation and would include interviews, observations, and artifacts.

Throughout the study, the term *peer researchers* is used to refer to the other researchers who conducted this thematic study. The researcher and her fellow doctoral students and peer researchers studied exemplary leaders in the following fields: Nikki Salas, city managers; Jacqueline Cardenas, unified school district superintendents; Chris Powell, elementary principals; Lisa Paisley, educational services assistant

superintendents; Jennifer LaBounty, community college presidents; Robert Harris, high school principals; John Ashby, middle school principals; Tammie Castillo Shiffer, regional directors of migrant education; Cladonda Lamela, chief nursing officers; Vincent Plair, municipal police chiefs and sheriffs; Qiana O'Leary, nonprofit executive directors; and this researcher studied elementary superintendents.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Our world is changing more rapidly now than any other time period in human history (Stephens, 2012). During the 21st century, organizations have encountered five significant business changes that require a shift in how leaders communicate within their organizations: economic, organizational, global, generational, and technological. These changes have made a profound impact on organizational communication (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

The predominant industry in the United States is now the service industry. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016), service industry employment, specifically health care and social assistance, has surpassed manufacturing employment. Service industries employ people who think for a living (i.e., knowledge workers; Drucker, 1999b), and this type of employee requires a sophisticated and technical approach to communication.

Organizational hierarchies are changing. In organizations that have embraced changes in traditional hierarchies between leadership and employees, employees are viewed as value added to the organization, as innovators or creative servers. This change in organizational hierarchy has promoted lateral and bottom-up communication to a position that has become equally as important as top-down communication (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2012; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Global access to goods and services, including human resources, could triple within the next 10 years. This global access, otherwise known as a global flow, has created a world economy that requires leaders who can navigate interconnectivity and cultural interactions (Manyika et al., 2014). In a hyperconnected global economy,

organizations rely on social technologies, blogs, wikis, online communities, Twitter, social networks, video chats, and video sharing to provide two-way conversations (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Ouye, 2011).

Generational changes are also impacting communication in the workplace. Millennials, employees born after 1980, communicate differently than the two previous generations due to access to instantaneous information during their lifetime (Remedies, 2012; Taylor & Keeter, 2010), and while at work, they expect leaders and their peers to work as a team through two-way communication (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Lastly, instant connectivity and social technologies have impacted how organizations communicate. Knowledge workers expect instant connection to information and people, and social technologies have created a new way for leaders and their employees to communicate and collaborate (Drucker, 1999b; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Henson, 2009; Ouye, 2011).

Our world is changing, and local leaders need to manage these changes for their organizations to remain sustainable in the global economy (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2012). Based on these significant business changes and their impact on organizational communication, it is important to determine how 21st-century transformational leaders communicate by engaging with their employees through two-way conversation, interconnectivity, and social media technologies and how these leaders develop communication systems that create organizational inclusivity (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Background

Organizations of all types and sizes are experiencing dramatic changes based on a new global and national economy, significant advancements in social technologies, and generational communication differences among employees (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). Simultaneously, 50% of the employees in the United States hate their jobs while 68% of employees state they are disengaged from their work. This level of employee disengagement leads to low production and an underperforming workforce whose members may never reach their full potential (Crowley, 2011).

Employee engagement is a predictor for organizational performance (Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010; Shuck & Reio, 2014). Research has indicated that disengaged and underperforming employees impact organizational performance and profitability due to higher absentee rates, increased employee turnover, low production of goods, and poor customer service (Albrecht, 2010; Crowley, 2015; Shuck & Reio, 2014). Recognizing that the success of organizations depends on the success and satisfaction of their employees, leaders are searching for ways to increase engagement and motivation through ongoing, dynamic communication practices (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2012; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Shuck & Reio, 2014).

Elementary superintendents of school districts serve as the chief executive officers of their school districts and are responsible for creating and implementing a collaborative work environment for staff. They are also responsible for student safety and learning in the primary, intermediate, and possibly in junior high grade levels depending on the school district configuration. Superintendents serve many stakeholders including board of education members, site and district administrators, teachers, staff,

parents, and students, and they are responsible for the organizational culture and communication between and among stakeholder groups (Addams, Donnelly, & Smith, 2012).

In order to create this culture of communication, researchers have recommended a shift from one-way, top-down communication between leaders and employees to two-way, dynamic interactions. Two-way interactions build organizational inclusivity, an important element in building the relationships necessary to improve employee engagement and motivation and organizational productivity (Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Glaser, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012a, 2012b; Men, 2012; Nichols, 2012). However, much more needs to be learned about the way in which leaders can use advanced forms of communication to foster the kind of relationships and creativity needed in 21st-century organizations.

Theoretical Background

Communication theory, relational leadership, complexity theory, and transformational leadership influence how leaders communicate within their organizations. In addition to the research provided on these four theories, conversational leadership is a new, emerging field of study related to and influenced by these theories.

Communication Theory

Communication theory, the process of sending and receiving messages, was first introduced as a concept by Shannon and Weaver (1949). From their work on communication theory, Schramm (1962) stated the importance of the communication process between individuals, the "flow of information and influence between persons and

in groups and the nature of language and symbols" (p. 251). Models of communication have been created as a result of these primary works on communication theory.

Relational Leadership

Hollander (1978) defined the interaction between a leader and a follower as mutually dependent and where each party provides something of value to the relationship. This relationship builds a high level of trust between the leader and the follower. Fredericks (2009) added to this definition of relational leadership by determining that leaders and followers interact with each other toward an organizational mission but also because the leaders recognize the people within their organization as their priority. Relational leaders are "inclusive, receptive, and supportive" because these leaders want their employees to feel good about the work they are doing (Fredericks, 2009, p. 169).

Complexity Theory

Complexity theory focuses on "leadership behaviors that create organizational effectiveness," including how leaders manage networks, interconnectivity, and interactions between people (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001, p. 389). Complexity theory suggests that leaders will not dictate every action within the organization because interaction also includes structures for innovation. Some of these structures include the leaders' ability to create highly interconnected networks among employees, organize the work environment to encourage interactions among employees, and extend decision-making power to the employees (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001). Kauffman (1995) also stated that interaction is instrumental in complex organizational behavior due to an

employee's willingness, or unwillingness, to work interdependently with other employees and among departments in the same organization.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leaders inspire the best work in others through influence, motivation, consideration, and stimulation (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Through these four factors, these leaders inspire and stimulate employees to work beyond traditional levels of performance but also care for their followers' personal needs and their personal development. D. Anderson and Ackerman Anderson (2010) indicated that transformational change occurs based on the impact to the people in the organization. Transformational leaders assist their people in changing how they think, feel, and work collaboratively together.

Conversational Leadership

The phenomenon of conversational leadership is a new and emerging field of study (Nichols, 2012). The elements of conversational leadership, as defined by Groysberg and Slind (2012b), include the leader's role in developing communication between and among employees through intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. Other researchers and authors have provided a knowledge base on the phenomenon of conversational leadership; however, only Groysberg and Slind have defined organizational conversation through the combination of these four elements.

Conversational Leadership Elements

Intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality have been defined by Groysberg and Slind (2012b) as elements of organizational conversation where leaders interact with employees through conversation similar to a conversation between two

people. The authors suggested that this conversational practice increases trust and employee motivation and commitment, improves organizational efficiency, and increases the deployment of the organization's vision through the execution of the vision by all employees (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Intimacy

Leaders who understand their role in building positive interpersonal relationships and understanding their employees' personal and professional needs provide emotional, intimate connections in the workplace. These relationships may provide for greater employee motivation and productivity (O. L. Brown, 2013; Gambetti & Biraghi, 2015; Pope, 1994).

Groysberg and Slind (2012b) agreed that creating leader and employee relationships is a primary goal of organizational communication, and they also added workplace intimacy as a means of flattening the traditional hierarchies in an organization. Based on global, economic, and technological changes, physical proximity to employees may not always be possible, but the mental or emotional proximity is essential. Leaders can demonstrate this level of proximity by personal, more casual communication and by demonstrating a transparent communication style (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a). Emotional proximity to employees allows the leaders to listen and learn about what their employees value and find important within the organization. As noted by other researchers, the purpose of workplace intimacy is the potential for workforce motivation and productivity (O. L. Brown, 2013; Gambetti & Biraghi, 2015; Pope, 1994).

Interactivity

Global, economic, generational, technological, and organizational changes have impacted how leaders and employees interact and collaborate (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a). Millennials, employees born after 1980, communicate differently than the two previous generations due to access to instantaneous information during their lifetime (Remedies, 2012; Taylor & Keeter, 2010), and while at work, they expect leaders and their peers to work as a team through two-way communication (Cox & McLeod, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Conversationally competent leaders interact with employees on an ongoing basis; they view their interaction with employees as a process, and this process builds on the employees' ability to contribute to the organization's mission (Bowman, 2014; Clifton, 2012; Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2012; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Hurley & Brown, 2009; Uhl-Bien, 2006). In the absence of face-to-face interaction, especially when interacting with employees or stakeholders in other parts of the world, the promotion of dialogue and collaboration through social media technologies is necessary (Cox & McLeod, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012a, 2012b).

Inclusion

Inclusive leaders involve their employees in daily and strategic operations and integrate diverse thinking into the organization as well as fully involving their employees in ongoing, corporate messaging (Boekhorst, 2015; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Hurley & Brown, 2009). Communication in an inclusive organization is about establishing and maintaining a relationship with employees (Glaser, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b) and the leaders' ability to model inclusivity with their employees with less concern for

communication control (Boekhorst, 2015; Nichols, 2012). This deliberate, collaborative culture and climate of inclusion in the organization increases employee engagement and motivation (Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Groysberg & Slind, 2012a, 2012b; Men, 2012; Nichols, 2012). In turn, employee engagement and motivation create an organization of innovation and efficiency and a team of employees who perform together (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Intentionality

According to Groysberg and Slind (2012b), intimacy, interactivity, and inclusion all provide an energy to the organization through employee innovation, engagement, and motivation, but intentionality closes the conversational loop with the organization's vision, clarity of purpose, and how employees can support this vision. Conversational leaders strategically plan consistent and constant communication, still valuing two-way communication between leaders and followers, and can articulate the reasons why actions are taken. This organizational intentionality also increases employee engagement because the organization has a clear sense of identity and employees know why they work for the organization (Barge, 1985; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Men, 2012). The leader's intentional transparency, two-way communication, and relationship orientation creates a positive environment where employees feel trusted, supported, and involved (Men, 2012).

Role of Superintendent in Organizational Leadership

The superintendent of a school district, at the elementary or secondary grade levels, is the chief executive officer of the organization. The superintendent's role, like any other chief executive officer, is to maintain a collaborative culture and to motivate

employees. The intentionality of a school district's work is to ensure students are learning and are part of a safe, healthy school environment.

Superintendent's Role as a Transformational Leader

School districts require a leader capable of leading during a time when the world is changing dramatically and inspiring the best work in others through influence, motivation, consideration, and stimulation (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Summers, 2015). Superintendents need to lead consciously (D. Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010; Summers, 2015) and with intentionality.

Superintendent's Role in Creating District Culture

Connections between communication and the culture of the organization have been well established in communication studies (Kowalski, 2005). The role of a superintendent in creating a positive culture of trust, risk taking, collaboration, generation of shared district vision, and human development of all employees, including teachers, administrators, and other staff, is essential (Addams et al., 2012; Summers, 2015).

Superintendent's Role in District Communication

School district superintendents play an important role in influencing and enhancing district communication (Addams et al., 2012). Superintendents who effectively communicate with external and internal stakeholders "influence school culture and productivity, lead change, gain acceptance of the district message, and build relationships within the community" (Antonucci, 2012, p. 152). As in other organizations and industries, the trend to include and interact with employees through two-way, dynamic communication is also important in a school district (Cox & McLeod, 2014; Kowalski, 2005).

Gaps in Conversational Leadership Research

Conversational leadership is a newer topic of research (Nichols, 2012). Based on a study of theoretical background related to conversational leadership and the four elements of conversational leadership defined by Groysberg and Slind (2012b)—intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality—there is minimal research on intimacy in the workplace and limited research on the other three elements. In addition, the role of superintendent in organizational and transformational leadership has been studied; however, the application of conversational leadership elements by superintendents has not been studied.

What Is Known

Pope (1994) found an absence of information on intimacy in leadership literature, and Uhl-Bien (2006) noted that "surprisingly little is known about how relationships form and develop in the workplace" (p. 672). Few researchers, aside from those previously mentioned, have identified workplace intimacy as a means of a leader's emotional connection to employees or for purposeful flattening of traditional workplace hierarchies.

Recent research and business trends based on global, organizational, generational, technological, and economic changes have changed the definition of workplace interactivity. Interactivity in the 20th century would incorporate face-to-face interaction and top-down directives (Barge, 1985). However, current research on interactivity for leadership and employee collaboration through a two-way, dynamic approach is becoming more prevalent (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Hurley & Brown, 2009; Men, 2012).

What Is Not Known

There are no known studies on the topic of superintendents who lead through conversation using Groysberg and Slind's (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. Therefore, there is a gap in the current research on this topic.

Statement of the Research Problem

Leadership in the 21st century has grown increasingly complex; however, teams, organizations, and employees need leaders who are willing to step up and lead (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Leaders realize the vital role that 21st-century employees play in the success or failure of an organization, and with 68% of the workforce disengaged from their work and 50% of employees hating their job (Crowley, 2015), it is imperative that leaders find ways to engage and motivate their employees for the success of their organizations (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2012; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Elementary school districts also require a leader capable of leading during a time when the world is changing dramatically (Summers, 2015) and inspiring the best work in others (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Lehmann-Willenbrock, Meinecke, Rowold, & Kauffeld, 2015; Singh, 2015). Superintendents need to lead consciously (D. Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010; Summers, 2015) and with intentionality. Amidst all the global, national, and local changes, how can elementary superintendents lead transformational change and inspire the best work in others?

One-way, top-down communication styles are no longer acceptable for 21st-century organizations. As in other organizations and industries, the trend to include and interact with employees through two-way, dynamic communication is also important in a

school district (Cox & McLeod, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Kowalski, 2005). The complexity in creating and managing an interconnected work environment is an ongoing challenge for leaders (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). How can elementary superintendents lead transformational change and inspire the best work in others through two-way, dynamic communication with employees?

Conversational leadership, a newer topic of research (Nichols, 2012), has been studied by several researchers and may be the communication needed for transformational leadership and employee motivation and engagement (Barge, 1985, 2014; Bowman, 2014; Glaser, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Hurley & Brown, 2009; Nichols, 2012; Weber, 2013). Groysberg and Slind (2012b) posited that conversational leaders create a flattened organizational hierarchy, thus increasing the potential for employee motivation and engagement through personal and transparent communication. They believed this could be accomplished using intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality with employees (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Of the four elements of conversational leadership defined by Groysberg and Slind (2012b)—intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality—there is minimal research on intimacy in the workplace (Pope, 1994) and limited research on the other three elements. In addition, while the role of superintendent in organizational and transformational leadership has been studied (Bryant, 2015; Singh, 2015; Summers, 2015), the application of conversational leadership elements by elementary superintendents has not been studied. More information is needed to discover ways in which elementary superintendents may use these conversational elements in their leadership roles.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to describe the behaviors that exemplary elementary superintendents practice to lead their organizations through conversation using Groysberg and Slind's (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are the behaviors that exemplary elementary superintendents practice to lead their organizations through conversation using Groysberg and Slind's (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality?

Subquestions

1. How do exemplary elementary superintendents lead their organizations through the conversation element of intimacy?
2. How do exemplary elementary superintendents lead their organizations through the conversation element of interactivity?
3. How do exemplary elementary superintendents lead their organizations through the conversation element of inclusion?
4. How do exemplary elementary superintendents lead their organizations through the conversation element of intentionality?

Significance of the Problem

Just as businesses across the world are experiencing significant changes, California's public school districts are also experiencing significant changes in multiple

converging systems at one time (Ed-Data, 2017). These changes require a leader capable of managing and communicating these changes through two-way, dynamic communication (Cox & McLeod, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Kowalski, 2005) and capable of inspiring employees in the organization to perform at an optimal level during this time of significant change (D. Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2015; Singh, 2015).

Unfortunately, the majority of employees are not engaged in their work, which leads to less-than-optimal levels of organizational performance (Albrecht, 2010; Crowley, 2015; Shuck & Reio, 2014). Crowley (2015) reported that 68% of the overall workforce is disengaged, and in a Gallup (2014) poll, teachers reported a similar level of workplace disengagement and dissatisfaction at nearly 70% (Bidwell, 2014). Even more alarming, of the 12 professions surveyed in a Gallup (2014) poll, teachers were the "least likely of these twelve professions to feel their opinions count and to feel their supervisor creates an open and trusting work environment" (p. 26). Organizational performance in a school district, like any other dynamic organization, relies on the leader's ability to engage and motivate the employees through ongoing, personal, and transparent two-way communication (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2012; Gallup, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Groysberg and Slind (2012b) recommended the use of four conversational elements—intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality—to flatten the traditional hierarchy in organizations. Flattening of the traditional hierarchy increases employee trust, improves organizational efficiencies and employee commitment, and improves the coordination of the organizational vision and mission among all employees. However,

there have been no studies conducted on the use of these four elements by school district superintendents, including elementary superintendents. This study fills the research gap regarding the behaviors that elementary superintendents practice to lead through Groysberg and Slind's conversational leadership elements of intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality.

The results of this study may assist elementary superintendents and other school leaders in creating organizational cultures that include all employees in ongoing, transparent two-way communication. This study may also provide professional organizations like the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) and the School Superintendents Association (AASA) with research to support new and current superintendents with the conversational elements necessary in creating engaging and motivating organizational behaviors. These two organizations serve over 30,000 members at a local, state, and national level (AASA, n.d.; ACSA, n.d.) and are utilized by superintendents for professional development and consulting services on topics like vision development, communication, and creating collaborative cultures.

In addition to these organizations, education offices at the county and state level and consulting companies that provide mentorship to superintendents may also benefit from the research on how to support new or current superintendents in their communication practices with employees.

Definitions

The following terms are defined based on research as the theoretical definitions, establishing how the variables are used in the study or to provide meaning to a variable that may be interpreted in different ways.

Behavior. An action, activity, or process that can be observed or measured (Dainton & Zelley, 2005; Griffin, 2012; West & Turner, 2010).

Exemplary. Someone set apart from peers in a supreme manner, whose suitable behavior, principles, or intentions can be copied (Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin, 2014).

Flattening of the organizational hierarchy. The traditional organizational hierarchy that separates leadership from employees has been replaced with a flatter hierarchy in 21st-century organizations. Organizations with a flattened hierarchy encourage two-way communication between leaders and employees, which improves communication and productivity because employees feel valued for their contributions to the organization (Auster & Freeman, 2013; Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2012; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Henson, 2009; Uhl-Bien, 2006).

Inclusion. The commitment to the process of engaging members of the organization to share ideas and participate in the development of the organization (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Hurley & Brown, 2009).

Intentionality. Ensuring clarity of purpose that includes goals and direction to create order and meaning (Barge, 1985; Groysberg & Slind, 2012a, 2012b; Men, 2012).

Interactivity. "Bilateral or multi-lateral exchange of comments and ideas, a back-and-forth process" (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b, p. 64).

Intimacy. The closeness, trust, and familiarity created between people through shared experiences, meaningful exchanges, and shared knowledge (Glaser, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Schwarz, 2011).

Delimitations

This study was delimited to 10 exemplary elementary school district superintendents in Southern California. An exemplary superintendent, in this study, is a school district leader who demonstrates at least four of the following six criteria:

- evidence of successful relationships with followers;
- evidence of leading a successful organization;
- a minimum of 5 years of experience in the profession;
- articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings;
- recognition by his or her peers; and
- membership in professional associations in his or her field.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters, references, and appendices. Chapter I provided an introduction of conversational leadership, background on theories and the study variables, statement of the problem, the research purpose, theoretical definitions, and the delimitations of the study. Chapter II presents what is known about the five business trends impacting organizational communication, leadership theories influencing communication, the four elements of conversational leadership, and the role of superintendent in organizational communication. Chapter III explains the research design and the methodology of the study, including the study population and sampling procedures for data gathering and analysis. Chapter IV presents and analyzes the findings of the study. Chapter V concludes the study with a summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Leadership in the 21st century is far more complex than was anticipated at the turn of the century. Within the first 10 years, technological advancements, including social technologies, created significant industry changes to the U.S. economy, from a predominant manufacturing industry to a predominant service industry. In addition, technological advancements improved the speed of communication and collaboration, creating global market competition and a hyperconnected, global economy. As a result, leadership responsiveness to organizational and employee needs during this "age of upheaval . . . [and] uncertainty" (Barton, Grant, & Horn, 2012, para. 2) is very different from just 20 years ago. Leaders in the 21st century need to create a culture where employees feel empowered to share their perspectives and challenge opinions of leadership. Organizations cannot rely on what has worked in the past during this time of significant and rapid change (Barton et al., 2012; Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2012).

During this era of uncertainty and significant change, experts in 21st-century leadership have identified five interconnected business trends that influence organizational communication: economic, organizational, global, generational, and technological. Employees in a service economy require accurate and immediate access to information and are empowered by organizational cultures where knowledge is readily shared and cocreated through a two-way, dynamic communication process with leadership. Cocreation of shared knowledge and instant access to information impacts the organizational structure, causing a flattening of the traditional hierarchies between leadership and employees. In addition, generational communication differences require a leader who can adjust to the individual communication needs of employees and support

the collective actions of all employees within the organization (Barge, 2014; Drucker, 1999b; Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2012; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Manyika et al., 2014; Ouye, 2011; Remedies, 2012; Taylor & Keeter, 2010).

It is also important during times of significant change for leaders to understand how to create conditions where employees feel empowered, engaged, motivated, and valued for their work and contributions to the organization. Systems of organizational communication, created strategically and with purpose, motivate and inspire employees to work at an optimal level for the organization (Crowley, 2011).

To understand the impact of these national and global workplace changes on organizational communication, a thorough literature review was conducted on the following topics:

1. a summary of the literature on the five business trends impacting the changing world;
2. theoretical background on four theories related to communication and how these theories support the background of organizational conversation;
3. literature related to Groysberg and Slind's (2012b) four organizational conversation elements; and
4. a summary of literature on the role of superintendent in organizational leadership.

