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How Exemplary Title I Elementary School Principals Lead With an Infinite Mindset

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This dissertation is dedicated to my baby sister, Jessica Rae.

ABSTRACT

How Exemplary Title I Elementary School Principals Lead with an Infinite Mindset

by Lindsey Rae Gatfield

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to explore and describe how exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive practices of Sinek's infinite mindset framework are embedded in their organization to inspire achievement of extraordinary results. A further purpose of this study was to understand organizational supports and barriers exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive affect infinite mindset development.

Methodology: This phenomenological study explored experiences of exemplary leaders and their perceptions of how the five practices of infinite mindset are embedded in their organization. The target population for this study was exemplary Title I elementary school principals in Orange County, California. Purposive sampling based on criteria and recommendations from an expert panel was used to select 10 exemplary leaders participating in this study. Qualitative data were gathered through in-depth interviews and collection of artifacts. Interview questions were designed around the five infinite mindset practices: just cause, building trusting teams, worth rival, existential flexibility, and courage to lead.

Findings: Examination of qualitative data from 10 Title I elementary school principals participating in this study indicated exemplary leaders perceive embedding practices of Sinek's (2019) infinite mindset framework supports achievement of extraordinary results. Findings from this study include 18 themes, eight key findings, seven major findings, and one unexpected finding.

Conclusions: Based on findings in this study, six conclusions were drawn to demonstrate how exemplary Title I elementary school principals embed Sinek's (2019) infinite mindset practices. Each research variable is included in these conclusions. Perceived supports and barriers that impacted embedding of infinite mindset practices in an organization were also included in the conclusions. Exemplary Title I elementary school principals focus on people in their organization and building trust with all staff members.

Recommendations for Action: There are six recommendations for further research. It is important to explore experiences of Title I principals in areas outside of Orange County, California. Further research could also include other types of schools such as secondary Title I schools and non-Title I schools. Perhaps most importantly, future studies should focus on perspectives of teachers and further explore barriers educators experience.

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PREFACE

Following discussions and considerations regarding the opportunity to study Sinek's (2019) infinite mindset framework, four faculty researchers and eight doctoral students discovered a common interest in exploring how exemplary leaders perceive the five infinite mindset practices of (a) advancing a just cause, (b) building trusting teams, (c) studying your worthy rival, (d) preparing for existential flexibility, and (e) demonstrating the courage to lead are embedded in their organization to inspire achievement of extraordinary results. Additionally, the researchers were also tasked with exploring the organizational supports and barriers exemplary leaders perceive affect the development of the infinite mindset in their organization. This exploration resulted in a thematic study conducted by a research team of eight doctoral students.

The eight peer researchers and four faculty advisors ultimately chose a phenomenological design that would be most appropriate for this study of the infinite mindset constructs and their perceived impact on how the constructs establish a culture of extraordinary results (Patton, 2015). The structure was resolved to be generally suitable as a nonexperimental, descriptive approach to best accumulate the lived experiences of the leaders. Each researcher interviewed 12 leaders to describe how the five practices of the infinite mindset were embedded in their respective organizations to inspire achievement of extraordinary results in their organizations. The team cocreated the purpose statement, research questions, definitions, interview questions, and study procedures to ensure thematic consistency. The thematic team agreed data collection would involve interviews and artifacts, increasing the validity of the thematic research study.

The term of peer researcher refers to the other researchers who conducted this thematic study. These peers were: (a) Jeff Heilig, Elementary Principals in South Los Angeles County, CA; (b) Kevin Giang, Student Affairs Leaders at University and College Institutions in Los Angeles County, CA; (c) Amna Osman, Elementary Principals in Monterey County, CA; (d) Lindsey Gatfield, Elementary Title 1 Principals in Orange County, CA; (e) Marc Patterson, K-12 Superintendents in Los Angeles County, CA; (f) Renee Gates, Alternative High School Principals in Orange County, CA and Riverside County, CA; (g) Christina Gfell, Comprehensive High School Principals in North Orange County, CA; and (h) Ricardo Espinosa, Community College Professors in the North Bay Area, CA.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The United Nation's Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2021) has estimated nearly 356 million children are living in extreme poverty across the globe. In the United States, 18% of all children, the equivalent of 1.6 million children, are living in poverty (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2021). A global pandemic has increased the number of families experiencing hardships in a world where access to basic necessities has already been limited for so many. It is well documented the recent COVID-19 global pandemic has disrupted schools and widened the inequities that were already present with the shift to virtual learning (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics & Leadership in Mathematics Education, 2020). The reliance on technology and quiet learning areas to engage in virtual learning from home created even more barriers for low-income students to engage in school (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). As schools across the United States have returned to in-person fulltime learning, many students in poorer communities were less likely to have returned to school by January 2021.

The COVID-19 global pandemic increased the number of families in the United States experiencing financial hardship, and the disparities for poorer students continue to widen in schools (Kober et al., 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2021). For students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, large gaps in achievement in comparison to their socioeconomically advantaged peers were well-documented even prior to the pandemic (Malin et al., 2020). In a study by Cobb (2017), schools in low-income areas, in contrast with the wealthy, majority-White schools, experienced a lack of materials and a negative attitude among teachers. All these factors drive inequities for low-income students in school systems.

Educators have much work to do to correct the inequities that exist for students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged so all students can receive the education they deserve. In a study of African American males, Adefope (2014) found when provided with equitable educational opportunities, students with various backgrounds can achieve learning goals. This finding provides hope for students living in poverty.

School principals have the ability to impact the culture, structures, policies, and instruction at their schools (Branch et al., 2013; Gentilluci & Muto, 2007; Habegger, 2008). They have the potential to create equitable opportunities for all students (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). Principals at Title I schools (i.e., schools receiving additional funding due to a high percentage of low-income students) have a responsibility to "ensure all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach minimum proficiency" (California Department of Education, 2022, para. 1). Furthermore, principals at Title I schools across the nation have a responsibility to transform education at the school level, creating equitable opportunities for socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

The COVID-19 global pandemic has brought the challenges of socioeconomically disadvantaged students to light and made it so schools can no longer be complacent in inequitable structures and practices (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Leadership theories continue to evolve, and as new theories emerge, it is important for educational leaders to understand how exemplary leaders put them into practice to achieve extraordinary results, particularly with at-risk populations.

Background

To understand this study, it is important to become familiar with the theoretical

foundations of organizational leadership, the evolution of educational leadership, the

theoretical framework, and leading Title I schools. The theoretical foundations of

organizational leadership related to this study were situational leadership, servant

leadership, transformational leadership, distributed leadership, and theories of mindset.

These theories of leadership connect with educational leadership, Sinek's (2019) idea of

infinite mindset, and principals leading schools that serve socioeconomically

disadvantaged students.

Theoretical Foundations of Organizational Leadership

Organizational leadership refers to a leader strategically focusing on both the

organization and its individuals to facilitate success in reaching a shared objective

(Bratton, 2020). The root of organizational leadership stems from the findings of

empirical studies that show how the culture of an organization changed with leadership

(Sankaran, 2020). Many theories, including servant leadership theory, situational

leadership theory, distributed leadership theory, transformational leadership, and mindset

theory, have been constructed out of a need to understand effective organizational

leadership. In each of these theories, the mindset of the leader is at the forefront in

determining the effectiveness of the leadership style and the organization.

Situational Leadership

Situational leadership is based on behaviors related to both task completion and

relationship building and focuses on what needs to be accomplished in an organization

(Hersey & Blanchard, 1977). The situational leader has awareness of the situations facing

the organization and adapts to the situation to respond most effectively (Zohair et al., 2021). The way in which the situational leader engages with someone depends on who is involved in the situation, what the problem entails, and the readiness of the organization.

