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Heart-Led Behaviors of Exemplary Unified School District Superintendents

A Dissertation by

Sepideh Yeoh

University of Massachusetts Global

A Private Nonprofit Affiliate of the University of Massachusetts

Irvine, California

School of Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

March 2022

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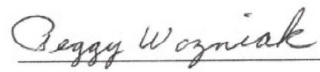
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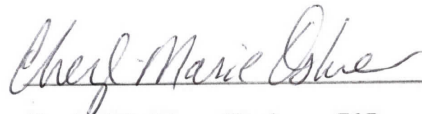
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Heart-Led Behaviors of Exemplary Unified School District Superintendents

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ABSTRACT

Heart-Led Behaviors of Exemplary Unified School District Superintendents

by Sepideh Yeoh

Purpose: The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe how exemplary K-12 school district superintendents lead from the heart using Mark Crowley's (2011) 4 principles (building a highly engaged team, connecting on a personal level, maximizing employee potential, and valuing and honoring achievements) to accomplish extraordinary results in their organizations.

Methodology: This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological inquiry methodology to study the behaviors of 8 exemplary K-12 school district superintendents in Southern California. Open-ended semistructured interviews were conducted utilizing a virtual platform. Responses from interviews in conjunction with observations and appropriate artifacts including meeting agendas, memos, and newsletters provided information about the behaviors and lived experiences of heart-led leaders. The data collected were analyzed and organized into themes by NVivo software. The emerging themes identified patterns of behavior exemplary superintendents exhibited in leading their district.

Findings: Data analysis from virtual interviews, observations, and artifacts resulted in 18 themes, 14 key findings, and 1,459 frequencies for the 4 principles of heart-led leadership.

Conclusions: The framework of heart-led leadership (Crowley, 2011) was utilized to describe the behaviors K-12 exemplary school district superintendents exhibit to lead their organizations. The analysis of data resulted in 4 conclusions. Superintendents who exhibit leadership from the heart (a) spend time to hire the right people, (b) connect on a

personal level to establish strong relationships, (c) create success for all members by maximizing employee potential, and (d) foster a culture of gratitude by valuing and honoring achievements.

Recommendations: Postpandemic replication of the study is recommended when in-person interviews can be facilitated. It is also recommended that a mixed methods study gathering and comparing qualitative and quantitative data be conducted to draw conclusions on heart-led behaviors of school district superintendents. Understanding the differences in leadership styles of male and female superintendents, further research is recommended to study gender differences in heart-led leadership principles. Moreover, because of the significance of mentoring relationships, it is recommended that a study be conducted to examine the differences in lived experiences between school district superintendents who have mentors versus those who do not.

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PREFACE

Upon consideration and discussions regarding the opportunity to study Mark Crowley's (2011) leadership from the heart strategies of exemplary leaders, 14 researchers with the collaboration of five faculty advisors, from education to corporate America, organized to form this thematic study. The thematic group was driven by a shared passion to explore the ways exemplary leaders lead from the heart to achieve extraordinary results.

The framework for this phenomenological research study was designed using Mark Crowley's (2011) four principles: building a highly engaged team, connecting on a personal level, maximizing employee potential, and valuing and honoring achievements. Each peer researcher studied a different population of leaders and identified a sample of exemplary leaders through criterion-based purposeful sampling from various public, for-profit, and nonprofit organizations to interview. In an effort to ensure consistency and reliability throughout the thematic group, the team of 14 peer researchers worked in collaboration to construct the purpose statement, research questions, definitions of terms, interview questions, and research study protocols.

Throughout the study, the term *peer researchers* is used in reference to the 14 researchers in the thematic group. The following is the complete list of the doctoral candidates, along with their chosen population in this research study, hereafter referred to as peer researchers: Giovanna Arzaga, charter executive directors; Aimee Barnard, special education administrators; Kelly Castillo, elementary principals; Joshua Chohan, elementary Title 1 principals in Sacramento County; Jeyan Danesh, secondary admin principals; Christina Foster, middle school principals; Martha (Stephanie) Herrera,

nonprofit women leaders with focus on domestic violence/sexual abuse; Teresa Hubbard, primary principals in Southern California; Randa Jad-Moussa, learning and development leaders in corporate organizations; Angela Love, community college chief human resource officers; Elizabeth Medina, Hispanic entrepreneur women; Aries Sanders, leaders of remote sales/marketing employees; Jeanine Wulfenstein, female superintendents, and Sepideh Yeoh, K-12 superintendents in Southern California.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Leadership as a method of interaction has been traced back to more than 2,000 years ago as told by ancient Greek storytellers (Hackman & Johnson, 2013). Winston and Patterson (2006) stated that a leader is an individual who is responsible to select, train, and influence followers. A transformational leader is identified as a leader who inspires action and energizes and intellectually stimulates team members (Bass, 1990; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Crowley, 2011; Diaz-Saenz, 2011; Northouse, 2014, 2019; Stewart, 2006). Similarly, Burns defined transformational leaders as leaders who connect with followers and increase their motivation level to commit to collaboration (Stewart, 2006).

For many organizations, regardless of size, location, public, private, civilian, or military, leadership has become a key factor in achieving success and bottom-line results (Coun, Peters, & Blomme, 2019; Covey & Link, 2012; Turnbull James & Collins, 2008). Grint's (2011) explanation on the British writer Thomas Carlyle's writings on heroes in 1841, and his reflections on leadership, have since evolved. Carlyle's (1993) great man theory suggests an assumption that great leaders are born with leadership traits, enabling them to lead. Furthermore, leadership drives culture, according to George (2003), author of *Authentic Leadership: Rediscovering the Secrets to Creating Lasting Value*, and culture destroys strategy, meaning even the best strategies are defeated by culture (Tucker & Russell, 2004). Another essential point made by George (2003) was that leadership is not a position determined by one's authority; it is developed and determined by the capacity to take responsibility for generating results.

The area of transformational leadership has been a topic receiving substantial attention from organizations and corporations over the past 2 decades. More specifically, transformational leadership from the heart has been studied and developed by numerous authors and leadership consultants including Covey (1994), Kouzes and Posner (2007), and Crowley (2011) with an emphasis on cultivating relationships by connecting to the heart (Ho, 2004). A key aspect discussed by transformational leadership experts reveals that transformational leaders are intentional about leading from the heart. Furthermore, such leaders maintain a balance of focusing on the mission of the organization with the well-being of team members (Winston & Patterson, 2006). Similarly, based on the work of Seijts and O'Farrell (2003), transformational leaders establish and maintain trust and inspire changes in behavior in achieving shared vision.

According to former U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, educational reforms must be balanced with providing quality education to prepare children for the future (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). As reported by the California Department of Education (Cal. Educ. Code § 35035, n.d.; CDE, n.d.-a, n.d.-b), there are 13,800 school districts in the United States, educating approximately 55 million students. According to the CDE, out of 1,037 school districts in California there are 346 K-12 unified, 525 elementary, 78 high school and 88 other types of school districts. This translates to a little over quarter of a million students served in K-12 unified districts (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Duncan explained that the future of America is dependent on the education provided to them.

Superintendents play a key role in leading school districts. According to the American Association of School Administrators (n.d.), modern-day superintendents are

comparable to orchestra conductors because they conduct the many aspects of their district including financial, educational, facilities, staff performance, and the daily operations of the district. Furthermore, Waters and Marzano (2006) stated that there is a strong correlation between district leadership and success and achievement. The work of Waters and Marzano (2006) and Wright (2019) emphasize the role of superintendents as one of power and influence on establishing trusting relationships, leading to student achievements.

Background

Throughout history, there have been many different styles of leadership practices among leaders. While the traditional model of leadership in the business world was not heart centered, there have been many models focusing on the importance of connecting to the heart. The analysis of leaders and leadership is one of the most ancient obsessions and a topic of interest among authors, philosophers, poets, and emperors (Bass, 1990; Offermann, Kennedy, & Writz, 1994; Stewart, 2006; Tucker & Russell, 2004; Winston & Patterson, 2006). Sergiovanni (1992) argued that research on leadership is missing because the focus has been on process and not substance, concluding that leadership is considered a behavior focused on ideas and not action.

Brief History of Leadership

According to Fairholm (2000), in the past 100 years, leadership, as the most complex organizational relationship, has gone through a series of transformations. Moreover, Fairholm stated that for much of the 21st century, leadership has meant management with leaders operating as heads of firms responsible for accomplishing results. In the same way, Burns (1978) described an old method of leadership,

transactional, which involves trading one thing for another to transformational, which involves engagement between the leader and followers resulting in trusting relationships.

Leadership's evolution has led to the expectation of modern-day leaders to demonstrate that worldly knowledge and workplaces are becoming the focus for finding meaning and purpose (Fairholm, 2000). Moreover, more recent research by Bartels and Jackson (2021) supports the idea of leadership that is meaning centered. Leaders, as described by Fairholm (2000), gain influence by acquiring knowledge about the organization's culture including vision, mission, shared values, relationships, and traditions. Such knowledge guides leaders in designing an integrated framework founded in the culture of the organization.

Theoretical Foundations

Transformational leadership. What differentiates leaders from transformational leaders? The response is evident in the leadership style of leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, John Lewis, and Nelson Mandela. Such leaders' humanistic leadership styles influence behaviors, shift mindsets, generate love, and project empathy leading to establishing trust (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Moreover, trust has been recognized and conceptualized as a critical component of transformational leadership by researchers (Covey & Merrill, 2006; Covey, Link, & Merrill, 2012; Kramer, 1999; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Complementary to this, Tucker and Russell (2004) defined transformational leaders as leaders who utilize their influence to achieve transformational outcomes.

Literature on strategic leadership (Grint, 2011) introduces four different perspectives on the characteristics of leaders as well as what they do and how they do it.

The work of Kramer (2011) further emphasizes the behavior of leaders and the significance of establishing a foundation of trust with followers. In recent decades, many leadership experts including Covey (2006), Kouzes and Posner (2012), Pearsall (1999), Crowley (2011), and Lencioni (2012) have explored and suggested the importance of trust and heart-led leadership. According to Burns (1978), the emphasis of transformational leadership is on the relationship between the leaders and follower. Such leadership, as stated by Burns, strengthens the relationship in a manner where the leaders and followers inspire, motivate, and elevate one another.

Servant leadership. The servant leadership style promotes universal empowerment and advocacy, connecting with others on deeper levels toward causes on a much larger scale (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Mother Teresa's style of leadership is a great example of servant leadership.

Authentic leadership. A leadership model most similar to servant leadership in terms of being values driven is the authentic leadership model. Authentic leaders, as stated by George (2003), view their job of creating growth and stability their responsibility. According to George, Sims, McLean, and Mayer (2007), everyone has the capacity to be inspirational and empowering; however, authentic leaders understand the value of personal growth and development and are willing to devote time and effort to it. Furthermore, authentic leadership begins with an understanding of personal narrative, experiences of childhood including positive influences from parents, teachers, coaches, and mentors; as well as overcoming a difficult experience (George et al., 2007). Moreover, understanding and sharing of personal narratives lead to cultivating relationships that are grounded in trust. To share one's personal narrative, that person

must be willing to practice vulnerability. Vulnerability is sometimes associated with feelings of shame and uncertainty; however, an important fact is that vulnerability encourages love, authenticity, creativity, and belonging (C. B. Brown, 2012).

Heart-led leadership. According to Sergiovanni (1992), research on leadership is empty for two reasons: the focus on behavior and not action, which separates the hand in leadership from the heart, and the lack of moral authority. In recent years, authors and scholars such as Covey (1994, 2006), Kouzes and Posner (2007, 2017), Sergiovanni (1992), Ho (2004), and Crowley (2011) have done much work on the significance of the inner work of leadership with emphasis on heart-led leadership to create meaning and ignite passion and enthusiasm toward organizational goals.

The work of Pearsall (1999) emphasizes the heart and its incredible capability to accurately detect energies of the hearts it encounters, having positive or negative effects. According to Crowley (2011), the human heart has the intelligence that can influence human behavior. What does this mean for leaders? Based on the work of Pearsall (1999), the more positive energy a leader projects, the healthier it is not just for the followers but also for the leader.

Theoretical Framework

Based on the ideas of Intrator, the ancient sense of the heart refers to it as the intersection of intellect, emotion, and spirit (Ho, 2004). Similarly, as explained by Pearsall (1999), our ancestors were aware of the powerful energy and wisdom of the heart. Consequently, the development of human brain shifted the focus from the heart and its energy to the brain. Scientific discoveries point to new possibilities that the heart thinks and remembers, which create a mysterious yet powerful energy force unlike any

other forces (Pearsall, 1999). The hierarchy of needs developed by psychologist Abraham Maslow highlighted the concept that people are searching for the authentic meaning of their life (Crowley, 2011). Moreover, while equitable pay will continue to be important, as people's basic needs are met, the need for respect, recognition, and fulfilment in the workplace becomes more apparent (Crowley, 2011).

According to Crowley (2011), while the needs of the 21st century employees in the business world have become more complex, leadership approaches have not evolved to respond to those needs. Further complicating this scenario are the necessity to thrive in the business world and the difficulty in replacing valuable employees (Crowley, 2011). Companies such as Wegman's grocery chain and the Four Seasons Hotels share core beliefs of investing in their employees and achieving their goals by fulfilling the needs of their employees, as stated by Crowley (2011). Additionally, Crowley reminded his readers that there is a disconnect between the traditional strategies of motivating employee behavior and the actual needs for performing to greatest capacity. The framework developed by Crowley provides four principles of leading from the heart: build a highly engaged team, connect on a personal level, maximize employee potential, and value and honor achievements.

Build a highly engaged team. Crowley (2011) emphasized finding people who are connected to and willing to bring their hearts into their work. The awareness of the heart and its potential energy connects people to their work, colleagues, and the organization. Crowley further explained the importance of providing clear expectations and support for strengthening talents.

Connect on a personal level. Modern-day employees seek greater connection with their leaders (Crowley, 2011). As explained by Crowley (2011), the desire is not to develop a deeply personal relationship, rather it is to gain insight into the components of motivation and inspiration.

Maximize employee potential. The old paradigm of leadership explained by Crowley (2011) demonstrated no interest in maximizing human potential. People performed tasks as expected and received compensation. However, employees are more loyal when they have the attention and support of their leader in maximizing their potential and enhancing their life (Crowley, 2011).

Value and honor achievements. Focusing on what is working well and valuing achievements and recognition of efforts, unlike financial rewards, affects people's hearts (Crowley, 2011). This expression of care is also an invitation of more of the behavior being recognized as stated by Crowley (2011).

K-12 Education

Special leadership is needed for schools because schools are composed of many stakeholder groups who may not always agree on issues (Sergiovanni, 2007). Moral leadership, as explained by Sergiovanni (2007), is cognitive based and is more likely to motivate individuals by having goals, values, and purposes. Strong leadership at the district level can be transformational and needed during peaceful times but is especially needed in times of crisis. This is a critical time for training students, building capacity, and equipping them for success. The global changes in the job market require preparation and adaptation to new skills (Donahue, 2017). As stated by Donahue (2017), while there are no quick solutions to structuring a 21st-century workplace, leaders and

policymakers need to get creative in developing the infrastructure to support and provide trainings to staff in helping students acquire skills needed for success.

According to Friedman and Mandelbaum (2011), in the last 2 decades, lack of creating solutions and responses to the needs facing education has been one of the biggest challenges in America. As CEOs, superintendents work in collaboration with their board in setting the direction and establishing a culture that supports the conditions for student achievement and success. Moreover, superintendents are responsible for the overall establishing of expectations for all functions within the district (Benzel & Hoover, 2015). Superintendents play a substantial role in establishing and maintaining the culture of the district. The nature of the superintendent role has limited tenure retention in comparison to their counterparts in the corporate sector, which can introduce myriad challenges including lack of sufficient time to build district culture (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Many factors influence a superintendent's tenure including internal factors of superintendent/board interactions; and external expectations from stakeholders, politics, and funding formulas (Melter, 2011). The personal factor of personality traits and leadership styles is another contributing factor identified by Melter (2011). Superintendents' tenure is an important topic because there is a significant correlation between superintendent tenure and changes in student achievement scores (Myers, 2011; Simpson, 2013). Furthermore, the work of Waters and Marzano (2006) uncovered the positive correlation between superintendent tenure and student achievement, thus emphasizing the significance of school boards hiring superintendents who fulfill key leadership responsibilities.

Education is in need of guidance and leadership from the heart and superintendents are in the best position to take on that practice. According to Kouzes and Posner (2012), serving in the CEO capacity, the modern-day superintendent needs strong leadership skills in connecting with and leading the many stakeholders who make up a school district such as the board, staff, students, and their families. Moreover, one of the characteristics of an exemplary leader is connecting with others and building relationships, resulting in increased team effectiveness (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

Superintendents are selected and supervised by elected school board members making the superintendent their only employee. According to Hess and Meeks (2010), for the superintendent and board relationship to work, mutual trust needs to exist. As explained by the author of *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, Patrick Lencioni (2012), trust is the foundation of healthy and functioning teams. Absence of trust leads to fear of conflict preventing open, honest, and transparent dialogue to take place (Lencioni, 2012).

Leading school districts has become increasingly challenging, given the circumstances created by the pandemic. Leading from the heart, establishing and maintaining trust, connecting with, and inspiring and empowering all stakeholders, fall within the superintendent's role. Additionally, Crawford (2009) stated that establishing connections is directly related to emotions. The notion that relationships with all stakeholders, as stated by Sergiovani (1992), are at the heart of education, brings emphasis to leadership from the heart. All of the changes and turbulence in the world require leadership that inspires and encourages understanding, compassion, empathy, and kindness. The world requires leaders who are willing to be vulnerable and lead from the heart. In times of change and transition, it is critical, to have transformational leaders

who can involve and motivate team members (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2010). Such leaders inspire trust and generate energy and enthusiasm to move toward a shared vision. As explained by Bryk and Schneider (2002), interactions that are grounded in relationships strengthen, trust, and lead organizations to success.

As stated by Wright (2019), trust is a key element in establishing and strengthening relationships. A statement by Confucius, explained by Luhmann (2018), referred to three resources rulers need: weapons, food and trust, which must be maintained at all cost. Mark Crowley's (2011) lead from the heart theoretical framework was created based on the author's 20-plus years of experience in leadership and management roles. In his work, Crowley shared the Latin base for the word "emotional," which means "to move" (p. 18). Based on this, to move people, their feelings need to be taken into consideration. With the emphasis on feelings, Crowley developed the four principles of leadership from the heart: building a highly engaged team, connecting on a personal level, maximizing employee potential, and valuing and honoring achievements to accomplish extraordinary results. These variables establish the foundation for leadership from the heart. Heart leadership creates a safety net for open and honest communication.

Statement of the Research Problem

According to Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2002), establishing relationships across the organization is an essential component of effective leadership. Such relationships are grounded in trust, and lack of trust can lead to suspicion, insecurity, and misinterpretations (Kowalski, 2006). As stated by Lencioni (2012), lack of trust leads to

fear of conflict and inability to have open and transparent dialogue. Furthermore, an organization without trust is vulnerable to destruction (Covey & Merrill, 2006).

While leadership has been defined in many different ways, Hackman and Johnson (2013) identified four recurring themes and stated that leadership is about the behaviors of the leaders, who they are, how they act, and the manner in which they interact with others. In the same way, good leaders do not try to gain more followers; instead, they nurture and lift up other leaders (Williams, 2005). Such leaders as stated by Williams (2005), create supportive environments by providing feedback, acknowledging and showing appreciation, and taking risks.