A chapter summary is also included at the end of the chapter.

New Leadership Communication Expectations Based on Five Business Changes

Our world is rapidly changing, and organizations require leaders who can support and nurture these changes through varied processes and structures of organizational communication. The speed of communication and options for communication, enhanced by technological advancements, have changed how leaders and employees communicate.

In addition, today's employees, based on economic and generational shifts, require a different type of organizational communication than 20 years ago (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2012; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Men, 2012; Nichols, 2012).

Economic Change

At a national level, the United States has experienced an economic change from a predominant manufacturing industry to a service industry. In 1990, manufacturing was the major industry, but by 2013, health care and social assistance for individuals became the major industry in the United States. Employment in health care and social assistance is also the most current need with 5.2% of positions unfilled (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). The shortage of professionals, like those employed in health care and business services, will continue as the baby boomer generation retires and these positions are filled by younger professionals (Ouye, 2011).

From a communication standpoint, service industries like health care, social assistance, and professional and business services employ people who think for a living (i.e., knowledge workers), and this type of employee requires a sophisticated and technical approach to communication (Drucker, 1999b; Groysberg & Slind, 2012a; Henson, 2009; Hvide & Kristiansen, 2012; Ouye, 2011). Knowledge workers expect instant access to information and collaboration with colleagues using advanced technologies. Drucker (1999a) identified knowledge workers and their productivity as the 21st century's most valuable asset. Engaging knowledge workers and fostering their productivity through two-way, dynamic communication is essential to employee retention and motivation and to the organization's productivity (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Organizational Change

Leaders in the 21st century are expected to create an innovative organizational culture among all employees, and in this culture, employees are more empowered to support the organizational vision and strategy (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2012). To create this innovative culture, experts recommend a shift from one-way, top-down communication between leaders and employees to two-way, dynamic interactions. Two-way interactions between leaders and employees build organizational inclusivity, an important element in building the relationships necessary to improve employee engagement and motivation and organizational productivity (Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Glaser, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012a, 2012b; Henson, 2009; Men, 2012; Nichols, 2012).

In addition to creating organizational inclusivity, two-way, dynamic interactions between leaders and employees also flatten the traditional organizational hierarchy. Organizations are expected to innovate to survive the competitiveness of the global market, and employees, human capital, are the greatest contributors to this innovation (Henson, 2009). As global, generational, and technological changes continue, every industry will continue to experience changes in the flattening of the organizational hierarchy (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2012; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Henson, 2009).

Global Change

Between 2012 and 2025, the global flow of goods, services, and finances is projected to triple, from $26 trillion to $85 trillion, and growth in knowledge-intensive goods will grow at a rate 1.3 times that of labor-intensive goods (Manyika et al., 2014). These data correlate with the change of the national economy from a manufacturing

economy to a service economy. In addition, digital flows—the transmission of information, ideas, and innovation from anywhere around the world—have continued to steadily increase since 2008. Digital platforms have decreased the cost of international transactions and have enhanced an organization's ability to outsource innovation from anywhere in the world. In addition to organizations, individuals are participating in digital flows, using digital platforms and social media to showcase their talents and find work. Nearly 900 million people have international connections on social media, and 360 million people contribute to cross-border commerce (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2012; Manyika et al., 2014; Manyika et al., 2016).

Global marketplace changes will continue to change how leaders and employees communicate across cultures and geographic areas. Communication in a global marketplace requires fluid yet complex interactions as organizations and individuals utilize technology for these interactions. Video teleconferencing and social media tools support two-way communications that are still necessary for leader and employee interaction. In addition, blogging and discussion boards allow employees to collaborate regardless of their location around the world (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a; Ouye, 2011).

Generational Change

Organizations currently employ workers from three generations: the baby boomers, Generation X, and the millennials. The millennial generation is significantly different from the two previous generations. These employees, born after 1980, are the most highly educated generation in the history of the United States, the most mobile, and the most accepting of rapid change (Henson, 2009; Ouye, 2011; Remedies, 2012). As a generation, they value nontraditional work environments, including working from home,

open-office collaborative workspaces, and flexibility of work hours due to global work demands (Henson, 2009; Ouye, 2011; Remedies, 2012).

As communicators, millennials expect instantaneous communication and efficient access to information. They are the first workforce generation to have had access to multiple technological tools to communicate, collaborate, and learn since their childhood: the Internet, instant messaging, e-mail, and cell phones (Remedies, 2012; Taylor & Keeter, 2010). Employees from all three generations benefit from leaders who know how to relate to their employees, but millennial employees, the most highly educated workforce in the history of the United States, need leaders who will listen to them and engage in open dialogue and information sharing (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Technological Change

According to Henson (2009), "Technology is under continuous transformation, becoming smarter, cheaper, easier to use, and less structured" (p. 14). Technology and social collaboration tools allow employees to access work materials anytime and from anywhere and to collaborate with colleagues from any connected device. This instant access to content and people has significantly changed the national and global work environment and has a significant impact on the traditional organizational structure through instant access to global information, innovative practice sharing, and exchange of free content and services (Manyika et al., 2016).

Collaboration technologies provide data and information sharing between leaders and employees, but they do not allow employees and leaders to learn about each other, their passions and commitments, on a personal level. Social media technologies in the workplace, such as Internet forums, blogs, wikis, podcasts, social bookmarking, e-mail,

instant messaging, and crowd sourcing, create a culture of organizational interactivity on a personal and professional level (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a; Ouye, 2011). This content and knowledge sharing between employees and leaders engages employees in organizational inclusivity, the production of organizational content, and common messaging.

Theoretical Background

Conversational leadership is a new, emerging field of study (Nichols, 2012); however, this field has been influenced by 20th-century communication theories, and the study of transformational leadership and conversational leadership has continued to change leadership communication styles in the 21st century. From an extensive literature review of theories on communication, four major theories related to conversational leadership emerged: communication theory, relational leadership, complexity theory, and transformational leadership. These theories have historically influenced how and why leaders communicate within their organizations and the importance of building relationships among all employee groups.

Communication Theory

Communication theory was first introduced as a concept by Shannon and Weaver (1949). They theorized the importance of communication as the process of sending and receiving messages or transferring information from a sender to a receiver. Their communication model was first introduced to support communication between senders and receivers on two mediums, the telephone and the radio. They also characterized the potential problems of communication when it does not take place face-to-face in a conversation:

1. technical: how accurately is the information shared between sender and receiver;
2. semantics: is the meaning conveyed accurately and appropriately; and
3. effectiveness: how does the information change the behavior of the receiver (Shannon & Weaver, 1949)?

From Shannon and Weaver's (1949) work on communication theory, Schramm (1962) stated the importance of the communication process between individuals, the "flow of information and influence between persons and in groups and the nature of language and symbols" (p. 251). He also studied and conveyed the importance of communication through social interaction, sharing of knowledge and experiences, asking questions, and providing advice or direction (Schramm, 1962).

Additional models of communication have been created as a result of these primary works on communication theory. All these models are influenced by the intent of the messages between sender and receiver, nonverbal and verbal behaviors of the sender and receiver, and the mode of communication, that is, individual, small group, or large group, with or without the use of technology (Schulz & Cobley, 2013).

Relational Leadership

Edwin Hollander has provided over 40 years of research and theory on the relationship between leader and follower. In his book *Leadership Dynamics*, Hollander (1978) defined the interaction between a leader and a follower as mutually dependent, where each party brings value to the relationship. The development of this relationship builds a high level of trust between the leader and the follower. In his most recent book, *Inclusive Leadership*, Hollander (2009) added to his previous theory by indicating the

importance of two-way communication between the leader and the follower and the influence they have on one another through their communication.

Fredericks (2009) added to Hollander's definition of relational leadership by determining that leaders and followers interact with each other toward an organizational mission but also because the leaders recognize that human capital is their priority. Relational leaders are "inclusive, receptive, and supportive" because these leaders want their employees to feel good about the work they are doing (Fredericks, 2009, p. 169).

Hollander's (1978, 2009) work on relational leadership connects to all four elements of conversational leadership defined by Groysberg and Slind (2012b), and Fredericks's (2009) research on relational leadership further identified the importance of motivation and engagement of all employees in the workplace through relationships between leaders and followers.

Complexity Theory

Complexity theory integrates psychological and human relations models to include systems and processes for creating interconnectedness among people, and it validates human-centered leadership. Because organizations are evolving and adaptive systems and the characteristics of these systems include complex human relationships, it is important for leaders to recognize their role in connecting and supporting people and ideas (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001; Regine & Lewin, 2000). Kauffman (1995) also stated that employee interaction and interdependence within the organization cannot be directed by leadership but must be enabled through the organization's collaborative culture.

In addition to the leader's ability to connect people and their ideas, leadership also creates structures for organizational innovation. Some of these structures include the

leader's ability to create highly interconnected networks among employees, organize the work environment to encourage interactions among employees, and extend decision-making power to the employees (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001; Regine & Lewin, 2000).

Regine and Lewin (2000) indicated that one of the most important lessons of complexity science in organizations is the system's ability to adapt to changes through simple interactions with employees:

> In business, how we interact and the kind of relationships we form have everything to do with what kind of culture emerges; with the emergence of creativity, productivity, and innovation in the work-place; with the organization's ability to anticipate and adapt to changes. In turn, the emergent order influences the behavior of individuals in the system—a feedback loop. Similarly, the culture that emerges in a company will influence people's behavior. From this continual interplay between people's behavior and the emergent culture flows a dynamic feedback loop that can enable or disable greater adaptability. (p. 16)

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leaders inspire the best work in others through the four factors of influence, motivation, consideration, and stimulation. Much like relational leadership and complexity theory, transformational leaders inspire and stimulate employees to work beyond traditional levels of performance by caring for their followers' personal needs and personal development (Bass & Riggio, 2006). As noted in Figure 1, transformational leaders lead by example, encourage the growth and development of others, are inspirational, and empower others to be successful ("Transformational Leadership," n.d.).

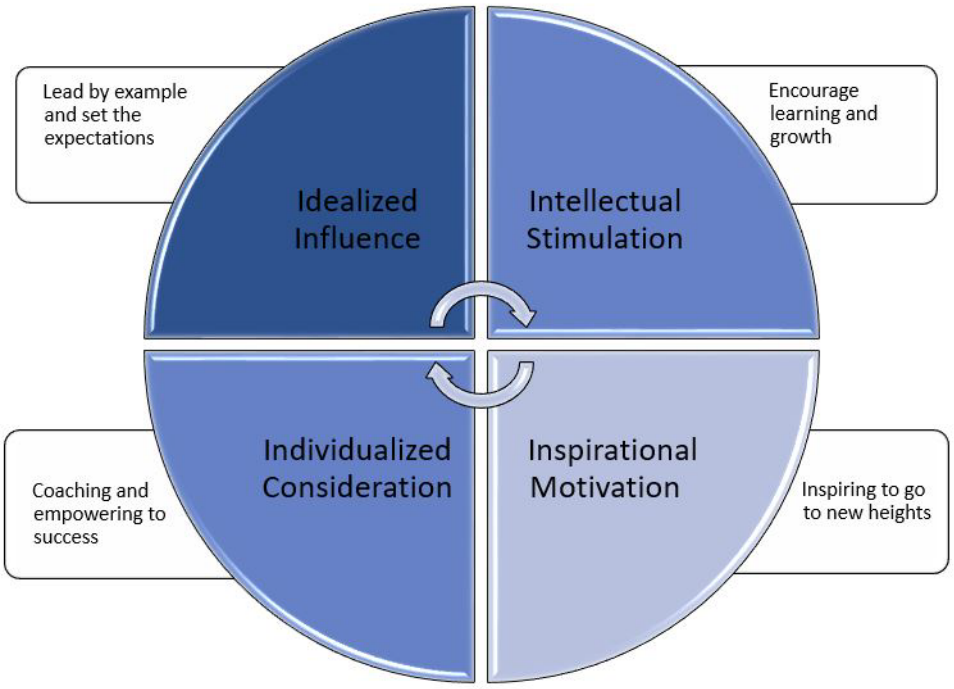

Figure 1. Transformational leadership model. Adapted from "Transformational Leadership: Leading Change Through Growth and Empowerment," n.d. (http://www.educational-business-articles.com/transformational-leadership/).

D. Anderson and Ackerman Anderson (2010) stated that when change becomes more complex, leadership awareness is the first step in transforming organizations. They explained, "Transformation is a radical shift of strategy, structure, systems, processes, or technology, so significant that it requires a shift of culture, behavior, and mindset to implement successfully and sustain over time" (D. Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010, p. 60). Transformational leaders recognize the need for the organization to change because the change is necessary for a greater vision and purpose. These leaders know that the change will require new practices and strategies and that they as leaders will also need to change their mindset, behavior, and style to accomplish this level of change. They possess inner strength and vulnerability and are also emotionally aware of their organizational culture.

Transformational leaders have the ability to impact every level of the organization. Based on the high emotional intelligence usually exhibited by this type of leader, transformational leaders know how to inspire, motivate, stimulate, and care for their employees (D. Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010; Schieltz, n.d.).

Conversational Leadership

Hurley and Brown (2009) recognized Carolyn Baldwin as the pioneer educator and World Café host, a structure for social networking, who first used the phrasing *conversational leadership*. Baldwin, an elementary school principal, developed conversational leadership as a communication strategy in 1993 (J. Brown, 2005; Nichols, 2012). She strategically used conversation to elicit perspectives of her employees to create common knowledge and an understanding of the personal values within the organization. Her communication model, conversational leadership, was designed to engage people in her organization by focusing on student learning outcomes (J. Brown, 2005; Nichols, 2012).

Since 1993, additional researchers have added to the knowledge base of this communication model. J. Brown and Isaacs (1997) focused on how companies use conversation during strategic planning and, like Baldwin, create business value through employee engagement. Hurley and Brown (2009) created a communication model (Figure 2) integrating six key processes for creating innovative leadership and employee development. These six integrated communication strategies were designed to engage and motivate all employees with conversation as the catalyst for creating an organization whose members think together:

1. Clarify[ing] purpose and strategic intent
2. Explor[ing] critical issues and questions

3. Engag[ing] all key stakeholders
4. Skillfully us[ing] collaborative social technologies
5. Guid[ing] collective intelligence toward effective action
6. Foster[ing] innovative capacity development (Hurley & Brown, 2009, para. 16)

Figure 2. Conversational leadership: Creating architectures for engagement. Adapted from "Conversational Leadership: Thinking Together for a Change," by T. Hurley and J. Brown, 2009, *The Systems Thinker* (https://thesystemsthinker.com/conversational-leadership-thinking-together-for-a-change/).

Conversational leadership strategies have gained momentum since 2009 as more businesses have turned to transformational leadership models to inspire and engage their employees (D. Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010; Glaser, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Weber, 2013). Glaser (2014) created the conversational dashboard presented in Figure 3 to demonstrate how to move an organization through levels of

conversational intelligence, building from a low level of communication to cocreator communication and a partnership between leaders and employees.

Figure 3. Conversational dashboard. Adapted from *Conversational Intelligence: How Great Leaders Build Trust and Get Extraordinary Results* (p. 94), by J. Glaser, 2014, Brookline, MA: Bebliomotion.

D. Anderson and Ackerman Anderson (2010) and Weber (2013) have described the importance of conscious process thinking, that is, the awareness and mindfulness of leaders as they listen, observe, and receive information from their employees. D. Anderson and Ackerman Anderson (2010) organized the process into two categories: business processes and human processes. Human processes relate to mental processing and relational interactions. Successful leaders view their organizations as interconnected, conscious systems in continual motion (D. Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010). Weber (2013) added that building effective teams and relationships at work incorporates not only how leaders think and what leaders do but also their state of being. When leaders are conscious and open to the thinking of others, they show genuine interest in

making collective decisions and their behavior reflects this openness. By leading consciously, leaders increase the organization's conversational capacity (Weber, 2013).

Lastly, Groysberg and Slind (2012b) contributed to conversational leadership theory through the development of four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. Top-down decision making, where directives are provided to employees and then employees are expected to execute the directives, is no longer an effective communication model considering the five business trends affecting organizations at a local, nation, and global level. Groysberg and Slind stated,

> A new source of organizational power has come to the fore. Our term for that power source is *organizational conversation*. Instead of handing down commands or imposing formal controls, many leaders today are interacting with their workforce in ways that call to mind an ordinary conversation between two people. (p. 2)

Conversational Leadership Elements

Organizational conversation is different from traditional corporate communication. Organizational conversation applies to all the processes used to circulate information, including ideas, images, and other content, throughout the organization among all members through a dynamic, two-way communication process. When organizational conversation performs at an optimal level, four conversational leadership elements are used: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Intimacy

Conversational intimacy is an important function of leadership. Leaders who build intimacy in their organizations listen to people at all levels of the organization and talk with people in a way that feels authentic, personal, and honest. Conversational intimacy allows leaders to manage change and increases employee buy-in during new organizational initiatives (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). Leaders who create intimate workplace environments build trust through conversation, and this trust creates the potential for increased workplace productivity and employee motivation (O. L. Brown, 2013; Gambetti & Biraghi, 2015; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Hess von Ludewig, 2014; Pope, 1994).

Organizational trust through improved communication requires leaders to exhibit two important leadership behaviors: "an openness to hearing what employees have to say, and a willingness to talk straight about matters that senior leaders [would] prefer *not* to talk about" (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b, p. 19). The leaders' ability to emotionally and consciously connect with employees by listening and learning from employees through emotional proximity and building emotional connections with stakeholders allows their organizations to thrive. The result of this level of workplace intimacy is the flattening of the traditional organizational hierarchy and employees feel valued for their contributions to the organization (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Pope, 1994).

Informal conversations to flatten organizational hierarchies. In a hyperconnected world where technology provides people with instant access to knowledge, every employee needs to contribute to the organizational vision and purpose through shared decision making and innovative thinking (Friedman & Mandelbaum,

2012). When leaders talk with and listen to employees across the organization, employees feel like their opinions and ideas matter, and they are more willing to participate in shared decision making. This level of conversational intimacy, where employees feel valued for their work and trusting working conditions are created between leaders and employees, creates a flattening of the traditional organizational hierarchy (Auster & Freeman, 2013; Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2012; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Henson, 2009; Uhl-Bien, 2006).

When emotionally connected leaders are consciously listening, employees feel comfortable and encouraged to provide the organization with an exchange of ideas, questions, and concerns through specific moments of conversation regardless of setting, informal or formal (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Glaser, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012a). The solicitation of these ideas, questions, and concerns is generated through various means, including face-to-face conversations, phone calls between leaders and employees, or impromptu visitations in different departments. These informal gatherings increase communication and intimacy among leaders and employees (Pope, 1994).

Emotional connections between leaders and followers. Leaders who understand their role in building interpersonal relationships and understand their employees' personal and professional needs provide emotional, intimate connections in the workplace (O. L. Brown, 2013; Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Gambetti & Biraghi, 2015; Pope, 1994). Sessions of open dialogue between leaders and employees, where employees do not feel judged for their creativity and innovation, are also important in building emotional connections (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011).

In addition to the actions and responsiveness of emotionally connected leaders, Crowley (2011) and Glaser (2014) have also proposed that these emotional connections include physical connectiveness. Heart-brain neuroscientific research indicates that trust emerges when the heart is connected to other human beings. When people form deep relationships, including intimate work relationships, heart patterns send messages to the brain that indicate a healthy environment, allowing human beings to feel open and safe with others and allowing for collective and creative thought processes (Glaser, 2014).

Conversations generate an emotional reaction between the speaker and the listener; however, the listener perceives even greater meaning from the messages than the speaker does. Words used during conversation are not neutral because words have stored histories in the brain of each receiver. Conversational leaders understand how to connect meaning to their chosen words, either through their choice of words used with employees or through stories they tell, and the relationships previously developed between individuals help in the interpretation of the communication (Glaser, 2014; Hoveid & Finne, 2014).

Emotional proximity. Emotional proximity to employees allows leaders to listen and learn about what their employees value and find important within the organization. Leaders can demonstrate this level of proximity by personal, more casual communication and through a transparent communication style (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a; Nichols, 2012). When leaders reveal themselves and show their vulnerability, employees shift their view of leadership to leaders as people, humanizing the relationship between employees and leaders.

Changes in how people communicate through various forms of technology, including e-mail, collaboration forums, and social media, have shifted how leaders and employees connect emotionally. However, these technologies can be used with conversational practices, allowing even virtual teams to intimately connect (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Interactivity

Conversationally interactive leaders talk with employees on an ongoing basis; they view their interaction with employees as a process that allows the employees to regularly contribute to the organization's vision and purpose (Bowman, 2014; Clifton, 2012; Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2012; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Hurley & Brown, 2009; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Leaders create conditions that allow for employee interaction, and the dynamics of these interactions help the organization "develop appropriate structure, innovation, and fitness" (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001, p. 406).

As the world is changing, the process through which leaders and employees interact in 21st-century organizations is also changing. Communication expectations require leaders who demonstrate transparency through two-way, dynamic communication (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2012; Groysberg & Slind, 2012a; Henson, 2009). In the absence of face-to-face interaction, especially when interacting with employees or stakeholders in other parts of the world, the promotion of dialogue and collaboration through social networking and various forms of technologically enhanced communications is necessary (Cox & McLeod, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012a, 2012b).

As conversationally interactive leaders listen to and talk with employees instead of talking to employees, they allow for the sharing of ideas and opinions through open

dialogue. As previously mentioned, this open dialogue increases workplace intimacy through the emotional proximity of leaders and employees (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a).

Creating a culture of two-way, dynamic communication between leaders and followers. The culture of an organization is significantly influenced by intentional leadership behaviors. In the case of conversational interactivity, this culture of interactivity between leaders and employees is defined by four behaviors exhibited and directed by the leaders:

1. collegiality toward all levels of employees;
2. openness to hearing ideas and information;
3. dense interaction with many opportunities for two-way interactions; and
4. sharing of knowledge throughout the organization (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Any organization, regardless of size, will only be as interactive as its culture permits, which is directly impacted by leadership behaviors. In larger organizations, even with digital technologies that can support two-way communication, this two-way communication will not occur if leaders display a lack of collegiality and openness to sharing ideas. In smaller organizations, if the leaders are not willing to share knowledge or interact with employees on a frequent basis, the culture of open dialogue will not exist (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a, 2012b; Vernuccio, 2014).