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership is focused on altruism and meeting the needs of the organization and those who are being led (Patterson, 2003). Servant leaders reject competition with others to serve the greater good and to learn from those around them (Greenleaf, 1998). According to Patterson (2003), the seven essential constructs that create a servant leader are agapao love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service. These constructs help a servant leader show love and appreciation to their employees, which can be inspirational for all involved. Servant leadership is based on serving employees through the creation of a caring environment and empathy.

Transformational Leadership

Burns (1978) described transformational leadership as a way to cause change in individuals and systems by raising the entire team to increased levels of motivation, morale, and performance. Through inspiring improvement in motivation, it is possible to make leaders out of followers, and thus impact even more systems. Transformational leadership also creates an environment for teams to learn together (Chiu et al., 2021). As such, transformational leadership is an effective strategy for leadership when an organization needs to innovate, changing practices for sustainability or purpose. Transformational leadership can bring teams together and create more powerful work.

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership is a type of collective leadership where leadership is distributed among stakeholders to create transformational change (Samancioglu et al., 2020), and leadership responsibilities are viewed as a team effort (Schleicher, 2012). When tasks become too involved or too much is demanded of a leader, it is important for them to rely on distributing leadership in an organization. Distributed leadership is often referred to as shared or democratic leadership, and, even at times, negatively referred to as simple delegation (Irvine, 2021). This shared leadership empowers employees and creates positive feelings and investment in the organization and the work (Cobanoglu, 2020).

Theories of Mindset

The mindset theory, originally known as the implicit theory of intelligence, states some people either believe intellectual attributes are fixed or unchangeable, and a different group of people believe intellectual attributes can be developed (Dweck, 2020; Dweck & Legget, 1988). According to Dweck (2020), whether a person holds a fixed mindset or a growth mindset impacts their level of achievement, regardless of talent or ability. Brunette et al. (2018) conducted a study that showed shifting to a growth mindset can improve a person's motivation and self-efficacy.

Educational Leadership

The history of schools in the United States dates back almost 2 centuries before the first colonies were established (Juneau, 2001). In the 1830s, the first public schools in the United States were established; and public schools are still the most common form of education for U.S. children (Kober & Rentner, 2020). Leadership in education comes in

many forms, from the principals of individual school sites to state superintendents overseeing an entire state's public school system. Educational leadership has been shaped by the history of schools in the United States, the evolution of leadership theories, and mindsets in school systems.

Three recent shifts in school systems in the United States have included the completion and implementation of Common Core State Standards in 2010 (Common Core State Standards Initiative [CCSSI], 2022), the development of standardized assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards (James, 2022), and the enactment of the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015 (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). These shifts changed professional learning for teachers and the expectations for student experiences in each classroom.

It is well documented that despite shifts in school systems, inequities still exist for students from low-income families (Kober & Rentner, 2020). One issue leading to the inequities in schools is the imbalance of funding. Although No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top were federal programs intended to increase achievement for all students, resources were not distributed equitably between states (Harris, 2012). Consequently, insufficient funding has led to inadequate resources, less competitive wages for teachers, and higher student to staff ratios in low-income communities (Baker & Weber, 2016).

Another practice leading to inequities for schools in low-income areas is tracking students. Tracking is the practice of sorting students into classes based on achievements observed and perceived ability (Domina et al., 2016). In the movement away from tracking, Domina et al. (2016) found detracking was done inequitably when comparing advantaged and disadvantaged schools. Where advantaged schools offered all students

advanced courses, low-income schools often only offered students one course per subject. This practice still places disadvantaged students on a track that holds them back from excelling.

Evolution of Educational Leadership

The structure of leadership in public schools in the United States has evolved over the last two centuries. As a result of compulsory attendance laws and increases in student populations, a shift to greater organization and centralized control occurred throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s (Bjorkedal, 2009). As accountability measures increased over the years, school districts wanted even greater control (Walter & Glenn, 1986). Leadership typically involved top-down approaches with mandates for implementing new strategies in classrooms with little input from stakeholders (Vargo, 2013).

Over recent decades, the top-down approach has evolved and changed to include more collective styles of leadership (Eckert, 2018). In some districts, for example, administrators created a team of teacher leaders to lead the charge in instructional shifts (Supovitz et al., 2020). The impact collective leadership has had on educator mindset is clear in the shift to more successful approaches for school districts and school sites.

Educational equity mindset theory is an important mindset theory in educational leadership. This mindset theory refers to how the importance of equitable education is perceived by a school leader (Nadelson et al., 2019). School leaders with an education equity mindset promote equitable practices for all learners in their organization. These leaders engage in instructional leadership, influence organizational culture and climate, lead in a transformative way, embrace collective leadership, advocate for educational equity, and partake in evidence-based decision making (Nadelson et al., 2019).

Theoretical Framework

Leadership exists in virtually all fields. Past research has resulted in constructed leadership theories such as servant leadership theory, situational leadership theory, and distributed leadership theory. These theories help to create a clear understanding of what leadership is and how certain beliefs and actions lead to specific cultures and results. In 1986, Carse explored the philosophies of playing to win versus playing to keep playing in his book, *Finite and Infinite Games*. Sinek (2019) used Carse's thinking as a foundation for writing *The Infinite Game,* with the purpose of informing business leaders of how the existence of an infinite or finite mindset impacts business and organizational culture. Sinek described business leaders who have an infinite mindset as those who look for long-term success, lead with a higher purpose, and are constantly evolving.

In analyzing leadership theories, it is apparent the mindset of leaders is a crucial component that contributes to the level of success one achieves. In *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, Dweck (2007) described how the way an individual or group thinks about their talents, and their abilities to improve, impacts what they are capable of achieving. Sinek (2019) believed leaders who adopt an infinite mindset build stronger and more inspiring organizations. Sinek's work developing the idea of an infinite mindset is closely related to Dweck's work on growth mindsets. In *The Infinite Game*, Sinek outlined how following the five elements of infinite mindset: (a) just cause, (b) trusting teams, (c) worthy rivals, (d) existential flexibility, and (e) the courage to lead, open infinite possibilities for corporations and leaders.

Just Cause

According to Sinek (2019), the existence of a just cause is an ideal providing an organization with meaning and a will to continue. Sinek (2019) explained, "A Just Cause is a specific vision of a future state that does not yet exist; a future state so appealing that people are willing to make sacrifices in order to help advance toward that vision" (pp. 32–33). This essential component of an infinite mindset is a future-oriented, common belief of how to make the world a better place. A just cause is bigger than what is best for just one person or organization; a just cause is a vision that keeps developing based on what is best for all those with the potential to be impacted.

Trusting Teams

Trusting teams is an essential component of an infinite mindset because trust is a characteristic of the most effective teams (Sinek, 2019). Trusting teams have a foundation built on vulnerability and safety. Sinek (2019) described the tendency for team members to trust one another at work, but not in all components of their relationship. To create a trusting team, team members must trust each other to be vulnerable, to listen to one another, and to care about one another. When a trusting team exists, "we feel safe to raise our hands and admit we made a mistake, be honest about shortfalls in performance, take responsibility for our behavior, and ask for help" (Sinek, 2019, p. 106). Trusting teams have a culture that is psychologically safe, meaning team members can express themselves to one another without fear of embarrassment or punitive punishment.

Worthy Rival

Oftentimes humans find themselves in competition with others. Sinek (2019) believed that an infinite mindset could turn a competitive rivalry into an opportunity for

improvement. Those people who are traditionally looked at as competition can actually help to push a leader to learn more and be more successful. Sinek explained when a leader chooses a worthy rival who is performing as well or better than them, then the leader has the capacity to boost their own resilience and develop new leadership skills.

Existential Flexibility

Existential flexibility is one's willingness to take risks and disrupt the status quo of an organization (Sinek, 2019). Sinek (2019) described the need for existential flexibility in leaders with an infinite mindset, especially due to the ability of flexibility to advance a just cause and get others excited about the work. Infinite-minded leaders know that most often the straightforward course other companies are on will not get them to that vision.