There are 1,024 public school districts in California of which 346 are unified school districts serving just over a quarter million students led by superintendents (Cal. Educ. Code § 35035, n.d.; CDE, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). Superintendents lead their districts under the direction of their governing boards and are in the position to establish norms and protocols in maximizing harmony and productivity (Goleman et al., 2002). Their role is the most influential in public education (Kowalski, 2006).

The public nature of the superintendent position makes them perfect targets and sources for blame and dissatisfaction. Waters and Marzano (2006) identified a positive correlation between superintendency longevity and student success pointing out the critical role of school boards in superintendent selection. According to Kowalski and Brunner (2011), the relationship between a superintendent and the school board is the foundation for district success. Moreover, Hess and Meeks (2010) stated that for the superintendent and school board relationship to be productive, it needs to have mutual trust.

For over 200 years, public education has been part of American culture, yet only recently the link between the work of school board and student achievement was examined (Hess & Meeks, 2010). Based on the ideas of Hess and Meeks (2010), one third of American public school students will not read at the levels needed for comprehension of textbooks in intermediate and secondary level. Additionally, Hess and Meeks pointed out the critical role school boards play in leadership of school districts and its impact on conditions that support productivity. Heart-led superintendent leaders inspire trust and generate energy and enthusiasm to move toward a shared vision. As explained by Bryk and Schneider (2002), interactions that are grounded in relationships strengthen trust and lead organizations to success.

The framework for this study, lead from the heart by Mark C. Crowley (2011), is based on heart-led leadership. Crowley developed the four principles of leading from the heart: building a highly engaged team, connecting on personal level, maximizing employee potential, and valuing and honoring achievements to accomplish extraordinary results to establish the foundation for leadership from the heart.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe how exemplary K-12 school district superintendents lead from the heart using Mark Crowley's (2011) four principles (building a highly engaged team, connecting on a personal level, maximizing employee potential, and valuing and honoring achievements) to accomplish extraordinary results in their organizations.

Research Questions

1. How do K-12 school district superintendents lead from the heart to accomplish extraordinary results by building a highly engaged team?
2. How do K-12 school district superintendents lead from the heart to accomplish extraordinary results by connecting on a personal level?
3. How do K-12 school district superintendents lead from the heart to accomplish extraordinary results by maximizing employee potential?
4. How do K-12 school district superintendents lead from the heart to accomplish extraordinary results by valuing and honoring achievements?

Significance of the Problem

Transforming organizations and individuals requires leadership that engages the head and the heart (Seijts & O'Farrell, 2003). Leadership concepts that have focused on logical influences to change behavior need to focus on helping people recognize the problems, discover solutions, and realize progress, triggering emotions, which leads to changes in behavior (Seijts & O'Farrell, 2003). Beginning in the mid-1980s, the public's rising demand on the school system to increase students' academic performance was followed by critical observation of superintendents and school boards and the link to school effectiveness. School district leadership has been found to have a significant (.24 positive) correlation to student achievement; meaning, effective leadership positively affects student achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Similarly, findings by Waters and Marzano (2006) suggested that practicing key leadership responsibilities of the school board and superintendents including relationship with schools can contribute to student success. According to Lamb (2018), school board dysfunction leads to decline in

student achievement. A 2013 Gallup report stated that only 26% of Americans have a great deal of faith in public schools (Lamb, 2018). Although public education has been criticized over the last few decades, most Americans believe that better schools contribute to a better society (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011).

The school district superintendent position was created in the mid-1800s in Buffalo, New York, and Louisville, Kentucky (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011). The role of superintendents has become increasingly challenging and complex evolving from district manager to a multilayered leadership role (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Moreover, modern-day superintendents must have the knowledge to navigate in political, financial, managerial and educational leadership (Weiss, Templeton, Thompson, & Tremont, 2014). Superintendents must also have knowledge of curriculum and instruction and effective communication skills as well as patience and great listening skills (Weiss et al., 2014).

The first school board was established in Dorchester, Massachusetts, around 1645 (Walser, 2009). The school board trustees work in collaboration with the superintendent to establish goals and objectives developed to support student learning and to represent beliefs, priorities, and values of the community (Gore, 2016). School boards are responsible for multimillion dollar budgets, as well as deciding on curriculum and instructional practices, and in California are mandated to follow the Brown Act requirements.

The relationship between the superintendent and school board is a constant and evolving topic as stated by Kowalski and Brunner (2011). Studies such as the *Lighthouse Inquiry* as highlighted by Lamb (2018) identified a correlation between student success

and the level of trust among superintendents and the school board. Moreover, according to Houston and Bryant (1997), the relationship between a superintendent and the school board provides a framework for cooperation among students, district staff, families, and the community. School board and superintendents' ability to establish trust with all stakeholders is critical in maintaining fiscal solvency and sustainability of school districts (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Establishing trust is the foundation for effective teamwork (Lencioni, 2012). Moreover, the work of Crowley (2011) focuses on heart-led leadership abilities of leaders in establishing trust. The nature of the superintendent and school board requires trust, which is a conduit to the success of the organization (Gore, 2016). Establishing trust has a significant impact on the board-staff relationship as stated by Covey et al. (2012). It is estimated that a 10% growth in trust has the equivalent of a 30% pay raise (Helliwell & Huang, 2010).

Educational leadership studies have focused on decision-making process, style, compliance, and performance in achieving results (Sergiovanni, 1992). Moreover, Sergiovanni (1992) stated that leadership fails because it is viewed as a behavior and not an action, separating the hand and heart of leadership. Crowley's (2011) four principles (building a highly engaged team, connecting on a personal level, maximizing employee potential, and valuing and honoring achievements) to accomplish extraordinary results in their organizations, connects to the heart providing a framework for establishing trust. The literature review identifies leadership styles and the importance of leadership from the heart in building relationships and establishing trust. However, the literature does not directly identify the behaviors superintendents exhibit in building trust within their districts. This study expands on the importance of establishing relationships founded in

trust. The study further aims to provide additional support to address the gap in research by providing data on exemplary unified school district superintendents who lead from the heart, utilizing Crowley's (2011) four principles in achieving extraordinary results. The findings will support new and aspiring superintendents to engage the heart in leadership as they work with their school board in setting the direction for their district. Moreover, the findings will provide a framework for professional training opportunities.

Definitions

The creation of definitions provided in this section was a collaborative effort by the heart thematic dissertation team. Operational definitions provide clarity of the terms in the study.

Building a highly engaged team. Building a highly engaged team is using strategies that help people become enthusiastically invested in and dedicated to work they believe is significant, meaningful, and challenging, where relationships are built on emotional connection and shared vision, and where values and commitment are based on personal strengths and interests aligned with organizational goals (Crowley, 2011; George & Stevenson, 1988; Rees, Alfes, & Gatenby, 2013; Senge, Lichtenstein, & Kaeufer, 2007).

Connecting on a personal level. Connecting on a personal level is seeing and acting on behalf of others and authentically communicating with the intention of adding values driven by humility, concern, and love (B. Brown, 2015; Crowley, 2011; Hayward, 2015; Maxwell, 2010).

Maximizing employee potential. Maximizing employee potential is igniting emotional drivers by promoting human well-being while proactively strengthening,

teaching, and building people toward high achievement (Burnett & Lisk, 2019; Crowley, 2011).

Valuing and honoring achievements. Valuing and honoring achievements is praising, acknowledging, recognizing, and appreciating positive accomplishments as an expression of care through monetary and/or nonmonetary rewards, which may lead to increased job satisfaction (Brun & Dugas, 2008; Crowley, 2011; Posamentier, 2008; Tessema, Ready, & Embaye, 2013).

Exemplary—operational definition. Exemplary leaders are defined as those who are set apart from their peers by demonstrating care for people in the organization and have a minimum of 3 years of experience as a superintendent. Additionally, exemplary superintendents must exhibit at least two of the following criteria:

1. Evidence of extraordinary results
2. Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings
3. Recognition by peers
4. Membership in professional association in their field

Exemplary—theoretical definition. Exemplary refers to one who is set apart from peers based on manners, behavior, and principles (Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin, 2014).

Extraordinary results. Extraordinary results are those accomplishments that are remarkable, surprising, exceptional, and that go beyond what is usually expected (O'Reilly & Pfeffer, 2000).

Superintendents. A superintendent is the CEO and is ultimately responsible for establishing expectations and structures for all departments within a school district (Benzel & Hoover, 2015).

Caring leadership. Caring leadership is showing kindness, empathy, and understanding that builds relationships that bring people together around a common goal. Caring leaders demonstrate warmth and genuine interest in people and treat others with mutual acceptance and respect (Kautz, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Tabor, Madison, Marler, & Kellermanns, 2020; Tomkins & Simpson, 2013).

Delimitations

The criteria for this study included eight exemplary K-12 school district superintendents who demonstrate at least four of the following criteria; the first three are required:

1. Evidence of caring for people in the organization
2. A minimum of 3 years of experience as a superintendent
3. Evidence of extraordinary results
4. Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings
5. Recognition by peers
6. Membership in a professional association in their field

Caring leadership is showing kindness, empathy, and understanding that builds relationships that bring people together around a common goal. Caring leaders demonstrate warmth, genuine interest in people and treat others with mutual acceptance

and respect (Kautz, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Tabor et al., 2020; Tomkins & Simpson, 2013).

Organization of the Study

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to identify and describe heart-led leadership strategies of exemplary unified school district superintendents in Southern California who establish trust using Crowley's (2011) four principles of leading from the heart. The study is organized into five chapters, references, and appendices. Chapter I provided introductions, background of the study, brief theoretical foundations and framework, research problem, and significance of the problem. Chapter II is an extensive review of the literature including leadership styles aimed to establish a foundation of trust. Chapter III describes the research design, methodology, population, sample, data collection, and the instruments used for data collection. Chapter IV provides the data analysis of the findings of the study. Lastly, Chapter V provides a conclusion of the study, significant findings, and future research recommendations.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter II provides a broad overview of the literature and is organized into five sections. The first section is an overview and evolution of leadership as well as stating the importance of heart-led leadership. The second section provides theoretical foundations and the framework. Section 3 presents Crowley's (2011) heart-led leadership principles: building a highly engaged team, connecting on a personal level, maximizing employee potential, and valuing and honoring achievements. Section 4 describes the role of the superintendent as the school district leader. The last section provides the chapter summary and recommendations for further research.

The Evolution of Leadership

In the last 100 years, as stated by Antonakis and Day (2018), research on leadership has led to a complexity and diversity of knowledge, making it one of the most examined phenomena among social scientists. According to Northouse (2019), the 1900s marked the beginning of research investigations into the role of leaders and their influence on followers. Northouse (2014) described leadership as a complex concept aiming to define an individual's ability to inspire followers toward a shared vision. The more traditional model of control and centralization of power in the early 1900s contributed to a vertical hierarchy of leadership (Meyer, 1979). This vertical style of leadership is established by controlling and intimidating followers, which may yield quick results but will create feelings of resentment (Goleman et al., 2002). By the late 1900s, noted Hallinger (2010), the research focus was shifted to align with evolving trends such as shared leadership.

Bennis and Nannus (1985) argued that thousands of pages on leadership have failed to provide a clear distinction between what distinguishes leaders from nonleaders. The reason for lack of distinction explained by Rost (1991) is that most of the research on leadership has focused on peripheral elements and content and not on the essence of leadership, which is about relationships. According to Ciulla (2014), some people become leaders because they possess talents, charisma, job title or family status, while others may stumble into the role. Regardless of how leaders arrive at their leadership role, they need followers (Ciulla, 2014). Ultimately, followers invest effort, resources, knowledge, and skills to follow a leader who would lead them to achieve their desired outcomes (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2010; Crowley, 2011; Fullan, 2001; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Stewart, 2006).

According to Bass (1990), the 20th century was the beginning of the scientific study of leadership. Earlier leadership models did not address the evolving needs of employees (Crowley, 2011; Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011). The work of Groysberg and Slind (2012) indicated the shift in organizational structures from a hierarchical model to an engagement model of employees collaborating and communicating from all levels. Similarly, Vignesh (2020) explained the key advantages of using a collaborative leadership style in the workplace. The seven key advantages to the collaborative leadership style identified by Vignesh included the following: a more welcoming workplace to new employees, stronger bond between employees, less time spent leading, balanced decision-making process, higher morale, boost in creativity and innovation, and an evenly distributed workload.

Moreover, a model and theory referred to as Vroom-Yetton-Jago, developed in the 1980s, emphasizes that there is no one leadership approach appropriate for every scenario (Vignesh, 2020). The Vroom-Yetton-Jago model offers a situational approach to decision making. For example, if speed is critical to decision making, an autocratic process is warranted. When collaboration is desired, a democratic process is warranted (Vignesh, 2020).

An organization's enhanced performance and ability to achieve strategic objectives relies on its leadership (Antonakis & Day, 2018). Of equal importance is the leader's ability to powerfully articulate the vision of the organization through carefully chosen words that also energize its followers (Conger, 1991). Moreover, effective leaders share stories and metaphors to create enthusiasm and energy (Conger, 1991). Such leaders value innovation while creating opportunities for their employees to engage as stakeholders in the organization's success (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Crowley (2011) further highlighted the importance of establishing personal connections in fostering a cohesive and collaborative organizational culture. A brighter future for organizations depends on leaders who inspire action, communicate information, and establish a high level of engagement at all levels (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2010; Crowley, 2011; Groysberg & Slind, 2012; Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

Leadership in Action

According to William Rothwell (2009), author of *The Manager's Guide to Maximizing Employee Potential* pointed out that a leader is anyone who can influence others to recognize their full potential. Leaders set the tone for their organizations and practice values with a focus on achieving results (Lencioni, 2012). Moreover, leaders

establish goals, norms, and protocols and develop direction-setting documents by articulating mission and vision statements to guide followers toward desired outcomes (Northouse, 2019). Effective leaders not only set goals but also provide support to create action plans and road maps for followers to achieve results (McKee, Boyatzis, & Johnston, 2008). The work of Kouzes and Posner (2017) has focused on interviewing and surveying thousands of people in an effort to identify what leaders do to make extraordinary things happen in their organizations. Leaders needed to get to know their constituents if they had any hope of empowering and inspiring them. Once a leader had achieved this knowledge, then it became possible for an organization to move toward a shared vision (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Leadership, as Kouzes and Posner further explained, is a conversation and not a speech. Burns (2004) reflects similar thinking when describing leadership as a relationship between leader and followers where they elevate each other. Hollander (1980) confirmed this thinking by coming to the conclusion that the concept of leadership is incomplete without attention to followers.

The concept of leadership is constantly evolving to meet the changing needs of individuals and organizations (Stewart, 2006). Such changes require 21st-century leaders to leverage diversity in establishing long-range sustainable strategies (Moua, 2011; Northouse, 2019). A leader's ability to foster a culture of inclusiveness leads to alignment between goals and actions (Northouse, 2019). Equally critical is a leader's state of mindfulness about manners and ability to manage public behavior (Campbell & Fullan, 2019).

Leadership revolves around public displays of intense personal interactions that can be emotionally charged (Harris, 2004). Harris (2004) noted that such a perspective

on leadership calls for a shift from the traditional cognitive state to a specific emphasis on individual perspectives connecting the inner emotional leadership perspective.

According to Harris, leaders need to be aware of three heart conditions that are necessary in any change process:

1. The first is emotional fitness which refers to establishing a climate of trust essential to foster engagement and ownership.
2. The second heart condition is defined as emotional literacy and depth, creating time and space to develop self-esteem and nurture positive relationships. The goal of emotional literacy is to enhance communication and relationships and build self-reflection into the fabric of organizational culture.
3. The first and second heart condition combine to create the third condition of emotional transformation.

Leadership Is the Engagement of the Heart

The *Heart's Code* by Paul Pearsall (1999) provides a deeper dive into cellular memories and their role in the mind and body connection. Pearsall compiled stories and research findings to support the notion that leaders cannot be as effective if they only rely on their brain and neglect to establish emotional connections with their constituents. The brain has been operating in its own way, creating a complex, fast-paced and intense world (Pearsall, 1999). The brain-led world, according to Pearsall, is a contributing factor to failing hearts, unhealthy cells, and weak immune systems. Prior to the development of the brain, the power of the heart was known by human species; however, technological innovations and global communications have led to the destruction of the heart (Pearsall, 1999). The power of the heart or love energy was highlighted by Albert Einstein as the

strongest force to heal the world (Pearsall, 1999). Furthermore, love energy travels 186,000 miles per second, faster than the speed of light as stated by Pearsall. This may explain why humans make emotional decisions and turn to strategy and logic to support them, because they feel before we think (Lamb, 2018).

The author of “Leading by Heart,” Belinda Harris (2004), has described leadership as a relationship process of exchanging emotions. As noted by Harris, emotions and cognition are two equally important elements in impeding leadership capability. However, the power of emotions and cognition remains untapped as contemporary literature on leadership continues to keep the two elements separate (Harris, 2004). Organizations do not place value on emotions and emotional connections and tend to treat them as instrumental means toward the end goals (Harris, 2004).

In *Leadership Is an Affair of the Heart*, Rick DuFour (2004) explained that humans have a few basic needs: the need to achieve, a sense of belonging, and a desire to make a difference. DuFour further noted that leaders who are successful in achieving results appeal not only to the bottom line but also to the heart of followers. In the same way Houston (2001) shared that leadership from the heart focuses on emotions resulting from behaviors and actions. According to Houston, affective leaders are concerned about the heart and the soul of organizations and further recognize and value the impact of their actions on the emotions of their followers. Moreover, Sergiovanni (1992) referred to the internal world of leaders, which goes beyond personal values and beliefs and lays the foundation for reality. Similarly, the work of Bolman and Deal (1995) reflected the importance of the heart of leaders being the heart of leadership.

The Trust Factor

An essential component of every human relationship is trust (Bowman, 2014). Trust is not established overnight, is difficult to build and easy to destroy (Lamb, 2018). In *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, Patrick Lencioni (2012) identified trust as the foundation for achieving results. The authors of *Becoming A Resonant Leader*, McKee et al. (2008) highlighted trust as a key element of effective leadership. Similarly, Simon Sinek (2009) noted that trust is an integral component of true leadership. Sinek further explained that trust is a blend of integrity, honesty, and accountability. In *Meaning-Centered Leadership*, authors Barbara Bartels and Edward Jackson (2021) shared their research findings confirming that trust is an essential component for establishing healthy relationships. Moreover, trust has been referred to as the glue that holds teams together (Bartels & Jackson, 2021).

Establishing trust requires time and effort in connecting on human level (Crowley, 2011). Diaz-Saenz (2011) highlighted trust as the most important component of the employer-employee relationship. Covey and Merrill (2006) defined trust as confidence and further explained that mistrust leads to suspicion. Absence of trust leads to fear of conflict and avoidance of dialogue (Lencioni, 2012). Trust creates a psychologically safe environment for conversations and a solid structure for healthy relationships (Covey & Merrill, 2006). Moreover, Harris (2004) highlighted the importance of trust in establishing and sustaining cultural change.

Conversational Intelligence by Judith Glaser (2016) suggested five steps for leaders to build trust with their teams:

- The first step is to be present, transparent, and focus on building relationships.
- The second step is to help team members identify their position within the organization. This step, noted Glaser (2016) enhances relationships and eliminates any ambiguity about belonging to the team.
- The third step is to build a communication protocol that is open, honest, and transparent.
- The fourth step recommended by Glaser (2016) is to create opportunities for engagement and move from monologue to dialogue.
- The fifth and final recommended step is to build trust by practicing honesty.