Promoting dialogue through varied forms of communication. Twenty-first-century leaders use many forms of communication, including videos, visuals, and displays, to support two-way, dynamic communication experiences for employees. Blogs, wikis, video blogging, social networks, web-enabled video chats, instant messaging, and Twitter chats are all communication tools proven to be effective in

promoting two-way communication between leaders and employees. Blogging allows employees to think and interact when they are ready to share new ideas, comments, or questions. This form of dialogue becomes personal for the employees and allows them to process information in their own time (Cox & McLeod, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

When face-to-face communication is not possible, especially when communicating with employees or stakeholders from around the world, videoconferencing allows for multiple users to interact and collaborate. High-quality video technologies have provided organizations with a tool for more interactive and intimate conversations. This form of communication still allows for the nonverbal behaviors, such as a speaker's inflection and how passionately the message is delivered, to relay messaging to the receiver. Video blogging is another form of interactive dialogue between leaders and employees. The message sent directly from the leader, which allows the receiver to see the leader and watch the leader's nonverbal cues, becomes a casual interaction between the leader and employees. Two-way communication can still occur through written commentary on the video blog (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Social media influences on leadership and employee collaboration. Social media technologies provide an intimate and interactive experience for leaders and employees and help organizations display their style, relevance, and importance in the social media community (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a; Vernuccio, 2014). Benefits of social media technologies include access to these technologies anytime, anywhere, with any device and the ability to create, encourage, and maintain conversations between

leaders and employees and other stakeholder groups (Cox & McLeod, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Ouye, 2011).

In addition, social media platforms allow contributors to cocreate the organizational brand on multiple platforms, which provides another means for leaders and employees to interact on the organization's vision and purpose. The leaders' openness to this type of organizational communication and branding speaks to the organizational culture of two-way, dynamic conversational interactivity (Vernuccio, 2014).

Inclusion

Two-way, dynamic communication begins with two or more participants who share in the communication. Each participant becomes personally and actively involved through back-and-forth conversation and plays an equal role in the conversation (Crowley, 2011; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Men, 2012). Leaders who develop this level of inclusivity create an organizational environment where employees are more emotionally invested, are more engaged in supporting the organizational vision and purpose, and are motivated to continue communicating with other employees and leaders. They feel valued for their contributions to the organization and, in turn, continue to add to and share the organizational story with stakeholders (Crowley, 2011; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Men, 2012).

Inclusive work environments not only allow for interaction among employees and leaders but also develop employees as content providers and creators (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2012; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). The traditional hierarchy in 20th-century organizations, where leaders created and communicated all the organizational

content, has transformed into a structure in 21st-century organizations where leaders and employees work together to create and communicate content. Employees become the "brand ambassadors, thought leaders, and storytellers" (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a, p. 81). This level of content generation by employees is similar to how Web 2.0 content was created by end users. As users created their own content and delivery of content in this online atmosphere, a common passion was shared among those involved. Conversational inclusion creates a similar response among employees where their collective passions create innovative content and innovative delivery models, which ultimately leads to improved organizational performance (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Creating a climate and culture of inclusion. Workplace climate and culture have distinct meanings but are both necessary in organizational inclusivity. An organization's climate is driven by what employees perceive happens in the organization, more surface-level interactions, and the culture of the organization is created by deeper values and beliefs shared among all members of the organization (Schneider, González-Romá, Ostroff, & West, 2017). As Figure 4 indicates, leaders create a climate of inclusion through authentic leadership behaviors and role modeling that are learned and replicated by employees.

Authentic leaders are naturally inclusive due to their emphasis on ethical and moral behavior and positive value system. More importantly, they are visible and accessible to employees, allowing employees to learn and become part of the organizational culture. Authentic leaders consistently demonstrate the importance of organizational inclusivity through verbal and nonverbal social cues in the work environment, including leaders' physical proximity with employees, acceptance and

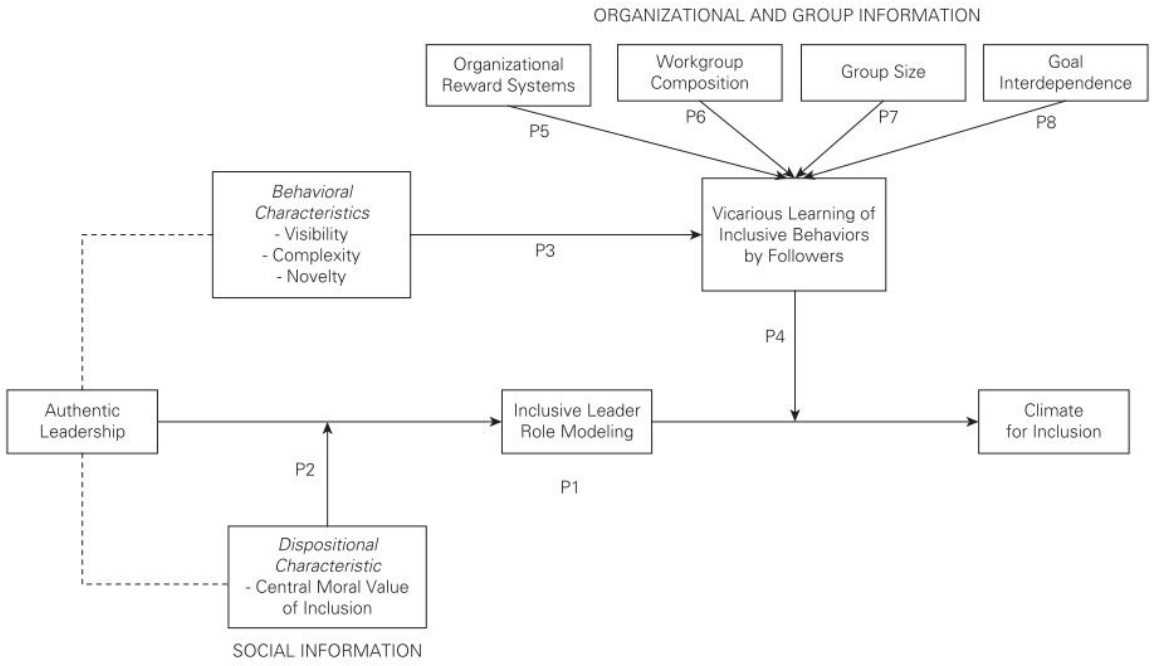

Figure 4. Organizational approach to developing a climate of inclusion. Adapted from "The Role of Authentic Leadership in Fostering Workplace Inclusion: A Social Information Processing Perspective," by J. A. Boekhorst, 2015, *Human Resource Management, 54*(2), p. 247.

implementation of employee ideas and innovations, and celebration of each employee's unique talents. Authentic leaders have the ability to make all employees feel like they belong. Employees receive these cues to understand how they should behave in the workplace, shaping employee perceptions of the organizational culture as one that values inclusion of all employees (Auster & Freeman, 2013; Boekhorst, 2015; Gambetti & Biraghi, 2015).

Auster and Freeman (2013) determined that organizations, like individuals, can create authenticity through four values:

1. introspective values: collective self-reflections and the story of the organization;
2. historical values: what the organization stood for in the past;

3. connectedness values: how leaders lead and organizational beliefs about processes; and
4. aspirational values: why the organization performs and the hopes for the future of the organization.

These four values help determine the dialogue necessary between leaders and employees in an inclusive organization. The culture and climate of an organization rely on these past, present, and future organizational values and the employees' ability to communicate a sense of how they belong and to what extent they can communicate the organization's vision and purpose (Auster & Freeman, 2013; Clifton, 2012).

Developing and sharing the organization's story. Organizational inclusivity is also developed when "ordinary employees . . . become producers as well as consumers of . . . organization[al] . . . activities" (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b, p. 122), and as a result, the organization increases its breadth of knowledge and content available through all the human resources in the organization. Employees develop, contribute, and share the organization's story through product development, reporting of events or meeting outcomes, images supplied by employees on social technologies, and creation of leadership materials and communications by the employees who create, test, or develop the products. This level of employee engagement, through mutual exploration of meaning, creates an inclusive work environment and one that incorporates employees' passion and commitment to each other and the organization (Crowley, 2011; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Stalinski, 2004).

Employee motivation and engagement. Unfortunately, employees are not highly motivated or engaged at work, with more than half of all employees in the United States

stating that they hate their jobs (Crowley, 2015). Traditional leadership models of top-down decision making and communication are no longer effective, and these models, along with the high percentage of employees who are dissatisfied with and disengaged from their work, negatively impact organizational productivity. Employees want to be cared for as individuals, provided with opportunities for growth and development, and allowed to contribute to the organization beyond their job description (Crowley, 2011, 2015).

Transparent, frequent, authentic, and strategic communication between leaders and employees positively impacts the organization-employee relationship, which also positively impacts employee engagement and motivation. Employees who create emotional connections at work, including their feelings about their organization's vision and purpose, the people they work with and for, and their fulfillment in their work, are more engaged. Leadership behaviors in an inclusive organization can positively impact employee motivation and engagement (Crowley, 2011; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Men, 2012).

Intentionality

Hurley and Brown (2009) recognized Carolyn Baldwin as the pioneer educator who first used the phrasing *conversational leadership*. Baldwin defined conversational leadership as the "intentional use of conversation as a core process to cultivate the collective intelligence needed to create business and social value" (as cited in Hurley & Brown, 2009, para. 7). Baldwin created her conversational leadership model for public school educators to develop a common vision and purpose among all employees and align results-oriented organizational actions with the vision (Jorgensen, 2010).

Groysberg and Slind (2012b) defined organizational intentionality in a similar manner, as people coming together in conversation with a goal in mind. Like the strategic communications employed by an inclusive leader, an intentional leader creates

> *conversational strategy*, which pertains to the way that leaders envision and plan for the conduct of organizational communication . . . [and] *strategic conversation*—the process by which leaders develop communication practices that help to align their company and their people to the contours of a specific business strategy. (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b, p. 174)

As intimacy, interactivity, and inclusion all create conditions to engage and motivate employees and to encourage innovative practices, organizational intentionality provides the organization with the forward movement necessary for achieving the optimal performance level of all employees. This forward movement is shaped by the leader's intentional communication and feedback from employees regarding the organization's vision, clarity of purpose, and organizational activity. Intentionality ties all four conversational leadership elements together to create operational activity through conversation (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a, 2012b).

Operational closure and organizational cohesion through clarity of purpose. Conversations are easy to begin, but intentional conversations include a beginning and a known end goal before the conversation begins. This clarity of conversational purpose allows employees to make meaning and eventually coconstruct meaning with leaders. Conversational leaders create quality conditions for intentional conversations, including the use of varied infrastructures like face-to-face interactions and social technologies. Employees share in the purpose of the conversation, through dialogue and debate, and become more engaged in the collaboration. Favorable business outcomes are more likely to occur when all employees are engaged in the conversation around the organization's

critical issues (Barge, 2014; Fenniman & Robinson, 2013; Groysberg & Slind, 2012a, 2012b; Hurley & Brown, 2009).

Leaders who communicate with intentionality provide multiple and ongoing opportunities for employees to hear about, talk about, and share among each other the organization's purpose and operational activities that are aligned to this purpose. All employees in the organization should be able to share why and how the organization meets its goals and how they play a critical role in the development and implementation of these goals. When employees and leaders find this shared, common view of the organization, communication becomes a value-added endeavor. Leadership plays a vital role in committing to this level of continual and consistent organizational messaging (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a, 2012b; Hurley & Brown, 2009; Nichols, 2012).

In larger organizations with complex department structures, employees typically devote their attention to the work they perform within the department, losing sight of the organization's vision, purpose, and operational activity. Conversationally intentional leaders provide employees with the opportunity to understand larger perspectives of the whole organization through two-way, dynamic communication processes in order to deepen their knowledge base of how all the departments work together to support the overall vision of the organization (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Conversational strategy: Conduct of organizational communication over time. An effective conversation creates clarity of mutual understanding about the desired outcomes, or the future state, for all employees involved in the communication. Intentional leaders continually and consistently plan for communication with their employees and recognize that this communication will be unpredictable due to the

fluidity of two-way, dynamic communication. However, intentional leaders also spend as much time determining the structures and processes for the conversation as they do in creating the content for the conversation and anticipating the organizational outcomes from the conversation. The structures and processes include how the leaders will communicate before, during, and after the change or initiative. This level of awareness and perception by leaders improves the overall quality of the relationship between the employees and the organization, which also positively affects employee engagement (Fenniman & Robinson, 2013; Glaser, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Men, 2012).

Strategic conversation: Business strategy with communication practices. As noted by Hurley and Brown (2009), "Conversation [is] a core process for effecting positive systemic change. Taking a strategic approach to this core process can not only grow intellectual and social capital, but also provide a collaborative advantage in our increasingly networked world" (para. 11). A strategic approach to organizational communication requires leaders to create plans and communication audits for ongoing and consistent communication. Conversationally intentional leaders determine their organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in communication before plans are created and executed. They analyze each communication to determine if the communication strategy matches organizational priorities. They are also forward thinking and reflective and consider how leaders have communicated with employees in the past to plan the improvement of future organizational communication (Barge, 1985; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

The Role of Superintendent in Organizational Leadership

Superintendents of public school districts are the chief executive officers of their organizations. Like chief executive officers in other organizations, their role is complex, but in public school districts, superintendents also serve the public interest. They are also tasked with ensuring that all students learn, maintaining fiscal solvency, and creating a positive work environment for staff across the school district. They are hired and held accountable by a locally elected governing board, whose members are not typically educators, which can also increase the complexity of the position. While superintendents are considered the chief executive officers of their organizations, overseeing all daily operations, they are also instructional leaders, agents of change, community leaders, politicians, and communicators with a broad range of stakeholders including board of education members, parents, teachers, school and district administrators, staff, community leaders, and taxpayers (Antonucci, 2012; Bolla, 2010; Hilliard & Newsome, 2013).

Effective communication practices in the role of superintendent are essential, and the information-rich society of the 21st century has made communication in this chief executive role even more significant (Cox & McLeod, 2014; Kowalski, 2005). Superintendents are the key influencers and enhancers of district communication, modeling communication practices for other leaders, creating inspiring messages for staff, and building relationships with the school district community. As in other industries, two-way, dynamic communication with stakeholders is also a 21st-century trend in public education, requiring superintendents to gain and use new communication

skills and strategies (Addams et al., 2012; Antonucci, 2012; Bryant, 2015; Cox & McLeod, 2014).

As communicators, superintendents are instrumental in creating a culture of open communication, encouragement, transparency, and trust. They are responsible for modeling the behaviors and communication strategies that encourage employee collaboration and decision making. These behaviors and actions create a culture consistent with the district's vision, values, beliefs, customs, and expectations of staff (Addams et al., 2012; Bryant, 2015; Curry, 2014).

Just as businesses and other organizations are being influenced by economic, global, organizational, technological, and generational trends in the 21st century, school districts are also experiencing significant changes. Superintendents who choose to be transformational change leaders can engage and motivate employees through strategic conversation. Transformational change leaders create opportunities for two-way conversations to encourage employee involvement, pose deep questions to create dialogue and reflective practices, and encourage commitments from employees about organizational changes (D. Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010; Summers, 2015).

Superintendent's Role as a Transformational Leader

According to Bennis and Nanus (2007) and Bryant (2015), transformational leaders

1. develop a shared vision and clear goals based on the needs of the organization and supported by the employees within the organization;
2. provide clear direction and organize employees, through two-way communication, to become part of the new organizational identity;

3. create trusting work environments through transparent communication;
4. establish personal relationships with stakeholders; and
5. project a strong self-awareness focusing on leadership strengths, which garners confidence from followers.

It is through these attributes that transformational superintendents create organizational conditions in which staff are willing to embrace change.

Lastly, transformational superintendent leaders exemplify conscious awareness by listening to, observing, and receiving information from their employees, and they are intentional leaders of change. They articulate a forward-thinking vision, listen to stakeholders throughout the district community in order to engage and involve stakeholders in the change process toward that vision, and pose questions to create two-way conversations between leaders, employees, and other stakeholders (D. Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010; Summers, 2015).

Superintendent's Role in Creating District Culture

The superintendent is key in understanding and shaping a district culture of open communication and collaboration with stakeholders, which is enhanced when a superintendent understands the district's historical context, traditions, beliefs, and values. Understanding the context and conditions that shape the district culture allows the superintendent to engage stakeholders through their traditions, beliefs, and values. In addition, creating a culture where stakeholders are asked to share ideas, to collaborate with other stakeholders, and to be part of district decision making allows for increased ownership in any change process and in the positive health of the organization. When stakeholders are provided with access to information or are asked to be part of the

organization's decision making, a culture of inclusivity is naturally created (Addams et al., 2012; Antonucci, 2012; Curry, 2014; Harvey & Drolet, 2004).

Superintendents are also responsible for creating a culture of trust within the organization through ongoing, consistent communication with stakeholders. Trust can be created through genuine, face-to-face interactions that show care and concern for the personal and professional well-being of others or through other modes of communication like online videos, blogging, and social networking. Superintendents gain trust by strategically utilizing these varied modes of communication with stakeholders. In addition, dependability, predictability, vulnerability, and modeling trusting behaviors expected throughout the organization are all leadership behaviors that increase stakeholder buy-in and the willingness of stakeholders to be part of the organization's overall vision and mission (J. R. Anderson, 2016; Bryant, 2015; Precey, 2012; Singh, 2015).

Superintendent's Role in District Communication

According to Antonucci (2012), "The ability to effectively communicate is perhaps the most important . . . skill[] a superintendent [can] possess" (p. 152). Superintendents are responsible for creating clear and concise messaging regarding the district vision, mission, and purpose and using communication strategies to encourage consensus on the vision, mission, and purpose among the school district community. From a professional and political perspective, superintendents who create trusting relationships with stakeholders have the ability to initiate and implement change more effectively because they understand how to create conditions of mutual understanding through two-way interactions (Antonucci, 2012; Hilliard & Newsome, 2013; Kelly, 2009;

Kowalski, 2005). Other key components of effective communication demonstrated by superintendents, as indicated in Figure 5, include showing an interest in people, being a good listener, and showing humanity skills and flexibility.

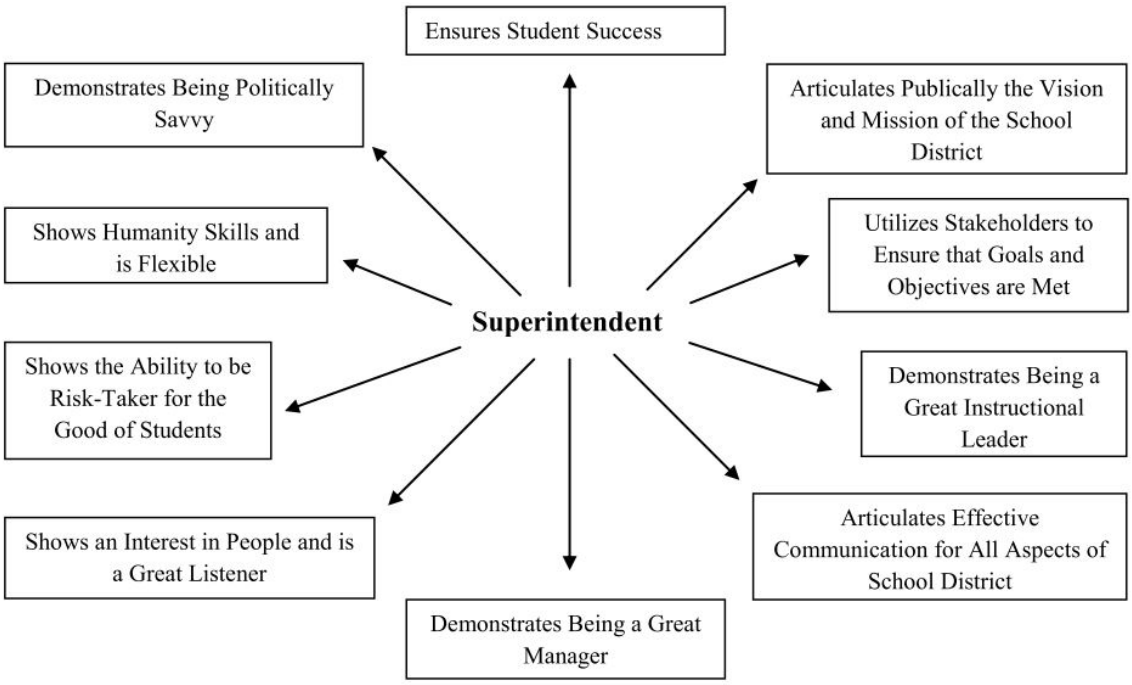

Figure 5. Superintendent as an effective communicator. Adapted from "Effective Communication and Creating Professional Learning Communities Is a Valuable Practice for Superintendents," by A. Hilliard and E. Newsome, 2013, *Contemporary Issues in Education Research, 6*(4), p. 357.

Superintendent leaders in the 21st century, like chief executive officers in other organizations, are experiencing changes in how they communicate using technology, including social networks, e-mail, blogging, podcasts, and online videos. These communication tools create increased organizational transparency, greater access to superintendents and other district leaders, and the means for superintendents to engage with stakeholders through two-way interactions. For superintendents, choices in technological platforms have increased opportunities to create meaning and improve

employee and stakeholder engagement. However, face-to-face interaction between superintendents and stakeholders is still an important element in creating a district culture of open communication, transparency, and trust. Based on the context of the message, Superintendents need to monitor the most appropriate form of communication to use (Cox & McLeod, 2014; Kelly, 2009).

Gaps in Conversational Leadership Research

Conversational leadership is a newer topic of research (Nichols, 2012); however, research on the behaviors that leaders use in conversation with employees and other stakeholders has gained momentum since 2009 as organizations have turned to transformational leadership models to inspire, motivate, and engage their employees (D. Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010; Glaser, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Weber, 2013).

Based on the study of multiple theories and the four elements of conversational leadership defined by Groysberg and Slind (2012b), there is limited research on leaders' application of these four elements in the workplace. Intimacy in the workplace has produced minimal research; Pope (1994) found an absence of information on intimacy in leadership literature, and Uhl-Bien (2006) noted that "surprisingly little is known about how relationships form and develop in the workplace" (p. 672). Furthermore, recent research on global, organizational, generational, technological, and economic business trends has produced limited findings related to workplace interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality.