Courage to Lead

Some leaders may feel fortunate to find motivation in their daily tasks at work. The courage to lead, however, motivates leaders to accomplish a purpose bigger than themselves (Sinek, 2019). Having the courage to lead means keeping a higher standard of ethics and being willing to change one's perception. When the courage to lead exists, a leader will ignore outside pressures and speak up if something is not aligned with the organization's ethics.

Leading Title I Schools

In 1965, the United States passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which created the structure for providing financial assistance to support socioeconomically disadvantaged students (California Department of Education, 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Through subsequent reauthorizations, including

the Every Student Succeeds Act, the federal government continues to provide funding to school districts to better serve needs of students from low-income families (California Department of Education, 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2020). These funds are intended to target programs to provide high-quality education at the district or school level.

According to the most recent data available, more than 55,906 public schools in the United States used Title I funds to support socioeconomically disadvantaged students in the 2015–2016 school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Principals at Title I schools are the site leaders who work with educational partners to determine the best use of funds granted each year. Even with Title I funds, between 2001 and 2012, "the richest 25 percent of school districts spent $1,500 more per student, on average, than the poorest 25 percent of school districts" (Barshay, 2020, p. 1). Students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged are outperformed by wealthier students, and likely will continue declining in achievement over their school experience (Carnevale et al., 2019; Public Impact & Oak Foundation, 2018).

The role of school principals is to work with stakeholders to determine how to overcome any barriers and provide high-quality education. As such, the quality of a school principal influences the achievement of students (Branch et al., 2013). When principals are more effective at promoting high-quality education, a positive correlation to outcomes in student learning occurs (Louis et al., 2009). To create a high-quality environment, it is important to understand how effective principals lead with a forward-thinking mindset focused on future potentials to achieve extraordinary results.

Statement of the Research Problem

The origin of schools in the United States goes back to the education of the wealthiest children in the beginning years of the nation, often excluding children based on income, race, ethnicity, and gender (Kober & Rentner, 2020). Kober and Rentner (2020) explained that when advocates argued for free public schools years later, it was with the goal to "create cohesion among disparate groups and social classes, build economic strength, and eliminate poverty, crime, and other social problems" (p. 3). It is well documented that these issues still exist and have oftentimes been exacerbated by inequitable systems (Kober & Rentner, 2020; Public Impact & Oak Foundation, 2018). In fact, according to Public Impact and Oak Foundation (2018), students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged are still outperformed by wealthier peers in almost all indicators of educational success. As students move through the K–12 school system built to eliminate poverty, socioeconomically disadvantaged students are likely to decline in achievement based on test scores (Carnevale et al., 2019).

Principals are the leaders on school campuses, charged with creating both a vision and school culture that sets all students up for success (Goldring et al., 2020; Habegger, 2008). They have the ability to impact achievement for all students, including those with socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. With all of this potential influence, however, principals are inundated with federal and state policies, disciplinary problems, and school operations (Yan, 2019). Béteille et al. (2012) found that these problems are even more pronounced in schools that serve socioeconomically disadvantaged students due to insufficient resources and community involvement and an overabundance of mandates and discipline issues.

A vast amount of research has been conducted on the positive impact principals can have on their schools. Habegger (2008) found that a principal can positively influence student achievement by creating a positive school culture through empowering teachers, creating a sense of belonging, and providing clear direction. Additionally, open communication from principals and development of trust between principals, teachers, parents, and students can improve a learning environment and increase student achievement (Zhang & Koshmanova, 2021). Cultivating leadership in teachers is another practice that has been shown to lead to effective school leadership (Goldring et al., 2020).

Although it is well documented a school's success is largely influenced by the effectiveness of its leader, this research has not translated into practice and the student achievement gap based on socioeconomic status continues to exist. Leadership theories continue to evolve, and as new theories emerge, it is valuable to learn how successful leaders are implementing these theories into their practice. Sinek's (2019) infinite mindset framework is one such new theory. Further research is needed to understand how Sinek's infinite mindset framework is used by exemplary school leaders to promote academic achievement for all students regardless of socioeconomic status.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and describe how exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive that the practices of Simon Sinek's infinite mindset framework are embedded in their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results. A further purpose of this study was to understand

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the organizational supports and barriers exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive affect the development of an infinite mindset.

Research Questions

The central research question for this study was: How do successful Title I elementary school principals perceive the practices of an infinite mindset are embedded in their organization to achieve extraordinary results? The research subquestions for this study included:

- How do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practice of advancing a just cause is embedded within their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results?

- How do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practice of building trusting teams is embedded within their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results?

- How do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practice of studying your worthy rival is embedded within their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results?

- How do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practice of preparing for existential flexibility is embedded within their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results?

- How do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practice of demonstrating the courage to lead is embedded within their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results?

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- What supports and barriers do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive affect the embedding of infinite mindset practices within their organization?

Significance of the Problem

A problem exists in the U.S. school systems. The current TK–12 school system is failing children living in poverty across the country, only widening the disparities they face (Barshay, 2020). This academic achievement gap negatively impacts socioeconomically disadvantaged students and makes them less likely to take advanced placement classes (Public Impact & Oak Foundation, 2018). Only 14% of students living in poverty graduate from college after high school, compared to 60% of students from wealthier families. As such, school principals have the ability to impact the level of achievement for all students in their school (Branch et al., 2013; Gentilluci & Muto, 2007; Habegger, 2008). When principals are instructional leaders, building a strong school culture of collaboration and managing the school effectively, student achievement increases (Grissom et al., 2021). Despite what is known about the impact principals have on student achievement, a wide gap in achievement exists between socioeconomically disadvantaged students and their wealthier peers (Public Impact & Oak Foundation, 2018). There is a need to better understand how principals can positively influence the achievement of socioeconomically disadvantaged students specifically in a systematic and comprehensive manner.

A study that investigates a cohesive framework for how principals can attain extraordinary results could provide valuable information toward closing the achievement gap. Although there are known data for various characteristics of successful principals,

there is limited research on a leadership framework that focuses on leading organizations with a futures mindset that allows organizations to thrive in a world of rapid change. Using Sinek's (2019) framework for an infinite mindset, this study analyzed how exemplary principals engage in Sinek's five practices to become transformational leaders and lead their schools to achieve extraordinary results. The practices examined include (a) establishing and believing in a just cause, (b) developing trusting teams, (c) having existential flexibility, (d) finding a worthy rival, and (e) leading with courage (Sinek, 2019).

This research is not only important for principals, but also for district leaders, administrator preparation programs, and school communities that serve socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Any findings would be beneficial for principals, district leaders, and administrator preparation programs to understand the practices needed for their principals to achieve extraordinary results. Schools and communities should be interested in this study to provide hope for their futures and a framework that has real potential to reduce the achievement gap. Any work toward closing the achievement gap benefits a community by decreasing the level of poverty among generations.

This comprehensive framework will be helpful to principals so they can focus on what matters most in achieving extraordinary results. They will understand and be able to implement Sinek's (2019) five practices of an infinite mindset. District leaders can use this information to support the professional development of school principals. After supporting current principals in this framework, district leaders can develop a training program on infinite mindset as new principals are appointed. Administrator preparation

programs can incorporate Sinek's five practices into their core work with aspiring principals. Together, educators can work to prepare principals to positively impact the achievement of all students.

<div align="center">**Definitions**</div>

The following definitions provide clarification on the terms relevant to the study.

Theoretical Definitions

Existential Flexibility

Existential flexibility is a leader's ability to anticipate changing conditions and initiate a potentially risky strategic disruption to set the organization on a new path necessary to achieve the idealized future (Dhiman, 2011; Sinek, 2019; see also Avolio, 2005; Goleman, 1995; Shankman, Allen, & Haber-Curran, in press, as cited in Owen, 2015).