Trust is the foundation for all engagements and a necessity for all relationships (Covey & Merrill, 2006; Lencioni, 2012; Bartels & Jackson, 2021). Moreover, leaders must always have trust in mind, starting with honesty in words and consistent with action (Bartels & Jackson, 2021). Absence of trust, as noted by Lencioni (2012), leads to fear of conflict and the lack of healthy conflict impacts desired outcomes (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Five dysfunctions of a team. From The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: Team Assessment, by P. Lencioni, 2012, p. 188. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Theoretical Foundations

Leadership Philosophy

The complexity of leadership and various models defined by research in the past 100 years can be an intimidating venture (Antonakis & Day, 2018). Further complicating the task has been the considerable volume and number of false starts, incremental theoretical advances, and contradictory findings as shared by Antonakis and Day (2018). Additionally, while the position of leadership is easy to identify, defining it precisely is challenging (Antonakis & Day, 2018).

Various scholars, philosophers, and researchers have attempted to understand how leaders lead (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Goleman et al., 2002; Hackman & Johnson, 2013; Higgs, 2003; Hollander, 1980). Joseph Rost (1991) identified 221 leadership definitions from various publications between the years 1900 and 1990. That number, according to Hackman and Jackson (2013), has doubled since 1990. Regardless of various definitions, Hackman and Jackson discovered four recurring themes in leadership:

- Who is the leader?
- What does the leader do?
- How does the leader act?
- How does the leader work with others?

Authentic leadership. The idea of authenticity and being true to oneself has gained noticeable momentum in modern times (Novicevic, Harvey, Ronald, & Brown-Redford, 2006). The ancient Greek attributed authenticity to leaders who assumed the role (Novicevic et al., 2006). Today's authentic leaders, described by Novicevic et al. (2006), strive to find a balance between personal freedom and communal obligations.

The philosophical definition of authenticity has been linked to ethics and virtues while the psychological articulation has to do with individual traits and identities (Novicevic et al., 2006). Researchers argue that elements of authentic leadership such as self-regulation and strong connections are developed over time (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; George, 2003, 2010; Lloyd-Walker & Walker, 2011).

According to George (2003; George et al., 2007), authentic leaders have a genuine desire to serve others. Such leaders understand their purpose and have strong values (George, 2003). Moreover, authentic leaders have the ability to establish and strengthen trusting relationships (George, 2003). Most importantly, as noted by George (2003), authentic leaders act from the heart as seen Figure 2.

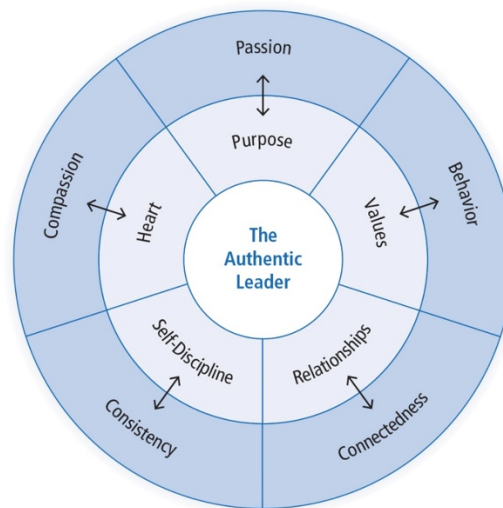


Figure 2. Practical approaches to authentic leadership. From *Authentic Leadership: Rediscovering the Secrets to Creating Lasting Value*, by B. George, 2003. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

While strong leadership has always been in constant demand, turbulent times require authentic leadership's strategic planning for desired outcomes (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Moreover, authentic leaders have a deep understanding of their true self and are

driven by their values, which guide them to do the right thing for their followers (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). In the same way, authentic leaders are aware of their vulnerabilities and are capable of openly discussing them (Avolio, 1999). Avolio (1999) described such leaders as leading from the front, particularly when there is risk involved. They lead with enthusiasm and confidence, generate hope, and inspire action (Avolio, 1999). Moreover, Luthans and Avolio (2003) proposed that confidence, hope, resiliency, and optimism are products of a process of positive self-development initiated in early childhood and shaped by life experiences and culture (see Figure 3).

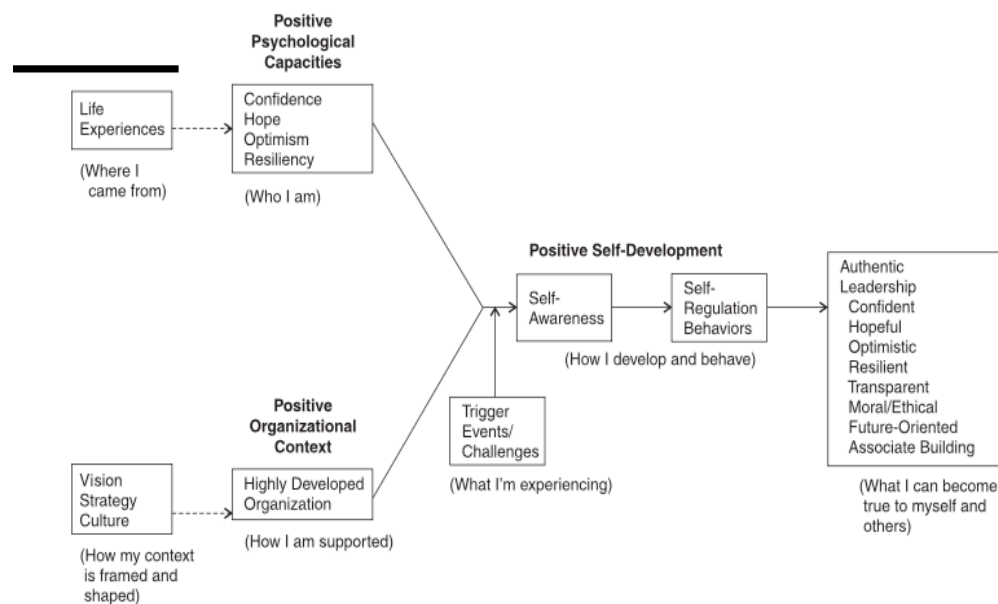


Figure 3. Authentic leadership development model. From “Authentic leadership development,” by F. Luthans & B. J. Avolio, 2003, p. 251, in K. S. Cameron, J. E. Dutton, & R. E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive Organizational Scholarship*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.

Servant leadership. The work of Burns (1978) and Greenleaf (1977) has brought recognition to the concept of servant leadership and has only gained more interest prior to the 2000s (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). The reason for lack of research in

servant leadership, as stated by Sendjaya and Sarros (2002), is that the concept of being a servant and leader has been historically contradictory. Servant leadership is reflective and relies on the power of invitation (Ferch & Spears, 2011). Ferch and Spears (2011) defined a powerful invitation as one that requires people to leave their personal interests at home and encourages people to bring their imaginations to the workplace, which opens doors to possibilities and creates an alternative future. Such an invitation provides the leader traction and leverage with followers (Ferch & Spears, 2011).

Spears's (1995) reflections on Robert Greenleaf's writings have led him to identify characteristics of servant leaders to include awareness, empathy, listening, healing, and building people and communities. Greenleaf's work on the influences of servant leadership has been referenced by many scholars, such as Drucker (1995a, 1995b), Senge (1997), Covey (2006), Keith (2015), and Blanchard (2018), as distinguishable as a way of life and not merely another management technique. Keith (2015) noted that the source of motivation for servant leaders is not to earn appreciation for their work from others. He stated that it is derived from a sense of satisfaction and meaning from serving others (Keith, 2015). Such sense of meaningfulness serves as an intrinsic motivator for servant leaders. According to Keith, people are less likely to burn out, more productive, innovative, committed, and psychologically healthier when they are intrinsically motivated.

Transformational leadership. More than 25 years ago, the concept of transformational leadership was introduced by James MacGregor Burns (Bass & Riggio, 2006). According to Diaz-Saenz (2011), transformational leadership has been the single most studied style of leadership over the past 30 years. The focus of transformational

leadership is on relationships, building trust, reflective and meaningful dialogue, and relational caring (Turkel, 2014). Transformational leaders create emotional connections and inspire followers toward a shared higher purpose (Diaz-Saenz, 2011). Moreover, such leaders serve as role models and are admired, trusted, and respected by their followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Contrary to the ideas of transactional leadership, transformational leadership's emphasis is on intrinsic motivation (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Burns (1978) defined leadership processes as transactional where there is an exchange of something of value, and transformational where the leader inspires the followers to take action. Based on Bass's (1985) model, transactional leaders provide rewards in exchange for followers' efforts. In contrast, transformational leaders encourage and motivate followers to enhance organizational performance toward a common vision (Bass, 1985). Moreover, as shared by Ackerman Anderson and Anderson (2010), transformational leaders' inspirational behaviors can lead to extraordinary outcomes. Tucker and Russell (2004) affirmed a similar conclusion when defining transformational leaders as those who establish a foundation of trust as a means of communicating and defining the organizational direction while gaining support for intended shared goals, values, and the organizational mission and vision.

The work of Ackerman Anderson and Anderson (2010) revealed that transformational change requires specific leadership skills to change culture by developing employees to reach their fullest potential. A change-embracing culture establishes safe environments for workers to understand their role and its impact on the workplace within the organization (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2010). Transformational leaders affect change in the workplace by engaging workers and

interacting with them (Kelly & MacDonald, 2019). According to Kelly and MacDonald (2019), such leaders promote communications upward and downward to promote group collaborations toward positive outcomes. In the same way, internal communication capabilities of transformational leaders foster employee trust during organizational change (Yue, Men & Ferguson, 2019). Cultivating trusting relationships with employees is likely to foster welcoming attitudes toward, and in support of the change (Yue, Men, & Ferguson, 2019).

Heart-led leadership. Leadership theories and models have changed dramatically in the last century. While Burns (1978) was one of the first to differentiate transactional and transformational leadership, scholars such as Sergiovanni (1992), Covey (1994), Forbes (1998), Heifetz and Linsky (2002), Ho (2004), Kouzes and Posner (2007, 2017), Crowley (2011) and Ciulla (2014) have begun to include an emphasis on heart-led leadership.

Crowley (2011) noted that when the heart is engaged, individuals feel cared for and are more likely to invest great effort and be more positively productive in the workplace. According to Kouzes and Posner (2017), leaders can encourage the heart by inspiring action and elevating employees to higher levels of performance, leading to employee satisfaction and positive outcomes for the organization.

Theoretical Framework of Heart-Led Leadership

In *Lead From the Heart*, Mark Crowley (2011) identified four principles of heart-led leadership for the 21st century. The 14 peer researchers in this thematic study utilized the theoretical framework that Crowley established when he identified these four principles of heart-led leadership. Crowley believed that employee engagement is an

affair of the heart, and he believed that leaders who used these four principles could accomplish extraordinary results in their organizations. The four principles of heart-led leadership are building a highly engaged team, connecting on a personal level, maximizing employee potential, and valuing and honoring achievements.

Principles of Heart-Led Leadership

The common theme throughout *Lead From the Heart* is the emphasis on establishing trust by connecting to employees and building relationships. Based on a 2010 *Fortune Magazine*'s deeper dive into what makes top companies shine, Crowley (2011) noted five common traits shared by top companies:

- Employees are the heart of the organization; therefore, the emphasis is on worker satisfaction and retention.
- The organization is committed to providing development and mentoring opportunities to employees.
- The organization has established a culture of celebrations.
- Teamwork and collaborative efforts are reinforced.
- The impact of individual and team achievements on organizational outcomes is communicated.

Crowley's (2011) analysis of the top 100 most desirable workplaces identified during the latter part of the 21st century included the Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts. The Four Seasons' CEO and founder, Isadore Sharp, believed that personal service could not be enforced as a policy, preferring to believe that personal service must be woven into the culture of the organization (Crowley, 2011). Similarly, another Fortune top organization to work for, Wegman's Food Market, another Fortune Top 100 pick, has a

philosophy that company goals can only be achieved if the needs of the workers are met (Crowley, 2011).

The authors of *The Simple Truths of Service*, Ken Blanchard and Barbara Glantz (2017) highlighted 10 simple truths of service. The book describes the actions of a grocery employee named Johnny who wrote and distributed “thought of the day” messages to all the store’s customers. Johnny’s actions illustrated the 10th and final truth enumerated by the Blanchard and Glantz book perfectly about how great service comes from the heart. The heart of each employee, as explained by Blanchard and Glantz (2017), is the core of great service. Similarly, great service to others does not exist if the desire to serve does not come from the heart (Blanchard & Glantz, 2017).

Build a Highly Engaged Team

For any organization to achieve its greatest potential, the energy of employees must be unleashed (Keith, 2015). According to Google’s Project Aristotle (Martini, 2018), there are five key elements needed to establish successful teams. The first key element describes a psychologically safe environment in which team members are encouraged to practice being vulnerable with one another by speaking up, sharing ideas, voicing concerns, and asking questions (Martini, 2018). The second key element of highly successful teams is dependability, where team members can depend on each other to get tasks done in a timely manner. Structure and clarity is the third key element identified in Google’s Project Aristotle. The structure and clarity element refers to the team members having clarity on roles, responsibilities, goals, and plans of the organization. Performing work that is personally meaningful to team members was identified as the fourth key element of highly successful teams. Impact of work was

noted as the fifth and final key element, which highlighted team members' desire of performing work that matters and creates change (see Figure 4).



Figure 4. Google Project Aristotle. From *Lessons for Diversity and Inclusion From Google's Project Aristotle*, by P. Martini, 2018, slide 10 (<https://www.astronomy.ohio-state.edu/martini.10/2018-11-13-djc.pdf>).

Bartels and Jackson (2021) noted that the search for meaning has been a human desire and pursuit for over 2000 years. This search began with Aristotle claiming that happiness is discovered in one's work (Bartels & Jackson, 2021). Moreover, the authors highlighted Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, and many recent authors and psychologists' philosophy that meaningful work can lead to a more profound sense of purpose (Bartels & Jackson, 2021). The idea that bringing meaning into the workplace can lead to healthier, happier, and fulfilled lives inspired Bartels and Jackson to dive deeper into meaning-centered leadership practices.

As the quest for meaning continues for both individuals and organizations, it is imperative to examine current employee satisfaction data and corresponding reports.

Bartels and Jackson (2021) shared the 2018 Gallup *State of the American Workplace* report, based on about 200,000 employees worldwide. The report revealed that 85 percent of workers worldwide, feel disengaged at work (Bartels & Jackson, 2021). Moreover, disengagement in the workplace leads to workers feeling unappreciated, unmotivated, anxious, and stressed resulting in absenteeism (Bartels & Jackson, 2021). Employee absenteeism impacts the entire team's workload and creates financial implications for the organization (Bartels & Jackson, 2021). Similar to the concepts on meaning-centered leadership by Bartels and Jackson, Martini's (2018) exploration of Project Aristotle identified meaning of work as the fourth element of establishing and strengthening engagement.

The willingness to be emotionally available and act with emotional maturity is evident in the 13th-century Persian poet and philosopher, Jalal ad-Din Rumi's quote, "Everyone has been made for some particular work and the desire for that work has been put in every heart" (Crowley, 2011, p. 61). An employee's capability and proficiency at their job is no assurance that they will be happy and content at their job. The problem exists in a work environment that ignores the employee's emotional needs. Crowley (2011) stated that there is a noticeable difference in the quality of work when the heart is engaged. Leaders must be mindful of the impact that a new hire has on the performance of established teams in any workplace. Moreover, further emphasis must be placed on seeking out and hiring workers who are emotionally available and willing to engage at a level that demonstrates their emotional availability and maturity (Crowley, 2011). Crowley further emphasized the importance of hiring people who are connected to and willing to bring their hearts into their work. The awareness of the heart and its potential

energy connects people to their work, to their colleagues, and to the organization (Crowley, 2011).

Leaders frequently make the mistake of hiring people who share their sensibilities and personality type (Crowley, 2011). Crowley (2011) suggested that leaders identify top performers who share similar positions to one another and determine the traits in each person that leads them to excel in those positions. Successful leaders demonstrate an ability to recognize the strength of their workers as well as provide opportunities to further nurture and develop them in their positions (Crowley, 2011). Crowley further stated that seeking ambitious team members who demonstrate a winning attitude builds momentum and contributes to an enjoyable and desirable work environment for the team.

Another element to creating a highly engaged team depends on interviewing with purpose and intentionality (Crowley, 2011). Crowley (2011) offered specific interview questions to identify the right fit. These questions focus on identifying a potential hire's greatest accomplishments as well as asking about how a potential hire would initiate or create an action plan for when goals are not accomplished. Crowley further suggested that job interview questions need to specifically identify a candidate's ambition and desire to grow and persistence and ability to overcome challenges. Such questions explore a candidate's goal-setting mindset as well as their ability to manage obstacles (Crowley, 2011). A few interview example questions recommended by Crowley are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Suggested Interview Questions by Crowley (2011)

Interview question	Candidate's identification of key traits
Tell me your greatest accomplishment this year.	
Do you set goals for yourself?	
What are some of your immediate, short- and long-term goals?	Ambition and desire to grow
How do you go about improving yourself?	
What happens when you don't reach a goal you set for yourself?	
Tell me about the most difficult challenge you have experienced.	Persistence and ability to overcome obstacles
How did you overcome the challenge?	
What do you enjoy about your current work?	
Tell me about a work experience when you were happiest.	Job fit

An additional element to creating a highly engaged team includes involving other members of the team in the new hire process, as stated by Crowley (2011). Such involvement creates a further chance of success in the hiring process as well as in the onboarding stage (Crowley, 2011). Crowley stated that leaders are often anxious to fill vacancies quickly and may sacrifice the important element of involving team members in the search and selection process. A leader's ability to remain patient in this process is rewarded by setting people up for personal and organizational success.

Engagement has also been identified as the first element in meaning-centered leadership (Bartels & Jackson, 2021). In their research, Bartels and Jackson (2021) stressed the desire of today's workplaces for coaches, not managers. The authors further clarified the components of engagement: trust, care and concern, and open communication with active listening. Bartels and Jackson further described trust as the foundation for all forms of engagement and a necessary ingredient for thriving relationships.

Connect on a Personal Level

Modern-day employees seek greater connection with their leaders (Crowley, 2011). Crowley (2011) explained that the purpose is not intended to develop a deeply personal relationship but rather is intended to gain insight into what motivates and inspires workers. Crowley described that leaders who follow the traditional leadership theory avoid making personal connections with workers because of fear of (a) losing control, (b) inability to implement change, and (c) impacting productivity and damaging bottom line. Crowley suggested that a leader's ability to gain insight into what motivates and inspires workers can lead to organizational success. Moreover, Crowley noted that when people feel like they matter, they are more connected and engaged, which enhances productivity. Similarly, Spears (1995) stressed on the point that letting people know they matter is the greatest lesson he has learned in his life.

According to Crowley (2011), leaders who spend uninterrupted time with each team member are able to accomplish many positive tasks. These individual meetings help both the leader and the team member to discover and define their goals and ambitions, learn about the challenges facing the individual and the team, and determine

the areas where the team member has potential for growth (Crowley, 2011). Establishing personal connections that are grounded in trust provides a clarity of purpose for the meetings and enables the leader to identify where support is needed. Unclear rationale for the meetings can lead to insecurities about job performance and mistrust (Crowley, 2011). Meetings where a personal connection is established provide great opportunities for leaders to express gratitude for every member of the team and what they bring to the team, noted Crowley. Crowley further added that unclear rationale for the meetings, where no such trust or personal connection has been established, can lead to insecurities about job performance and mistrust among team members and mistrust of the team leader.