In addition, research on the role of superintendent in organizational and transformational leadership has resulted in 16,682 dissertation studies during the past 10

years based on a Boolean search of superintendents and transformational leadership. However, there are no known studies on the topic of superintendents who lead through conversation using Groysberg and Slind's (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership, resulting in a gap in current research on this topic.

Summary

Our world is changing more now than in any time period in human history (Stephens, 2012). During this time of significant change, Groysberg and Slind (2012b) recommended that leaders use intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality in the workplace to increase trust between leaders, employees, and other stakeholders; inspire, motivate, and engage 21st-century employees; improve organizational productivity and efficiency; and increase two-way, dynamic communication of the organization's vision, mission, purpose, and activity.

Conversational leaders are emotionally connected to their employees, creating an organizational climate where employees feel valued for their ideas, information, and questions, and they create organizational clarity through purposeful communication strategies. While the elements of conversational leadership have been clearly defined by Groysberg and Slind (2012b), more information is needed to determine how superintendents may use conversational elements in leading 21st-century transformation in their organizations. Chapter III explains the research design and the methodology of this study, including the study population and sampling procedures for data gathering and analysis.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Educational research is guided by six principles: posing significant questions, linking research to theories or frameworks, using methods to investigate research questions, providing logical conclusions based on the research, generalizing or extending the research to other potential studies, and disclosing the study's delimitations. When choosing a methodology to investigate the study's purpose and research questions, the chosen methodology must support all the principles of educational research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Based on the purpose of this study, describing the behaviors that exemplary elementary superintendents practice to lead their organizations through conversation using Groysberg and Slind's (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership, this study's methodology aligned to the phenomenological qualitative inquiry method. Phenomenology's disciplinary roots in philosophy focus on "the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or group of people" (Patton, 2015, p. 104). This study described the behaviors of a group of exemplary elementary superintendents and their perspectives of these lived events (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In this study, exemplary superintendents were defined as those who met four of the following six criteria:

1. evidence of successful relationships with followers;
2. evidence of leading a successful organization;
3. a minimum of 5 years of experience in the profession;
4. articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings;

5. recognition from peers; and
6. membership in professional associations in their field.

In addition, throughout this study, the term *peer researchers* is used to refer to the 12 Brandman University doctoral students who worked under the guidance of four faculty chairs in collaborating on the design and implementation of this study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to describe the behaviors that exemplary elementary superintendents practice to lead their organizations through conversation using Groysberg and Slind's (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are the behaviors that exemplary elementary superintendents practice to lead their organizations through conversation using Groysberg and Slind's four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality?

Subquestions

1. How do exemplary elementary superintendents lead their organizations through the conversation element of intimacy?
2. How do exemplary elementary superintendents lead their organizations through the conversation element of interactivity?
3. How do exemplary elementary superintendents lead their organizations through the conversation element of inclusion?

4. How do exemplary elementary superintendents lead their organizations through the conversation element of intentionality?

Research Design

A qualitative research design involves several key characteristics distinctive from those of a quantitative design. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated that qualitative studies include some degree of each of the following characteristics:

- Natural setting, study of behavior as it occurs
- Context sensitivity, consideration of situational factors
- Direct data collection, data collected directly from the source
- Rich narrative description, detailed narratives with in-depth understanding of the behaviors
- Process orientation, focus on why and how behaviors occur
- Inductive data analysis, generalizations created from synthesized information
- Participant perspective, focus on each participant's understanding, descriptions, and meanings
- Emergent design, design evolves and changes as study progresses
- Complexity of understanding and explanation, multiple perspectives are complex. (p. 321)

Within qualitative research, there are alternative inquiries to support the methods used in conducting the research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). One alternative method, phenomenology, is used to study topics about which there is minimal knowledge (Donalek, 2004), and because conversational leadership is a newer topic of research (Nichols, 2012), the methodology supported further discovery of the conversational

leadership phenomenon. Using this qualitative inquiry method contributed to understanding this phenomenon by gathering stories, perspectives, and experiences on the four conversational leadership variables identified in the central research question and subquestions. Although all qualitative studies have the orientation of discovering participant perspectives, a phenomenological study focuses much more on the "consciousness of human experiences" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 346; see also Patton, 2015).

Phenomenological studies require lengthy, personal, in-depth interviews with study participants. To gain detailed information on each study variable through the interview process, semistructured, open-ended questions were designed to "allow for the exploration of lived experiences in relation to variables of interest" (Galletta, 2012, p. 9). Because of the amount of data generated through personal, in-depth interviews using semistructured, open-ended questions, phenomenological studies may have a smaller sample size of six to 10 participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015).

Interviews in this study were conducted in person, virtually using Adobe Connect video technology, or by phone with 10 exemplary elementary superintendents to capture each participant's perceptions, feelings, descriptions, and stories. The results were coded, and themes were created and analyzed as a means to generate shared meaning on the phenomenon of conversational leadership. In addition to the in-depth interviews, a collection of artifacts and observations of study participants allowed the researcher to gain additional insight on the study participants' leadership behaviors.

Population

A population is a group of individuals who conform to specific criteria and share common characteristics (Creswell, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This study's population was the 525 elementary superintendents in California (California Department of Education, n.d.). As elementary superintendents in California, they all share common characteristics as the chief executive officers of their school districts working directly with their local boards of education and a variety of internal and external stakeholders. They all are governed by the California Education Code, state budget, and regulations that impact their activity and interaction with stakeholders; they are each responsible for creating the organizational culture and communication among stakeholders.

Target Population

The population was narrowed from all 525 elementary superintendents in California to elementary superintendents located in eight counties in Southern California: Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, Santa Barbara, and Ventura. These eight counties are commonly identified as making up the Southern California region and comprise 58% of the entire state's population ("Southern California," n.d.). The Southern California region was selected in order to conduct as many face-to-face interviews as possible in the study participants' natural setting, an important element of the phenomenological research design (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). When face-to-face interviews could not be conducted due to conflicts in study participant and researcher scheduling, virtual interviews using Adobe Connect, a web-based conferencing tool with integrated video technology, or phone interviews were conducted.

Study Sample

A researcher's decision on sampling procedures "depends on the researcher's purpose, availability of subjects, and financial resources" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 139). To support the qualitative research design of this study, nonprobability sampling techniques of purposive and convenience sampling were chosen based on known elements conducive to the study's purpose and availability of study participants.

Nonprobability sampling is used in research studies where the random selection of study participants does not occur. Purposive sampling, a type of nonprobability sampling, uses study participants who are available or who meet predetermined characteristics or criteria (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In the case of this study, a judgment was made about each of the study participants using a set of predetermined characteristics, which aligns to the use of nonprobability, purposive sampling as compared to probability sampling and the random selection of study participants.

Convenience sampling is another type of nonprobability sampling. Employing purposive and convenient nonprobability sampling allows the researcher to generalize the research outcomes to other similar subjects who meet the characteristics of the study's target population. In the case of this phenomenological study, the objective was to understand the shared experiences of the target population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), convenience sampling is commonly used in qualitative research based on "practical constraints, efficiency, and accessibility" (p. 137). For this study, participants were chosen based on their location and availability to participate in the study.

From the target population, 10 exemplary elementary superintendents in Southern California were purposefully and conveniently sampled based on exhibiting at least four of the following six characteristics:

1. evidence of successful relationships with followers;
2. evidence of leading a successful organization;
3. a minimum of 5 years of experience in the profession;
4. articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings;
5. recognition from peers; and
6. membership in professional associations in their field.

Sample Subject Selection

After the Brandman University Institutional Review Board (BUIRB) granted approval of the study proposal, one of the professional associations for California superintendents, the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA), was contacted through regional leadership representation, the ACSA region directors. These directors are often retired superintendents with expert knowledge of superintendents throughout their region. ACSA region directors were able to identify, based on their experience working with and knowledge of superintendents in their regions, those superintendents who had successfully led organizations in their region, were members of ACSA or other professional organizations, and had received recognition by peers.

ACSA divides the state of California into 19 locally supported regions, and the region directors in Regions 13-19, located in the eight Southern California counties, were each contacted by phone to discuss the study and the sample criteria. They were each

asked to generate potential study participants who would meet at least four of the study sample criteria. Discussions with four of the seven ACSA region directors generated a list of 10 potential study participants located in four counties in Southern California.

Instrumentation

Interviews are one of the common instruments used in qualitative research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In alignment with a phenomenological research design (a qualitative inquiry method), semistructured, open-ended interview questions were created to explore the lived experiences of exemplary elementary superintendents as these experiences related to the four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Process for Creating Interview Questions

Interview questions, including open-ended and probing questions, were developed prior to the interview process with study participants as a guide for the researcher (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Harrell and Bradley (2009) identified semistructured interviews as having the following characteristics:

- guides are used for asking questions, but the researcher can decide the order of the questions asked during each interview;
- standard questions are used in each interview, but probing questions may be used by the researcher to ensure he or she understands the answers provided; and
- the style of the semi-structured interview is more conversational

Semistructured interviews "allow for the exploration of lived experiences in relation to variables of interest" (Galletta, 2012, p. 9), and this instrument aligned to the qualitative inquiry method of this phenomenological study.

Interview questions. As a result of a comprehensive literature review on Groysberg and Slind's (2012b) elements of conversational leadership, open-ended interview questions (Appendix A) were created by the 12 peer researchers. Teams of three researchers were each assigned one of the four elements of conversational leadership and created questions for peer review. Each team was also assigned a university professor to act as an expert panel member to evaluate the alignment of each interview question to the purpose of the study and the qualitative inquiry method. In addition, prior to field testing of the interview questions, all 12 questions were analyzed, discussed, and revised during multiple collaboration sessions among the thematic dissertation team members and four expert university professors. During the final collaboration session, probing questions were determined for potential use by each researcher.

Field testing of interview questions. All 12 peer researchers conducted a field test of the 12 interview questions with a participant who met the study sample criteria but was not part of the final sample. An expert in conducting qualitative research interviews served as an observer during the field test. The field-test participant and the observer provided feedback on the interview process and the 12 questions immediately following the interview. The observer also provided feedback on procedures, including consent paperwork and researcher body language that could cause researcher bias.

All 12 field-test participants, one from each peer researcher, completed an evaluation survey (Appendix B) of the interview process and questions. The 12 evaluations were reviewed by the peer research team and expert faculty members; interview questions were revised based on this evaluative feedback. The final 12

interview questions (Appendix A) were approved by all 12 peer researchers and the expert faculty members.

Interview Protocol and Process

Prior to each interview, each study participant received four documents for his or her review: the open-ended interview questions (Appendix A), the BUIRB Research Participant's Bill of Rights (Appendix C), the informed consent and audio recording release (Appendix D), and the invitation to participate (Appendix E). Each peer researcher conducted 10 interviews based on the researcher's selected study sample, resulting in 120 interviews using the 12 interview questions and additional probing questions used by each researcher.

A common interview protocol was used during each of the 120 interviews for research reliability. The protocol included an introduction of the researcher, the purpose of the study, a reminder to complete the form providing informed consent and consent for audio recording, and the 12 interview and potential probing questions.

During each interview, the researcher recorded the session for confidential transcription and also took notes. All transcriptions and notes were reviewed and coded for qualitative themes.

Researcher as an Instrument of the Study

According to Patton (2015), "Qualitative inquiry is personal and the researcher is an instrument of the inquiry. The researcher's background, experience, training, skills, interpersonal competence, and how the researcher engages in the fieldwork and analysis undergird the credibility of the findings" (p. 3). During this study, the researcher was employed as an elementary superintendent in Southern California. Based on the

researcher's personal background and experience as an elementary superintendent, there was potential for researcher bias during the interview process. To reduce researcher bias that may have been projected from body language or added verbal comments, the researcher engaged in a field test with an expert qualitative researcher/observer, who was asked to be attentive to any aspect that could imply bias toward any response. Self-awareness, using body language that would not indicate approval or disapproval of participant responses, was increased as a result of this experience and utilized to reduce bias in interviews with the study participants.

Validity

Validity is defined as the "extent to which an instrument measures what it purports to measure" (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008, p. 2278). Multiple strategies were used to increase the content validity of this qualitative study, including the use of multiple researchers and an expert review team, multimethod strategies, and participant review (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Multiple Researchers

After a thorough, individual review of literature, a team of 12 researchers collectively developed, field tested, revised, and implemented the interview protocol used during the study. This process included peer researcher collaboration on definitions of each study variable and the establishment of criteria defining an exemplary leader. During this process, four university professors provided expert validation to the instrumentation and interview process, variable definitions, and exemplary leader criteria. Kimberlin and Winterstein (2008) stated that content validity relies on the judgment of field experts as these experts review the content and the construct of the instrument.

Multimethod Strategies

Qualitative studies often include several types of data collection, but one was selected as the main method. This study's main method of data collection was the in-depth interview. Multimethod strategies also allowed the researcher to triangulate the data from the in-depth interview with observations and documentation or artifacts. Triangulation can also occur using multiple researchers as each researcher interprets the data. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) noted, "Different strategies may yield different insights about a topic and may broaden the understanding of the method and the phenomenon of interest" (p. 331).

Participant Review

After each interview was conducted and transcribed, the study participant was asked to review the interview transcript for content accuracy prior to eliciting themes from all data collected. Each recorded interview was sent to a confidential transcriptionist, and the transcribed interview was then forwarded to the study participant for review. Study participants were each asked to review the transcript and send any corrections to the researcher within a week of the review. Corrected transcripts and transcripts not requiring modification were then analyzed and coded for themes.

Reliability

Instruments designed for research require internal, external, and intercoder processes to test their reliability, that is, the instruments' ability to produce similar results when used repeatedly and by different researchers (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008; Patton, 2015). Pretesting or pilot testing an instrument allows for the identification of

measurement errors when used by different researchers; the continued refinement of the instrument focuses on minimizing these errors (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008).

Internal Reliability

Twelve peer researchers collaborated on the study's purpose, variables, research questions, and the instruments used for data collection. Patton (2015) and McMillan and Schumacher (2010) identified a research team as a means to triangulate the research data collection and analysis of findings. Using several interviewers, 12 in the case of this study, reduces the potential bias of data analysis. The research team also designed the semistructured interview instrument. Study participants were asked the same questions in the same order, and data were coded when all study participants had been interviewed, which increased the reliability of the study's results due to the construct of the interview guide (Patton, 2015).

Kimberlin and Winterstein (2008) identified pretesting or piloting an instrument as an important step in creating a reliable instrument. The following process was used by all 12 researchers prior to finalizing the interview instrument:

1. Each researcher conducted a field test with a field-test participant and an expert observer. The field-test participant met four of the six criteria of an exemplary leader, and the expert observer was present to observe the researcher for study bias and interviewing skills. The field test was audio recorded for additional review of the pace and probing questions used by the researcher.
2. Both the field-test participant and the expert observer provided feedback using a feedback response template (Appendix B).

3. Based on feedback from all 12 peer researcher field tests of the interview instrument, the researchers discussed the responses to each field-test question and the alignment of these responses to the research questions. Recommended changes to the interview instrument were then collectively implemented by the 12 peer researchers under the supervision of the expert university faculty team.

External Reliability

External reliability was not a significant factor in this study based on the study's purpose of generalizing study participant responses and participants' "consciousness of human experiences" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 346; see also Patton, 2015). The phenomenological qualitative inquiry research design of this study along with the other, concurrent studies of the thematic dissertation team described the behaviors of a large group of 120 exemplary leaders and their perspectives of these lived events. Data collection and analysis was generalized from the lived experiences of these 120 study participants and would not be generalized among other study participants chosen in any subsequent studies, which minimizes factors associated with external reliability.

Intercoder Reliability

Intercoder reliability "establishes the equivalence of ratings obtained with an instrument when used by different observers" (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008, p. 2277). In the case of this study, with 11 additional researchers using the same study purpose, research questions, variable definitions, and instrumentation, intercoder reliability allowed all 12 researchers to analyze data to share insights and discuss their perspectives of the phenomenon emerging from the data. To increase research reliability, a peer researcher analyzed 10% of the coding from this study and the description of the study's

themes (Patton, 2015). The peer evaluator coding process was reviewed against the researcher's coding process to increase accuracy in coding procedures and to improve intercoder reliability.

Data Collection

Face-to-face or virtual interviews, observations, and artifact collection were conducted with the 10 exemplary elementary superintendents. All electronic data stored from audio recordings of each interview were maintained on the researcher's personal computer with password protection installed. Field notes taken during the interviews were locked in a drawer in the researcher's home. Data collection began after the researcher received BUIRB approval and completed the National Institutes of Health (NIH) certification for the protection of human research participants used in this study (Appendix F).

Semistructured Interview Process

Prior to each interview, the study participant received three documents for his or her review: the open-ended interview questions (Appendix A), the BUIRB Research Participant's Bill of Rights (Appendix C), and the informed consent and audio recording release (Appendix D). Study participants were asked to review each of the documents for their understanding of the research and to provide signed consent prior to the interview.

After documents were reviewed and signed by each study participant, the researcher used an interview guide of 12 open-ended questions codeveloped with 11 other researchers and expert university professors. The peer research team developed these questions based on a thorough literature review of the four conversational leadership elements. Additional probing questions, created prior to the interview guide

field testing, were asked if the researcher needed more detail or further clarification of the participant's response or to better understand the content of the response (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015).

Each of the 10 interview sessions, conducted face-to-face, virtually, or via phone, was recorded using Adobe Connect, a web-based conferencing software, and an additional digital recording device as a backup recording tool. Notes were also taken by the researcher during the interviews. These notes included body language, facial expressions, and other nonverbal behaviors during verbal responses. Each audio recording from Adobe Connect was downloaded as a link to a confidential transcriptionist. The digital recording device produced an audio file for transcription, if necessary.

When all 10 transcripts of the interview sessions were received by the researcher, common themes were noted upon review of the transcripts. Themes were then coded and analyzed using NVivo, a web-based software program.

Observations

Direct observations allow a researcher to see firsthand the behaviors the study participants attempt to convey during an interview process; these serve as an additional method of data collection to the interview to support the triangulation of research data and increase the validity of the study. Observational data "describes in depth and in detail the setting that was observed, the activities that took place in the setting, the people who participated in those activities, and the meanings of what was observed from the perspectives of those observed" (Patton, 2015, p. 332). A strength of observational fieldwork is the researcher's ability to witness and observe behaviors of the study

participants. During an interview, the participant needs to be able to articulate the information requested. Observations allow the researcher to align the observed behaviors, in the participants' natural setting, with other collected data (Patton, 2015).

Conducting a thorough literature review of the four elements of conversational leadership allowed the researcher to understand the observable leadership behaviors in the participants' settings. During observations of study participants, conducted during public meetings, field notes were taken by the researcher on the researcher's perceptions of the study participants' verbal, nonverbal, and tacit knowledge as these behaviors related to the four conversational leadership elements. Field notes on tacit knowledge were maintained based on the participants' actions or artifacts produced (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Artifacts

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), "Artifacts are tangible manifestations that describe people's experiences, knowledge, actions, and values" (p. 361). Artifacts were collected firsthand from the study participants and through the researcher's investigation of artifacts located on each superintendent's district website and social media accounts. Artifacts included samples of two-way communications between the superintendents and stakeholders, presentations, agendas, vision statements, strategic plans, newsletters, and calendars. Similar to the use of observations, analysis of content in artifacts allowed the researcher to triangulate research data and increase the validity of the study (Patton, 2015).

Data Analysis

Patton (2015) stated, "The challenge of qualitative analysis lies in making sense of massive amounts of data" (p. 521). Ten hours of interviews, 120 detailed responses to the 12 open-ended and probing questions, and the notes taken during observations and artifact analysis created massive amounts of data. Because of the depth of data, a structure was used to increase the reliability of the study's findings:

1. When each interview transcript was received, it was reviewed by the researcher and the study participant to ensure the recording was accurately transcribed by the third-party transcriptionist.
2. Each interview transcript was read a second time by the researcher to gain a general impression of the wording used by the study participant and to begin recognizing potential themes from study participant responses.
3. Interview transcripts were then uploaded to NVivo, a web-based software program, for computer-assisted analysis of the data collectively produced by all 10 interviews.
4. Common themes and patterns emerged from both the researcher's analysis of interview, observation, and artifact data and the computer-assisted analysis of data.

Themes were then coded using NVivo software to reveal patterns and sort these patterns into categories. Patton (2015) recommended determining categories that are similar (internal homogeneity) and different (external heterogeneity). In this study, coding produced internally homogeneous themes related to the four elements of conversational leadership (intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality). After the coding process was completed, frequencies of each theme were collected and analyzed for the strength of each identified theme.

Data analysis using the codes, themes, patterns, and frequencies of codes allowed the researcher to understand the behaviors that exemplary elementary superintendents practice to lead their organizations through conversation using Groysberg and Slind's (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality.

Limitations

Limitations of a study may impact the researcher's ability to make generalizations about a population (Patton, 2015). However, in this phenomenological study, the intent was not to generalize the results but to understand the shared experiences of those sampled (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This study's limitations included study participant location, time, researcher as a study instrument, and sample size.

Study Participant Location

There are approximately 13,000 elementary, unified, and secondary school districts in the United States; California accounts for nearly 10% of those school districts. There are 525 elementary school districts (preschool through Grade 6 or 8) in California (California Department of Education, n.d.). Due to the proximity of the researcher in San Diego County, the location of school districts selected for this study was narrowed to four Southern California counties in order to maximize the potential for face-to-face interviews, observations, and collection of artifacts. Study participants in locations outside of Southern California may produce different results.

Time

Superintendents as chief executive officers of their school districts are extremely busy, and calendaring an extensive interview time would not have been permissible.

Each study participant was asked to provide 60 minutes for the entirety of the interview. Interviews of 60 minutes limited the opportunity for deep reflection on each of the 12 questions. To mitigate this limitation, the researcher sent transcripts to the participants to give them a second chance to reflect on what they said during the interviews.

Researcher as Study Instrument

Patton (2015) indicated that the researcher is an instrument of the qualitative inquiry. During the study, the researcher was employed as a superintendent in an elementary school district in Southern California and had served in a school district leadership role for 20 years. Leadership training and experience during those 20 years included interviewing techniques and interpersonal skill development. Having similar work and training experiences as the 10 study participants, the researcher may have experienced bias, through verbal or nonverbal cues, during the interview and observation processes. To mitigate potential researcher bias based on the background of the researcher, the same semistructured interview protocol was used during all 10 interviews, and a peer researcher analyzed 10% of the coding generated through data analysis to correlate the themes and codes determined by the researcher.