Infinite Mindset

An infinite mindset is a leader's desire to inspire their organization to continually learn and grow to achieve profound results that extend into the future without limits. A leader with an infinite mindset follows five essential practices: (a) advance a just cause, (b) build trusting teams, (c) study their worthy rivals, (d) prepare for existential flexibility, and (e) demonstrate the courage to lead (Carse, 1986; Dweck, 2007; Sinek, 2019).

A Just Cause

A just cause is a vision of an idealized, aspirational future, something bigger than oneself and the organization. It connects to and reflects the values, emotions, and a sense

of purpose of the followers, motivating them to make sacrifices to achieve it (Carse, 1986; Finnigan & Stewart, 2009; Mascareno et al., 2019; Noghiu, 2020; Sinek, 2019).

A Trusting Team

A trusting team is a unit where individuals work together to know each other at a deep level and care about and value one another, creating a high performing team environment that includes active listening, vulnerability, integrity, and personal accountability in the team in a psychologically safe space (Fehr, 2018; Lencioni, 2006; Sinek, 2019).

Worthy Rivals

Worthy rivals are successful industry leaders who perform as well as or better than a leader or their organization. Leaders or organizations are inspired to study these players and improve based on the strengths and abilities identified in them (The Millennial Executive, 2021; Sinek, 2019;).

The Courage to Lead

The courage to lead is a leader's ability to stand up against/to pressures or norms that do not align with organizational or individual goals and values and is characterized by the willingness to take risks for sustained success in an unknown, idealized future (Lassiter, 2017a; Sinek, 2019).

Operational Definitions

Extraordinary Results

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

Expert

An expert is someone who has knowledge, skill, education, experience, position, or an affiliation with a company or organization in the field of study (Patton, 2018).

Principal

The top administrator, or leader, of an individual school site is the principal.

Title I Elementary School

A Title I elementary school is a school serving students in any grade span between transitional kindergarten and sixth grade that receives Title I funds to support socioeconomically disadvantaged students (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

Delimitations

This study was delimited to 10 exemplary Title I elementary school principals in Orange County, California. An exemplary Title I elementary school principal in this study is a leader who demonstrates extraordinary results. The leader must have a minimum of 5 years of experience in the field of education and 2 years in an administrative leadership role. In addition, the exemplary leader must meet at least three of the following criteria:

- The exemplary Title I elementary school principal demonstrates evidence of collaboratively leading an organization fostering creativity and future-orientation improvements.
- The exemplary Title I elementary school principal actively participates in community leadership and shared problem-solving activities.

- The exemplary Title I elementary school principal has had articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings on leadership.

- The exemplary Title I elementary school principal has received recognition by his or her peers as a leader.

- The exemplary Title I elementary school principal is a member in good standing in professional associations in his or her field.

Organization of the Study

This study was organized into five chapters and concludes with references and appendices. Chapter I provides the introduction of academic inequities for socioeconomically disadvantaged students and the impact of school principals, the background, the five characteristics of exemplary Title I elementary school principals, and the research questions used in the study. Chapter I also provides both theoretical and operational definitions used in the study. Chapter II provides an extensive review of the literature and research that has been conducted on educational leadership, mindset, and Title I schools. Chapter III describes the methodology used to collect and analyze the data used in the study. Chapter IV provides an analysis of the qualitative data collected and a summary of the research findings. Chapter V concludes the study with the significant findings, conclusions, research gaps, and recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

According to the Southern Education Foundation (2013), 48% of students in the public school system in the United States came from low-income families. In a report from the 2016–2017 school year, 25% of schools in the United States qualified as high poverty (Barshay, 2020). Many students have been socioeconomically disadvantaged for years, and the recent COVID-19 global pandemic increased the number of families experiencing financial hardships. The recent global pandemic also disrupted school systems in the United States and widened already present inequities for these same children living in socioeconomically disadvantaged circumstances (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics & Leadership in Mathematics Education, 2020). In the shift to virtual learning from home, and thus a new reliance on internet access and quiet learning areas, these low-income students faced even more barriers in trying to engage in school each day (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Even when schools began returning to in-person learning, students in poorer communities were less likely to have returned to school by January 2021, continuing virtual learning longer than students in wealthier communities (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

Several factors drive inequities for low-income students in school systems. The number of families in the United States experiencing financial hardship increased during the COVID-19 global pandemic and the disparities for poorer students became even greater (Kober et al., 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2021). For socioeconomically disadvantaged students, large gaps in achievement in comparison to their socioeconomically advantaged students are well-documented even prior to the COVID-19 global pandemic (Malin et al., 2020). Schools in higher income, and mostly White,

areas have access to more materials than schools in low-income areas (Cobb, 2017). In addition, Cobb (2017) found schools in low-income areas tend to employee more teachers with negative attitudes.

All students, regardless of their socioeconomic status, deserve a high-quality education. There is a lot of work to be done in correcting the inequities that exist for socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Although data show socioeconomically disadvantaged students are outperformed by their peers (Malin et al., 2020), a study of African American men showed students from diverse backgrounds can achieve learning goals when provided with equitable opportunities (Adefope, 2014). If equitable opportunities are provided to students living in poverty, there is hope for increasing the quality of their education and learning.

A school's culture, structures and policies, and instruction are impacted by the school's principal (Branch et al., 2013; Gentilluci & Muto, 2007; Habegger, 2008). School principals have the ability to either create or suppress a climate of assuring equitable education for all students on campus (Theoharis, 2008). As such, the potential to create equitable opportunities for all students is in the hands of the principals (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). Title I-funded schools are schools that receive additional Title I funding from the federal government because they serve a population of students that are socioeconomically disadvantaged (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). The specific role of a Title I principal includes using the additional federal Title I funding they have received to provide students with opportunities to achieve in a high-quality educational setting (California Department of Education, 2022). Socioeconomically

disadvantaged students deserve equitable educational opportunities, and it is up to principals at Title I schools to transform their organization to meet those needs.

The literature has shown the leader of an organization changes the culture of that organization (Sankaran, 2020). This idea of the cultural impact of a leader led to the study of organizational leadership, where a leader strategically facilitates an organization and its individuals to reach a shared objective (Bratton, 2020). Theories such as servant leadership theory, situational leadership theory, distributed leadership theory, transformational leadership theory, and mindset theory have been constructed through the study of organizational leadership. Each of these theories relies on the mindset of the leader and how the leader sees their role in the organization (Gotian, 2022).

A person's mindset is how they perceive themselves as an individual (Taylor & Gollwitzer, 1995) and if they believe their intellectual attributes are changeable (Dweck & Legget, 1988). Mindset theory establishes the difference between people who hold a fixed mindset and those who hold a growth mindset. A person with a fixed mindset believes their intellectual attributes are fixed and unchangeable, whereas a person with a growth mindset believes these same attributes can be changed. Whether a person holds a fixed or growth mindset impacts their level of performance and achievement, resulting in those with a growth mindset finding more success (Bostwick & Becker-Blease, 2018).

Building from Carse's (1986) work with finite versus infinite games, Sinek (2019) constructed the idea of an infinite mindset. In *The Infinite Game,* Sinek discussed the impact of a finite or infinite mindset on business practices and success. Infinite-minded leaders are forward-thinking and know they need to constantly evolve to find long-term success. Finite-minded leaders, on the other hand, spend more time focused on short-term

goals and the idea directly in front of them. Sinek's work on infinite mindset is related to Dweck's (2007) work on growth mindset as both Dweck and Sinek agreed the mindset of a leader has the power to impact their entire organization. Multiple foundational leadership theories contribute to or are related to the idea of mindset and its impact on an organization.