Maximize Employee Potential

The traditional paradigm of leadership that was followed in the early 2000s, as explained by Crowley (2011), demonstrated no interest in maximizing human potential. People performed tasks as expected and received compensation accordingly. The paradigm's focus was on execution of tasks. There was no attention or effort made in developing people. Any such focus was thought to detract from productivity (Crowley, 2011). Leaders who lead from the heart create opportunities to build and strengthen others and maximize their potential (Crowley, 2011). As a result of heart-led leadership, employees are more loyal and value both their leader's attention and support, which maximizes the employee's potential and enhances their life (Crowley, 2011).

Developing people and maximizing their potential, shared Crowley (2011), benefits leaders and establishes a positive culture where broadening and deepening capabilities are encouraged and celebrated. According to Crowley, people are almost

never maximized to their fullest potential because they are often boxed in and judged without a deeper look into their capabilities. When employees feel guided to progress in their lives, further emphasized Crowley, they feel competent and loyal to their leader and the organization.

According to Crowley (2011), a key element in maximizing employee potential begins with the leader having a clear understanding of each employee's skillset. Crowley noted that testing employees' knowledge is an effective method of identifying areas for growth. Based on the identified areas for growth, leaders can develop a process to further strengthen employees' knowledge and skills through sharing of personal expertise.

Coaching employees to win, is another component of maximizing potential as stated by Crowley (2011). According to Crowley, when people feel valued and cared for, they not only meet but exceed the highest expectations. Exceptional results are achieved when leaders set high expectations and challenge employees to their fullest potential (Crowley, 2011). Moreover, a leader's ability to coach employees in a human way builds capacity to reach highest potential (Crowley, 2011).

Similar to the work of Crowley (2011), The author of *The Manager's Guide to Maximizing Employee Potential*, William Rothwell (2009) identified strategies to maximize employee potential. Rothwell shared that the way leaders feel about their employees is directly correlated to the performance of their employees. The role of management, as defined by Rothwell, requires expert juggling between management's fulfilling the responsibilities of its role while supporting employees and preparing them for the future. Developing strategies to build competencies and recognize and maximize employee potential contributes to the success of organizations (Rothwell, 2009).

Value and Honor Achievements

Focusing on what is working well and valuing achievements and recognition of efforts, unlike financial rewards, affects people's hearts (Crowley, 2011). Leaders who express their care and demonstrate their gratitude by focusing on those achievements make a significant difference in the satisfaction of their workplace. While valuing and honoring achievements are key components of heart-led leadership, noted Crowley (2011), being genuine and consistent are crucial. Inattention to the employees can create mistrust and can cause factions among team members.

According to Crowley (2011), recognition of valued achievements must be done within the structure of the institution so that all team members are aware of what specific performances are consistently recognized. Such consistent and genuine recognition provides everyone in the organization with the opportunity to not only envision themselves and their contributions as enhancing their performance but also to be worthy of similar recognition. It is important to make the recognition of achievements a celebratory ceremony (Crowley, 2011). When leaders value and honor employees publicly, they also inform the entire team what behaviors they value most (Crowley, 2011).

Crowley (2011) provided five specific habits for leaders to develop in valuing and honoring employee achievements:

1. "Give recognition only when it is earned" (p. 123). Author of *Not Everyone Gets A Trophy*, Bruce Tulagan (2016), highlighted the misguided belief of building self-esteem by handing out participation trophies. It is important that employees understand their leader's expectations and standards of excellence and the awareness

- that meeting such expectation will result in recognition. By giving recognition only when it is earned, the meaning of the act of recognition is fully expressed.
2. “Never ration recognition when it is earned” (p. 124). While some leaders find it logical to extend recognition to top a few employees, the objective should be to make every team member more effective. Crowley shared that by acknowledging intermittent accomplishments, employees are motivated to achieve long-term targets. In addition, reserving recognition for unique achievements undermines employees and their performance.
 3. “Ensure all recognition is genuine and sincere” (p. 125). A leader’s genuine expression of appreciation can deeply affect employees. On the contrary, when the leader’s appreciation expression does not come from the heart, the act of recognition has little chance of making an impact on the employee. Genuine recognition reinforces employees’ value and honors contributions.
 4. “Institutionalize recognition” (p. 126). The goal of this habit is for the leader to inform team members of specific performances recognized. It is equally critical to be consistent and deliver on recognition promises. Such recognitions become part of the culture of the organization and are celebrated on a regular, possibly monthly, basis. Leaders can create energy and enthusiasm by calling out employees being recognized to the front of the room, clapping for them, and creating a ceremony. Establishing such ceremonies not only honors those being recognized but also showcases to the entire team what behaviors are most valued.
 5. “Encourage people” (p. 129). The antidote for fear and distrust is encouragement, which creates hope and inspires optimism. According to Crowley, the word

encourage dates back to the 14th century, means to give heart to people, and implies reassurance. When employees are encouraged, they gain hope and find inspirations to persevere and try new approaches. While there are many ways to encourage employees, Crowley suggested personalized handwritten notes to express confidence in them. Encouraging employees positively affects hearts and enhances performance. Some specific phrases suggested by Crowley are designed to inspire greater future effort and commitment.

Role of the Superintendent

According to Kowalski and Brunner (2011), the school superintendent position was created in the mid-1800s in Buffalo, New York, and Louisville, Kentucky. Since its inception, the superintendent position has evolved from curricula implementation and teacher supervision to a much more complex role (Kowalski, 2006). Based on the work of Owen and Ovando (2000), Houston (2001), Kowalski (2006), Wilmore (2008), Kowalski and Brunner (2011), and Wright (2019), as CEOs, school district superintendents are responsible for the overall operations of their district. These operations include curriculum adoption and instruction, senior cabinet and school site leadership, oversight of human resources, policy cycle, responsibility for student safety and discipline, supervision of fiscal management, and ultimate responsibility for public relations. Assuming such high-stakes accountability has increased the complexity of the superintendent role (Schwarz, 2010).

The work of Schwarz (2010) pointed out that absence of trust from top levels of school districts destroys healthy collaborative processes, and such erosion may negatively impact student success. When an organization is founded in trust, efforts are placed on

student success and achievement rather than managing conflict and power struggles (Schwarz, 2010). Moreover, trust is an essential element in maintaining productive work environments (Luhmann, 2018).

Davis Campbell and Michael Fullan (2019), authors of *The Governance Core*, categorized superintendents into three categories: hands-off, proactive damage control, and purposeful. In the hands-off approach, the superintendent assumes no governance responsibility (Campbell & Fullan, 2019). The proactive damage control category of superintendent believe their role is to shield staff from the board and control all interactions between the staff and the board (Campbell & Fullan, 2019). Interestingly, the third category of superintendents who approach governance with a purposeful lens have longer and more productive tenures (Campbell & Fullan, 2019).

Paul Houston (2001), author of “Superintendents for the 21st Century,” described the superintendent role as the one person who is expected to assume the responsibility for all aspects of the organization. The disfunction of the role surfaces when there is misalignment of accountability and authority and when expectations and resources are unmatched (Houston, 2001). There needs to be a shift in how the role is viewed. However, there is critical need for a bigger shift that needs to take place in the hearts and the minds of those who assume the role (Houston, 2001). The leadership role of superintendents is unique and timely as stated by Wilmore (2008). The challenges of the 21st century highlight the need for configuration of the superintendent role to attract transformational leaders who see change as an opportunity for growth (Houston, 2001).

The topic of school district leadership has been popular among scholars and researchers. A research project led by Waters and Marzano (2006) highlighted three

findings on the leadership role of superintendents. The first finding supports a positive correlation of 2.4, a significant relationship, between district leadership and student success. The second finding, according to Waters and Marzano, identified five district-level leadership responsibilities that have a significant correlation with student academic success. The five leadership responsibilities include (a) collaborative goal-setting, (b) non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction, (c) board alignment and support of district goals, (d) monitoring goals for instruction and achievement, and (e) utilizing resources to support instruction and achievement goals (Waters & Marzano, 2006). The third finding in Waters and Marzano's research found a significant correlation of .19 between length of superintendent tenure and student achievement. A surprising finding by Waters and Marzano was that they found a negative correlation between site-based management and student success, indicating that an increase in site-based management is associated with a decline in student success. This surprising finding led to the belief that effective superintendents set clear, non-negotiable goals for instruction and learning and provide support to site-based principals to autonomously design action plans to meet those goals (Waters & Marzano, 2006).

The Superintendent's Role in Establishing Trust

The level of trust modeled by superintendents and boards set the tone for professional interactions within districts (Hoffman, Sabo, Bliss, & Hoy, 1994). Furthermore, as stated by Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004), establishment of trust supports a healthy school culture, enhances parent engagement, and increases community partnerships. Superintendents must gain the trust of key stakeholders early in the development of their collaborative relationship and identify

strategies to nurture it (Cora, 2019). High level of trust, as stated by Leithwood et al. (2004), fosters a positive and collaborative environment for teachers, principals, and parents, which can play a significant role in student learning. Similarly, Marzano and Pickering (2010) noted that effective school leadership positively impacts student achievement across a district.

Developing clear district goals is an essential key responsibility of superintendents (Bird, Dunaway, Hancock, & Wang, 2013). Moreover, establishing district goals has been identified as one of the leadership responsibilities positively correlated with student success (Marzano & Pickering, 2010). Stakeholder trust is strengthened when goals are established and met (Foster & Young, 2004). When goals are not met, as noted by Foster and Young (2004), people lose confidence in leadership.

While smaller school district superintendents have additional responsibilities due to limited resources and staffing, the role of superintendents regardless of the size or location is complex and demanding (Cora, 2019). The complexity of the superintendent's role requires them to collaborate with various stakeholders and cautiously navigate politics of relationships (Cora, 2019). The *Iowa Lighthouse Study*, referenced by Steve Lamb (2018) identified trusting relationships between superintendents and boards to be a contributing factor in leading school districts toward success and achievement for students. Such a trusting relationship has been referred to by Kowalski and Brunner (2011), as a foundational building block for success.

The Need for Further Research in Leadership From the Heart

Business writers, such as Peter Drucker, Jim Collins, and Jack Welch, have devoted considerable time to the study of leadership (Stewart, 2006). The examination of

all facets of leadership by well-known scholars including Sergiovanni (1992), Covey (1994), Forbes (1998), Heifetz and Linsky (2002), Ho (2004), Blanchard and Glantz (2005), Kouzes and Posner (2007, 2017), Peters (2010), and Ciulla (2014) has resulted in a variety of perspectives and a deeper dive into the topic. There is, however, a missing piece, which has to do with bridging theory and action. The question is, With so many resources and findings supporting effective leadership, why is there a disconnect between what is known to work effectively and the actions taken to support an effective outcome? Alex Edmans noted that while companies believe that human asset is what matters, there is a gap between that belief and the old-school philosophy that embraces working employees as hard as possible and compensating them as little as possible (Crowley, 2011).

New research could identify specific personal actions of leaders that have an impact on the organization. Relative to school districts, new research is needed to clarify the role of transformational and instructional leadership and its impact on student achievement (Marks & Printy, 2003). The term *instructional leadership* gained interest in the 1980s and evolved into a new form of leadership for learning in the 21st century (Hallinger, 2010). The constant evolution of leadership, particularly in recent findings among those examining the role that leadership plays in the success of school districts, needs to respond to the necessities of the society (Marks & Printy, 2003). Furthermore, as stated by Marks and Printy (2003), leadership approaches need to be communicated to practitioners. In addition, while research on leadership is rich in content and sources, there is not a lot of literature on Mark Crowley's (2011) theoretical framework and the

four variables. Moreover, there is gap in research on heart-led leadership of exemplary superintendents.

Summary

A leader's ability to cultivate relationships grounded in trust can foster a positive culture of collaboration and inspire collective action toward a shared vision. As leaders of school districts, superintendents are in the position of setting goals and objectives and supervising the design and implementation phase to achieve desired results. The youth in America are in the midst of myriad challenges: the uncertainties of the pandemic, and as stated by Bolman and Deal (1995), violence, drugs, and mental health issues. Some may argue that these are the challenges of all Americans; however, school districts have a commitment to educate and prepare students for the real world; therefore, the adults are at a critical point of needing to remedy the challenges to save the youth and protect the country. Bolman and Deal stated that the missing element in education is the soul. The soul in education, according to Bolman and Deal, fills the emptiness that exists in the lives of students and provides meaning and purpose.

More than ever, as noted by DuFour (2004), education needs leaders who can create a culture of success by identifying measurable goals, aligning resources, and implementing protocols to support desired outcomes. Moreover, DuFour highlighted the need for leaders who can celebrate small wins of individual teachers and all staff in a public way. Today's leaders in education grapple with a host of complicated and politically charged issues as they strive to foster a positive and collaborative culture that supports success and achievement for all students. Relationships that are built on trust

are vital to success for all, including school district leadership, staff, teachers, students, and the community.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe exemplary leadership behaviors that unified school district superintendents exhibit in leading with the heart and achieving extraordinary results. The framework utilized for examining heart-led behaviors of superintendents was Mark Crowley's (2011) four principles of building a highly engaged team, connecting on a personal level, maximizing employee potential, and valuing and honoring achievements (see the Synthesis Matrix, Appendix A).

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

Chapter III provides the main components of the study's methodology. The chapter begins by outlining the study purpose, research questions, study design, population, and methodology for sample selection. The instrumentation section presents the process of instrument development to collect data from the participants of the study. Also provided in Chapter III are the methods used for data collection and analysis. Additionally, study reliability and validity and study limitations are identified in this chapter. Chapter III concludes with a summary of the methodology.

This study methodology was aligned to describe the behaviors unified K-12 school district superintendents exhibit in leading from the heart using Crowley's (2011) four principles to accomplish extraordinary results in their organizations. The qualitative phenomenological research design of the study helped to examine and make sense of the experiences and behaviors that exemplary superintendents exhibit to lead their organizations to achieve extraordinary results (Patton, 2015). Conducting phenomenological interviews, collecting and analyzing artifacts, and making observations allows the researcher to understand the study participants' perspective on the experience of the phenomenon (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The open-ended nature of semistructured interview questions allows the participants to provide unique responses (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Data for this research were gathered by compiling interview responses as well as meeting agendas, memos, newsletters, and other appropriate artifacts. Collected data were then coded and organized into themes.

In determining the specific behaviors exemplary superintendents exhibit in leading from the heart, Crowley's (2011) four principles of building a highly engaged team, connecting on a personal level, maximizing employee potential, and valuing and honoring achievements were identified as the framework for this research. Throughout this study, the term *peer researchers* was used to refer to the 14 University of Massachusetts Global doctoral candidates investigating the same topic varying in population with guidance from five faculty chairs.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe how exemplary K-12 school district superintendents lead from the heart using Mark Crowley's (2011) four principles (building a highly engaged team, connecting on a personal level, maximizing employee potential, and valuing and honoring achievements) to accomplish extraordinary results in their organizations.

Research Questions

1. How do K-12 school district superintendents lead from the heart to accomplish extraordinary results by building a highly engaged team?
2. How do K-12 school district superintendents lead from the heart to accomplish extraordinary results by connecting on a personal level?
3. How do K-12 school district superintendents lead from the heart to accomplish extraordinary results by maximizing employee potential?
4. How do K-12 school district superintendents lead from the heart to accomplish extraordinary results by valuing and honoring achievements?

Research Design

The purpose of research design illustrates how the research was conducted, the role of the subjects, and the data collection methods used to produce empirical data to answer the study's research questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The most appropriate research design for this study was a qualitative phenomenological approach, enabling the researcher to explore, identify, and describe how people articulate experiences and transform them into consciousness (Patton, 2015). The phenomenological inquiry of interviews, observations, collection, and review of artifacts provides insight into the participants' experiences and perspectives (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The qualitative research approach further allows the researcher to investigate and capture the meaning of people's experience (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Subsequently, the qualitative researcher's interests are to investigate, explore, and describe behaviors, attitudes, and views of the population of interest (Patten, 2015). The open-ended-semistructured interview questions were designed to encourage unique responses from participating superintendents (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Interviews were conducted via Zoom or in person. Responses were recorded. Peer researchers took notes during the interviews, observed participants, and included relevant data information. The notes were coded and organized into themes. The themes that emerged from this process were analyzed to identify their meaning. As noted by Patton (2015), qualitative research design enables the researcher to ask specific questions to determine the meaningful nature of experiences as they relate to the phenomenon.

Population

The population of a study is defined as a group of a specifically selected representative sampling of individuals who correspond to the researcher's interest and from which a sample can be drawn to generalize results (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). According to the California Department of Education (Cal. Educ. Code § 35035, n.d.; CDE, n.d.-a, n.d.-b), out of the 14,000 school districts in the United States, there are 1,037 school districts in California, supported by 58 county offices of education. Based on the statistics published by the CDE, the 1,037 California school districts include 346 unified, 525 elementary, 78 high school, and 88 other school districts. The population identified for this study was composed of public school superintendents in K-12 unified school districts in California (Cal. Educ. Code § 35035, n.d.; CDE, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). School districts serving students from kindergarten to 12th grade are considered unified school districts. Each unified public school district is managed by a superintendent under the leadership of a school board. K-12 unified school superintendents are responsible for all aspects of their districts. Superintendents serving K-12 unified school districts have a broader scope of influence because of the populations they serve, which is a point of interest in this research. In the past 2 decades, the role of superintendents has evolved and is viewed as a complex and pivotal role of managing school districts and leading the policy implementation efforts (Björk, Browne-Ferrigno, & Kowalski, 2014). A target population of superintendents in Southern California was drawn from the population of 346 K-12 unified school district superintendents in California.

Sampling Frame

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a sampling frame or survey population consists of a list of sampling units from which the sample is chosen. McMillan and Schumacher further stated that a sampling frame is intended to be generalized representing a specific population. Studying large groups of participants can be time consuming and costly as noted by McMillan and Schumacher; therefore, for the purposes of this study, the targeted population identified was exemplary superintendents employed in K-12 unified public school districts in five of the Southern California counties of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, Santa Barbara, and Ventura (see Table 2).

Table 2

Five Southern California Counties Target Population of K-12 Unified School District Superintendent (USD) for This Study

County	Number of K-12 USD superintendents
Los Angeles	48
Orange	7
Riverside	19
Santa Barbara	2
Ventura	8
Total	84

Sample

The sample of a study refers to a group of subjects that participate in the study and provide data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Selecting participants for research studies can be done by probability or nonprobability sampling (Doherty, 1994). The probability sampling method is done randomly, while nonprobability sampling involves judgment selection (Doherty, 1994). The sample for this study was selected utilizing nonprobability, purposeful sampling. As stated by McMillan and Schumacher (2010),

nonprobability, purposeful sampling enables the researcher to choose participants from a particular population based on knowledge and expertise on the research topic. Moreover, the objective of qualitative research purposeful sampling is to gain a deeper understanding of relationships (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). A group of California School Boards Association (CSBA) faculty who provide training for superintendents and school board members in California, assisted the researcher in identifying the eight participants for the sample study based on the Cheryl Osbornexemplary criteria (see Figure 5).

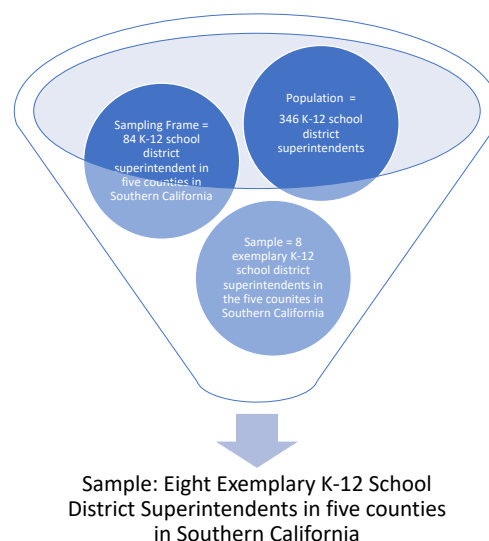


Figure 5. Exemplary K-12 school district superintendents sample funnel.