Sample Size

Phenomenological studies may have a smaller sample size of six to 10 participants based on the amount of data produced during interview sessions with study participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). A sample size of 10 study participants is too small to generalize the results among all exemplary elementary superintendents. While this researcher's sample size was limited to 10 exemplary elementary superintendents, 11 other researchers on the thematic dissertation team also

interviewed 10 study participants in each of their selected fields of study. A total of 120 study participants were interviewed using the same methodology and instrumentation.

Summary

This qualitative study, in the tradition of phenomenology, focused on the lived conversational leadership experiences of exemplary elementary superintendents. This chapter demonstrated an alignment among the purpose of the study, the research questions, the research design, study population and sample criteria, and the instrumentation used during the study. Limitations of the study, including the thematic dissertation team sample size of 10 study participants, concluded the chapter. Chapter IV provides the results of the research findings, and Chapter V summarizes these findings and provides conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for additional research.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

This phenomenological, qualitative study described the behaviors that exemplary elementary superintendents practice to lead their organizations using four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. Chapter IV reestablishes the purpose of the study, research questions, and the research methods and data collection procedures used in this study. An overview of study participant demographics is provided prior to the last sections of the chapter, a data analysis and a summary of key findings aligned to the study's research questions.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to describe the behaviors that exemplary elementary superintendents practice to lead their organizations through conversation using Groysberg and Slind's (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality.

Research Questions

This study included one central research question and four subquestions, one for each of the four elements of conversational leadership. All questions were written to align to the study's purpose.

Central Research Question

What are the behaviors that exemplary elementary superintendents practice to lead their organizations through conversation using Groysberg and Slind's (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality?

Subquestions

1. How do exemplary elementary superintendents lead their organizations through the conversation element of intimacy?
2. How do exemplary elementary superintendents lead their organizations through the conversation element of interactivity?
3. How do exemplary elementary superintendents lead their organizations through the conversation element of inclusion?
4. How do exemplary elementary superintendents lead their organizations through the conversation element of intentionality?

Population

This study's population was the 525 elementary superintendents in California (California Department of Education, n.d.). The population was narrowed from all 525 elementary superintendents in California to elementary superintendents located in eight counties in Southern California: Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, Santa Barbara, and Ventura. These eight counties are commonly identified as making up the Southern California region and comprise 58% of the entire state's population ("Southern California," n.d.). Based on these data, the target population was approximately 300 elementary superintendents in Southern California.

Study Sample

The study sample criteria for determining exemplary leaders were collaboratively created among all 12 peer researchers and the four thematic team dissertation committee chairs. Each of the peer researchers used the criteria for determining a study sample

within his or her respective target population. All potential study participants needed to exhibit at least four of the following six characteristics:

1. evidence of successful relationships with followers;
2. evidence of leading a successful organization;
3. a minimum of 5 years of experience in the profession;
4. articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings;
5. recognition from peers; and
6. membership in professional associations in their field.

To further narrow the target population of 300 to a study sample of 10 exemplary elementary superintendents, Southern California region directors from the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) were contacted by phone and through e-mail. Phenomenological studies may have a smaller sample size of six to 10 participants based on the amount of data produced during interview sessions with study participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). This researcher's sample size was limited to 10 exemplary elementary superintendents, but 11 other researchers on the thematic dissertation team also interviewed 10 study participants in each of their selected fields of study. Each of the ACSA region directors was asked to generate a list of potential study participants who would meet at least four of the study sample criteria. Discussions with four of the ACSA region directors, from Regions 16-19, generated a list of 10 study participants.

Research Methodology and Data Collection

For this qualitative phenomenological research study, personal, in-depth interviews with 10 exemplary elementary superintendents were conducted to gain insight into their lived experiences related to each of the four elements of conversational leadership. The 10 interviews were the primary form of data collection, with a collection of artifacts and observations of study participants as secondary sources of data.

Twelve open-ended, semistructured interview questions collaboratively developed by the peer research team (Appendix A), consisting of three questions for each of the four elements of conversational leadership, were asked of each of the study participants. Six of the 10 interviews were face-to-face, three were phone interviews, and one interview was conducted through Adobe Connect. All 10 interviews lasted between 38 and 60 minutes with an average interview duration of 50 minutes.

While this study's main data collection method was the in-depth interview, multimethod strategies allowed the researcher to triangulate the data from the in-depth interviews with observations and artifacts. A total of three observations, conducted in both private and public settings, involved interactions between leaders and employees, leaders and parents, and leaders and their local boards of education, with a total observation duration of 4 hours.

Forty artifacts were collected firsthand from the study participants and through the researcher's investigation of artifacts located on each superintendent's district website and social media accounts. Twenty-six of the 40 collected artifacts demonstrated an alignment with content shared by the superintendents during the interviews or observed by the researcher. These 26 artifacts were used to identify additional frequencies in the

23 conversational leadership themes. The other collected artifacts not used as additional frequencies. Artifacts used as additional frequencies included communication samples between the superintendents and stakeholders: presentations, agendas, vision and core value statements, strategic plans, newsletters, state compliance documents, and social media posts. Data extracted from the artifacts, while not coded for study themes like the interview and observational data, allowed the researcher to connect consistencies between interviews, observations, and artifact content related to this study.

Study Participant Demographic Data

To increase the confidentiality of all study participants, each participant was assigned a number, and no names of participants, schools, or the district were used in this study. Tables 1 and 2 each identify the study participants by number, and Table 2 provides demographic data on each participant. All study participants met or exceeded the peer research team's definition of an exemplary leader as noted in Table 1.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The findings discussed in this chapter were derived from the content provided by the selected exemplary elementary superintendents regarding their lived experiences, as noted during interview sessions, related to the four elements of conversational leadership.

Data Analysis

Transcripts of all 10 interviews were uploaded to NVivo, a web-based software program, for computer-assisted analysis of the data collectively produced. Patton (2015) recommended determining categories that are similar (internal homogeneity) and

Table 1

Exemplary Criteria: Elementary Superintendents

Study participant	Successful relationship with followers	Leading a successful organization	Minimum of 5 years in the profession	Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings	Recognition by peers	Membership in a professional organization
1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
8	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
9	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
10	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓

Table 2

Study Participant Demographic Data

Study participant	Age range	Gender	Years in the profession
1	50-55	Female	25-30
2	55-60	Male	30-35
3	50-55	Male	25-30
4	55-60	Female	30-35
5	50-55	Female	25-30
6	50-55	Female	25-30
7	45-50	Male	20-25
8	45-50	Male	20-25
9	55-60	Female	30-35
10	50-55	Female	25-30

different (external heterogeneity). In this study, coding produced internally homogeneous themes related to the four elements of conversational leadership (intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality). After the coding process was completed, frequencies of each theme were collected and analyzed for the strength of each identified theme.

Data analysis using the codes and frequencies of the codes allowed the researcher to understand the behaviors that exemplary elementary superintendents practice to lead their organizations through conversation using Groysberg and Slind's (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality.

Reliability

Findings from the interviews were triangulated with the observation and artifact data, and the results were reported by the research subquestions. To increase research reliability, a peer researcher analyzed 10% of the coding from this study and the description of the study's themes (Patton, 2015). The peer researcher independently coded 10% of the generated data (all coded frequencies from one of the 10 interviews) with 91% agreement; 32 of the 35 frequencies matched the conversational leadership element, indicating reliable coding by the researcher.

Research Question and Subquestion Results

The peer research team, in design of the study's purpose and research questions, created an interview protocol containing 12 questions. The study's central research question was, What are the behaviors that exemplary elementary superintendents practice to lead their organizations through conversation using Groysberg and Slind's (2012b)

four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality? This central question was answered by the analysis of the study's subquestions:

1. How do exemplary elementary superintendents lead their organizations through the conversation element of intimacy?
2. How do exemplary elementary superintendents lead their organizations through the conversation element of interactivity?
3. How do exemplary elementary superintendents lead their organizations through the conversation element of inclusion?
4. How do exemplary elementary superintendents lead their organizations through the conversation element of intentionality?

From a thorough coding of all interview data and observations, 23 themes and 361 frequencies of these themes developed related to the four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. Figure 6 illustrates how many themes emerged for each of the four elements of conversational leadership. Interactivity and intentionality each had five themes, inclusion had six themes, and intimacy had seven themes.

In addition to the 23 themes among all four conversational leadership elements, the frequency with which each theme was referenced was also calculated. Frequencies were calculated using transcribed interview data, observations, and artifacts. Intimacy had the highest number of themes and was referenced with the highest frequency, with seven themes and 107 frequencies, which accounted for 30% of the data. While interactivity had five themes and 88 frequencies (24%), inclusion had more themes (six)

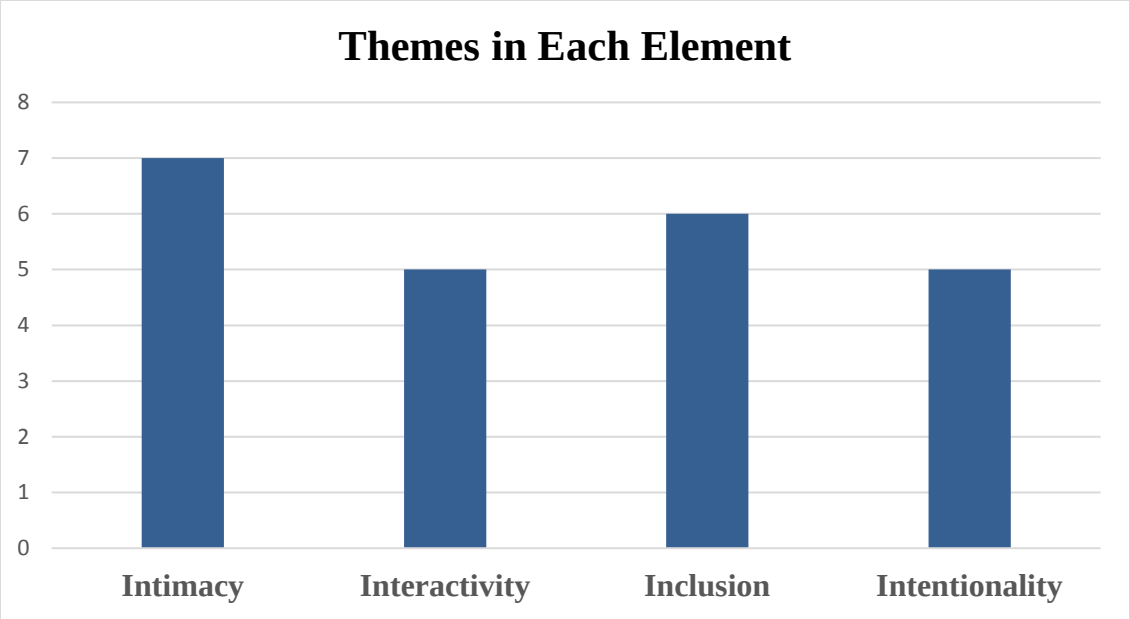

Figure 6. Frequency of themes for each element.

but fewer frequencies at 74 (21%). Lastly, intentionality had more frequencies than interactivity and inclusion at 92 (25%). Intimacy and intentionality accounted for 55% of all the data frequencies. Figure 7 provides a visual representation of the frequency with which each element was referenced.

Intimacy

The peer research team defined intimacy as the closeness, trust, and familiarity created between people through shared experiences, meaningful exchanges, and shared knowledge (Glaser, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Schwarz, 2011). During the coding process, seven themes emerged related to the conversational leadership element of intimacy, and the element was referenced by the 10 study participants a total of 107 times, which represented 30% of the responses. Table 3 identifies the seven themes of intimacy.

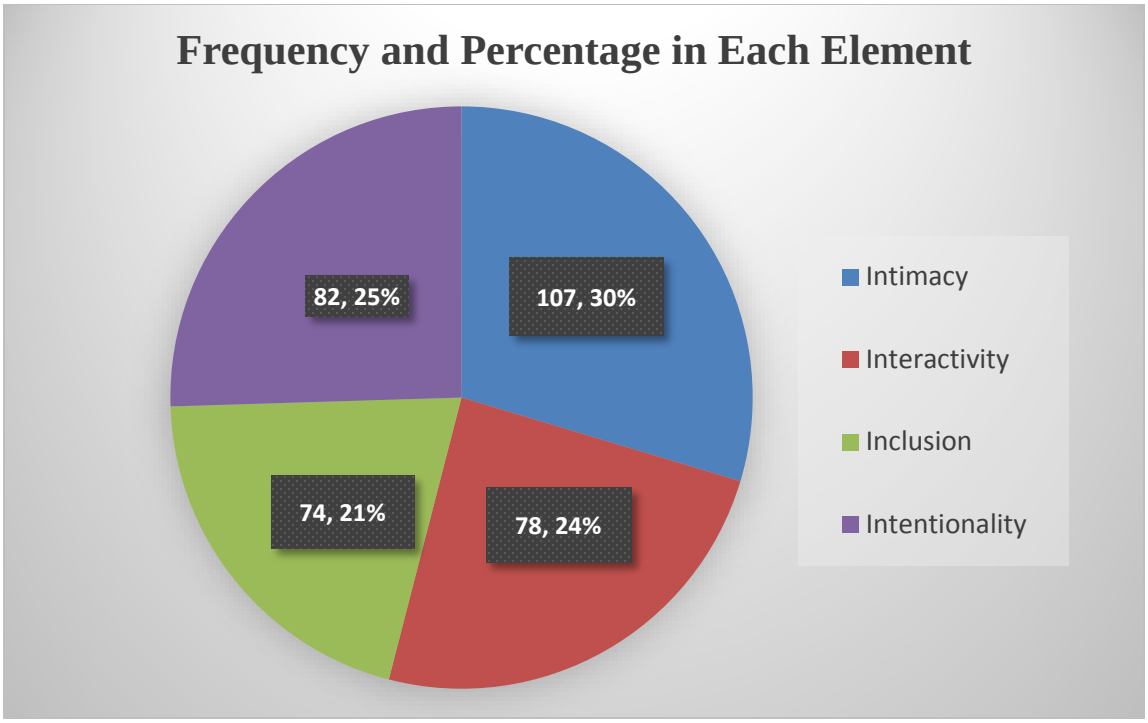

Figure 7. Frequency in each element.

Table 3

Intimacy Themes

Theme	Interview sources	Observation sources	Artifact sources	Total sources	Frequency
Listening to engage stakeholders	10	1	1	12	25
Using honest and authentic communication to build trust	7	1	1	9	21
Creating informal and approachable relationships	8	2	0	10	20
Using personal stories to build trust	10	0	0	10	14
Being physically and emotionally available to stakeholders	4	3	0	7	11
Celebrating and honoring stakeholders	3	1	2	6	8
Caring for the individual needs of stakeholders	5	0	0	5	8

Note. Sources include transcribed interviews, observations, and artifacts.

Listening to engage stakeholders. This theme was referenced 25 times in 12 different sources and represented 23% of coded content related to the element of intimacy. This theme produced the most frequencies for the intimacy element. When emotionally connected leaders are consciously listening, employees feel comfortable and encouraged to provide the organization with an exchange of ideas, questions, and concerns through specific moments of conversation regardless of setting, informal or formal (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Glaser, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012a).

Every superintendent, 100% of the study participants, provided content specific to this theme and relayed the importance of listening to stakeholders in order to understand people and their individual needs. One superintendent shared how important it is to listen to not only what stakeholders say but also what they do not say:

> The biggest thing I'll say here that needs to be in part of this conversation, we work with our principals so much on using conversation to elicit feedback. That's where I really say that listening is the most underused skill people have. Listen, listen, listen. So not only listen when you ask questions but also listen to what people aren't saying. When people do talk, listen because all we ever want to do is hear ourselves talk and post our opinions on things. So listen, engage, and listen.

Listening in relationship to intimacy was also defined by the superintendents as following through from their past conversations and data provided through surveys or district questionnaires. One superintendent provided the following content to illustrate how he listens to his stakeholders: "I think it's common in my leadership conversations to reference, you know, past comments that people have made, referencing their

experiences." Another superintendent stated, "I would say that we get positive feedback: 'Hey, they really listened to what we said in the survey, and people were pretty honest.'" During one of the observations where listening was coded, the superintendent built in time for questions and answers during his parent advisory group meeting. Parents knew they would have an opportunity to ask questions, but the superintendent also actively listened to the parents as they asked questions or made comments. He allowed them time to talk and ask questions without interruption or any direct answers. The parent advisory meeting agenda used during this observation was reviewed and coded as an additional frequency for this theme.

Using honest and authentic communication to build trust. This theme was referenced 21 times in nine different sources and represented 20% of coded content related to the element of intimacy. Leaders who create intimate workplace environments build trust through conversation, and this trust creates the potential for increased workplace productivity and employee motivation (O. L. Brown, 2013; Gambetti & Biraghi, 2015; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Hess von Ludewig, 2014; Pope, 1994). In addition, organizational trust through improved communication requires leaders to exhibit two important leadership behaviors: "an openness to hearing what employees have to say, and a willingness to talk straight about matters that senior leaders [would] prefer *not* to talk about" (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b, p. 19).

Seven superintendents, 70% of the study participants, shared how they build trust through honest and authentic communication, and this theme also emerged during one of the observations. A main thread throughout each of these interviews was the importance of honesty, being honest always and consistently. One superintendent stated, "One of the

most important traits or practices to create trust is to be open and honest. Whether it's a positive conversation or whether it's a constructive feedback conversation, people know where they stand." Another superintendent shared,

> Absolutely everything I say is as honest [as] it could be. I want people to feel like they can say what they need to say. I don't think we're a strong organization if people don't say what they need to say because no one will talk about it. What they do under their breath or in the parking lot is very dysfunctional. I act in a certain way that I then hope other people will do the same. I guess it's a lead-by-example strategy.

During the previously mentioned observation of a superintendent at a parent advisory group meeting, the superintendent discussed politically sensitive content, sharing of state assessment results and the changing of a dual-language program at one school site to a dual-language school, in an honest and authentic manner. When another sensitive topic, bullying and the district's bullying policy, came up through a parent question, the superintendent showed the parent how to find the bullying policy online and discussed the work the district had done to address the topic. He maintained an open and honest tone in his delivery of the content and was open to parent questions. The parent advisory meeting agenda used during this observation was reviewed and coded as an additional frequency for this theme.

Creating informal and approachable relationships. This theme was referenced 20 times in 10 different sources and represented 19% of coded content related to the element of intimacy. When leaders talk with and listen to employees across the organization, employees feel like their opinions and ideas matter, and they are more

willing to participate in shared decision making. This level of conversational intimacy, where employees feel valued for their work and trusting working conditions are created between leaders and employees, creates a flattening of the traditional organizational hierarchy (Auster & Freeman, 2013; Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2012; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Henson, 2009; Uhl-Bien, 2006).

Eight superintendents, 80% of the study participants, referenced this theme during the interviews, and two observations provided additional supporting data. All the superintendents shared how important it is to learn about the people they work with, on a personal and professional level, in order for all stakeholders to feel comfortable approaching the superintendents and having an open conversation. One superintendent stated, "It's really important to foster informal relationships, just hanging out with people, having informal conversations, being able to laugh. They just think I'm informal and friendly and approachable. I want that for everyone. I lead that way on purpose." Another superintendent said, "There's also an intentional effort that I think the leader has to make in creating personal conversation and connection with people and knowing who people are personally."

During the two observations where this theme emerged, both superintendents knew the principals, teachers, and parents and connected with them on a personal level, asking them specific information about a topic. In both observations, the stakeholders felt comfortable asking questions and sharing personal information with the superintendents.

Using personal stories to build trust. This theme was referenced 14 times in 10 different sources and represented 13% of coded content related to the element of

intimacy. Conversational leaders understand how to connect meaning to their chosen words, either through their choice of words used with employees or through stories they tell, and the relationships previously developed between individuals help in the interpretation of the communication (Glaser, 2014; Hoveid & Finne, 2014).

All 10 superintendents, 100% of the study participants, were able to identify the purpose of using personal stories to build trust. They each recognized that using personal stories creates personal connections between themselves and stakeholders and that stories can demonstrate a vulnerable situation, helping stakeholders relate to the them. One superintendent called personal stories his "anchors; people will remember them, and they can be motivational and inspirational." His personal story was shared at a recent welcome-back event to help his employees see the person he is and what he believes in rather than the role he plays in the organization:

> When I first met all the staff last year during our grand opening, I used my own personal story. I was illiterate until the fourth grade. I stood up and shared the story about how I struggled growing up in a household that was extremely abusive. I didn't speak really until the third grade, and I was illiterate until I had a teacher angel who would rub my back every day and said, "You can do it, you can do it." I never looked back. I feel like it's been my responsibility to pay it forward. I share that story just to give them a connection to who I am substantively versus "here's the guy, he's going to come in and tell us this or that." It built a real sense of "at least we understand who he is." There is such a dichotomy between the role and the personal, and I've often talked about separating the personal from the professional, and it's very hard.

Another superintendent reported that he/she shares stories from past experiences at work to support principals and to build trust and credibility:

> I always tell stories of when I was in a similar situation or how I dealt with a parent who was upset when the principal is dealing with a parent who is upset. Some principals need a lot of support, and you have principals who need very little support. I think telling stories and giving examples of what I've done throughout my career, it creates trust and credibility.

Being physically and emotionally available to stakeholders. This theme was referenced 11 times in seven sources and represented 10% of coded content related to the element of intimacy. Leaders who understand their role in building interpersonal relationships in the workplace also understand their employees' personal and professional needs. These leaders create intimate connections through physical and emotional proximity (O. L. Brown, 2013; Crowley, 2011; Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Gambetti & Biraghi, 2015; Glaser, 2014; Pope, 1994).

Four superintendents, 40% of the study participants, stated that being physically and emotionally available to all school district stakeholder groups (employees, parents, and the community) was important. All three observations also demonstrated the importance of this theme. One superintendent stated,

> It's about being physically available and also emotionally available when I'm out at the school sites and here in my office. People like to come by and visit, and one thing I've always had to work on as a person is putting the person before the task. There's always so much to do, and I want to get it all done, but people want to come see me for a purpose, and so ensuring that I'm here enough for people

> and at the school sites and then being emotionally available. I just had a conversation today with someone who wanted to share something very personal with me, and had I not been physically and emotionally available for that person, they would have changed their mind.