Theoretical Foundations of Organizational Leadership

It is well documented that the culture of an organization changes with leadership and these empirical findings have led to the study of organizational leadership (Sankaran, 2020). Bratton (2020) defined organizational leadership as the strategic focus of a leader on both the organization as a whole and its individuals to facilitate success in reaching a shared goal. An organizational leader impacts the organization's ability to launch innovative practices and adopt new technologies and their success in these areas (Amoako, 2022).

In the early 1900s, leaders of organizations held power and were seen as the only people with the knowledge to teach others (Taylor, 1919). Taylor (1919) developed the scientific management theory that described a top-down approach to leadership. Decades later, Muczyk and Reimann wrote *The Case for Directive Leadership* in 1987. According to Muczyk and Reimann (1987), directive leadership was beneficial in certain cases and leaders needed to closely keep track of employees to ensure they follow through with given directives. In both scientific management theory and directive leadership, the leader is understood as the type of hero who can impart knowledge and save the organization with a top-down leadership approach (Muczyk & Reimann, 1987; Taylor, 1919).

There has been a great need for more collaborative leadership as organizations have had to cope with the disruptions and implications of the COVID-19 global pandemic (Shu & Wang, 2021). In a world becoming more interconnected and cooperative, the leader has become more of a facilitator guiding the decision-making process and resulting action plans through collaboration. Lawrence (2017) explained with collaborative leadership comes shared vision and values, mutual respect and trust, and interdependence. In a collaborative leadership approach, team members share the responsibility of leadership, rather than one leader being held responsible. In 1977, Bandura described a pattern where greater success was found when a group's confidence in its abilities to work together was higher. Groups of people are more effective when they share a common belief they can work together to overcome challenges and reach desired results (Donohoo et al., 2018).

To understand effective organizational leadership, many theories such as servant leadership theory, situational leadership theory, distributed leadership theory, transformational leadership, and mindset theory have been constructed over time. In each of these theories, the achievements of an organization rely not only on the skillset of the organizational leader, but also on the mindset of the organizational leader (Gotian, 2022). In terms of school leaders, Mlakar (2019) explained, "mindset drives decisions and behaviors, decisions and behaviors determine leadership style, and leadership style influences school climate" (p. ii).

Situational Leadership

One theory of organizational leadership is situational leadership. Situational leadership takes into consideration both the task and relationship of situations to

determine how a leader interacts with members of an organization (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977). The focus of situational leadership is what needs to be accomplished in an organization, and the theory considers the unique situation of each employee. The situational leader relies on their awareness of the situation and their ability to choose an appropriate response (Aslam et al., 2022). Who is involved in the situation, what the situation entails, and the readiness of the person involved and the organization as a whole all impact the way in which the situational leader engages with the situation (Zohair et al., 2021).

A situational leader uses the developmental continuum of competence and commitment to determine the level of competence of organizational members and then adapt their leadership style accordingly (Aslam et al., 2022). In this way, it is necessary for leaders to adapt to present circumstances in the moment. The Center for Leadership Studies (2022) described four leadership styles a situational leader chooses between based on the task and relationships in the current circumstance: (a) telling leadership style, (b) selling leadership style, (c) participating leadership style, and (d) delegating leadership style.

The telling leadership style is intended to create movement from the leader to the follower and is less collaborative because it is used when the employee has little to no experience or skill with the task at hand (Center for Leadership Studies, 2022). The selling leadership style creates buy-in and understanding by providing discussion about the purpose of the task, but still puts the leader in an authoritative role in terms of what the task is and how it will be completed. The participating leadership style is based on the leader's trust in the employee's abilities and acts as a motivator for the employee

completing the task. Lastly, the Center for Leadership Studies outlines the delegating leadership style creates autonomy because the leader trusts both the employee's abilities and their motivation. These leadership styles displayed by a situational leader range from a more authoritarian style to a more collaborative style depending on the situation.

Because each employee's abilities and confidence are unique to them, a situational leader determines which leadership style they will use on a case-by-case basis (Pasaribu et al., 2022). Pasaribu et al. (2022) explained organizations with situational leaders have reported a positive impact on both job satisfaction and employee performance.

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership, another theory of organizational leadership, is a philosophy in which the leader is focused on the greater good, acting as a servant first and leader second (Greenleaf, 1998). A servant leader prioritizes the well-being and needs of those they are leading and the organization (Patterson, 2003). Blanchard and Broadwell (2018) described two parts of leadership: (a) leading as the visionary or strategic role and (b) serving as the implementation role. Servant leadership is about how a leader implements strategy or a vision through serving those in the organization. Although a servant leader does not always share leadership responsibilities collectively, their style is closer to a collaborative approach than certain situational leadership styles discussed previously, because servant leadership consistently puts the follower first and empowers them to lead.

Although many aspects of servant leadership are covered in the literature, the seven essential constructs that create a servant leader are agapao love, humility, altruism,

vision, trust, empowerment, and service (Patterson, 2003). Agapao love means moral love a leader demonstrates by doing the right thing at the right time for the right reason. Humility creates a servant leader's focus on others, keeping one's own achievements in perspective and not over-valuing oneself. Patterson (2003) described altruism as the link between good motives and good behaviors, making a risk or sacrifice for the benefit of others. In servant leadership, vision is a leader's faith in what is possible in the future. Trust is described as a person's ability to put confidence in one another that they will do what they say they will do, and they will do so with integrity and respect for others. The goal of servant leadership is for the leader to empower others by giving their power to others and providing them with freedom to achieve. Empowerment makes servant leadership more of a collective leadership style than situational leadership. The last essential construct of servant leaders is service, the leader's generosity of time, energy, and compassion in acting as a servant in leadership to others (Patterson, 2003).

The constructs of servant leadership create an upside down traditional hierarchical pyramid, where the leader is responsive to the stakeholders they are leading. The goal of this responsiveness and servant leadership is to support employees and the organization in reaching their desired outcomes (Blanchard & Broadwell, 2018).

Transformational Leadership

The study of organizational leadership has also led to the development of the transformational leadership theory, a collaborative style of leading. Transformational leadership causes change in individuals and organizations by raising an entire team to increased levels of motivation, morale, and performance (Burns, 1978). Saeed and Jun (2021) described how transformational leaders collaborate and put others first, guiding

team members to recognize and develop their strengths and shortcomings. Leading in this way develops trust between leaders and collaborators and develops close relationships among a team (Salanova et al., 2020).

Collective efficacy plays a large role in transformational leadership and is linked to team members' self-efficacy over time (Salanova et al., 2020). Transformational leadership creates an environment for teams to collaborate and learn together (Chiu et al., 2021). A transformational leader brings teams together and creates effectiveness and strength in the level of work the team develops. A transformational leader motivates employees and increases employee retention (Saeed & Jun, 2021). When an organization needs to innovate, transformational leadership is an effective strategy in shifting practices (Chiu et al., 2021). When the leader of an organization implements transformational leadership strategies, followers become leaders and the impact of the organization's work increases (Burns, 1978).

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership is another theory that has emerged from the study of organizational leadership. Distributed leadership focuses on the joint interactions of leaders, followers, and their combined situation (Spillane, 2006). This style of leadership is especially collaborative. Irvine (2021) explained that with such high demands on leaders, the heroic leader model can no longer be maintained. Instead, organizations must rely on collective leadership that distributes decision-making and responsibilities among all stakeholders (Samancioglu et al., 2020). In this way, leadership is a practice and does not just lie in one specific role.

In distributed leadership, leadership responsibilities involve many employees and not just the few top members of the organization (Spillane, 2006). It is a team effort to share leadership responsibilities (Schleicher, 2012). Cobanoglu (2020) described how sharing these responsibilities empowers employees and creates positive relationships between the employees, the work, and the organization. Employees are more invested in their work as well. Extending leadership beyond the top individual in the organization has the power to transform an organization and its goals (Samancioglu et al., 2020).