Based on the collective thematic teams' definition, criteria for exemplary leaders were developed. The criteria for this study included eight exemplary K-12 school district superintendents who demonstrate at least four of the following criteria; the first three are required:

1. Evidence of extraordinary results
2. Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings
3. Recognition by peers
4. Membership in a professional association in their field

Selection of Participants

A group of six CSBA faculty were asked to assist the researcher by nominating eight unified school district K-12 superintendents in the five Southern California counties of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, Santa Barbara, and Ventura. The CSBA faculty members are familiar with the roles played by superintendents. Moreover, the faculty offers governance training and works closely with school superintendents in California. The CSBA faculty were asked to nominate K-12 unified school district superintendents who met the criteria as exemplary. Creswell (2003) suggested a sample size of five to 25 for a qualitative phenomenological research study to be a sufficient number. As stated by McMillan and Schumacher (2010), the objective of purposeful sampling is to gain a deeper understanding of relationships. Based on the subject matter expert recommendations, a sample size of eight exemplary leaders for the study was determined by the peer researchers within the thematic group.

Instrumentation

The thematic team of 14 researchers collaborated in this phenomenological research study. Under the guidance of faculty chairs, the thematic team developed a qualitative instrument for this study. Qualitative research utilizes interviews as a methodology to gather information about the participating sample's experiences and

perspectives (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Based on the four principles of heart-led leadership framework developed by Crowley (2011), the thematic team designed 12 semistructured interview questions. Additionally, each question was accompanied by a probe with the aim of gathering more information from the interviewees. The interview questions were designed to align with Crowley's four principles of heart-led leadership. Moreover, the interview questions were analyzed and examined for alignment with the purpose statement by the faculty chairs. The recommendations from the faculty chairs were taken into consideration and revisions were made. After several rounds of discussion meetings and necessary revisions to ensure alignment between the purpose of the research study and the research questions, the 12 interview questions were shared with the thematic team (Appendix B). The peer researchers, with guidance from the chairs, developed an introduction protocol to maintain consistency of the interview process. The protocol included a script (Appendix C) that provided a brief overview of the thematic study, notification of the Zoom recording, and offered an opportunity for further clarification before the start of the interview.

Researcher as an Instrument of the Study

In qualitative research studies, the researcher is the instrument and can influence the data collection and analysis based on personal biases (Patton, 2015). The researcher for this study is a consultant with CSBA and provides trainings to public school district superintendents and board members in California. To reduce researcher bias, an observer was invited to observe the semistructured virtual interview and share feedback for improvement of the quality of the questions and the interviewing process.

Field-Testing

The thematic peer researchers field-tested the 12 interview questions with a participant who met the exemplary criteria of the study. The field-test interviewee's responses were not included in the data collection for the final study. Additionally, the field-test interviewee responded to a postinterview set of five questions to gather feedback on the questions and the process (Appendix D). Moreover, each of the field-test interviews was observed by a process observer who shared feedback on the clarity of questions and the overall interview process (Appendix E).

The field-test participant had over 20 years of experience in the field and demonstrated caring for people to accomplish extraordinary results. In addition, the participant met all four of the exemplary criteria for the study. The characteristics of the superintendent who participated in the field test are provided in Table 3.

Table 3

Field-Test Participant Characteristics

Exemplary characteristics	Field-test participant qualification
Recognition by their peers	X
Recommendation by one or more recognized regional executive leaders	X
Membership in professional association in their field	X
Articles, papers, or written materials published or presented at conferences	X

Validity

In qualitative research, validity refers to the degree of interpretation of common meanings between the researcher and participants in a study (McMillan & Schumacher,

2010). Subsequently, triangulation is a method to determine regularities in the data by cross-validating data collection and sources as stated by McMillan and Schumacher (2010). In the same way, Patton (2015) stated that the use of investigator triangulation involving multiple researchers is a method to strengthen a study.

The peer researchers in the thematic study had the opportunity to collaborate on and develop the overall process of the interview protocol and the interview questions, and to examine the alignment to the study purpose to enhance validity. Upon completion of the field-testing, the peer researchers and chairs had the opportunity to debrief and share reflections on the field-test interview experience. The field-test debrief provided the opportunity to make the appropriate revisions to ensure validity of the study.

Reliability

Reliability describes the likelihood of achieving consistent results when the study is replicated (Patten & Newhart, 2017). Because the researcher in a qualitative study is the research instrument, personal biases can influence data collection and analysis (Patton, 2015). In this study, each of the peer researchers in the thematic team was involved in developing and field-testing of the interview protocol and questions. Furthermore, the feedback from the field test was shared and subsequent refinements were made to maintain reliability.

Internal and Intercoder Reliability

To increase the reliability of a study, researchers utilize internal and intercoder strategies (Patton, 2015). Internal reliability of this study was supported by the thematic peer group of 14 researchers who collaborated in creating a uniformed interview protocol and process. The thematic team conducted 28 field-test interviews allowing them to test

the reliability of the qualitative instrument. The team also had the opportunity to share the field-test interview experience and notes when identifying revisions to the instrument.

Intercoder reliability is a term used when independent coders evaluate a characteristic of a study or artifact and arrive at the same finding (Salkind, 2017). According to Salkind (2017), reliability of any instrument depends on its ability to produce consistent responses. A potential challenge with qualitative research, as stated by Patton (2015), is the researcher bias, which can lead to skepticism. Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted that intercoder reliability is reached when there is an 80% agreement among peer researchers. Standardizing the study's research protocol, interview questions, and the collective expectation for achieving 80% intercoder reliability required one thematic peer researcher to examine one interview, which was about 10% of the interview findings.

Data Collection

The research design chosen for this study was a qualitative phenomenological method, which described the lived experiences of participants and includes interviews, observations, and collection of artifacts to interpret the phenomenon in the study (Patton, 2015). For the purposes of this study, data collection involved interviewing eight exemplary K-12 school district superintendents virtually, via Zoom. Data collection also included observations of board and executive cabinet meetings as well as examination of artifacts. Prior to the interview process, the researcher attained approval from UMass Global Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix F). The researcher also completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative Program and obtained the National Institutes of Health (NIH) certificate (Appendix G). The NIH certification

reaffirmed the researcher's understanding of working with and protecting human participants in the study. The NIH certification also verified the researcher's understanding and respect for maintaining confidentiality to protect the integrity of the research study. Confidentiality of participants was protected by securing the identifying codes in a two-step authentication password-protected electronic folder. The researcher is the only individual with access to the secure folder. Moreover, interview transcripts and audio-file recordings were in possession and accessible to the researcher. Every security measure was taken into consideration in protecting the confidentiality of the participants.

Collection of artifacts consisted of meeting agendas as well as written communications, newsletters, and memos. Other types of artifacts included journals, articles, and/or books authored by participants. Materials produced and presented at conferences were also collected as artifacts. Participants were also encouraged to share any particular book, quote, or movie they considered particularly helpful in leading from the heart and achieving extraordinary results. Moreover, information gathered from conversations with team members to further understand the heart-led behaviors of the participants were utilized as additional artifacts.

The observation component of data collection consists of the researcher obtaining permission from the participants to observe virtual staff and board meetings at the completion of the interview. At the beginning of the virtual interview with the participants, the researcher explained that she was taking notes to further understand the participant's lived experiences.

Ethical Consideration

Prior to data collection, this researcher completed collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) training, specific to research involving human subjects (Appendix E). Additionally, prior to data collection, approval from the University of Massachusetts Global Institutional Review Board (UMGIRB) was obtained (Appendix F). Following UMGIRB approval to proceed, e-mails were sent to participants inviting them to participate in the study. The e-mail notifications included an overview of the interview process. Upon agreement to participate in the study, participants were provided additional documents such as the informed consent, consent to audio recordings, and the UMass Global participant's bill of rights.

Interview Process

Ensuring confidentiality of data was a top priority, and several steps were taken to protect it. Each of the eight subjects was assigned a reference number to protect their name in data analysis. The interview process included the following procedural steps:

1. Obtained the UMGIRB approval prior to data collection (Appendix F).
2. Conducted a Zoom meeting with a CSBA group of consultants in identifying potential K-12 school district superintendents meeting the exemplary criteria and serving in one of the five counties chosen for this study.
3. Contacted the identified exemplary K-12 school district superintendents via e-mail (Appendix H) or by phone (Appendix I) to extend the invitation to participate.
4. Upon agreement of participation, the interview was scheduled and a calendar invite was shared.

5. Five to 7 days prior to the interview, a confirmation e-mail was sent to participants (Appendix J) with the following four attachments:
 - Participation invitation (Appendix H)
 - Interview questions (Appendix B)
 - The informed consent and audio recording release (Appendix K)
 - The participant's bill of rights (Appendix L).
6. Interview was conducted upon receipt of signed forms. Each interview session was recorded and included the following steps:
 - Welcoming remarks, thanking the superintendents for participating
 - Review of (a) informed consent and audio recording release, (b) participant's bill of rights
 - Asking if clarification in any of the interview process is needed
 - Interview was conducted by asking the 12 interview questions accompanied by probing when additional clarification is needed
 - The researcher took notes of verbal and nonverbal cues to further understand the lived experiences of the participants
 - At the completion of the interview, participants were asked if the researcher could virtually observe them at work and during meetings in gathering information for data triangulation
 - Participants were thanked and researcher asks if there are any questions
 - Interview transcription was shared with the participant for accuracy

Data Analysis

According to Patton (2015), the purpose of qualitative research analysis is to convert raw data into valuable information. Upon study invitation and acceptance from the participants, virtual interviews were scheduled utilizing Zoom. Participants responded to the 12 research questions and provided input for the study. Data collected from the virtual interview sessions of the eight exemplary K-12 school district superintendents in the study were transcribed electronically through a confidential transcription service. The transcriptions were provided to the participants to review for accuracy. All field notes from observations were typed and filed electronically into appropriate and secure folders.

Upon organizing data, the researcher reviewed each participant's interview transcript, field notes, and related artifacts. The next step was to draw broad impressions to make sense of the meaning of the data. Utilizing the qualitative research software, NVivo, to house, compare, and code the data collected, the researcher reviewed content analysis, determined patterns, identified themes, and determined meaning (Patton, 2015). As noted by McMillan and Schumacher (2010), data coding is the process of identifying small, isolated segments of data containing one specific idea or relevant information. The small, isolated segments of this study consisted of words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs from interview transcripts, field notes, and artifacts. The segments were examined and coded. Codes with greater counts of frequency were labeled as contributing to a theme. Upon completion of coding, a peer researcher from the thematic research team reviewed 10% of the coding data with an 80% level of agreement to increase intercoder reliability. The codes and themes that emerged from the transcripts

served as a foundation for describing behaviors of K-12 school district superintendents who lead from the heart to achieve extraordinary results in their organizations.

Limitations

Creswell (2003) refers to research limitation as factors that have a negative impact on the generalization of the findings of a study to another population. It is critical for researchers to identify potential limitations and develop strategies to manage them. For this study, the restrictions of the pandemic, sample size, and time constraints were identified as potential limitations.

The Pandemic

The implications of COVID-19 have impacted the ability to conduct in-person interviews and observations, which are two critical data collection instruments in the qualitative research method. The interviews were conducted via Zoom, and when possible, virtual observations were arranged. While virtual environments can be cold and impersonal, the convenience of Zoom as an interview platform is one of the advantages described by Archibald, Ambagtsheer, Casey, and Lawless (2019).

Sample Size

For this study, eight K-12 school district superintendents who met the criteria for being exemplary were selected. Each participant was selected through purposeful sampling based on nomination by a team of consultants from the CSBA. The sample size of eight participating K-12 superintendents was a limitation of the study.

Time Constraints

As CEOs for school districts, superintendents have many demands on their schedules, and asking for an hour of their time, particularly during the reopening of

schools in the middle of a pandemic, can be challenging. The issue of the limitation of a superintendent's availability was raised by one study field-test participant who is a K-12 superintendent in Northern California.

Researcher as the Study Instrument

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), the internal validity of a study can be threatened if the researcher is identified as an instrument in the study (Patten, 2012). In this study, the researcher was the instrument conducting interviews, observations, and reviewing artifacts. Moreover, in qualitative research, the researcher determines the meaning of the data collected (Patton, 2015). The researcher in this study has served as a governance consultant working with and training school boards and superintendents in California for the past 5 years. The relationships built working with the school district superintendents created a potential for bias. For this reason, the researcher extended the interview invitations to participants who had no prior work relationship to the researcher.

Summary

Chapter III presented the purpose of this study to identify and describe the behaviors K-12 unified school district superintendents exhibit in achieving extraordinary results by leading from the heart using Crowley's (2011) four principles of heart-led leadership. This study utilized phenomenological a qualitative research methodology to identify and describe the lived experiences of the K-12 superintendents in the study. Moreover, the research questions and research design were described. Additionally, this chapter presented the population, the methodology to select the study sample, development of the instrument by the thematic team, and data collection and analysis.

Chapter III also provided a description of the study validity, reliability, and the results of the field-testing of the instruments. Finally, limitations of the study were highlighted in this chapter. Chapter IV provides details of the data collection and research findings. Chapter V outlines the conclusions for the study and recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

This qualitative phenomenological research study described the behaviors exemplary K-12 school district superintendents exhibit in leading their organizations, through Crowley's (2011) four principles of building a highly engaged team, connecting on a personal level, maximizing employee potential, and valuing and honoring achievements. Chapter IV describes the purpose of the study, research questions, methodology, data collection, population, and sample size. An analysis of the data collected and a presentation of key findings conclude Chapter IV.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe how exemplary K-12 school district superintendents lead from the heart using Mark Crowley's (2011) four principles (building a highly engaged team, connecting on a personal level, maximizing employee potential, and valuing and honoring achievements) to accomplish extraordinary results in their organizations.

Research Questions

1. How do K-12 school district superintendents lead from the heart to accomplish extraordinary results by building a highly engaged team?
2. How do K-12 school district superintendents lead from the heart to accomplish extraordinary results by connecting on a personal level?
3. How do K-12 school district superintendents lead from the heart to accomplish extraordinary results by maximizing employee potential?

4. How do K-12 school district superintendents lead from the heart to accomplish extraordinary results by valuing and honoring achievements?

Population

The population identified for this study was composed of 346 public school superintendents in K-12 unified school districts in California (CDE, 2021). According to the CDE (2021) out of the 14,000 school districts in the United States, there are 1,037 school districts in California, supported by 58 county offices of education. Based on the statistics published by the CDE, the 1,037 California school districts include 346 unified, 525 elementary, 78 high school, and 88 other school districts. A target population of 84 K-12 school district superintendents serving five of the Southern California counties of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, Santa Barbara, and Ventura was identified (see Table 2 in Chapter III).

Sample

The sample for this study was identified as eight exemplary K-12 school district superintendents in the five counties of Southern California. Selection was based on purposeful sampling of K-12 unified school district superintendents recommended by the researcher's peers at the California School Boards Association (CSBA). Selection was based on the exemplary criteria developed by the thematic team. As stated by McMillan and Schumacher (2010), nonprobability, purposeful sampling enables the researcher to choose participants from a particular population based on knowledge and expertise of the research topic. To produce great data, it is critical to find great respondents, as suggested by Patton (2015). To be considered exemplary, the participants needed to have served a minimum of 3 years as a superintendent and demonstrated evidence of caring for people

in the organization. Moreover, the participating superintendents had to meet at least two of the following exemplary criteria:

1. Evidence of extraordinary results
2. Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings
3. Recognition by peers
4. Membership in a professional association in their field

The researcher received nominations for the participating superintendents from a team of CSBA consultants who worked with and offered governance training to superintendents and board members in California. Additionally, the CSBA team received a copy of the exemplary criteria in making their recommendations. A sample of eight superintendents who met the criteria for exemplary were invited to participate in the study. Creswell (2003) suggested a sample size of five to 25 for a qualitative phenomenological research study to be a sufficient number. As stated by McMillan and Schumacher (2010), the objective of purposeful sampling is to gain a deeper understanding of relationships. Based on the subject matter expert recommendations, a sample size of eight exemplary leaders for the study was determined adequate by the peer researchers within the thematic group. The data collected from the eight participants in this study contributed to data collected from a group of 14 thematic peer researchers who analyzed 112 exemplary leaders.

Research Methodology and Data Collection

The phenomenological qualitative methodology of the study allowed the researcher to understand the behaviors K-12 unified school district superintendents

exhibited in leading their districts. Each of the eight superintendents participated in a virtual interview utilizing Zoom. Triangulation of data was achieved by collecting artifacts and virtual observation of participants during meetings; these served as secondary sources.

Interviews

The researcher conducted a total of eight virtual interviews with the superintendents who participated in the study. An interview protocol/script, developed by the thematic peer researcher team, guided the researcher with consistency for the opening statement, definitions of each of the four heart-led principles, and interview questions (Appendix B). Each semistructured virtual interview lasted between 35 and 60 min. Each interview involved the respondents answering 12 interview questions developed collaboratively by the thematic peer researcher team (Appendix B). The 12 interview questions were organized into four sections, each containing three questions responding to the four heart-led principles of building a highly engaged team, connecting on a personal level, maximizing employee potential, and valuing and honoring achievements (see Table 4). Each interview was recorded and transcribed by Rev transcription service after each interview. Transcriptions were sent to each participant to review and confirm accuracy and intent of responses.

Table 4

The Four Sections of the Interview Questions

Heart-led principle	Definition	Questions
Building a highly engaged team	Building a highly engaged team is using strategies that help people become enthusiastically invested in and dedicated to work they believe is significant, meaningful, and challenging, where relationships are built on emotional connection and shared vision, and where values and commitment are based on personal strengths and interests aligned with organizational goals (Crowley, 2011; George & Stevenson, 1988; Rees, Alfes, & Gatenby, 2013; Senge, Lichtenstein, & Kaeufer, 2007).	1-3
Connecting on a personal level	Connecting on a personal level is seeing and acting on behalf of others and authentically communicating with the intention of adding values driven by humility, concern, and love (B. Brown, 2015; Crowley, 2011; Hayward, 2015; Maxwell, 2010).	4-6
Maximizing employee potential	Maximizing employee potential is igniting emotional drivers by promoting human well-being while proactively strengthening, teaching, and building people toward high achievement (Burnett & Lisk, 2019; Crowley, 2011).	7-9
Valuing and honoring achievements	Valuing and honoring achievements is praising, acknowledging, recognizing, and appreciating positive accomplishments as an expression of care through monetary and/or nonmonetary rewards, which may lead to increased job satisfaction (Brun & Dugas, 2008; Crowley, 2011; Tessema, Ready & Embaye, 2013; Posamentier, 2008).	10-12

Observations

As a multimethod strategy to triangulate data, the virtual observations allowed the researcher to create field notes. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), field notes help the researcher document and recall something heard. The restrictions imposed by the pandemic and implications for school districts, along with researcher and participants' availability, limited the number of observations. Therefore, a total of five virtual observations were conducted. Two of the observations were conducted at management meetings, and three were conducted at board meetings. Observations lasted

between 30 min and 2 hours. Field notes created from observations added depth to better understand heart-led behaviors of participating school district superintendents.