The other superintendents responded with similar content, addressing the importance of being visible in the school and district community so that stakeholders and the superintendents have an opportunity to connect, face-to-face, on a personal and professional level.

Observations of the superintendents included discussions with stakeholders about both their professional and personal lives, including a father of a newly tenured teacher who shook the hand of the superintendent and thanked her for treating his daughter with such respect and dignity, an experience his wife, who worked in another school district, did not receive. This superintendent made herself available in the audience after the tenure event and listened to and engaged with this teacher's father on a personal and professional level.

Celebrating and honoring stakeholders. This theme was referenced eight times in six sources and represented 7% of coded content related to the element of intimacy. This theme produced the lowest number of frequencies for the intimacy element, tied with the theme of caring for the individual needs of stakeholders. Similar to the previous theme, this theme relates to the demonstration of caring for all stakeholders through celebration and recognition of their work. While Crowley (2015) maintained that employee engagement can be improved through the manager's ability to care for, grow,

and appreciate all employees, only three of the 10 superintendents referenced this theme a total of six times during the interview sessions.

Three of the superintendents, 30% of the study participants, connected workplace intimacy to this theme, and one observation included a celebration of 27 newly tenured teachers. One superintendent shared multiple strategies he uses for celebrating and honoring stakeholders, including offering "moments of public praise" when highlighting principals or teachers in front of parents; honoring stakeholders through district board of education spotlights with many stakeholder groups including employees, students, parents, and community members; and asking principals to bring a notable topic to the next leadership meeting for sharing. Another superintendent stated that he writes a weekly staff newsletter and includes "shout-outs" for employee recognition. His format for recognition, which includes the ability for employees to recognize other employees, has become so popular that he cannot fit in all the shout-outs every week.

The observation of this theme, the celebration of 27 newly tenured teachers, included a personalized message for each teacher crafted and delivered by his or her school principal. In addition to this personalized message, each teacher received a gift. Teachers had family members in attendance and took pictures in the board of education room after the event. In addition, two artifacts, a board agenda and a superintendent newsletter, mentioned during two interviews were reviewed and coded as additional frequencies for this theme.

Caring for the individual needs of stakeholders. This theme was referenced eight times in five sources and represented 7% of coded content related to the element of intimacy. This theme and the previous theme, celebrating and honoring stakeholders,

produced the lowest number of frequencies related to the intimacy element. Employees want to be cared for as individuals, provided with opportunities for growth and development, and allowed to contribute to the organization beyond their job description (Crowley, 2011, 2015).

Five superintendents, 50% of the study participants, shared content on this theme. One superintendent stated,

> Caring about the people in the organization and they know that, over time by your actions, that's what builds trust I think between you and the people that are working with you. We have a very strong interest in creating a working environment for people that is inspiring and supportive, and we want to be an organization where people want to come to work. We pride ourselves on that; part of that is who's in HR [human resources], because the HR department is a huge driver of this culture in that way. It goes down to the facilities. We want people working in impeccable environments. We want people to have the resources they need to do their jobs well. When adults are inspired and cared for, they do a better job for kids. So because of that, that's a core part of our leadership culture, one that creates people who have a lot of pride in their workplace.

The other four responding superintendents shared common messages regarding learning about their employees on a personal and professional level so that they would understand how to individually care for them. Another superintendent stated how important it is that his stakeholders feel cared for by him and by the actions he takes in listening to his employees and following through with the information shared.

Interactivity

The peer research team defined interactivity as the "bilateral or multi-lateral exchange of comments and ideas, a back-and-forth process" (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b, p. 64). During the coding process, five themes emerged related to the conversational leadership element of interactivity, and the element was referenced by the 10 study participants a total of 78 times. Table 4 identifies the five themes of interactivity.

Table 4

Interactivity Themes

Theme	Interview sources	Observation sources	Artifact sources	Total sources	Frequency
Varying stakeholder groupings to promote conversation	10	2	3	15	24
Creating a culture of nonjudgmental open dialogue	10	1	2	13	22
Using consistent two-way communication tools to generate organizational content	8	3	3	14	19
Creating conditions for individual voice	6	2	1	9	14
Modeling, acceptance, and encouragement of risk taking	5	0	1	6	9

Note. Sources include transcribed interviews, observations, and artifacts.

Varying stakeholder groupings to promote conversation. This theme was referenced 24 times in 15 sources and represented 27% of coded content related to the element of interactivity. This theme and another theme related to the conversational leadership element of interactivity, creating a culture of nonjudgmental open dialogue, represented 52% of all frequencies for the conversational element of interactivity. Leaders create conditions that allow for employee interaction, and the dynamics of these

interactions help the organization "develop appropriate structure, innovation, and fitness" (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001, p. 406).

All 10 superintendents, 100% of the study participants, generated content for this theme, and the practice of varying stakeholder groupings was observed during two observation sessions. All the superintendents discussed how important it is to vary informal and formal groupings for conversational purposes, including one-on-one, small-group, and whole-group settings and those with a variety of stakeholders, particularly as the content relates to state compliance topics. One superintendent shared a strategy she has used to gain valuable feedback on how to communicate on a sensitive topic:

> I will bring in a few principals or directors or any other configuration of management. I chose about six people who I think really have their pulse on the community and are hearing what is being said in the community—you know those people, those who always know what's going on. I bring them in, and I ask them to guide what we were doing.

Another superintendent shared how she uses leadership team meetings for small-group discussion: "A lot of it is going to be having small-group conversations and then sharing that out. In those small groups, you get a chance to really explore and talk about and think through things." A third superintendent shared how she structures her leadership meetings to encourage conversation, especially when the team is developing a district direction: "We really structure our leadership meetings so there is a lot of time for conversation, especially early on when we were developing the direction that we're going in." A fourth superintendent shared how she creates conversation during an annual open forum with parents:

> We also hold a parent forum, and we've held one the last 2 years; it's been very informal because we're a small district. I have people sit in a circle, a semicircle so they can see each other, so it's not just me standing up front and talking, where people can ask questions. I kind of put myself out there, and they can ask questions about anything in the district. If I have information to their question, I'll give it to them or follow up so that people can know. There is a conversation between them and me.

During the two observations where this theme was coded, the superintendent or the meeting facilitator created conditions for one-on-one, small-group, and whole-group discussions. The one-on-one or small-group discussions were shared out broadly with the whole group. In addition, three artifacts, two leadership team agendas and an annual open-forum parent meeting agenda, discussed during three interviews were also used as additional frequencies for this theme.

Creating a culture of nonjudgmental open dialogue. This theme was referenced 22 times in 13 sources and represented 25% of coded content related to the element of interactivity. This theme and the previous theme, varying stakeholder groupings to promote conversation, represented 52% of all frequencies for the conversational element of interactivity. Sessions of open dialogue between leaders and employees, where employees do not feel judged for their creativity and innovation, are important in building emotional connections (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011).

All 10 superintendents, 100% of the study participants, connected this theme to the conversational element of interactivity. Based on their responses, the superintendents discussed that a culture of nonjudgmental open dialogue is created through various

structures: dialogue, debate, and questions in meetings; one-on-one meetings, informal or formal; and surveys or questionnaires. Four of the superintendents also shared how this culture also results from their personality as they are open and friendly, actively listen, and model these behaviors for other stakeholders. One superintendent said,

> You're always modeling that you're open and how you interact with people, that you aren't quick to dismiss people or walk by people when they have a question. You model for others in the organization that you listen and that you acknowledge people's point of view. You don't necessarily have to agree or disagree. I think the other way is that you aren't confrontational with people and that you provide those forums for people to ask any question so they know, "Hey, she'll tell us that." I think it's constantly keeping the conversation going and demonstrating to people that even if you're on a different side of the issue, that you really engage with those people, and I think that's how you create that culture: You as a leader, you have to model.

In terms of a structure developed to create this culture, another superintendent shared,

> I do a survey every year: "How am I doing? What kinds of things could I improve on doing?" That to me, that kind of culture has been developed over time though, because we're very intentional about wanting that as an outcome. We want a culture of open dialogue, feedback, communication, and we're open to it, and we use that to improve. We try, everyone tries, not to get really super defensive about, you know, things that get said and done. We just try to find ways: "Okay, well that's feedback; what should we do with that?" Whether

> you're trying to fix a process or a system or do something to improve, or if it's your own personal performance or the performance of your team. We have our school sites give us feedback, dialogue about how they perceive the district office. We work for them, not the other way around. Do our people feel that way? I think culture just gets built over time with a lot of intention and through demonstrable action, not just talk, right, action that shows people that you say you care about open dialogue, but do they see it, feel it, and engage in it?

During the observation with a superintendent and a parent advisory group, the superintendent created the meeting structure to be informal, in his office at his conference table with food and drinks, and included time in the agenda for parents to ask questions or share communications from the school sites. Parents asked questions before and during the meeting, and the superintendent listened. He also openly shared his struggles coming into the district the previous school year and how he needed to maintain a balance between change initiatives and staff buy-in. In addition, two artifacts, an evaluation survey and the parent advisory meeting agenda, mentioned during an interview and observed by the researcher at the parent advisory meeting, were reviewed and coded as additional frequencies for this theme.

Using consistent two-way communication tools to generate organizational content. This theme was referenced 19 times in 14 sources and represented 22% of coded content related to the element of interactivity. The culture of organizations is significantly influenced by intentional leadership behaviors, including many opportunities for two-way interactions between leaders and stakeholders (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Interviews with eight superintendents, 80% of the study participants, and three observations contributed content on this theme. Similar to other themes, creating a culture where two-way communication is encouraged was important to the superintendents who shared content on this theme. One superintendent noted that he/she consistently uses a shared-decision-making protocol with principals, parents, and classified and certificated staff. Another superintendent stated that he/she consistently uses leadership team meetings for structured debates. Leaders use some of the time during the meeting to research and gather content for the debate, and the other time is spent debating the topic with other leaders. This debate structure creates common knowledge on a topic, and in the end, the team has made a collective decision on the topic. A third superintendent reported using a newsletter format for two-way communication with his district employees. He creates the content based on feedback from his employees, including weekly "shout-outs" to employees based on what he has observed during the week or what other employees have observed. He stated that he often receives feedback from his employees on his weekly newsletter, and "the whole newsletter idea was to open up dialogue, two-way communication."

All three observations generated content for this theme. All three observations included common practices in each school district for generating content through two-way protocols, written or verbal. In one district, the meeting facilitator used a common protocol for generating content, including conversational sentence starters, and this protocol was used to generate information and then share it with the entire team. Two artifacts, a shared-decision-making protocol and a superintendent newsletter, discussed during two interviews and a third artifact, a common protocol for generating district

content, observed during the professional development session by the researcher were used as additional frequencies for this theme.

Creating conditions for individual voice. This theme was referenced 14 times in nine sources and represented 16% of coded content related to the element of interactivity. Conversationally interactive leaders talk with employees on an ongoing basis; they view their interaction with employees as a process that allows the employees to regularly contribute to the organization's vision and purpose (Bowman, 2014; Clifton, 2012; Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2012; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Hurley & Brown, 2009; Uhl-Bien, 2006).

Six superintendents, 60% of the study participants, provided content for this theme, and this theme was also observed twice, during a professional learning session with site administration and during the parent advisory meeting. This theme also generated content on how superintendents create these conditions through formal and informal processes and how they personally model this behavior. One superintendent created a crowdsourcing site, an online collaboration tool, as a means of generating ideas and content around a specific problem. He shared this result:

> I often say [that] the smartest idea in the room should win and not the loudest voice. I developed a crowdsourcing site where the best ideas were to bubble up. We were talking about safety. The best idea came from a bus driver. I use that as an example because their opinions are generally not asked. We generally ask the teachers or administration, and it was a challenge to get the district as a whole to believe that this is a good thing because you have to be prepared for answers you don't want.

Another superintendent shared how she creates conditions for individual voice through one-on-one conversations with staff:

> Informally through two-way exchanges, I just had a conversation in the hallway with an employee regarding a difficult situation we are in. A lot of who you are as a leader involves asking questions to engage the person's thinking about "What should we be thinking about? What should our next steps be?" I think that happens on the fly all the time, and if you are careful about really asking and genuinely caring about someone contributing to your thinking, about the decisions you're making, it can happen informally.

In both observations, the structure of the meetings created conditions for individual voice. During the professional development session observed with site administrators, the meeting leader assigned roles to each administrator prior to the task, including the topics for sharing with the whole group. The task and the sharing of content allowed for individual voice. During the parent advisory meeting in another observation, the superintendent shared the story of the bus driver in his previous district who presented the best idea for student safety. He shared this story with the parents to illustrate the importance of listening to stakeholders, all stakeholders, and how important individual voice is to an organization. In addition, an artifact, the crowdsourcing site mentioned during an interview, was reviewed and coded as an additional frequency for this theme.

Modeling, acceptance, and encouragement of risk taking. This theme was referenced nine times in six sources and represented 10% of coded content related to the element of interactivity. This theme produced the fewest frequencies for the element of

interactivity. As conversationally interactive leaders listen to and talk with employees instead of talking to employees, they allow for the sharing of ideas and opinions through open dialogue where employees do not feel judged for their creativity and innovation (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Groysberg & Slind, 2012a).

Five superintendents, 50% of the study participants, provided content related to this theme. Each shared the importance of modeling risk-taking behavior and the acceptance of this behavior to potentially increase interactivity among other stakeholders. One superintendent shared,

> We allow for great risk. We want them taking chances, we want them trying new things, and we are no different than everything in the literature today, but we want, and in some ways expect, failure at time[s], just because we're trying to push the envelope. We're a high-achieving district; it is challenging, but we think that if we do it together and we allow people to be creative and innovative and all of those other things, that's when they fall on the ground, [and] we find ways to build them back up and bring them back in with their next idea on the table.

Another superintendent shared,

> One of the things that I had observed in our organization is that we're pretty open to ask questions and be critical in the critical thinking kind of manner, but it started to get in the way of risk taking and creativity. I try things and fail, or I wish I had done things a different way. I don't think that promotes risk taking in others, and I really want to do that. I try to be a model in that way; I'm pretty open about that. I taught our team a visioning protocol this past year so we can be risk takers and dream big visions.

The visioning protocol artifact mentioned during this interview was reviewed, coded, and included as an additional frequency for this theme.

Inclusion

The peer research team defined inclusion as the commitment to the process of engaging stakeholders to share ideas and participate in the development of the organization (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Hurley & Brown, 2009). During the coding process, six themes emerged related to the conversational leadership element of inclusion, and the element was referenced by the 10 study participants a total of 74 times. Table 5 identifies the six themes of inclusion.

Table 5

Inclusion Themes

Theme	Interview sources	Observation sources	Artifact sources	Total sources	Frequency
Asking questions to include stakeholders in organizational goals	9	2	1	12	15
Encouraging ownership of ideas	7	1	1	9	15
Creating common messages on organizational content	6	2	1	9	15
Using technology to encourage stakeholder contribution and representation	6	1	2	9	12
Following through on stakeholder feedback	4	1	2	7	10
Cultivating leadership in stakeholders	3	2	0	5	7

Note. Sources include transcribed interviews, observations, and artifacts.

Asking questions to include stakeholders in organizational goals. This theme was referenced 15 times in 12 sources and represented 20% of coded content related to the element of inclusion. This theme produced the most frequencies for the element of

inclusion. Authentic leadership is created through four values, including connectedness values, which refer to how leaders lead and organizational beliefs about processes, including asking questions of stakeholders to gain content on the organization's vision and purpose (Auster & Freeman, 2013; Clifton, 2012).

Nine superintendents, 90% of study participants, shared content related to this theme, and this theme emerged during two observations. From a formalized process (e.g., a 90-day listening tour conducted by a newer superintendent in a school district) to informal one-on-one processes, each of the nine superintendents shared the practice of asking questions and gaining feedback to include stakeholders in the organization's goals. One superintendent shared how he/she uses questions to refocus the organization on the stakeholders' foundational beliefs:

> Strategically, at different times, we bring out our foundational beliefs so they don't become a catch phrase. One of the beliefs is engaging our learners through purpose, passion, power, and play. But what does that mean? So we frequently are talking about that. I'll ask the question, you know, "Where have you seen this in our district in the last couple of weeks, teachers using passion to teach? What does that look like? What should that look like?" We'll have conversations with our principals around those kinds of questions. I think you strategically structure questions to get at your foundational beliefs when you're always talking about foundational beliefs, and then that comes out through the work that you see around you.

Another superintendent shared her process for eliciting stakeholder feedback on a state compliance document. Once data are generated in committees, questions are asked

of the stakeholders. An online collaboration document is created so that all participants can view content generated through the questioning process. The superintendent shared, "We ask them, 'What are best next steps; how does this process, program, or procedure benefit students; and how could parents support this process, program, or procedure?'"

Both observations included a time when the facilitator or superintendent asked questions about the topic being discussed. The facilitator during the professional development session asked the site administration team how they could apply their learning back at the school sites and share their ideas with the whole team. The online collaboration document artifact discussed during an interview was used as an additional frequency for this theme.

Encouraging ownership of ideas. This theme was referenced 15 times in nine sources and represented 20% of coded content related to the element of inclusion. This inclusion theme produced the same number of frequencies as the inclusion theme of asking questions but was referenced by fewer superintendents. An inclusive work environment allows employees to become personally and actively involved in conversations, and employees feel like they play an equal role in the conversation (Crowley, 2011; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Men, 2012). Leaders who develop this level of inclusivity create an organizational environment where employees are more emotionally invested and are more engaged in supporting the organizational vision and purpose. They feel valued for their contributions to the organization and, in turn, continue to add to and share the organizational story with stakeholders (Crowley, 2011; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Men, 2012).

Seven superintendents, 70% of study participants, shared content for this theme, and the theme emerged during one of the observations. Each of the seven superintendents discussed how he or she creates conditions where stakeholders generate and follow through with ideas, particularly by providing stakeholders with the freedom to brand their schools and with site autonomy to decide how to move school achievement forward. One superintendent stated,

> One of the things we've been working on is branding and just being really clear in our own communication and messaging, particularly outside of the organization but inside too. Instead of doing everything for people, I think they have to do it themselves.

Another superintendent identified how important it is for school staff to take ownership in how they brand and market their school site and how grade-level teams are charged with increasing student achievement. He said,

> So, all of those things are internally driven from the staff, the parents, the students at times, and certainly the principal. I think if I came in and said, "You're the arts school, you're the math school," it might work as long as I'm standing there pointing at them, but it's not going to hold, and that's not who they really are. One way that you can see the ownership that people have is their ability to generate that content, and then I've mentioned that grade-level teams have a lot of autonomy around the work that they do and how they get to it.

During the observed professional learning session with site and district administrator teams, the facilitator created conditions for site administrator teams to take ownership of the content they learned and openly shared with the whole group. They

were asked to share where they were in the process of developing content at their school sites and what their next steps would be with staff. An artifact mentioned during an interview, school branding and marketing content found on the district website, provided an additional frequency for this theme.

Creating common messages on organizational content. This theme was referenced 15 times in nine sources and represented 20% of coded content related to the element of inclusion. This inclusion theme had the same number of frequencies as the inclusion theme of asking questions but was referenced by fewer superintendents. Leaders and employees who collaboratively develop, contribute, and share the organization's story create an inclusive work environment that incorporates passion and commitment to each other and the organization (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Stalinski, 2004).

Six superintendents, 60% of study participants, discussed how they create common messages on organizational content with their teams. This topic was also observed during the professional development session. Superintendents who shared this content talked about how they build inclusive work environments by creating common messages with their leadership teams, negotiating teams, safety teams, or parent teams. A common finding from this theme included the importance of using multiple stakeholders in creating district messages, which improves the ownership of the message content and consistent delivery of the content shared. One superintendent stated,

> We've worked with languaging and messaging, and a lot of our admin meetings when we talk about something difficult, we're like, "Okay, here's the message." We did all this because you know how people can walk out of a room and hear 20

different things. Here is the message, here's how we talk about X, Y, or Z. We are trying to message that, to give people the language on how to talk about our district.

A second superintendent discussed how his district creates "great messages" every year around a district theme. He also shared, "When you are consistent and create a message that people like, you don't need to be the one saying it. They'll say it for you." Yet another superintendent stated, "We have a common vocabulary about the way that we talk about our mission, goals, and what is the essential work that we do in the school district."

The essential outcome of the professional learning observation was the site administrators' ability to create a common message on the importance of implementing the topic they were learning about together that day. The communication protocol used during the training created this common content for the entire leadership team to use back at their respective school sites. Two artifacts, a district's theme content on its website and the communication protocol used during the professional development session, were shared during two interviews and served as additional frequencies for this theme.

Using technology to encourage stakeholder contribution and representation. This theme was referenced 12 times in nine sources and represented 16% of coded content related to the element of inclusion. Inclusive work environments not only allow for interaction among employees and leaders but also develop employees as content providers and creators (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2012; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). Employees become the "brand ambassadors, thought leaders, and storytellers" (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a, p. 81). The traditional hierarchy in 20th-century

organizations, where leaders created and communicated all the organizational content, has transformed into a structure in 21st-century organizations where leaders and employees work together to create and communicate content (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a). Social media platforms allow contributors to cocreate an organization's brand on multiple platforms (Vernuccio, 2014).

Six superintendents, 60% of study participants, shared content related to this theme, and one superintendent was observed using technology to encourage stakeholder contribution. Four of the six superintendents discussed their reliance on using social media and websites for district communication, and two of the superintendents shared either negative past experiences resulting in minimal social media presence or just a lack of social media presence by district staff. One superintendent stated,

> We have exponentially grown the number of our teachers using social media to brag about the things that are going on in their school. We have more people using Twitter and our district hashtag now, where teachers are constantly posting what they're doing and what's going on in their school with the sheer idea of getting people to be spokespeople for this organization and communicating positively about it.

Another superintendent stated,

> We are heavily invested in social media as everyone is. We have lots of input processes for parents. As much as you have various social media sites, you know, talking to people and having a conversation around it and being able to listen and share what you're thinking, it is better than just one-directional communication in most cases.

During the observation of the superintendent in the parent advisory meeting, the superintendent shared the new district logo competition topic and showed the parents how to find the voting site from the district website. The top vote winner will become the new district logo. This topic generated excitement among the parents in the room. An artifact mentioned during an interview, the superintendent's Twitter account, and an artifact shared during the observation, the district logo competition web page, provided two additional frequencies for this theme.