Theories of Mindset

Mindset theory states people either believe intellectual attributes are unchangeable or intellectual attributes can be developed (Dweck & Legget, 1988). Mindset theory, previously labeled the implicit theory of intelligence, proposes an individual's mindset influences the goals they set to achieve (Dweck & Yeager, 2019). A person who holds a fixed mindset believes their attributes are unchangeable, and a person who holds a growth mindset believes these same attributes can continue developing over time. Whether a person has a fixed mindset or a growth mindset reflects their individual identity and impacts their interactions with others and how they perceive their role in an organization (Taylor & Gollwitzer, 1995). Shifting to a growth mindset has been shown to improve both one's motivation and self-efficacy (Burnette et al., 2018).

A significant amount of research exists on the link between achievement and growth mindset in both leaders and other individuals in an organization. In a study on growth mindset in organizations, employees were found to perform better and be more satisfied in their job when they identified as having a growth mindset (Han & Stieha, 2020).

People who hold a growth mindset perform at higher levels and achieve more than people with a fixed mindset (Bostwick & Blecker-Blease, 2018).

Another theory related to mindset is the education equity mindset theory. The education equity mindset refers to a person's perception of the importance of equitable education for all learners (Nadelson et al., 2019). When school leaders have an education equity mindset, they promote and support equitable practices in their organization. The characteristics of principals with an education equity mindset include engagement in instructional leadership, influencing organizational culture and climate, expressing transformative leadership, embracing collaborative leadership, advocating for educational equity, and partaking in evidence-based decision making (Nadelson et al., 2019).

Educational Leadership

The first structured school in the United States, Boston Latin School, was founded in 1635 and funded by the Town of Boston (Crooks, 2022). By the time the first colonies were established and Boston Latin School opened, the idea of education in the region had already been around for almost 200 years (Juneau, 2001). The first schools in the American colonies were arranged by churches, towns, charities, or even traveling schoolmasters (Kober & Rentner, 2020). The United States' earliest government recognized the need for citizens to be educated to fulfill their civic duty, and so the idea of public schools was born. In the 1830s, the first public schools in the United States were established; they were funded by tax dollars and overseen by elected officials (Abowitz & Higgins, 2011; Kober & Rentner, 2020). Since then, public schools have continued to be the most common form of education for U.S. children (Kober & Rentner, 2020).

There are many forms of leadership in education, including but not limited to school site principals, district office administrators, and state superintendents. The history of schools in the United States, an evolution of leadership theories, and mindsets in school systems, have all shaped the concept of current educational leadership. Leaders in education have a significant impact on those they lead. School leadership influences the climate, priorities, and personnel on a school campus (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). A school leader also impacts an organization's ability to transform (Grisby et al., 2010).

The same styles of organizational leadership found in businesses can also be seen in school systems across the United States. Literature has described the experiences and impacts of situational leadership, servant leadership, transformational leadership, and distributed leadership on schools (Gilley et al., 2008; Irvine, 2021; Knight-Hay et al., 2021; Reed, 2021).

The need for situational leadership in schools has increased since the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic (Francisco & Nuqui, 2020). School principals have constantly shifted their leadership style each day as they encounter issues and promote quality education. Francisco and Nuqui (2020) explained principals with situational leadership style are adaptive while staying committed to their vision of student achievement. In a study of leaders in higher education, Reed (2021) found leader effectiveness was based on the leader's ability to adapt to the correct leadership style for the situation.

Servant leadership also exists in school systems. The role of the principal as a servant leader is to develop strong relationships with teachers, built on the foundation of a shared vision of student achievement (Davis, 2021). Meeting the needs of teachers and

students is at the forefront for servant leaders in schools, so it is necessary for a school leader to continually adapt to meet those needs. When a school principal exemplifies the servant leadership style, they shape a more positive school climate where teachers feel more valued (Knight-Hay et al., 2021). The school environment is improved through developed trust and active listening to the needs of teachers.

Research has shown transformational leadership has a significant association with the quality of a teacher's work and school improvement (Gilley et al., 2008). Teachers are empowered through transformational school leadership, where a principal can build a foundation of collective beliefs about teacher capabilities (Pereira & Gomes, 2012). Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) described a model for principals to follow for transformational leadership at a school site. Principals need to set direction first through a vision, then they need to develop people, and finally redesign the school culture and community relationships. Principals can be transformational leaders when they are able to generate a shared mission and broaden interests and benefits beyond individual teachers.

Based on the growing demands on school leaders' time, a shift to distributed leadership has been necessary for many principals (Irvine, 2021). Distributed leadership in schools has led to the expansion of leadership roles on school campuses beyond the traditional administrator role (Shava & Tlou, 2018). Irvine (2021) explained the school culture is very important in distributed leadership and emergent leaders should be nurtured and supported. A school leader might distribute leadership on their campus in many ways, but in any form, trust and collaboration are key. Principals who are distributed leaders have shifted their mindset away from being the complete controller of

the organization to seeing their main role as building the leadership capacity of others on campus (Shava & Tlou, 2018).

Title I Schools and Educational Inequities

To understand the leadership needs of Title I elementary school principals, it is necessary to understand the specific challenges faced in these schools. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) determined a structure for providing financial assistance to support the education of students in the United States who were socioeconomically disadvantaged (California Department of Education, 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Over the years, the U.S. government has reauthorized this funding through No Child Left Behind and the Every Student Succeeds Act, and continued to provide financial assistance to local educational agencies serving the needs of students from low-income families. The funds provided annually by the federal government are intended to target programs that provide high-quality education for these socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

A local educational agency receives Title I funds from the federal government based on formulas based on U.S. census poverty rates; they can only receive these funds if they are responsible for educating at least 10 students from low-income families and at least 5% of the school-age population enrolled (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). According to the most recent data available from the U.S. Department of Education (2020), more than 55,906 public schools across the United States used Title I funds in the 2015–2016 school year. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), around $14.3 billion in Title I funds were granted to local education agencies serving socioeconomically disadvantaged students throughout the United States. Even with these

additional funds, though, a discrepancy still exists between school districts serving

socioeconomically advantaged and school districts serving socioeconomically

disadvantaged students. In analyzing data between 2001 and 2012, Barshay (2020)

explained, "the richest 25 percent of school districts spent $1,500 more per student, on

average, than the poorest 25 percent of school districts" (p. 1). Although this discrepancy

in funding is an equity issue by itself, socioeconomically advantaged students outperform

students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged (Public Impact & Oak Foundation,

2018).

Despite Title I funding and shifts in education over the years, students who are

socioeconomically disadvantaged still experience inequities in schools (Kober & Rentner,

2020), and an imbalance in school funding is one of the issues leading to these inequities

(Baker & Weber, 2016). As inequities continued to exist, Race to the Top, a competitive

grants initiative focused on personalizing learning, was developed by the Obama

administration to increase achievement for all students. (Harris, 2012). Harris (2012)

explained in exchange for changes aligning with the Obama administration's vision for

education, states would receive grant money. However, the distribution of funding from

Race to the Top was inequitable because only certain states received the funding

depending on their ability to enact change in their schools (Harris, 2012). Inadequate and

inequitable funding in low-income communities has led to insufficient school resources,

less competitive wages for high quality teachers, and higher student to staff ratios (Baker

& Weber, 2016).

A second practice leading to inequities in schools serving students from low-

income areas is tracking (i.e., separating students based on perceived ability). Placement

of students in a lower-level class leads to their negative attitudes toward the subject area and low self-concepts (Chiu et al., 2008). In recent years, educators focused on equity have pushed for schools to move away from tracking, but data show detracking has been done inequitably in schools serving socioeconomically disadvantaged students in comparison to schools serving wealthier students (Domina et al., 2016). Atteberry et al. (2019) found that when higher level courses were made available to all students, most students wanted to challenge themselves and were motivated to succeed. Many schools in wealthy areas opened advanced courses to all their students, and schools in low-income areas still were only able to offer students one course per subject. The inequities in tracking and the lack of true detracking has put students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged on a path that holds them back from the same opportunities students from schools in wealthier areas are given.