Artifacts

A total of 22 artifacts supporting heart-led leadership behaviors were collected and coded. Artifacts included district newsletters, information on district websites, correspondence to staff, meeting agendas, and meeting minutes. Each school district website had a designated section for the superintendent to communicate and share information with stakeholders. The superintendent's sections contained messages to the school community and focused on the district mission, vision, and goals.

Participant Demographics

To ensure confidentiality, any information that could potentially identify the participants, such as their name or district of employment, was not referenced in the study. Participant confidentiality was maintained by assigning a number corresponding to each participant's set of data. Table 5 presents the participants' demographics, and Table 6 illustrates how each participant met the exemplary criteria for participating superintendents.

Table 5

Participating School District Superintendent Demographics

Participant	Age range	Gender	Years in education
1	45-60	M	25-35
2	35-50	F	12-25
3	29-35	M	10-20
4	35-49	F	14-25
5	50-64	F	19-25
6	40-50	F	12-20
7	45-55	M	18-25
8	55-64	M	22-30

Table 6

Criteria for Exemplary K-12 School District Superintendent

Participant	Minimum of 3 years as supt.	Evidence of extraordinary results	Written articles	Recognition by peers	Membership in prof. assoc.
1	X	X	X	X	X
2	X	X	X	X	X
4	X	X	X	X	X
5	X	X	X	X	X
6	X	X	X	X	X
7	X	X	X	X	X
8	X	X	X	X	X

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Chapter IV provides data drawn from interviewing eight exemplary school district superintendents, observations, and artifacts. The research findings are based on Crowley's (2011) four principles of building a highly engaged team, connecting on a personal level, maximizing employee potential, and valuing and honoring achievements.

Data Analysis

Each Zoom interview was recorded and transcribed by Rev, a third-party confidential transcription service. To protect the integrity of the data, the transcriptions were shared with each of the superintendents for confirmation of accuracy and intent of responses. The transcriptions were uploaded into a data platform, NVivo. The software program, NVivo, has the capability to categorize, classify, and analyze qualitative data and organize them into themes. The themes, known as nodes in NVivo, were aligned to Crowley's (2011) four principles of heart-led leadership. Moreover, data obtained from observations and artifacts were coded for the themes identified. After the completion of coding for themes, NVivo revealed frequencies for each theme. The data from this study

identified 14 key findings that represent how exemplary school district superintendents lead their districts using Mark Crowley's (2011) four principles of heart-led leadership: building a highly engaged team, connecting on a personal level, maximizing employee potential, and valuing and honoring achievements to achieve extraordinary results.

Reliability

An interview script containing 12 interview questions was utilized to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of exemplary K-12 school district superintendents and how they lead their organizations to achieve extraordinary results. The interview script safeguarded against inconsistencies and increased reliability for interviews. Furthermore, the uniformity in the interview process supported the study's internal reliability. Additionally, triangulation of data collection included virtual interviews, observations, and artifacts.

Research Questions and Results

With guidance from the faculty advisors, the thematic peer researchers developed the study's purpose, four research questions, interview protocol, and 12 interview questions. The 12 interview questions were divided into four sections corresponding to each of Crowley's (2011) four principles of heart-led leadership. A definition developed by the thematic peer researchers was shared with the participating superintendents, then the researcher asked three questions in each of the four sections.

Building a Highly Engaged Team

The thematic peer researchers defined building a highly engaged team as using strategies that help people become enthusiastically invested in and dedicated to work they believe is significant, meaningful, and challenging, where relationships are built on

emotional connection and shared vision, and where values and commitment are based on personal strengths and interests aligned with organizational goals (Crowley, 2011; George & Stevenson, 1988; Rees et al., 2013; Senge et al., 2007). Coding for building a highly engaged team resulted in five themes: alignment to vision, assessment of strengths and areas for growth, hiring the right people, shared values, and the why.

Table 7

Building a Highly Engaged Team Themes

Theme	Data Source & Number of Sources	Frequency
Alignment to vision	Interview, Artifact—9	33
Assessment of strengths and areas for growth	Interview, Artifact—10	34
Hiring the right people	Interview, Artifact—14	38
Shared values	Interview, Artifact—9	33
The why	Interview, Artifact, Observation—12	24

Note. Sources include transcribed interviews, artifacts and observations.

The participating superintendents shared that building a highly engaged team begins with hiring the right people. Having clarity about the talents and skills needed is significant. Such clarity is an essential component in developing job descriptions that are aligned to the needs and the vision of the organization. Crowley (2011) highlighted a quote by Rumi, the 13th Century Persian poet and philosopher, “Everyone has been made for some particular work and the desire for that work has been put in every heart” (p. 61). Finding people who are willing to bring their heart to work is critical (Crowley, 2011). The objective as explained by Crowley, is to find team members who demonstrate a clear passion and desire to be part of the organization. Crowley suggested that when leaders settle for less, they move the organization away from success. Not compromising high standards, holding vacancies for as long as needed, and finding temporary replacements

until the right applicants are identified contribute to the overall strength of the team (Crowley, 2011). One of the superintendents emphasized hiring the right people:

I don't hire people unless they're almost perfect and consequently, it's resulted in building some pretty incredible teams. I'm just very determined to not settle and to not compromise on who I bring into these positions. And consequently, it's resulted in teams that are really unified and loyal to each other.

The work of educational psychologist Benjamin Bloom identified personal drive and determination as key elements leading to success (Crowley, 2011). This is the reason interviewing with purpose and gaining insight into the personal "why" is meaningful. Simon Sinek's (2009) work centered on exploring and identifying the "why" inspired the superintendent who shared how the personal motivator and why can be incorporated into the hiring process: "It all ties back to our why, we spend a lot of time talking about our own personal motivations and connection to the work. And we also spend time storytelling about that."

The goal of hiring is to enhance a team's performance by recruiting and hiring the right individuals. Crowley (2011) suggested hiring people who are winners and finding ways for them to excel in their roles. Another superintendent focused on the characteristics of team players and the key components he looks for when hiring:

When you are able to hire your team, you're looking for very key components. You're looking for those individuals that are team players, are willing to work towards that common goal, bring different pieces to their personality, their work ethic, their work experiences. And then developing that entire cohesive team is having as many opportunities as possible to work together as a team towards

common goals, looking at opportunities for genuine input, truly listening, taking that input and making something of it so that it is a collective effort, so the team feels valued and valuable in the work that we're doing collectively.

Reviewing the organization's mission, values, and vision set the tone for what is expected from the candidates prior to the hiring process (Crowley, 2011). The review and alignment of the position requirements to district goals, priorities, and vision result in creating a team that is dedicated to their collective work. The alignment of the position requirements and job description to the mission and vision continue to the evaluation process, as shared by one superintendent:

We spend a great deal of time aligning our goals and our vision. And so that starts with the board, and then cabinet, and then principals on down to teachers and the professional staff. And when I say alignment, the board adopts goals and priorities for a year, and then my evaluation is built on that. The principal's evaluations are built on that, and so on down the line. So we all know what we're working on.

Hiring team members who complement each other's strengths was highlighted by another superintendent. The importance of a common value system was also emphasized by this superintendent:

I think the selection of the team members that complement one another's competencies is important. And it's also important to, if you are fortunate enough to select your own team, to start with a common belief system. And the why of being there is important.

Having a common vision and shared beliefs and values as important components of building a highly engaged team was shared by another superintendent:

It has to be around shared values, really you have to begin with what do we believe in? How do we want to do our work together? What are the most important? What are our core values? And when you are doing value-based work, then it's meaningful.

Understanding the value that each team member brings to the team was also highlighted in the response from one superintendent:

I think it's important to make sure that everyone on the team understands the importance of their work, whether it's a site principal or they're a department administrator, but everyone serves a very important function. And it's important that everybody recognizes the value of their contributions to the organization and to our mission.

Connecting on a Personal Level

The thematic peer researchers defined connecting on a personal level as seeing and acting on behalf of others and authentically communicating with the intention of adding value driven by humility, concern, and love (B. Brown, 2015; Crowley, 2011; Hayward, 2015; Maxwell, 2010). Coding for connecting on a personal level resulted in six themes: being present, build relationships, communication, show care and concern, visit school sites, and vulnerability.

Table 8

Connecting on a Personal Level

Theme	Data Source & Number of Sources	Frequency
Being present	Interview, observation, artifact—38	145
Build relationships	Interview, observation, artifacts—76	183
Communication	Interview, observation, artifact—38	145
Show care & concern	Interview, observation, artifact—41	148
Visit school sites	Interview – 8	115
Vulnerability	Interview – 20	127

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

Connecting on a personal level and spending time outside of work and meetings were mentioned by all superintendents. Creating connections lead to building relationships that are founded in trust (Lencioni, 2012). Moreover, leaders who make personal connections with their employees inspire them to higher levels of achievement (Crowley, 2011).

Connecting on a personal level means spending uninterrupted time with team members on a consistent basis. As stated by Crowley (2011), too often the focus of conversations is on the business and not the individual team member. The uninterrupted allocated time creates a safe and consistent space for team members to share highlights and challenges with the leader. One superintendent shared experiences of connecting on a personal level by visiting classrooms in each of the school sites:

I think that you have to be with people, so you can't manage from the office. We really believe that the most important work of the school district happens at schools and in classrooms. So all of our leaders spend time there. And so we walk classrooms with principals. It's a good opportunity for the principal to share any struggles or needs they have that we can provide assistance. It's pretty rare

for us to call up [a] principal to the district office. We prefer we go to them, and then we can solve a lot of other issues maybe while we're there, not just the single topic that we were there to discuss. So being present and being honest when things are going to be hard, we don't sugarcoat that.

Research findings by neuroeconomist Paul Zak (2014) revealed that sharing personal information by storytelling induces a strong neurological response that is responsible for releasing oxytocin, a feel-good chemical that promotes empathy and strengthens connection. Sharing of personal stories was a strategy one superintendent found to be an authentic form of communication:

I think the most valuable or important way of doing that is through storytelling.

When you tell people a personal story or connect with a personal incident, I think that really makes for an authentic communication. When you share an example or a reason why, it helps to make something more real.

Vulnerability has been identified as a powerful tool to transform leadership practices (C. B. Brown, 2012). A closer look at the origin of the word vulnerability, offered by C. B. Brown (2012), indicates that it is derived from the Latin word *vulnerare*, meaning capable of being wounded. Practicing vulnerability allows people to be seen as people, igniting empathy and connection. One superintendent shared a specific experience about practicing vulnerability and taking a chance:

You show vulnerability that you don't have all of the answers and that you might think you have a solution to something, but you open yourself up to criticism from the team, "Okay, this is what I'm thinking, but can we do that." Again, using an example from the pandemic, we were trying to figure out how we were

going to reopen schools in 2021. And we did a survey of our community and it was clear, like there was no one pathway. They were all divided. They all needed something different. So I thought, well, could we do a hybrid program, a distance program and a regular full-time, in-person program? And I took it to the team, and I said, “I have this idea. And I know it’s going to be a lot of work. I know it’s going to be really hard. And if you say we can’t do it, then we can’t do it. But I need to know if you think it’s possible. Like, I think this would be the best thing if we could make it work.” And everybody thought about it. And they said, “Well, yeah. It’s going to be a lot of work, but it’s possible.” And every member of the team who would have to contribute to make that actually happen weighed in. And so we decided to move forward with that. And it was extremely successful.

For another superintendent, practicing vulnerability meant being real and participating and helping with any and all tasks needing assistance. This approach has proven to be significant in showing care and establishing personal connections:

I could pick up a phone. I can help dump the trash. I schlep tables. I move chairs. I stack things. That’s not my primary role, but if I’m going to ask somebody else to do it, why can’t I do it? I bring treats to meetings. I cook. I can bring in the case of water. I can carry things. I can do whatever. I also talk about and stress and model a very flat organization that yes, there’s a chain in command. Yes, there are certain people that you contact. But if you need something, text me. The entire leadership team, not all the employees, but the entire leadership team has my cell phone number. And I say, text me, if it’s going

to take you 30 minutes to figure it out, or 5 minutes to send me a text, just send me a text. Let's save some time, if I can help you in any way. And that's on a personal level and a professional level. There's folks that are going through struggles or whatnot and so they'll send a text and say, "Hey, do you know anything about this application? Or do you have a contact here or there or whatnot?" And so it's just being real. You just got to check your ego at the door and be real.

According to Crowley (2011), demonstrating care and concern for employees builds loyalty. Additionally, when people feel cared for, they become more productive (Crowley, 2011). Connecting with people through showing care and concern does not have to be complicated, as one superintendent stated:

Oh, it's a simple little thing, but people really like it. Years and years ago, I started buying hundreds of See's suckers, those little caramel lollipops. And then at Christmas time, I put them in a basket, and I stop by each school, and I'll start doing that this week, and visit every campus between now and Friday. And I call it my Elfing tour. So just go by and just tell everybody how much I appreciate them. And they pick up a lollipop and we chat for a few minutes, and then I go on to the next school. But people go out of their way and talk about, "Oh, it's almost lollipop season," or "I can't believe he includes us," whoever us is, the nutritional service workers or the custodian. And so I think it's a way to say, "I see you," right? And that people really, really appreciate that.

Traditional leadership models have discouraged leaders to keep clear of people's personal issues with the fear that such connections would complicate the leader-worker

relationship (Crowley, 2011). Crowley further explained that team members understand that leaders spend more time on things and people who matter to them. One superintendent shared that checking in with team members and asking simple questions about how they are, is a way to connect with them:

I check in with people, “Hey, how are you? How did it go? How’s it going?”

And that’s really appreciated. So I try to do the notes and the thing like that, that’s not my forte, but I pick up the phone. The other thing I do is really, they know that family comes first. So at any point when someone needs to run home because something happened with their child or they need to make to. ... They know they just have to tell me, it’s not a having to ask because I understand that somebody who’s concerned about their family isn’t going to be able to do what they need to do. And so, I try to do that and to reach out always, and I’m always available at all times by text.

Maximizing Employee Potential

The thematic peer researchers defined maximizing employee potential as igniting emotional drivers by promoting human well-being while proactively strengthening, teaching, and building people toward high achievement (Burnett & Lisk, 2019; Crowley, 2011). Coding for maximizing employee potential resulted in five themes: collaboration, give autonomy, meaningful work, safe environment, and training and professional development (see Table 9).

Table 9

Maximizing Employee Potential

Theme	Data Source & Number of Sources	Frequency
Collaboration	Interview, Observation—23	70
Give autonomy	Interview—11	58
Meaningful work	Interview, Observation—37	84
Safe environment	Interview, Observation—9	56
Training and professional development	Interview—16	63

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

The capacity of individuals is often overlooked by being judged quickly and not having the chance to reach their true potential (Crowley, 2011). Most individuals never reach their full potential (Crowley, 2011). The topic of self-care as a key component of well-being was a popular topic of conversation and the participating superintendents had much to offer on strategies to promote well-being and maximize employee potential.

One superintendent shared,

We do check in frequently at our meetings. And so, checking in, sometimes it looks like us moving into a breakout room and having a few minutes with four or five colleagues just to see how everybody is and what's happening. Sometimes, we'll have a breathing activity. Some of our folks who are trained in that, so they'll do a little four-by-four breathing, and people turn off their cameras.

To help employees, leaders need to know their employees' level of expertise and identify areas for further growth (Crowley, 2011). Another superintendent emphasized the importance of checking in with staff and building in time to get a feel for where people are emotionally:

Lately we've been doing check-ins at the beginning of every meeting. That's been a goal of all our directors and [we] implement that at our principal meetings

or admin meetings. Having that time at the beginning to ask people how are you feeling? To talk about gratitude, to spend a few minutes, so the first 10 minutes calling, texting, doing something to tell someone that you care about them and why.

When it came to promoting self-care and well-being, modeling the behaviors participants wanted to see in their team was highlighted by the participating superintendents. Filling one's own cup, as one superintendent shared, could mean going on walks, practicing breathing, not responding to e-mails in the evenings and weekends, and taking time to just be alone. In a note to staff prior to Thanksgiving break, one superintendent wrote, "Put your to do list to the side, just let it be, stay in your pajamas, do whatever you need to do, go for a walk." Prior to the Winter break, the same superintendent wrote a similar note to staff encouraging them to take a day to do whatever brings them joy. Another superintendent stated that being intentional about well-being is critical:

I would just say that I'm intentional about the concept. And so I'll ask people in meetings, "How are you?" We start off our meetings with "How are you doing? Let's reflect for a minute," right? "Are you taking care of yourself?" I'll share that with them all the time. And then we board protocols here that I've developed with my board and they value life work balance.

One superintendent's creativity inspired his team to look outside the box and schedule a different kind of professional development day for his staff:

These people are burned out, they're tired, they're stressed. I think we need to just give people a mental health day and we need to figure out a way to make that

work, to put as minimal of requirements on them as possible. And so we ended up restructuring the whole day to tell people, “Hey, if you just want to work in your classroom, if you just need some quiet time to do your grade book for second semester or to grade finals for first semester or collaborate with a colleague or whatever, go do what you need to do to feel better and to get more prepared.” If you want to engage in a little more self-care, we had yoga, meditation, healthy breathing, and mindfulness sessions. We also had a presenter who talked about trauma-informed strategies.

Another method to maximize employee potential was identified by one superintendent who said people need to be encouraged to continue to learn. The superintendent was purposeful about having such conversations:

And I really take some pride in helping prepare people for additional responsibility or promotional opportunities. And so we celebrate that as well. And people sometimes don’t see that potential in themselves. And so when somebody tapped them and said, “You could be really good as a principal,” for example, “You should think about this credential program or leadership opportunity.” I think that ignites folks forward as well.

While offering opportunities for growth and providing trainings to all staff are necessary, as one superintendent pointed out, organizational culture plays a big role in the success of such trainings:

There’s just that kind of a culture that we do it because it’s a good opportunity for us to continue to grow, not because of what it’s going to get from me. We are always providing training, a variety of kinds of training. So we run our own

leadership academy to try and give people opportunities for growth and prepare them for promotional opportunities in this school district.

Valuing and Honoring Achievements

The thematic peer researchers defined valuing and honoring achievements as praising, acknowledging, recognizing, and appreciating positive accomplishments as an expression of care through monetary and/or nonmonetary rewards, which may lead to increased job satisfaction (Brun & Dugas, 2008; Crowley, 2011; Tessema et al., 2013; Posamentier, 2008). Coding for valuing and honoring achievements resulted in two themes: communication and fun and silly events (see Table 10).

Table 10

Valuing and Honoring Achievements Theme

Theme	Data source & number of sources	Frequency
Communication	Interview, observation, artifact—20	58
Fun and silly events	Interview, observation—7	45

Note. Sources include transcribed interviews, artifacts and observations.

While all participating superintendents agreed that valuing and honoring achievements are critical, each one has developed a unique approach to acknowledge and celebrate such achievements. Regardless of the approach, Crowley (2011) suggested a consistent method of appreciation that becomes part of the organizational culture, encouraging employees to persist in the face of challenging tasks and in times of crisis. The word “encourage,” according to Crowley (2011), dates back to the 14th century and means “to give heart” to people (p. 131). It is not surprising that encouragement ignites optimism and motivates people to accomplish more (Crowley, 2011).

One participating superintendent shared that a lot of hard work, planning, and dedication goes into recognizing and honoring employees. The employees are recognized both officially and unofficially:

One of the official things we do is that we have an employee of the year for each school. And each of those schools and student of the year, at each of those schools are recognized at board meetings. The unofficial way is all the little things that you do to make sure people know that they're appreciated and cared for. When I walk onto every campus, I make sure that not only do I just go to whatever room I'm going and I'm leaving, every single time I walk into the cafeteria, I make sure that our classified staff know that I'm there. I spend a minute with our food service workers, our campus monitors, the custodian is always acknowledged.