Following through on stakeholder feedback. This theme was referenced 10 times in seven sources and represented 14% of coded content related to the element of inclusion. As stated in the discussion of one of the previous themes, encouraging ownership of ideas, a leader's demonstration of follow-through on employee feedback illustrates the importance of the employees' contributions. Employees feel valued for their contributions to the organization and, in turn, continue to add to and share the organizational story with stakeholders (Crowley, 2011; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Men, 2012).

Four superintendents, 40% of study participants, commented on the importance of following through with stakeholder feedback and how stakeholders feel more included once they witness the follow-through. This follow-through makes the stakeholders feel valued for their contributions. In addition to the interview content, this behavior was also described during one of the observations.

One superintendent talked about how he created a student leadership council in his district, and during one specific data review of a student safety survey, the council talked more deeply about questions around physical and emotional safety. He and other

leaders learned that the students had concerns regarding their social-emotional safety at school and at home due to social media. From that conversation, the superintendent and middle school principal coordinated training for all students on how to identify social and emotional needs in themselves and other adolescents. The same superintendent shared that members of his community can see their suggestions or comments in state compliance documents: "Any of our parents can find themselves in the district plan created from their suggestions."

During the parent advisory meeting observation, the superintendent discussed the student leadership council and its outcomes from the previous year, including how these outcomes generated training for all junior high students this year. He also discussed how parent feedback from the previous year created the dual-language school in the current school year in lieu of a dual-language program at the school site. Two artifacts, a student safety survey and a district plan, were mentioned in an interview, and both artifacts served as additional frequencies for this theme.

Cultivating leadership in stakeholders. This theme was referenced seven times in five sources and represented 9% of coded content related to the element of inclusion. This theme produced the fewest frequencies for the element of inclusion by the fewest superintendents, three study participants. However, literature indicates the importance of organizational inclusivity where "ordinary employees . . . become producers as well as consumers of . . . organization[al] . . . activities" (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b, p. 122), and as a result, the organization increases its breadth of knowledge and content available through all the human resources in the organization. In addition, employees want to be cared for as individuals, provided with opportunities for growth and development, and

allowed to contribute to the organization beyond their job description (Crowley, 2011, 2015).

Three superintendents, 30% of study participants, discussed the importance of cultivating leadership in others, and two of the observations aligned to this theme. All three superintendents discussed building leadership capacity in various stakeholders including students, classified employees, and current managers. One superintendent stated,

> I've tried really hard to focus on those who are the formal leaders and those who are the informal leaders within the system. I'm trying really hard to accentuate new leaders to build capacity, to give voice to those who want it.

The same superintendent talked about building capacity in his principals where they feel confident in making decisions together without his permission and without the fear that he would push back on their ideas. He described the outcome with the following statement:

> We were able to have them realize that, for them, this was key and that their decision would carry through with me; there would be no pushback. We need to supersize everyone's powers. This was a great opportunity for us to do that, and it was a great moment that moved the system forward, built trust, built respect for their work, and to this day, we're still putting that in place.

Two observations revealed this theme. During the tenured teacher celebration, the principals were tasked with delivery of the content for each teacher's award. The other observation provided a leadership opportunity for the principals and vice principals

to return to their school sites and lead their staff in professional learning based on the workshop they attended.

Intentionality

The peer research team defined intentionality as ensuring clarity of purpose that includes goals and direction to create order and meaning (Barge, 1985; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Men, 2012). During the coding process, five themes emerged related to the conversational leadership element of intentionality, and the element was referenced by the 10 study participants a total of 92 times. Table 6 identifies the five themes of intentionality.

Table 6

Intentionality Themes

Theme	Interview sources	Observation sources	Artifact sources	Total sources	Frequency
Continuous messaging of organizational purpose	9	2	2	13	30
Promoting organizational focus and direction through ongoing communication	7	1	1	9	24
Encouraging stakeholder feedback on organizational goals and direction	8	1	3	13	18
Learning common content for organizational focus and direction	6	1	2	9	10
Staying the course to create additional clarity of organizational purpose	6	0	1	7	10

Note. Sources include transcribed interviews, observations, and artifacts.

Continuous messaging of organizational purpose. This theme was referenced 30 times in 13 sources and represented 33% of coded content related to the element of intentionality. This theme had the highest number of frequencies of all the intentionality

themes and was the most referenced theme among all four conversational leadership elements. Leaders who communicate with intentionality provide multiple and ongoing opportunities for employees to hear about, talk about, and share among each other the organization's purpose and operational activities that are aligned to this purpose. All employees in the organization should be able to share why and how the organization meets its goals and how they play a critical role in the development and implementation of these goals (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a, 2012b; Hurley & Brown, 2009; Nichols, 2012).

Nine superintendents, 90% of the study participants, provided content for this theme, and the theme emerged during two observations. The superintendents shared how they continuously message organizational goals, priorities, and guiding principles with stakeholders. The superintendents spoke about a specific number of goals or a plan their district has written for messaging the organization's purpose; examples included a strategic plan; a thematic goal; a state compliance document with district vision, goals, and annual priorities; a one-page foundational-beliefs document; and a one-page district blueprint with goals and objectives. One superintendent shared,

> I have a one-page foundational-belief document that are [*sic*] about how we do the work, why we do the work, when we do the work. You know, what learning is about, an answer to all of those basic questions, and it has pretty much all of the work that we have been doing in one place, in one way. I think that you need to be intentional about this work, and again, it comes back to some basic stuff. What are the foundational beliefs of the district? How do you talk about trust? How do you talk about how we work together?

Another superintendent said,

> In our advisory meetings for our state compliance work, we're just very committed to being in alignment and talking about the goals and the action steps that are underneath that umbrella. We have a learning and achievement goal, and we have a culture and climate goal. Yesterday, when we were speaking with our union leaders about student behavior, I was very focused on "let's talk about that through the lens of the goal that we have in culture and climate," and I think that by just always going down to, by having these goals everywhere, people can recite them. I firmly believe that if you interviewed people, they would know the four goals we have. So, there's that repetition, the conversational strategy of repetition.

During two observations, the professional learning session and the parent advisory meeting, this theme was observed. The professional learning session was on how the principals could continue to support and teach the adults on their campuses about one of their major district initiatives. Together, the site administrator teams created additional messages that they would be able to use with their teacher teams when they returned to their respective sites. In the second observation, the superintendent stated the district's mission and tagline theme when he was talking with the parents. In addition, two artifacts discussed during two interviews, a one-page foundational-beliefs document and a district plan, were used as additional frequencies for this theme.

Promoting organizational focus and direction through ongoing communication. This theme was referenced 24 times in nine sources and represented 26% of coded content related to the element of intentionality. Organizational

intentionality provides an organization with the forward movement necessary for achieving the optimal performance level of all employees. This forward movement is shaped by the leader's intentional communication and feedback from employees regarding the organization's vision, clarity of purpose, and organizational activity (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a, 2012b).

Seven superintendents, 70% of study participants, provided content for this theme, and during one observation, the parent advisory meeting, this theme emerged. Superintendents shared the multiple structures they have for promoting organizational focus and direction with many stakeholder groups, including district board of education members, leadership team members, staff, and parent groups. One superintendent talked about how she promotes organizational focus and direction through principal meetings, including principal evaluation meetings. She shared,

> One specific example I can share with you is in the work that I do directly with principals. So, in my evaluation of principals, I meet with them three times a year. They have very, very specific goals. The principals have very specific goals, and their expectations as a school leader have a direct alignment to the district blueprint. We have this level of organizational clarity from me to the classroom, the board to the classroom, and it begins with the blueprint, and then the principals' goals and objectives have an exact alignment to the blueprint. Principals are held accountable for raising student achievement by being aligned to what the district's priorities are in that blueprint; that clarity is communicated in their goal-setting conference.

Another superintendent talked about all the face-to-face sessions he has with staff and parents to share the district focus for the year. He stated, "At the beginning of the school year, I'll go out and bring a few assistant superintendents with me to talk with parents about our focus for the year." He also shared that he and some of his cabinet members attend formal staff meetings at all the school sites after the parent meetings to talk with the staff, and he also brings his board members around to visit classrooms, again to promote the organizational focus by seeing and talking about student learning. In this discussion he shared,

> We make sure that the board gets out to visit sites, at least every school twice a year. These are less formal because they're out seeing stuff, but as I tell them, you could have six people show up at [a] state compliance feedback meeting, and you think that the whole district is going downhill because you heard from six people who aren't happy about something. You need to get multiple data points, and the best data point is to be out and see what's happening in the classroom. My board is really taking me up on that. Most of them make the effort to go out to school sites with me and see what's happening. It's fabulous because I can say, "Remember what we were talking about here? Here's what it looks like."

A third superintendent talked about using the interview process to promote the organization's focus and direction. She shared that the interview process and the questions say a lot about the organization's focus. She stated, "I think the actual interviews do a lot because I think actually writing the interview questions get to where you want your community or where you want people to focus. They tell that person a lot about your organization."

In the observation of the parent advisory committee meeting, the superintendent reminded the parent participants about their responsibility to the greater school district parent community. He shared that as members of this parent advisory committee, they had promised to share the district content discussed back at each of their respective school sites with other parents. He shared how important it is that other parents know and hear about the district goals and direction from these parents. One artifact discussed during an interview, a principal evaluation document, provided an additional frequency for this theme.

Encouraging stakeholder feedback on organizational goals and direction. This theme was referenced 18 times in 13 sources and represented 19% of coded content related to the element of intentionality. Conversational leaders create quality conditions for intentional conversations. Employees share in the purpose of the conversation, through dialogue and debate, and become more engaged in the collaboration. Favorable business outcomes are more likely to occur when all employees are engaged in the conversation around the organization's critical issues (Barge, 2014; Fenniman & Robinson, 2013; Groysberg & Slind, 2012a, 2012b; Hurley & Brown, 2009).

Eight of the superintendents, 80% of the study participants, referenced this theme related to the element of intentionality, and this theme emerged during one observation. The superintendents shared how important it is to intentionally encourage and include stakeholders in conversations around district work. One superintendent described a strategy he uses when writing an article for his leadership team on the district's foundational beliefs. He writes the article and then asks the leadership team to review, dialogue, and debate the article content. He stated,

> When I write an article, it's usually for my leadership team. I'll bring it to them and, you know, look for a point you agree with. Look for points you disagree with. We'll again get into smaller groups so they can have a strategic conversation around that, and then we talk about it as a group, and then I get great feedback to fix things. I've done that with pretty much most of our foundational-belief points, and I've done it with other articles I've written. I'll bring one in, and we'll debrief it as well.

A second superintendent shared how she gains feedback from multiple stakeholders on the district's state compliance work. She shared,

> We have very systematic reviews of our progress on action steps, and we do a ton of survey work. We did an overall survey, including a survey with teachers, kids, and administrators, on all our key goal areas. Last year, we did 43 stakeholder engagement exercises with different kinds of teams, and those are really the very systematic sort of ways [of] getting feedback about where we are and where we need to go.

A third superintendent also shared survey work she had done but at the executive and district level. The survey was performed after her first year as superintendent and provided some direction for future district work. She stated,

> After the first year, we gave a pretty in-depth survey to the entire leadership team about how we were doing as a cabinet and as the district, and then we pulled out some themes. We felt we had some structured conversations about those during the leadership team meetings, which I saw then be woven into the directions of things that were going to work on in the future.

This theme also emerged during the observation of the meeting of the parent advisory committee, which was created by the superintendent when he first arrived as the superintendent. He created this committee and a student advisory committee because he saw a deficit in opportunities for parents and students to provide feedback on the district-level focus and direction. The agenda created for the observed parent advisory committee meeting allowed opportunities for parents to provide feedback on district goals and direction. Four artifacts provided additional frequencies for this theme; three of the artifacts were discussed during three interviews, and the fourth artifact was shared during the observation. These artifacts included an article written by a superintendent, a stakeholder feedback survey for a state compliance document, a survey to leadership on the performance of upper management, and a parent advisory committee agenda.

Learning common content for organizational focus and direction. This theme was referenced 10 times in nine sources and represented 11% of coded content related to the element of intentionality. Conversationally intentional leaders provide employees with the opportunity to understand larger perspectives of the whole organization through two-way, dynamic communication processes in order to deepen their knowledge base of how all the departments work together to support the overall vision of the organization (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Six superintendents, 60% of the study participants, provided content for this theme, and the theme emerged during one observation, the site and district administration professional learning session. The six superintendents described that learning common content is an intentional leadership strategy for deepening the knowledge base of employees. When they learn common content, the content becomes a common language

for stakeholders. This common language provides an organizational focus and a potential future direction. One superintendent used a visioning protocol as an example of learning common content in the district. She taught her employees the protocol, and it has been used throughout her leadership team for creating and implementing ideas across the district. Four of the six superintendents talked about using book clubs for the purpose of learning common content; three of the superintendents said they use book clubs with their leadership teams, and one superintendent reported that she has read books with parents. She stated, "We've done book studies with our parents. You know, it keeps enough people informed so that the conversations about the schools are generally positive." A second superintendent shared her work on creating a thematic goal after the leadership team read Lencioni's book, *The Advantage*:

> We had the whole team read *The Advantage*, and then we, as a team, developed the thematic goal together. When you talk about conversation, I felt like we really tried to focus every leadership team meeting to this, and it was connected to this, and the principal evaluation, it's more about my conversations with the principals and with my team.

The observation during the professional learning session was based on common learning and content on one of the major district initiatives. Prior to the observation, a national trainer provided the site and district administrator teams with common content, and the afternoon was spent creating common messages and implementation strategies for each school site. In addition, two artifacts, a visioning protocol used with the leadership team and a thematic goal document, discussed during two interviews provided additional frequencies for this theme.

Staying the course to create additional clarity of organizational purpose. This theme was referenced 10 times in seven sources and represented 11% of coded content related to the element of intentionality. This theme had the same number of frequencies as learning common content for organizational focus and direction, but it was referenced in two fewer sources. When employees and leaders find a shared, common view of the organization, communication becomes a value-added endeavor. Leadership plays a vital role in committing to this level of continual and consistent organizational messaging (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a, 2012b; Hurley & Brown, 2009; Nichols, 2012).

Six superintendents, 60% of the study participants, provided content for this theme. The superintendents discussed the importance of not changing the district direction annually and how maintaining the same focus year after year improves clarity of the organization's purpose. Some of the reasoning behind this maintenance, or staying the course, has been a result of 3-year state compliance plans, which include an alignment to state priority areas. One superintendent stated, "I feel like we have stayed the course, and we just more refined our course." Another superintendent shared,

> Our board has five priorities; they're all on one page. They've literally been almost identical for the last 3 years. We believe that gives us consistency. When you have core values and you have consistent priorities, let's attack the real thing that changes the behavior, which is beliefs. So, we talk a lot about beliefs, what we believe about ourselves and what we're capable of, what we believe we want the next year to include. That threefold of having a set of core values that you can refer to, having a consistent set of priorities, and then working down to beliefs, I

say leverage action, allows us to ensure that people remain committed because you will do things that you believe in.

One artifact, a one-page document illustrating the five priorities of the district board of education, was mentioned during an interview and served as an additional frequency for this theme.

Key Findings

After the interviews were transcribed and coded for themes, the observations were coded for themes, and the artifacts were reviewed for themes, 10 key findings were evident regarding how exemplary elementary superintendents lead their organizations using the four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. Selection of the 10 key findings was determined by evaluating which themes were referenced by at least six of the 10 superintendent study participants, a simple majority, and represented at least 20% of all frequencies within each of the four conversational leadership elements.

Intimacy

1. Listening to engage stakeholders represented 23% of all intimacy frequencies and was referenced by all 10 (100%) of the superintendent study participants.
2. Using honest and authentic communication to build trust represented 20% of all intimacy frequencies and was referenced by seven (70%) of the superintendent study participants.

Interactivity

3. Varying stakeholder groupings to promote conversation represented 27% of all interactivity frequencies and was referenced by all 10 (100%) of the superintendent study participants.
4. Creating a culture of nonjudgmental open dialogue represented 25% of all interactivity frequencies and was referenced by all 10 (100%) of the superintendent study participants.
5. Using consistent two-way communication tools to generate organizational content represented 22% of all interactivity frequencies and was referenced by eight (80%) of the superintendent study participants.

Inclusion

6. Asking questions to include stakeholders in organizational goals represented 20% of all inclusion frequencies and was referenced by nine (90%) of the superintendent study participants.
7. Encouraging ownership of ideas represented 20% of all inclusion frequencies and was referenced by seven (70%) of the superintendent study participants.
8. Creating common messages on organizational content represented 20% of all inclusion frequencies and was referenced by six (60%) of the superintendent study participants.

Intentionality

9. Continuous messaging of organizational purpose represented 33% of all intentionality frequencies and was referenced by nine (90%) of the superintendent study participants.

10. Promoting organizational focus and direction through ongoing communication represented 26% of all intentionality frequencies and was referenced by seven (70%) of the superintendent participants.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to describe the behaviors that exemplary elementary superintendents practice to lead their organizations through conversation using Groysberg and Slind's (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. This chapter provided a data summary of the 23 major themes aligned to the central research question and four subquestions. Data were summarized and coded from 10 interviews and three observations, and 26 of the 40 collected artifacts were used as additional frequencies for the themes. These artifacts allowed the researcher to connect consistencies between the interview content and the observations. Ten key findings describing the behaviors of exemplary elementary superintendents were identified from the 23 themes.

Chapter V provides a final summary of the study, including major findings, unexpected findings, conclusions, implications for action, recommendations for further research, and concluding remarks and reflections from the researcher.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this phenomenological study, the researcher described the lived experiences of exemplary elementary superintendents who lead their organizations using one or more of the four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. A thorough analysis of data generated by study participant interviews, observations, and artifacts resulted in 10 major findings and 23 conversational leadership themes. As a result, conclusions about these findings have been formed and recommendations for future research have been identified.

Chapter V provides a final summary of the study, including the study's purpose, research questions, and key findings. Also included in this chapter are the unexpected research findings, conclusions, implications for action, recommendations for future research, and concluding remarks and reflections from the researcher.

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to describe the behaviors that exemplary elementary superintendents practice to lead their organizations through conversation using Groysberg and Slind's (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. This study included one central research question and four research subquestions, one for each of the four elements of conversational leadership. The central research question was, What are the behaviors that exemplary elementary superintendents practice to lead their organizations through conversation using Groysberg and Slind's (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality? The research subquestions were as follows:

1. How do exemplary elementary superintendents lead their organizations through the conversation element of intimacy?
2. How do exemplary elementary superintendents lead their organizations through the conversation element of interactivity?
3. How do exemplary elementary superintendents lead their organizations through the conversation element of inclusion?
4. How do exemplary elementary superintendents lead their organizations through the conversation element of intentionality?

For this qualitative phenomenological research study, personal, in-depth interviews with 10 exemplary elementary superintendents in Southern California were conducted to gain insight into their lived experiences as they related to each of the four elements of conversational leadership. Data generated from the interviews and observations were coded and analyzed for themes in NVivo. Additionally, 40 artifacts were collected and reviewed, with 26 yielding data related to the research questions. While this study's main data collection method was the in-depth interview, multimethod strategies allowed the researcher to triangulate the data from the in-depth interviews with observations and artifacts. The study's target population was the approximately 300 elementary superintendents in Southern California.

Each of the peer researchers, 12 doctoral students with four faculty chairs who collaboratively designed this study, used the same criteria for identifying a study sample of 10 leaders within his or her respective target population. These target populations included elementary and unified school district superintendents, assistant superintendents of educational services, and principals; community college presidents; regional directors

of migrant education; chief nursing officers; municipal police chiefs and sheriffs; nonprofit executive directors; and city managers. All potential study participants needed to exhibit at least four of the following six characteristics identified by the peer research team as criteria for determining an exemplary leader:

1. evidence of successful relationships with followers;
2. evidence of leading a successful organization;
3. a minimum of 5 years of experience in the profession;
4. articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings;
5. recognition from peers; and
6. membership in professional associations in their field.

Major Findings

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to describe the behaviors that exemplary elementary superintendents practice to lead their organizations through conversation using Groysberg and Slind's (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. The study's central research question was answered by the analysis of the data related to the study's subquestions. The following findings, also presented in Chapter IV, were determined by evaluating which themes were referenced by at least six of the 10 superintendent study participants, a simple majority, and represented at least 20% of all references within each of the four conversational leadership elements. Data frequencies for each theme were generated by interviews, observations, and a collection and analysis of study participant artifacts.

Key Findings: Intimacy

1. Listening to engage stakeholders represented 23% of all intimacy frequencies and was referenced by all 10 (100%) of the superintendent study participants.
2. Using honest and authentic communication to build trust represented 20% of all intimacy frequencies and was referenced by seven (70%) of the superintendent study participants.

Key Findings: Interactivity

3. Varying stakeholder groupings to promote conversation represented 27% of all interactivity frequencies and was referenced by all 10 (100%) of the superintendent study participants.
4. Creating a culture of nonjudgmental open dialogue represented 25% of all interactivity frequencies and was referenced by all 10 (100%) of the superintendent study participants.
5. Using consistent two-way communication tools to generate organizational content represented 22% of all interactivity frequencies and was referenced by eight (80%) of the superintendent study participants.

Key Findings: Inclusion

6. Asking questions to include stakeholders in organizational goals represented 20% of all inclusion frequencies and was referenced by nine (90%) of the superintendent study participants.
7. Encouraging ownership of ideas represented 20% of all inclusion frequencies and was referenced by seven (70%) of the superintendent study participants.

8. Creating common messages on organizational content represented 20% of all inclusion frequencies and was referenced by six (60%) of the superintendent study participants.

Key Findings: Intentionality

9. Continuous messaging of organizational purpose represented 33% of all intentionality frequencies and was referenced by nine (90%) of the superintendent study participants.
10. Promoting organizational focus and direction through ongoing communication represented 26% of all intentionality frequencies and was referenced by seven (70%) of the superintendent participants.

Unexpected Findings

This study resulted in two unexpected findings, one related to the conversational element of intimacy (celebrating and honoring stakeholders) and a second related to the conversational element of inclusion (cultivating leadership in stakeholders). In both instances, only three superintendents, 30% of the study participants, referenced these themes, yet literature supports and acknowledges the importance of celebrating and honoring stakeholders and cultivating leadership in stakeholders.