School Accountability

Both the federal and state governments have used accountability measures to address educational inequities. Before the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, individual states had already enacted measures for school accountability into law. In California, for example, the Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999 held public schools in the state accountable for student academic progress and achievement (Larsen, 2009). Schools were incentivized to use resources more efficiently but were held accountable without access to any additional resources. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), signed by President George W. Bush in January 2002, increased accountability measures for all states, requiring every student to be proficient in math, reading, and writing by the 2013–2014 school year (Larsen, 2009). Even though many schools were

seeing improvement in student achievement, the rate of growth outlined by NCLB was unattainable for most schools.

Many shifts in accountability have shaped the school systems in the United States, but the most impactful shifts in recent years include (a) the implementation of Common Core State Standards in 2010 (Common Core State Standards Initiative [CCSSI], 2022), (b) the development of standardized assessments aligned to the standards (James, 2022), and (c) the enactment of the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015 (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Each of these shifts contributed to a change in both professional learning for teachers and expectations for how students engage in the curriculum and instruction. In 2010, the CCSSI developed common math and English-language arts standards to be adopted by states to better prepare students for college and careers (CCSSI, 2022). In alignment with the Common Core State Standards and with the purpose of increasing accountability for these rigorous expectations, new assessments were developed for the 2014–2015 school year (James, 2022). James (2022) explained that participating states choosing to use a nationally recognized benchmark chose between two common-core-aligned assessments from the Partnership for Assessment of College and Career Readiness (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC). Later, in December of 2015, President Barack Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act into law (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). This act renewed accountability measures for schools to effect change, advance equity, complete annual statewide assessments, and teacher high academic standards to students.

Evolution of Educational Leadership

The structures of educational leadership in public schools have evolved since the first schools were established in the United States. Initially, schools in the American colonies relied significantly on the leadership of parents and church leaders (Kober & Rentner, 2020). In the late 19th century, many growing communities began employing a lead administrator at the town's school (Rousmaniere, 2013). These lead administrators, who were referred to as preceptors, school masters, head teachers, or principals, continued teaching in the classroom but added on the responsibilities of monitoring enrollment, disciplining students, and maintaining the building. Just as the role of each town's lead administrator varied, so did their responsibilities. In *The Principal's Office: A Social History of the American School Principal,* Rousmaniere (2013) described how administrators during this time held no professional affiliation, job description, or certainty of stability.

A shift to centralized control of public schools became a necessity in urban schools in the early 20th century, where student populations were increasing and compulsory attendance laws were spreading (Bjorkedal, 2009). Common school reformers began clarifying the role of the school head, or principal, and the function of schools (Rousmaniere, 2013). The professionalization movement during this time pushed principals farther from the classrooms and community engagement, instead creating a culture of authority and discipline.

In the late 20th century, with the implementation of standardized assessments and initiatives from both the state and federal levels, centralized control was considered even more essential and school districts demonstrated further control (Walter & Glenn, 1986).

Top-down approaches were common in school districts, and classroom teachers had little to no input on the mandates impacting their curriculum and instruction (Vargo, 2013). In 2010, Reeves described the Law of Fatigue, which states that new initiatives receive fewer resources to enact when the number of initiatives increases while the amount of resources stays the same. When so many initiatives exist, people often become overwhelmed and confused by what they are implementing and the purpose of that initiative (Greene & Kramer, 2020). The overabundance of initiatives and mandates led to the necessity of more collective leadership styles in the beginning of the 21st century (Eckert, 2018).

Since the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic, school leaders in many states, including California, have had the added responsibilities of maintaining mask mandates, social distancing, and other measures to stop the spread of the virus. With so many leadership responsibilities, schools had no choice but to shift their mindset and lead using collective leadership styles. To support sharing leadership, school leaders in some districts have developed teams of teacher leaders to take over the implementation of instructional shifts at school sites (Supovitz et al., 2020).

Mindsets in School Systems

The idea of mindset is applicable to many settings and organizations but has been most influential in the field of education (Kapasi & Pei, 2022). In the shift to more collaborative leadership and the shared responsibility of student learning, educational leaders have focused on the idea of mindset in school systems in recent years. The mindset of educators impacts collective efficacy, or the belief that teams are more effective when they share a common belief that they can impact results (Donohoo et al.,

2018). A school culture that encompasses collective efficacy influences the way teachers feel, think, and behave in their work (Bandura, 1993). Students achieve at significantly higher levels when educators believe they can work together to influence student outcomes. When educators hold a shared belief about their abilities at the school, their expectations for success increase, and both teachers and administrators work with more persistence and resolve (Eels, 2011).

Growth mindset has become a common topic of conversation for students, teachers, and administrators. The strong link between a growth mindset and achievement can be seen in students at every socioeconomical level (Claro et al., 2016). A student's mindset can alter their projected path of success (Boaler, 2006). Similarly, a teacher's mindset can impact the teacher's professional growth and how they perceive a student's abilities, which both impact student achievement (Lin et al., 2022). Teacher growth mindset is the belief that their own professional competencies can continue to develop and shapes their ideas of student abilities (Lin et al., 2022). Furthermore, a school principal's mindset influences their priorities, vision, actions, and overall style of work (Rowley, 1991).

Theoretical Framework

Leadership is not unique to the field of education and has been studied in a multitude of fields. Leadership theories, such as servant leadership theory, situational leadership theory, and distributed leadership theory, have been constructed over time through the study of organizational leadership. These leadership theories aid in an understanding of the effect of a leader on their organization, especially in the way their

beliefs and mindset impact the culture and achievements of the organization (Gotian, 2022; Sankaran, 2020).

In *Finite and Infinite Games*, Carse (1986) described the philosophies of living life by playing to win versus playing to continue playing. A finite game is played to win and, as such, has a definitive beginning and ending. An infinite game, on the other hand, is always evolving and never comes to an end. Carse explained winning a finite game may lead to wealth, status, power, or glory, but playing an infinite game leads to something far greater than one person.

In 2019, Sinek wrote *The Infinite Game* using Carse's (1986) work on finite and infinite games as a foundation. The purpose of Sinek's work was to explain the perceived impacts of infinite and finite mindsets on the culture and achievements of a business. For business leaders, an infinite mindset means leading in a constantly evolving way, with an idealized vision for long-term success (Sinek, 2019). Finite leaders tend to focus on what is right in front of them, dealing with situations as they arise and missing opportunities to excite the organization with a greater purpose.

When analyzing leadership theories and Sinek's (2019) idea of infinite mindset together, it is clear the mindset of a leader impacts the achievements of their organization. Leadership styles stem from the decisions and behaviors driven by a leader's mindset (Mlakar, 2019). In 2007, Dweck wrote the way a person thinks about their ability to improve their talents impacts what they are capable of achieving. Dweck noted these findings go beyond one individual and can be applied to an entire organization. Leaders can even use their own growth mindset to inspire those they lead and transform their organization. In keeping with the idea of the impact mindset has on achievement, Sinek

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developed the idea of an infinite mindset. Sinek described how infinite possibilities open to leaders who lead using the five elements of infinite mindset: (a) just cause, (b) trusting teams, (c) worthy rivals, (d) existential flexibility, and (e) the courage to lead.