Other methods of valuing and honoring achievements are expressed in written materials such as newsletters, parent letters, and press releases. In a cabinet meeting, one superintendent shared a video highlighting a gardening project led by a teacher and parent volunteers. Another superintendent begins every meeting with a conversation valuing and honoring achievements:

We try to start every cabinet meeting, every principal meeting, leadership meeting with conversations around good job, good work, recognizing staff for things that they're doing. And it's not necessarily me. I'm not the one that's leading that work, that's the group who's leading it. And so I think having somebody recognize you for something that you did, that might have been just part of your

job, but we always like to recognize, I think, for our work. And so we do, we spend a lot of time doing that.

Making recognitions true heartfelt celebrations require creativity (Crowley, 2011).

A quote by Coleridge, emphasizes that what comes from the heart, goes to the heart (Crowley, 2011). The gesture does not have to be grand; however, it does need to be consistent. Whether the recognition is weekly, monthly, or annually, it needs to be genuine and sincere. One superintendent shared a very creative and fun way of recognizing employees and getting to know them on a personal level:

We instituted every Monday morning employees contribute or suggest a song, and then we play it in the building. So that's our way of starting the week in the most positive way possible. And we then recognize who submitted the name of the song for whatever made them want to appreciate, to share it with everyone else.

Recognitions don't always have to be monetary. Highlighting and sharing achievements of staff members with the school community, indicates to people that their actions and contributions are seen and valued. A creative way to value and honor achievements shared by one superintendent is to share a photo of a classroom visit highlighting the teacher and what was worked on in the classroom during the visit: "In public board meetings, if I visit a classroom, I'll bring an example of a picture I took in that classroom and what that teacher was doing."

Celebrations do not always have to be serious. Creating fun and memorable events that are woven into the fabric of the organizational culture, establishing traditions that are celebrated for generations. One superintendent reiterated the importance of

creating fun and sometimes silly moments, emphasizing the importance of such moments in our very serious world, and in times of crisis:

We try to build in plenty of opportunities for social get-togethers and celebrations, and sometimes that's silly, and sometimes it's serious. So, it's being there for people when they have family members who are sick or maybe even passing to silly things like Halloween parties and costume days and that sort of thing.

Key Findings

This qualitative research study utilized virtual interviews, observations, and artifacts to gather data, which were coded into themes and analyzed, resulting in 14 key findings. The 14 key findings characterized how exemplary school district superintendents lead their districts using Crowley's (2011) four principles of heart-led leadership: building a highly engaged team, connecting on a personal level, maximizing employee potential, and valuing and honoring achievements to achieve extraordinary results.

Data from virtual interviews, artifacts, and observations were collected and analyzed to generate frequencies related to each of the four principles of heart-led leadership. The data presented in Figure 6 suggests that connecting on a personal level had the highest number of frequencies. Crowley (2011) suggested that employees need a greater connection with their leader. Strategies for connecting on a personal level were shared by all eight respondents as measures to get to know staff and develop long-lasting relationships that are grounded in trust. The next section with the highest frequencies is maximizing employee potential. Developing people, as stated by Crowley (2011), not

only benefits them but also builds them up as advocates for the team, the leader, and the organization.

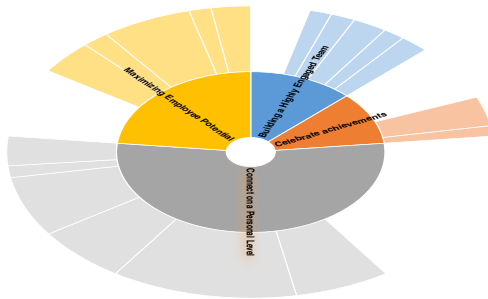


Figure 6. Details of frequency within in each theme.

Crowley's (2011) heart-led leadership principles of building a highly engaged team and valuing and honoring achievements received almost equal number of frequencies as seen in Figure 7. Building a highly engaged team is an opportunity for leaders to match talents with job descriptions and create a pathway for them to reach their highest potential (Crowley, 2011). What came up during the interviews is the fact that not every superintendent has the opportunity to hire their own staff. Overtime, as staff members move around and positions become vacant, superintendents who participated in the study shared that they take the time needed to fill the vacancies with the right talents. The importance of establishing celebratory events related to Crowley's heart-led principle of valuing and honoring achievements, was highlighted by the participating superintendents.

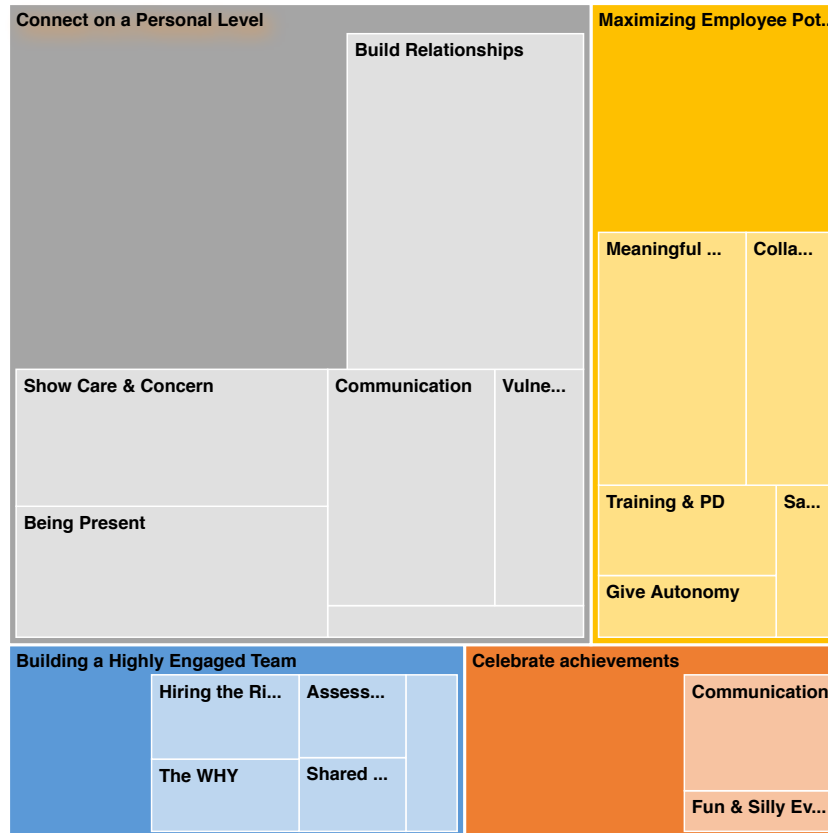


Figure 7. Frequency in each principle.

The next four sections provide specific key findings related to each of Crowley's (2011) four principles of heart-led leadership:

Key Findings for Build a Highly Engaged Team

1. Superintendents are intentional about who they hire. While superintendents initially inherit their teams, when they have the opportunity, they search for and hire the best and most qualified to join their team.
2. With the right people in the right positions, superintendents strengthen team engagement by reminding them of their "why." The reflection on the "why" fuels the energy and enthusiasm and creates engagement.

3. Superintendents understand the importance of alignments of district goals with the vision starting with the board adopting goals and priorities, and working with cabinet, principals, teachers, and professional staff.
4. Evaluations are built on the adopted goals. This includes not only the superintendent's evaluation but all staff evaluations.
5. Superintendents create meaning and bring fun into the workplace by celebrating occasions that can seem silly at times. They feel that meaning is difficult to cultivate being away from people.

Key Findings for Connect on a Personal Level

1. Connecting on a personal level is a key component of establishing and strengthening relationships for superintendents. Superintendents build time into agendas and schedules to spend the necessary time to get to know team members. Such opportunities include a check-in item on the meeting agenda to share feelings and reflections or to respond to a question creating a safe space to get to know team members.
2. Superintendents make it a point to visit school sites on a regular basis and spend time getting to know their team members. This includes visiting classrooms and checking in with teachers and all support staff.
3. In creating personal and meaningful connections with staff, superintendents reach out to staff when they are ill or care for a loved one who is ill. They make phone calls and personally visit staff at home/hospital and offer support. This includes substituting in the classroom for teachers who may need a little time to take care of a personal matter.

Key Findings for Maximize Employee Potential

1. Superintendents get to know their staff and coach them to identify their areas for growth.
2. Professional development opportunities are aligned to the needs of staff.

Superintendents are willing to step outside of the normal and common staff development trainings and build in mental health/wellness sessions in the training schedule.
3. When staff members complete a particular training or develop a program, they are highlighted and showcased either in a video or article, which is shared with the community.

Key Findings for Value and Honor Achievements

1. Superintendents understand that valuing and honoring achievements creates a culture of gratitude and creates meaning. Recognition at board meetings as well as cabinet meetings showcasing and honoring achievements are opportunities to value and honor achievements.
2. Simple handwritten notes to staff congratulating and honoring them was identified as an important component of honoring achievements.
3. Celebrating achievements is an essential part of school culture, and superintendents make sure that such celebrations are not rare and happen on a regular basis.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to describe how exemplary school district superintendents lead their districts using Mark Crowley's (2011) four principles of heart-led leadership: building a highly engaged team,

connecting on a personal level, maximizing employee potential, and valuing and honoring achievements to achieve extraordinary results. This chapter provided 20 themes aligned to the four research questions. Chapter V is organized to provide a summary of this study to highlight major findings, unexpected findings, conclusions, recommendations for further research, and reflections from the researcher.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This phenomenological qualitative study was conducted to describe the lived experiences of exemplary K-12 school district superintendents who lead their districts using Mark Crowley's (2011) four principles of heart-led leadership: building a highly engaged team, connecting on a personal level, maximizing employee potential, and valuing and honoring achievements. The purpose and research questions were developed by the thematic peer researchers.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe how exemplary K-12 school district superintendents lead from the heart using Mark Crowley's (2011) four principles (building a highly engaged team, connecting on a personal level, maximizing employee potential, and valuing and honoring achievements) to accomplish extraordinary results in their organizations. The research questions follow:

1. How do K-12 school district superintendents lead from the heart to accomplish extraordinary results by building a highly engaged team?
2. How do K-12 school district superintendents lead from the heart to accomplish extraordinary results by connecting on a personal level?
3. How do K-12 school district superintendents lead from the heart to accomplish extraordinary results by maximizing employee potential?
4. How do K-12 school district superintendents lead from the heart to accomplish extraordinary results by valuing and honoring achievements?

This phenomenological research study was composed of eight virtual interviews utilizing a Zoom platform. The eight K-12 exemplary superintendents in the five

counties in Southern California shared their lived experiences within the four elements of Crowley's (2011) framework. A third party transcription service, Rev, provided interview transcripts for each of the interviews. The transcriptions were reviewed and confirmed for accuracy by each of the respondents. NVivo software facilitated data analysis and coding for the eight interviews. Twenty-two artifacts were collected and coded for themes. Additionally, five virtual observations of management and board meetings helped the researcher create field notes to analyze and provided data to support the research questions. Triangulation methods using interviews, artifacts, and observations aided the researcher to triangulate data. The target population for this study was 84 K-12 school district superintendents in five counties in Southern California: Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, Santa Barbara, and Ventura (see Table 2 in Chapter III).

The 14 heart-led thematic peer researchers, under the guidance of faculty chairs, collaborated and designed the interview script and interview questions. A sample of eight was selected for each of the peer researchers within their respective target population. The target populations included charter executive directors, special education administrators, elementary principals, elementary Title I principals in Sacramento County, secondary administrative principals, middle school principals, nonprofit women leaders with focus on domestic violence/sexual abuse, primary principals in Southern California, learning and development leaders in corporate organizations, community college chief human resource officers, Hispanic entrepreneur women, leaders of remote sales/marketing employees, female superintendents, and K-12 superintendents in Southern California.

Based on the collective thematic teams' definition, criteria for exemplary leaders were developed. The criteria described qualifications to participate in the study, which included serving as a school district superintendent for a minimum of 3 years and demonstrating evidence of caring for people in the organization. The participating superintendents had to meet at least two of the following exemplary criteria:

1. Evidence of extraordinary results
2. Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings
3. Recognition by peers
4. Membership in a professional association in their field

Major Findings

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe how exemplary K-12 school district superintendents lead from the heart using Mark Crowley's (2011) four principles (building a highly engaged team, connecting on a personal level, maximizing employee potential, and valuing and honoring achievements) to accomplish extraordinary results in their organizations. The data analysis produced 18 themes and 14 key findings presented in Chapter IV. The 14 key findings represented how exemplary K-12 school district superintendents lead their organizations using Crowley's heart-led leadership principles of building a highly engaged team, connecting on a personal level, maximizing employee potential, and valuing and honoring achievements to accomplish extraordinary results in their organizations. The themes follow.

Building a Highly Engaged Team

1. Superintendents build a highly engaged team by ensuring alignment of district initiatives to the vision.
2. When presented the opportunity, superintendents focus on hiring the right people.
3. Superintendents make an assessment of strengths and identify areas for further growth.
4. Establishing and honoring shared values is a strategy used by superintendents in building a highly engaged team.
5. Superintendents establish a time and place to explore team members “why.”

Connecting on a Personal Level

1. Superintendents have a high level of awareness about mindfulness and being present.
2. Building relationships is critical component of connecting to team members.
3. Open, honest, and transparent communication further strengthens relationships.
4. Superintendents are willing to get out of their comfort zone to show care and concern for their team members.
5. Superintendents make an effort to visit school sites on a regular basis and feel that it is an important component of connecting with members of their team.
6. Superintendents believe in the power of vulnerability.

Maximizing Employee Potential

1. Superintendents believe that creating a collaborative culture enhances employee potential.
2. Providing autonomy to staff members and allowing them to make decisions are key.
3. Superintendents believe that meaningful work can be a catalyst for further growth.

4. Providing a psychological safe environment establishes a foundation of trust.
5. Superintendents structure trainings and professional development opportunities to fit the needs of staff.

Valuing and Honoring Achievements

1. Superintendents understand and appreciate the significance of celebrations in valuing and honoring achievements.
2. Incorporating fun and sometimes silly events to honor the achievements of staff promotes gratitude.

Unexpected Finding

The unexpected finding in this study was the overarching theme of mindfulness, across all themes, which has been identified by researchers and philosophers throughout history, and yet it has not been incorporated in many of the current leadership practices. The challenges associated with the pandemic such as isolation, social distancing, and opinions about masking and vaccination have been the cause of societal anxieties. As stress, anxiety, and depression become common conditions among all ages in this modern society, the need to turn inwards to search for solutions becomes critical.

The theme of mindfulness as a solution to the stresses caused by the uncertainties of the current crisis, was unexpected. All participating superintendents shared creative ways they are promoting the concept of mindfulness by scheduling wellness days and incorporating yoga, meditation, and mindfulness into their traditional professional development programs.

Conclusions

The data collected and analyzed for this phenomenological qualitative research study resulted in key findings leading to conclusions. Crowley (2011) emphasized four principles of heart-led leadership: building a highly engaged team, connecting on a personal level, maximizing employee potential, and valuing and honoring achievements to achieve extraordinary results. Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that exemplary school district superintendents have a higher chance of achieving extraordinary results by investing time and energy in hiring the right people when granted that opportunity, getting to know and connecting with them, showing care and concern, communicating growth areas and providing opportunities for further development, and creating a culture of celebrations. The following four sections provide conclusions drawn from the findings of this study for each of Crowley's (2011) four principles of heart-led leadership.

Conclusion 1: Building a Highly Engaged Team—Superintendents Take the Necessary Time to Hire the Right People

Crowley (2011) shared that building a highly engaged team begins with hiring the right people. According to Crowley, selecting people who are willing to bring their heart into their work is a critical component of building a highly engaged team. Exemplary leaders understand the benefits of building a highly engaged team. The findings from a study in Utah identified engagement drivers impacting productivity (Ricklefs, 2016). According to Ricklefs (2016), there are four engagement elements impacting productivity: access to work-life balance, having a positive relationship with their team and leader, having meaningful work, and having the authority and autonomy to make

decisions that impact their work. It is safe to conclude that creating conditions for engagement benefits the individual and team performance, directly impacting the leader and the organization.

While superintendents understand and appreciate the significance of building a highly engaged team, the reality is that many begin their superintendency journey inheriting most and sometimes all of their team members. In those cases, assessing strengths and areas for growth help identify areas for professional training. Over the course of their superintendency, as staff members leave, superintendents have the opportunity to create strategies to fill vacancies. When presented with the opportunity to do the selections and hiring process, superintendents should not settle for less than a perfect fit for the vacancies. They spend time reviewing job descriptions, mission, vision and district goals, as well as evaluation templates, to ensure alignment across all documents before hiring. Data collected from interviews, observations, and artifacts provided additional support for this conclusion:

1. Creating job descriptions that set clear expectations of the positions and communicating them to candidates at the time of interview lead to building a highly engaged team.
2. Leaders hire people who demonstrate strong skills and knowledge in their fields. Moreover, having the right people in the right positions may mean having to hire temporary staff while the search continues.
3. With the right people in the right positions, creating opportunities to get to know team members will enhance levels of staff engagement.

4. Leaders identify strengths and growth areas for each and every team member. The open communication of the observations with the individual team member leads the design of a road map for professional development and training.
5. Leaders develop strategies to have hard (yet kind) conversations with team members focused on areas for growth. While such conversations can be difficult, they are necessary for the success of the team as a whole. Leaders can not shy away from having hard conversations.
6. Thinking outside the box and creating solutions and training opportunities that fit the needs of the team are important components for leaders.
7. It is critical that leaders model the behaviors they want to see in their teams. Such role modeling of behavior includes being vulnerable about one's own areas needing growth and not being afraid to admit making mistakes.
8. Providing the staff the autonomy to make decisions leads to accomplishing extraordinary results.
9. In creating highly engaged teams, it is important that superintendents work with their boards to establish goals that are aligned with the district's vision and communicate the goals with every level of the organization.
10. As leaders of school districts, superintendents must ensure that all documents and evaluations are aligned to district goals. This alignment includes superintendent and professional staff evaluations.
11. Leaders need to create opportunities for staff to explore their personal "why" and inspire them to reflect on their purpose.

Conclusion 2: Connect on a Personal Level—Superintendents Who Spend Time Connecting on a Personal Level Will Establish Strong Relationships

Based on the findings from the study, K-12 school district superintendents who spend time getting to know their staff develop stronger and more meaningful relationships. According to Crowley (2011), it is important for leaders to personally connect to their staff so they can gain insight into what inspires and motivates them. Connecting on a personal level lays the foundation for establishing relationships that create psychologically safe environments for transparency in communication. Data collected from interviews, observations, and artifacts provided additional support for this conclusion:

1. It is important for leaders to spend uninterrupted time with staff on a regular basis.
Superintendents create time to check in with principals, teachers, and support staff during school visits. This is an opportunity to check in and find out about challenges or struggles that may be holding team members back from achieving extraordinary results.
2. Writing handwritten notes to staff members creates personal connections and contributes to a positive and collaborative culture.
3. Practicing vulnerability and sharing personal information creates a foundation of trust with staff.
4. Building time into each of the meeting agendas to ask personal questions and provide a safe environment for self-reflection and sharing are important strategies to connect on a personal level.