Celebrating and honoring stakeholders was an unexpected finding related to the conversational element of intimacy. This theme was the least referenced theme for the element of intimacy; however, the literature recognizes the importance of celebrating and appreciating employees so that they feel valued, cared for, appreciated, and ultimately engaged in their work (Crowley, 2011, 2015). Auster and Freeman (2013) and Boekhorst (2015) added that authentic leaders consistently demonstrate the value of each employee

through the celebration of each employee's unique talents, and they create a sense of belonging in the work environment where employee uniqueness is rewarded.

Cultivating leadership in stakeholders was an unexpected finding related to the conversational element of inclusion. This theme was the least referenced theme for inclusion and the least referenced theme in the entire study. Only three superintendents referenced the possibility of increasing leadership capacity, the continued development of their employees, as a form of inclusion in their organizations, yet literature supports the growth and development of employees as a form of organizational inclusivity. Employees want to be provided with opportunities for collective leadership and professional growth and development beyond their job description (Auster & Freeman, 2013; Crowley, 2011, 2015). Groysberg and Slind (2012b) also acknowledged the importance of including employees as organizational content providers through inclusive, two-way conversational practices. Leaders who create these organizational conditions provide additional opportunities for employees to take on more informal and formal leadership roles.

Conclusions

As a result of the study's key findings, the following conclusions describe the lived experiences of exemplary elementary superintendents who practice leading their organizations using four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality.

Conclusion 1: Elementary Superintendents Who Want to Provide an Intimate, Trusting Work Environment Must Make Every Effort to Listen to Engage Stakeholders and Commit to Honest and Authentic Communication

Exemplary elementary superintendents in this study revealed that they listen to employees and other stakeholder groups, including district board of education members, parents, community members, and students, to gain feedback on the continued needs of the district and ensure other district leaders value the purposeful act of listening. When emotionally connected leaders are consciously listening, employees feel comfortable and encouraged to provide the organization with an exchange of ideas, questions, and concerns through specific moments of conversation (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Glaser, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012a).

Groysberg and Slind (2012a, 2012b) attested that creating leader and employee relationships is a primary goal of organizational communication. Leaders can demonstrate this level of intimacy by personal, more casual communication and by demonstrating a transparent communication style. Honest and authentic communication used consistently with stakeholders creates an intimate work environment; stakeholders learn over time that they can trust the superintendent's communication. Organizational trust through improved communication requires leaders to exhibit two important leadership behaviors: "an openness to hearing what employees have to say, and a willingness to talk straight about matters that senior leaders [would] prefer *not* to talk about" (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b, p. 19).

Interviews, observations, and artifacts supported the following conclusions:

1. Exemplary elementary superintendents who participated in this study stressed the importance of listening to stakeholders as part of their communication behavior related to the conversational element of intimacy. Listening to stakeholders was as important as any other leadership behavior related to the intimacy element.
2. Exemplary elementary superintendents who participated in this study reported that they consistently use honest and authentic communication to create trust with stakeholders. Over time, stakeholders know what to expect based on this communication style.

Conclusion 2: It Is Essential That Elementary Superintendents Who Want to Support Stakeholder Interactivity Create a Culture of Nonjudgmental Open Dialogue, Use Two-Way Communication Tools to Generate Organizational Content, and Vary Stakeholder Groupings to Promote Conversation

Exemplary elementary superintendents in this study created a district culture of nonjudgmental open dialogue by encouraging conversation among stakeholders and modeling the acceptance of communication regardless of their personal and professional beliefs. Literature suggests that communication in 21st-century organizations requires leaders who are intentionally open and transparent with stakeholders through two-way interactions (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2012; Groysberg & Slind, 2012a; Henson, 2009). Sessions of open dialogue, where employees do not feel judged for their creativity and innovation, are important in building emotional connections between leaders and employees, and when these connections are made, interaction between leaders and

employees is dense and knowledge is shared throughout the organization (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2012; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Exemplary elementary superintendents in this study recognized the value of two-way conversation between themselves and other stakeholders. Two-way conversation allows superintendents to learn about what each stakeholder values and, in turn, the superintendents share what they value back in the communication. Groysberg and Slind (2012b) acknowledged that leaders who value the importance of two-way conversation are open to hearing ideas and information and provide many opportunities for two-way interactions. This culture encourages two-way communication between stakeholder groups. As in other organizations and industries, the trend to include and interact with employees through two-way, dynamic communication is also important in a school district (Cox & McLeod, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Kowalski, 2005).

Exemplary elementary superintendents in this study also revealed that they vary stakeholder groupings, from one-on-one interactions to small groups and whole-group discussions, to promote meaningful conversation. Marion and Uhl-Bien (2001) stated that leaders create conditions that allow for employee interaction, including structures, and the dynamics of these interactions help the organization.

Interviews, observations, and artifacts supported the following conclusions:

1. Exemplary elementary superintendents who participated in this study have created an organizational culture where stakeholders are not afraid to talk. They model nonjudgmental open dialogue for other leaders and stakeholders and encourage two-way conversation through a variety of structures.

2. Exemplary elementary superintendents who participated in this study have used a variety of communication tools to encourage two-way interaction between themselves and other stakeholders. These tools include face-to-face dialogue and debate and newsletter or social media content that elicits continued conversation on organizational content.
3. Exemplary elementary superintendents who participated in this study reported that they vary how they achieve two-way communication and know when to change the grouping structures to improve communication, formally or informally. Recurring principal meetings and district leadership team meetings are often the basis for a change in groupings during meetings, from whole-group to small-group or one-on-one discussions, to solicit two-way conversation among leadership team members.

Conclusion 3: It Is Critical for Elementary Superintendents Who Are Committed to the Inclusion of Stakeholders for Sharing Ideas and Participating in the Development of the District to Ask Questions to Include Stakeholders in Forming Organizational Goals, Creating Common Messages on Organizational Content, and Encouraging Ownership of Their Ideas

Exemplary elementary superintendents in this study revealed that they ask questions to include stakeholders in the development of district goals. This inclusive leadership behavior encourages feedback through questions and answers. Authentic leaders have the ability to make all employees feel like they belong. Employees receive these cues to understand how they should behave in the workplace, shaping employee perceptions of the organizational culture as one that values inclusion of all employees (Auster & Freeman, 2013; Boekhorst, 2015; Gambetti & Biraghi, 2015).

Exemplary elementary superintendents in this study reported that they create an inclusive work environment when they work with stakeholders on the development and delivery of common messages on organizational content. In this study, these common messages were found to be created between the superintendents and members of the district leadership team, parent groups, and other district committees. Organizational inclusivity is developed when "ordinary employees . . . become producers as well as consumers of . . . organization[al] . . . activities" (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b, p. 122), and as a result, the organization increases its breadth of knowledge and content available through all the human resources in the organization. This level of employee engagement, through mutual exploration of meaning, creates an inclusive work environment and one that incorporates employees' passion and commitment to each other and the organization (Crowley, 2011; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Stalinski, 2004).

Exemplary elementary superintendents in this study revealed that they encourage stakeholders to contribute ideas for the overall direction of the district and to take ownership of these ideas. This leadership behavior allows stakeholders to become personally and actively involved in conversations and to feel like they play an equal role in the conversation. They feel valued for their contributions to the organization and, in turn, continue to add to and share the organizational story with other stakeholders (Crowley, 2011; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Men, 2012).

Interviews, observations, and artifacts supported the following conclusions:

1. Exemplary elementary superintendents who participated in this study connect with stakeholders by asking questions about the district's goals. They use questions and gain feedback from these questions through a variety of structures, including face-to-

face sessions, questionnaires, and surveys, to include stakeholders in the development of the district's goals.

2. Exemplary elementary superintendents who participated in this study create common messages on organizational content with their teams. These superintendents shared the importance of including multiple stakeholders in creating district messages to improve ownership and consistent delivery of the messages.
3. Exemplary elementary superintendents who participated in this study encourage stakeholders, particularly other district leaders, to communicate and take ownership of their ideas. These superintendents give their leaders the freedom to communicate content and to decide how they deliver content to other stakeholders. Superintendents shared that their leadership teams feel empowered to create content and share content with other stakeholders.

Conclusion 4: Elementary Superintendents Who Want to Ensure Clarity of Organizational Purpose Through Conversation Must Continuously Message the District's Purpose and Promote Focus and Direction Through Ongoing Communication

Exemplary elementary superintendents in this study reported that they continuously and relentlessly message the district's purpose. This was the most referenced theme in the study. They use multiple venues to share the district's purpose, including face-to-face interactions with stakeholders and other forms of one-way communication like newsletters and social media feeds. These ongoing opportunities for stakeholders to hear about, talk about, and share among each other the organization's purpose allow stakeholders to share why and how the organization meets its goals and

how they play a critical role in the development and implementation of these goals (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a, 2012b; Hurley & Brown, 2009; Nichols, 2012).

Exemplary elementary superintendents in this study also revealed that they promote their district focus and direction through ongoing communication. These superintendents use a variety of structures to promote, market, and advertise the organizational focus and direction, including action plan development with principals, strategic planning with the board of education and greater district community, parent meetings on school campuses, formal staff meetings, and video messages from the superintendents. These intentional leadership behaviors provide the forward movement necessary for achieving the optimal performance level of the organization, and favorable organizational outcomes are more likely to occur when all employees are engaged in the conversation around the organization's critical issues (Barge, 2014; Fenniman & Robinson, 2013; Groysberg & Slind, 2012a, 2012b; Hurley & Brown, 2009).

Interviews, observations, and artifacts supported the following conclusions:

1. Exemplary elementary superintendents who participated in this study use many opportunities to message their district purpose to create organizational clarity. They can spontaneously articulate the district purpose and have created written documents that support this clarity, including one-page vision, mission, and goal documents.
2. Exemplary elementary superintendents who participated in this study have created multiple structures for ongoing communication of their district's focus and direction. They intentionally use these structures to help all stakeholders understand the district focus and direction, and in turn, stakeholders can articulate the focus and direction to other stakeholders.

Implications for Action

Conversational leadership is an emerging field of study. The implications from this research provides additional content in the conversational leadership field for individual and organizational use. The following implications pertain to conversational leadership as practiced in the field of superintendent leadership:

1. As organizations continue to seek 21st-century leaders who can lead them through the complexity of our changing world, human resource departments should use content from this research in identifying highly communicative organizational leaders who are inclusive, intentional, and interactive and who create intimate connections with employees and other stakeholders. An assessment of these skills could be used as an employment prescreening tool. Employee onboarding should include training on the importance of conversational leadership as the elements relate to the organization's vision, mission, and goals. Leaders should be provided with ongoing feedback on their application of the elements in their daily work, and additional, ongoing training on the elements of conversational leadership should be provided.
2. To create a district-wide culture of conversational leadership, Superintendents should provide ongoing training for leaders in their organization, including specific training on the behaviors associated with listening; non-judgmental, open dialogue; and the modeling, acceptance, and encouragement of risk taking.
3. Superintendents should provide other leaders with a consistent risk-taking protocol for the development and encouragement of risk taking. One risk-taking protocol used by a study participant was the Disney protocol: Dream, Believe, Dare, Do. Superintendents should model the use of this protocol with their leadership teams.

4. A book should be written highlighting the lived experiences of these 10 elementary Superintendents. Specific examples of how Superintendents can lead through the four elements of conversational leadership should be included in the book.
5. The researcher should contribute the lived experiences of the 10 Superintendents to the World Café online blog. The World Café (n.d.) was created by Juanita Brown and David Issacs in 1995 to promote dialogue across the generations and to engage people through conversation. Each of the four conversational leadership elements should be addressed in separate blog submissions. The researcher should monitor the blog to promote continued two-way dialogue with other blog contributors.
6. *The Leader in Me* curriculum, by FranklinCovey, should incorporate the four elements of conversational leadership into its student leadership and communication modules. This elementary school curriculum is designed to empower students through leadership skills and is designed for children as young as 5 years old (*The Leader in Me*, n.d.). Teaching young children about the importance of conversation could support the development of future workforce leaders.
7. High schools should incorporate the four elements of conversational leadership into student leadership courses, including college and career technical classes and the associated study body.
8. Colleges and universities should create conversational leadership classes to support college-aged students in the development of these critical communication skills. Aligning these courses with change management coursework should also be considered.

9. The researcher should submit a speaker proposal to a professional organization at a local, state, or national event. In the case of this research study, a submission to the School Superintendents Association (AASA) or the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) should be considered for a workshop on the lived experiences of superintendents who lead through the elements of conversational leadership.
10. In addition to ACSA workshops or conferences, ACSA should include this research as part of its 70-hour professional learning Superintendents Academy.
11. The researcher should organize a local TEDx event to generate conversation in communities. This event would allow speakers to share their knowledge about the four elements of conversational leadership from an application level, and the event would be recorded for continued viewing around the world.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on this study's findings, additional research on the four elements of conversational leadership defined in this study is recommended in the nine following areas:

- There has been limited research in the area of intimacy in the workplace and how to build honest, trusting, and authentic relationships through intimacy. Study participants referenced this element more than any of the other four elements, which could signify an interest in the topic and a need for continued study. This study provided some context to the element of intimacy through conversation, but a detailed study on just the element of intimacy in the workplace should be conducted.
- This study did not delineate the difference between male and female responses to the interview protocol and observations. A study on conversational leadership that

compares female responses to male responses, examining both similarities and differences, should be conducted. This study could generate data on the differences between men and women leaders in the area of conversational leadership.

- A study on how Superintendents work with their Board of Education on the development of a district conversational leadership culture should be conducted.
- A study on how Superintendents model, accept, and encourage risk taking within their organization should be conducted. Internal and external political factors associated with risk taking should be included in the research.
- A study on how leaders celebrate and honor stakeholders to create or improve workplace intimacy should be conducted.
- The thematic dissertation team conducted research with the following study participants: elementary and unified school district superintendents, assistant superintendents of educational services, and principals; community college presidents; regional directors of migrant education; chief nursing officers; municipal police chiefs and sheriffs; nonprofit executive directors; and city managers. Conversational leadership research with study participants in leadership in other fields, particularly for-profit organizations, should be conducted.
- The thematic dissertation team should combine data generated among all 12 studies. Generalizations should be determined across all private and public sector leadership capacities explored by the team. While this team did not use a meta-analysis approach in representation of findings, a future study could use this approach.
- This study was conducted in four Southern California counties: Riverside, Orange,

San Diego, and Los Angeles. Future studies should examine leaders in other regions across the United States.

- This study was a qualitative phenomenological study examining the lived experiences of 10 exemplary elementary superintendents. An experimental or nonexperimental quantitative study could be conducted with a larger sample of elementary superintendents. For example, in a nonexperimental quantitative study, a researcher could survey a larger target population using a questionnaire. The questionnaire would be used to learn about a leadership group's beliefs, values, behaviors, and opinions in relation to each of the four elements of conversational leadership (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

I have lived a very fortunate life, a life where I could go to school and continue going to school to become a doctor of education. I am now among the 2% in the United States who acquire such a title (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017), a select group of other highly committed and fortunate people.

The professional timing of this doctoral program could not have been more appropriate for me. I had the opportunity to make a difference in my school district during the program with a transformational change project, and as I interviewed my colleagues, amazingly smart and thoughtful superintendents, I continued to learn from them and will continue to apply some of their wise words during my career as a superintendent. These progressive, conversational leaders have inspired me to also lead with intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality and have provided us all with examples of how to lead through conversation.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Conversational Leadership Interview Questions

Note: The interview is in 4 sections. Each section begins with the definition of a particular element of Conversational Leadership and then proceeds to 3 related interview questions.

Intimacy. The closeness, trust and familiarity created between people through shared experiences, meaningful exchanges, and shared knowledge (Schwarz, 2011; Groysberg & Slind, 2012; Glaser, 2014).

1. How do you create conversations that promote trust between you and the members of your organization?

2. Research indicates that a leader can use personal stories that show vulnerability to build trust and authenticity with members of their organization. Please share with me an example of a time when you disclosed a personal story that showed your vulnerability in an effort to build trust and authenticity with members of your organization.

3. Tell me about a time when you listened attentively to members of your organization to engage them in honest and authentic conversations.

Interactivity. Bilateral or multilateral exchange of comments and ideas; a back-and-forth process (Groysberg & Slind, 2012).

1. How do you engage members of your organization in conversations that are two way exchanges of ideas and information about your organization?

2. How would you describe the strategies you use to cultivate a culture of open dialogue?

3. Tell me about a time in which you effectively promoted conversation with members of your organization that incorporated an exchange of ideas around a difficult issue or topic.

Inclusion. The commitment to the process of engaging stakeholders to share ideas and participate in the development of the organization (Groysberg & Slind, 2012; Hurley, T. & Brown, J. 2009).

1. What conversational strategies do you find effective to ensure members of the organization remain committed to and included in the organization's goals and or mission?

2. What strategies do you use to encourage all members to become active contributors and spokespersons for the organization?

3. Please share a story about a time when you allowed the members of your organization to generate the content for an important message.

Intentionality. Ensuring clarity of purpose that includes goals and direction to create order and meaning (Barge, 1985; Groysberg & Slind, 2012; Men, 2012).

1. Can you share some examples of when you used conversation to create clarity around your organization's purpose?

2. How do you use conversation to elicit feedback on the goals and direction of your organization?

3. What strategies do you use to give focus and direction to the organizations' communication activities?

APPENDIX B

Field-Test Participant Feedback Questions

While conducting the interview you should take notes of their clarification request or comments about not being clear about the question. After you complete the interview ask your field test interviewee the following clarifying questions. **Try not to make it another interview; just have a friendly conversation**. Either script or record their feedback so you can compare with the other two members of your team to develop your feedback report on how to improve the interview questions.

1. How did you feel about the interview? Do you think you had ample opportunities to describe what you do as a leader when working with your team or staff?

2. Did you feel the amount of time for the interview was ok?

3. Were the questions by and large clear or were there places where you were uncertain what was being asked?

4. Can you recall any words or terms being asked about during the interview that were confusing?

5. And finally, did I appear comfortable during the interview… (I'm pretty new at this)?

APPENDIX C

Research Participant's Bill of Rights

BRANDMAN University Chapman University System

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.

Brandman University IRB Adopted November 2013

APPENDIX D

Informed Consent and Audio Recording Release

INFORMATION ABOUT: The behaviors that exemplary leaders practice to lead their organizations through conversation using the four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion and intentionality.

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Kristin Brogan-Baranski, M.Ed.

PURPOSE OF STUDY:
You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Kristin Brogan-Baranski, M.Ed., a doctoral student from the School of Education at Brandman University. The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to describe behaviors that exemplary elementary Superintendents practice to lead their organizations through conversation using Groysberg and Slind's (2012) four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion and intentionality.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and will include an interview with the identified student investigator. The one-to-one interview will take approximately 60 minutes to complete, in-person or electronically using a web-based collaboration software, 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 and research materials 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 not to 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 understand that the interview will be audio recorded. The recordings will be available only to the researcher and the professional transcriptionist. The audio recordings will be used to capture the interview dialogue and to ensure the accuracy of the information collected during the interview. All information will be identifier-redacted and my confidentiality will be maintained. Upon completion of the study all recordings, transcripts and notes taken by the researcher and transcriptionist from the interview will be destroyed.
d) If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Kristin Brogan-Baranski, M.Ed. at kbroganb@mail.brandman.edu or by phone at 619-739-3717; or Dr. Patricia White (Advisor) at pwhite@brandman.edu.

e) No information that identifies me will be released without my 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, I will be so informed and consent re-obtained. There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research.
f) 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.

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 it and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

_____ Date: _____
Signature of Participant or Responsible Party

_____ Date: _____
Signature of Principal Investigator

APPENDIX E

Invitation to Participate

BRANDMAN University

CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

Invitation to Participate

Dear _____:

My name is Kristin Brogan-Baranski and I'm a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Brandman University, Irvine. I am a member of a dissertation team with 11 other researchers. This letter serves as an invitation to participate in a research study.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this phenomenological research study is to describe the behaviors that exemplary elementary Superintendents practice to lead their organizations through conversation using Groysberg & Slind's (2012) four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. Results of this study will be summarized in a doctoral dissertation.

PROCEDURES: If you choose to participate in this study, you will be invited to a one-on-one interview with me for approximately 60 minutes. Based on your schedule, we can conduct this session face-to-face or through a web-based collaboration software. During the interview, I will ask you 12 questions designed to allow you to share your experiences as an exemplary Superintendent. Your answers will contribute to each of the four study variables identified in the purpose above: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. The interview will be audio-recorded for transcription purposes and will remain confidential with me. I may also ask to observe you during a public or private meeting. This observation will be at your discretion.

RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, and DISCOMFORTS: There are no major risks to your participation in this research study. The interview and potential observation will be at a time and place convenient to you.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: There are no major benefits to you for participating. However, you may benefit by contributing to the body of knowledge on how exemplary leaders use conversation to lead. In addition to the personal satisfaction in contributing to important research on leadership, you will have the opportunity to read the findings and conclusions of the study. The findings and conclusions will allow you to gain insights from other exemplary Superintendents on how they use conversation to engage employees and deliver the vision of their organization.

ANONYMITY: If you agree to participate in this study, you can be assured that all content shared with me will remain confidential. Your name will not be associated with any notes,

transcripts from the interview, or observations. All information will remain in a locked file cabinet, accessible only to the researcher. No employer will have access to the interview or other data collected through the research. You will be free to discontinue the interview and withdraw from the study at any time. During the interview, you are encouraged to ask questions to help you understand the process for research and/or how it will impact you. Feel free to contact the principle investigator, Kristin Brogan-Baranski, at kbroganb@mail.brandman.edu or by phone 619-739-3717 to answer any questions or concerns you have. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or your rights as a participant, you 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.

Thank again for your consideration,

Kristin Brogan-Baranski
Doctoral Candidate, Ed.D.
1837 Monarch Ridge Circle
El Cajon, CA 92019

APPENDIX F

National Institutes of Health (NIH) Certification

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Kristin Brogan-Baranski** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 05/15/2016.

Certification Number: 2075075.

Screen capture of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) certification in protecting human research participants, provided to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Brandman University on 9/27/17. This certifies that doctoral candidate Kristin Brogan-Baranski has successfully completed the "Protecting Human Research Participants" training.