Conclusion 3: Maximize Employee Potential—Superintendents Who Invest Time and Energy Into Maximizing Employee Potential Create Success for all Members of Their Organization

The findings of this study support that maximizing employee potential by encouraging continuous learning and growth and offering training programs produces positive outcomes. Exemplary superintendents identified strategies to maximize employee potential. Based on the work of Carter (2009), while leaders take people where they want to go, great leaders take leaders where they need to be, even if they do not realize it. As shared by Crowley (2011), when everyone in the organization is continually deepening their knowledge, the leader excels. Data collected from interviews, observations, and artifacts provided additional support for this conclusion:

1. Spending time with staff leads to understanding the growth areas, which can lead to appropriate trainings. Moreover, leaders' creativity in planning and providing training results in more meaningful learning opportunities.
2. Understanding the impact of the pandemic on the well-being of their staff, exemplary leaders focus their energy on methods to respond to their social and emotional needs.

Conclusion 4: Valuing and Honoring Achievements—Superintendents Who Value and Honor Achievements Foster a Culture of Gratitude Benefiting all Members of Their Organization

When employees feel valued, they are more productive and willing to go the extra step. This is particularly important in times of crisis including the current pandemic. Honoring achievements inspire employees persist in the face of overwhelming projects (Crowley, 2011). Findings by Scherbaum, Naidoo, and Saunderson (2021) suggested

that employee recognitions may be a valuable investment for organizations. Moreover, valuing and recognizing employees leads to stronger performance and better results for organizations (Scherbaum et al., 2021).

1. Honoring achievements can encourage and lead to positive behavior.
2. By being valued, staff gain the positive reinforcement to manage the many challenges they are faced with.
3. Recognizing achievements on a consistent basis creates an organizational culture that values celebrations.

Implications for Action

This study focused on the behaviors that K-12 exemplary school district superintendents exhibit in leading their organizations to achieve extraordinary results. The following implications for action are offered to improve leadership practices for superintendents and aspiring superintendents. The findings uncover a critical aspect of leadership, which is more about the leaders and their ability to think critically to solve problems. Leaders need to have a clear idea of who they are, what they stand for, and how they can operate from their best, before they can lead. Moreover, the findings support the notion of mindfulness in leadership and the leader's capability to assess each situation and get creative with the solutions. The pandemic presented a series of new challenges for school district superintendents. Managing the expectations of the board, staff, students, families, and the community throughout the pandemic, have been major sources of additional stress for the superintendents. Moreover, these superintendents have had to balance all the new aspects of their role while adhering to public health requirements and the new legal mandates as a result of leading in times of crisis.

This section is dedicated to showcasing eight implications for action and is intended to serve as resource to current and future superintendents.

1. Leaders must identify and have clarity about their own values and beliefs. They must have a strong understanding of who they are, their passions, strengths, and areas for further growth.
2. HR leaders should implement programs to train leaders to lead from the heart and provide ongoing opportunities for coaching in this area. Moreover, educational leadership programs at the college and university levels should include heart-led leadership in required curriculum.
3. It is very important for superintendents to model the behavior they want to see with their teams. Leadership begins with the leaders and their ability to self-regulate.
4. As leaders of districts, superintendents need to create space for wellness and honor work/life balance and self-care. Such behaviors need to be modeled by superintendents. Similarly, the self-care component should be required in all curriculums at the college and university levels.
5. Superintendents need to show vulnerability and be willing to admit when they make a mistake.
6. Connecting with staff and establishing trusting relationships are critical. Superintendents need to build time into agendas for regular check-ins, and open, honest and transparent communication that is consistent.
7. Fostering a psychologically safe, positive, and collaborative culture where collective vision is recognized and valued is key. Superintendents need to strengthen the culture

- of their organizations by establishing norms and protocols and by instituting accountability measures that are aligned with the collective goals and the vision.
8. Professional leadership organizations should offer training in leading from the heart for experienced leaders.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the findings of this study of heart-led behaviors of school district superintendents, the following areas are recommended for further research:

1. It is recommended that a phenomenological study be replicated after school districts have recovered from the pandemic and when interviews and observations can be conducted in person.
2. A mixed methods study is recommended to gather and compare qualitative and quantitative data in drawing conclusions about heart-led behaviors of school district superintendents.
3. It is recommended that a study be conducted to identify and describe the differences in heart-led behaviors of male and female school district superintendents.
4. It is recommended that a study be conducted to examine the difference in lived experiences between school district superintendents who have mentor/s versus those who do not to further understand the role of mentors in practicing heart-led leadership.
5. Compare leaders who received coaching or post graduate professional development with those who have not to examine the difference in heart-led behaviors.

Final Reflections

To be effective today, the leader shoulders an almost sacred responsibility to create conditions that enable people to have happy and productive lives.

—Peter Senge

Life is made up of a series of single moments that can determine outcomes. In those single moments, we are faced with making decisions that ultimately impact not just ourselves, but those we are connected to, those we serve. Listening to the wisdom of our heart can significantly alter the experiences of each of the single moments. The eight respondents in my study shared many of those single moments, including moments that pushed them out of their comfort zone to listen to the wisdom of their heart. Modern-day superintendents are faced with many challenges requiring them to think outside the box. It is obvious that the role of the superintendent has evolved over the past few decades and, most recently, with the implications of the pandemic. The rules and guidelines for school safety and student/staff health protocols are changing on a daily basis, making leadership from the heart more critical than ever. Creating check-in points and connecting with each and every person within the school district to promote mental wellness is a reoccurring theme among exemplary superintendents. As one superintendent simply pointed out, “When you show care of concern for your teachers, they model that same care and concern in their classrooms.” Such a demonstration of care and concern is even more critical in times of crisis.

On a personal note, my dissertation journey has been one of the most meaningful experiences of my life and has provided many opportunities for reflection. I had always believed that heart-led leadership is needed to transform organizations toward a shared

vision and extraordinary outcomes. My research findings fill every fiber of my being with happiness and contentment that heart-led leadership is in fact necessary in achieving extraordinary results. Being kind to those around us, showing care and concern, engaging others, connecting on a personal level, identifying and maximizing potential, and honoring achievements establish the foundation for trusting relationships. In closing, I came to learn, to learn about me, who I am and who I want to become, and although I'm not there yet, I am much closer than I have ever been and I find that exuberating. Thank you for reading my dissertation and I hope you are finding its content beneficial, connecting you to the wisdom of your own heart.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Synthesis Matrix

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

Source	Leadership	Trust	Superintendents	Leadership Development	Heart Centered Leadership	Building a Highly Engaged Team	Connecting on Personal Level	Maximizing Employee Potential	Valuing Achievements	Vulnerability	Change Management	Transformational Leadership	Heart Led Leadership	Servant Leadership	Authentic Leadership
Fiedler, F. E. (1971). Personality and situational determinants of leader behavior. Retrieved from	X														
Forbes, B. A. (1998). Guiding Premises and Implementing Strategies for Transnational Leadership in the 21st Century. <i>Consensus</i> , 24(1), 2.													X		
Foster, R., & Young, J. (2004). Leadership: Current themes from the educational literature. <i>The CAP Journal</i> (12), 3, 29-30.	X														
Fullan, M. (2001). <i>The new meaning of educational change</i> : Routledge.										X					
George, B. (2003). <i>Authentic leadership: Rediscovering the secrets to creating lasting value</i> : John Wiley & Sons.															X
George, B., et al. (2007). "Discovering your authentic leadership." <i>Harvard business review</i> 85(2): 129.	X	X							X						
Glaser, J. E. (2016). <i>Conversational intelligence: How great leaders build trust and get extraordinary results</i> : Routledge.		X													
Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R. E., & McKee, A. (2002). <i>The new leaders: Transforming the art of leadership into the science of results</i> .											X				

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

Before we begin our interview questions, I want to review the purpose of this study and the four research questions that will be the focus of our interview today.

Purpose Statement:

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe how exemplary leaders (superintendents, principals, city managers, police chiefs, corporate leaders, military leaders, etc.) lead from the heart using Mark Crowley's four principles (building a highly engaged team, connecting on a personal level, maximizing employee potential and valuing and honoring achievements) to accomplish extraordinary results in their organizations.

Research Questions:

1. How do exemplary leaders lead from the heart to accomplish extraordinary results by building a highly engaged team?
2. How do exemplary leaders lead from the heart to accomplish extraordinary results by connecting on a personal level?
3. How do exemplary leaders lead from the heart to accomplish extraordinary results by maximizing employee potential?
4. How do exemplary leaders lead from the heart to accomplish extraordinary results by valuing and honoring achievement

The interview questions will be preceded by a definition of the Crowley principle that is connected to those questions. The first principle is found in research question one,

Building a Highly Engaged Team.

Definition:

Building a highly engaged team is using strategies that help people become enthusiastically invested in and dedicated to work they believe is significant, meaningful, and challenging, where relationships are built on emotional connection and shared vision, and where values and commitment are based on personal strengths and interests aligned with organizational goals (Crowley, 2011; George & Stevenson, 1988; Rees, Alfes & Gatenby, 2013; Senge, Lichtenstein & Kaeufer, 2007).

Interview Questions:

1. How do you develop a team that is dedicated to their collective work?
•Probe: Please share a time when you supported one of your teams that was having difficulty.
2. How do you make work meaningful for your team?
•Probe: Please share an example?
3. How do you develop relationships on your team that are built on emotional connections?
•Probe: How did the development of relationships lead to a shared vision?

We now move to our second principle from research question #2, **Connecting on a Personal Level**.

Definition:

Connecting on a personal level is seeing and acting on behalf of others and authentically communicating with the intention of adding value driven by humility, concern, and love (B. Brown, 2015; Crowley, 2011; Hayward, 2015; Maxwell, 2010).

Interview Questions:

4. How do you communicate authentically with members in your organization?
•Probe: Please share a time when this was important to the organizations' success.
5. How do you use humility to add value to members in your organization?
•Probe: How has this developed personal connections with employees?

6. How do you show concern and love for your staff?
•Probe: Please share an example of how this has made a difference in the performance of staff?

Our third principle from research question #3 is **Maximizing Employee Potential**.

Definition:

Maximizing employee potential is igniting emotional drivers by promoting human well-being while proactively strengthening, teaching, and building people toward high achievement (Crowley, 2011; Burnett & Lisk, 2019).

Interview Questions:

7. How do you promote emotional well-being in your organization?
•Probe: Please share a time when you experienced the benefits of promoting emotional well-being in your organization.
8. How do you create an environment that motivates staff members to high achievement?
•Probe: Please share a specific story or example where this happened?
9. How do you strengthen and build employees in a way that supports high achievement?
•Probe: Please share a story of the specific strategy that you used that led to high achievement.

Our fourth principle found in research question #4 is **Valuing and Honoring Achievements**.

Definition:

Valuing and honoring achievements is praising, acknowledging, recognizing, and appreciating positive accomplishments as an expression of care through monetary and/or nonmonetary rewards, which may lead to increased job satisfaction (Dugas & Brun, 2008; Tessema, Ready & Embaye, 2013; Posamentier, 2008; Crowley, 2011).

Interview Questions:

10. Valuing and Honoring Achievements is important to inspiring employees to a higher level of satisfaction. How do you acknowledge employees' achievements at work?

Probe: Can you elaborate on how you recognize their achievements?

11. How do you ensure that your employees see that their work is valued?

Probe: Describe specific non-monetary and/or monetary practices that you use for this purpose.

12. Can you share an example of when you provide an expression of care for an employee?

Probe: Please tell me a little more about that.

This concludes the interview questions. I would like to again thank you very much for your time. If you would like, when the results of our research are known, we will send you a copy of our findings.

General Probes:

May be used during the interview when you want to get more information and/or extend the conversation with them. These are not questions you share with the interviewee. It is best to be very familiar with them and use in a conversational way when appropriate to extend their answers.

1. "What did you mean by.....?"
2. "Do you have more to add.....?"
3. "Would you expand upon that a bit.....?"
4. "Why do you think that was the case?"
5. "Could you please tell me more about.....?"
6. "Can you give me an example of.....?"
7. "How did you feel about that?"

APPENDIX C

Thematic Interview Protocol Template

I would like to start by thanking you for sharing your valuable experiences with me. I know your time is precious and I appreciate your willingness to participate in this interview. Making this personal connection with you will be of great benefit to my research and I truly appreciate your contribution to this study.

My name is Sepideh Yeoh and I am a Governance Consultant with California School Boards Association. I'm a doctoral candidate at UMass Global in the area of Organizational Leadership. I'm a part of a team conducting research to describe how exemplary leaders lead from the heart using Mark Crowley's four principles (building a highly engaged team, connecting on a personal level, maximizing employee potential and valuing and honoring achievements) to accomplish extraordinary results in their organizations.

Our team is conducting 112 interviews with leaders like yourself. Our hope is that the information we gather will provide a clear picture of what exemplary leaders do to lead their organizations through the use of Crowley's four principles and our work will add to the body of research currently available.

Informed Consent (START RECORDING to obtain verbal consent)

Prior to this interview you received information concerning the purpose of the research, a copy of the interview questions, UMass Global's Participant's Bill of Rights, and the Informed Consent form. After reviewing the protocols, you were offered an opportunity to ask questions concerning the research and the consent process. At that time, you provided verbal consent to be a participant in the interview. For purposes of verifying your consent would you again provide a verbal yes as to your consent that will be included in the recording of this interview. Thank you.

I will now begin the interview. During the interview I may take notes as the interview is being recorded. If you are uncomfortable with me taking notes, please let me know and I will continue without the notes. When our interview is complete, I will stop the recording and conclude our interview session. After your interview is transcribed, you will receive a copy of the complete transcripts to ensure I have accurately captured your thoughts and ideas. Following your review and approval of the transcription, the data will be analyzed. The digital recording will be erased three years after the publication of the dissertation. Please remember that anytime during this process you have the right to stop the interview. If you do not understand the questions being asked, please do not hesitate to ask for clarification.

I would like to remind you that any information that is obtained in connection to this study will remain confidential. All of the data will be reported without reference to any individual(s) or any institution(s). Pseudonyms will be used to ensure the confidentiality of each participant.

Is there anything I can clarify before we begin?

Okay, let's get started, and again, thanks so much for your time.

APPENDIX D

Field-Test Participants 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.

Before the brief post interview discussion, give the interviewee a copy of the interview protocol. If their answers imply that some kind of improvement is necessary, follow up for specificity.

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? *If the interview indicates some uncertainty, be sure to find out where in the interview it occurred.*
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)?

Remember, the key is to use common, conversational language and very user friendly approach. Put that EI to work 😊

NOTE: Red font is for your eyes and support info only

APPENDIX E

Interview Feedback Reflection Questions

Conducting interviews is a learned skill set/experience. Gaining valuable insight about your interview skills and affect with the interview will support your data gathering when interviewing the actual participants. As the researcher you should reflect on the questions below after completing the interview. You should also discuss the following reflection questions with your 'observer' after completing the interview field test. The questions are written from your prospective as the interviewer. However, you can verbalize your thoughts with the observer and they can add valuable insight from their observation.


1. How long did the interview take? _____ Did the time seem to be appropriate?
2. How did you feel during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous?
3. Going into it, did you feel prepared to conduct the interview? Is there something you could have done to be better prepared?
4. What parts of the interview went the most smoothly and why do you think that was the case?
5. What parts of the interview seemed to struggle and why do you think that was the case?
6. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would that part be and how would you change it?
7. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?

APPENDIX F

UMass Global Institutional Review Board (BUIRB) Approval





☆ **Institutional Review Board**

December 4, 2021 at 5:01 PM

Details 

IRB Application Approved: Sepideh Yeoh

To: Sepideh M Yeoh, Cc: ddevore@umassglobal.edu, Dr. Jonathan Greenberg, irb@umassglobal.edu

Dear Sepideh Yeoh,

Congratulations! Your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the UMass Global Institutional Review Board. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If you need to modify your IRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at IRB.umassglobal.edu

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.




Thank You,

IRB
Academic Affairs
UMass Global
16355 Laguna Canyon Road
Irvine, CA 92618
irb@umassglobal.edu
www.umassglobal.edu

This email is an automated notification. If you have questions please email us at irb@umassglobal.edu.

APPENDIX G

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative Certificate

		Completion Date 18-May-2020 Expiration Date N/A Record ID 36668472
This is to certify that:		
Sepideh Yeoh		
Has completed the following CITI Program course:		
<div>Human Subjects Research (Curriculum Group) Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers (Course Learner Group) 1 - Basic (Stage)</div>		
<div>Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.</div>		
Under requirements set by:		
Brandman University		
 Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative		
Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wda7aae41-a484-4fbf-9d78-f605fe16c77d-36668472		

APPENDIX H

Invitation to Participate in the Study

Dear _____:

My name is Sepideh Yeoh and I'm a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at UMass Global, Irvine. I am a member of a dissertation team with 13 other researchers. This letter serves as an invitation to participate in a research study.

PURPOSE: The purpose of my study is to describe how exemplary K-12 school district superintendents lead from the heart to accomplish extraordinary results. The framework of my study is Mark Crowley's Lead from the Heart principles.

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 via Zoom. 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 principles of leading from the heart, Build A Highly Engaged Team, Connect On A Personal Level, Maximize Employee Potential and Value and Honor Achievements. 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 lead from the heart. 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 heart led behaviors they exhibit in accomplishing extraordinary results.

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, Sepideh Yeoh, at syeoh@mail.umassglobal.edu or by phone at (xxx) xxx-xxxx 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, UMass Global, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

Thank you again for your consideration,

Sepideh Yeoh
Doctoral Candidate, Ed.D.

APPENDIX I

Phone Invitation to Participate in the Study

Hello Superintendent _____,

This is Sepideh Yeoh, California School Boards Association (CSBA) faculty and consultant. I am a doctoral candidate at UMass Global, formerly Brandman University. I am conducting a study on the heart led behaviors exemplary K-12 school district superintendents exhibit in accomplishing extraordinary results.

Your name was referred to me by _____, at CSBA as someone fitting the criteria for exemplary. I would like to include your heart led experiences in my study. If you are interested in participating, we can set up a one hour zoom session for an interview. I will send you the 12 questions as well as definitions of the principles in the study, prior to the interview.

If interview date and time is set continue with:

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my study. I look forward to seeing you on _____ at _____. I will follow up with a calendar zoom invite. I will also send you a confirmation e-mail after this call.

Thank you again and have a wonderful day/afternoon/rest of the day!

APPENDIX J

Confirmation e-mail to participants

Dear Superintendent _____,

It was a pleasure speaking with you on the phone and I truly appreciate your willingness to participate in my study. Attached, please find:

- Participation invitation,
- Interview questions and definitions of the four principles in the study,
- The Informed Consent and Audio Recording Release,
- And The Participant's Bill of Rights.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions or need clarification. I am excited to meet you via Zoom on _____ at _____.

Best,
Sepideh Yeoh
Doctoral Candidate, UMass Global
xxx-xxx-xxxx

APPENDIX K

Informed Consent and Audio Recording Release

INFORMATION ABOUT: Heart-led behaviors that exemplary K-12 unified school district superintendents exhibit to lead their organizations to accomplish extraordinary results.

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Sepideh Yeoh

PURPOSE OF STUDY: You are being invited to participate in a research study conducted by Sepideh Yeoh, a doctoral candidate from the School of Education at UMass Global. The purpose of the study is to describe how exemplary K-12 school district superintendents lead from the heart to accomplish extraordinary results. The framework of my study is Mark Crowley's Lead from the Heart principles.

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, via Zoom and will be scheduled at a date and time 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, feel free to contact Sepideh Yeoh at syeoh@mail.umassglobal.edu or by phone xxx-xxx-xxxx.

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, UMass Global, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Rd, 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.

Signature of Participant or Responsible Party

Date: _____

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date: _____

APPENDIX L

Research Participant's Bill of Rights



UMASS GLOBAL 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 UMASS GLOBAL Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The UMass Global 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, UMASS GLOBAL, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.