When analyzing the previously discussed leadership theories of situational leadership, servant leadership, transformational leadership, and distributed leadership, components of Sinek's (2019) five elements of infinite mindset were apparent. In situational leadership, the participating and delegating styles rely on trust between the employees and the leader (Center for Leadership Studies, 2022). The selling style in situational leadership focuses on giving employees a purpose to create buy-in (Center for Leadership Studies, 2022), much like Sinek's idea of just cause. Similarly, servant leadership hinges on building trust and considers what is possible in the future when achieving a vision (Blanchard & Broadwell, 2018; Patterson, 2003). Transformational leadership is innovative and can be effective in shifting the practices of an organization (Chiu et al., 2021), relating to Sinek's idea of existential flexibility. Much like Sinek's trusting teams, both transformational leadership and distributed leadership depend on trust and positive relationships between employees and the organization (Cobanoglu, 2020; Salanova et al., 2020; Sinek, 2019). Each of these leadership theories connect to at least one of the practices of an infinite mindset, but only Sinek has built a framework using all five of the elements.

Just Cause

One of the five elements of Sinek's (2019) infinite mindset is just cause. According to Sinek, a just cause provides an organization with meaning and a will to continue. Just cause is a statement that is an idealized vision for the future and inspires

people to sacrifice to see the vision through. Sinek described a just cause as a sense of purpose that is bigger than what is best for just one person or organization. A just cause is an ideal that continues inspiring people over long periods of time (Srivastava, 2021).

The culture of an organization is strengthened when the vision unites the group around those shared ideas (Owens, 2004). A successful leader ensures workers feel they are a part of something bigger than themselves (Srivastava, 2021). Organizations and leaders find success in a larger collective goal through an ongoing commitment of targeted focus and resources (Finnigan & Stewart, 2009). This larger collective goal achieves much more than the results of smaller, more frequent goals.

Trusting Teams

According to Sinek (2019), trust is an important characteristic of effective teams, and trusting teams is another essential element of an infinite mindset. Effective teams share common values, mutual trust, and a sense of relationship (Harvey & Drolet, 2006). Research has shown when team members view their top managers as trustworthy in their business practices, both their productivity and profits increase (Fehr, 2018). Fehr (2018) also described how a foundation of trust drives cooperation in the organization's culture. If trust does not exist between team members, then an exaggeration of untrustworthiness can occur and be applied in all situations, so the team cannot move forward together (Patterson et al., 2012).

Trusting teams are built on the foundation of vulnerability and psychological safety (Sinek, 2019). Brown (2012) described how being vulnerable creates a sense of belonging, authenticity, and creativity for those involved. In trusting teams, members listen to one another and actually care about one another (Sinek, 2019). Ideas can be

expressed without fear of embarrassment or punitive punishment. In *The 5 Dysfunctions of a Team,* Lencioni (2006) described how trust allows team members to speak up and push back against someone else's idea. When team members are able to push back, ideas are made even stronger and desired results can be achieved.

Worthy Rivals

A third element of Sinek's (2019) infinite mindset is worthy rivals. Sinek considered traditional competition as an opportunity for improvement. A worthy rival is another leader who performs as well or better than the leader, and can push that leader to learn more and achieve more. In addition to learning new skills, taking an opportunity to learn from a worthy rival further develops a leader's resilience (Sinek, 2019). The Millennial Executive (2021) explained a worthy rival, "motivates you to constantly improve in a way few others can. . . by revealing to you areas where you have room to grow and improve" (summary section).

Having a worthy rival influences a growth mindset (The Millennial Executive, 2021). Instead of looking at other leaders as competition, it is important to shift one's mindset to see how looking at another leader as a worthy rival will help a leader to become better at what they do. Having a worthy rival provides a new perspective. Other leaders or organizations that are traditionally looked at as competition can actually help to push a leader to learn more and be more successful (Sinek, 2019).

Existential Flexibility

Another element of an infinite mindset is existential flexibility. When a leader is willing to take risks and consciously disrupt the status quo of an organization, they are demonstrating existential flexibility (Sinek, 2019). An effective leader must be able to

anticipate changing conditions and set a new path to building their vision when necessary. The idea of existential flexibility comes when a leader strives to be the very best in what the leader or organization does (Dhiman, 2011). When a leader is determined to do whatever it takes to be successful, they use existential flexibility to disrupt the course they are on when facing impediments to success (Sinek, 2019).

Dhiman (2011) described how effective leaders are able to turn any fears into opportunities. To have existential flexibility, a just cause that excites an organization is essential, so the leader can do whatever is needed to reach the vision (Sinek, 2019). In 1962, Rogers developed the diffusion of innovation theory, explaining the five established adopter categories (Boston University, 2022). According to the theory, early adopters can be helpful to innovative leaders as they are willing to embrace change and adopt new ideas as they come to them. Infinite-minded leaders know the course to their idealized future is not a straight path and existential flexibility allows for the advancement of their just cause (Sinek, 2019).

Courage to Lead

The final element of Sinek's (2019) infinite mindset is the courage to lead. According to Lassiter (2017b), courage is essential for effective leadership. Courage is no longer about being physically aggressive or fearless, but instead focuses on standing up and doing what is right for others (Detert, 2021). It is important for leaders to positively reinforce a culture of taking risks and trying new ideas, regardless of their outcome. Courageous leaders have the courage to engage in tough conversations and give feedback to develop potential in others (Brown, 2018). Courageous leaders are willing to change

their perceptions as they learn new information and engage in diverse experiences (Sinek, 2019).

To develop the courage to lead, it is necessary for a leader to foster growth, build capacity, and create collaboratively with others (Lassiter, 2017b). This courage comes from finding inner strength and the determination to lead. Having the courage to lead means a leader holds a high standard of ethics and will speak up when something is not aligned with the ethics of the organization (Sinek, 2019). Most importantly, Sinek (2019) described how the courage to lead results in the drive to accomplish a purpose bigger than one person.

Focus of the Study

The focus of this study was on elementary school principals and their role in educational equity. Elementary school principals have the responsibility of supporting high quality teaching and impact the quality of education students receive at their school site (Branch et al., 2013).

Elementary School Principals

An elementary school principal is the lead administrator or supervisor on a school campus who serves students in any range between transitional kindergarten and 6th grade. According to Yan (2013), the main responsibilities of a principal include handling operations, school discipline, decision making, and supporting high quality teaching. The school operations led by the principal include managing people, data, and processes, especially the hiring and supporting of classified and certified staff members (Wallace Foundation, 2013).

To support high quality teaching, a principal's responsibility is to develop a common understanding of what best practices for teaching look like among teachers (Goldring et al., 2020). In addition, principals analyze data and assess teacher effectiveness to better understand the quality of teaching on campus. The Wallace Foundation (2013) found it was especially important for principals to encourage professional learning and support a vision of high expectations for the achievement of all students.

The role of a principal looks different across various districts (Yan, 2019). Some school districts ask their principals to fulfill more of a managerial role, as others are looking to build up their principals as instructional leaders. Regardless of the responsibilities given to a principal, principals commonly work over 10 hours each day (Usdan et al., 2000). In fact, Yan (2019) found principals worked 59 hours per week on school-related activities.

Principal's Role in Educational Equity

Research has shown student achievement is influenced by the quality of a principal (Branch et al., 2013). Research has also shown socioeconomically disadvantaged students are likely to underperform and continue declining in school achievement throughout their school experiences (Carnevale et al., 2019). Principals at socioeconomically disadvantaged schools are responsible for collaboratively determining the best use of Title I federal funds granted each year. In partnership with stakeholders, they are also responsible for providing a high-quality education to all students enrolled in their school. When principals effectively support the high-quality education to which students are entitled, studies show student learning occurs (Louis et al., 2009). To create

this level of high-quality education for all students, regardless of their socioeconomic status, it is necessary to understand how effective principals achieve extraordinary results using a forward-thinking mindset focused on an idealized future.

Summary

Schools have been part of the fabric of the United States for almost 400 years, with the notable development of public schools in the 1830s (Juneau, 2001; Kober & Rentner, 2020). There have been many shifts in U.S. school systems that have caused leadership in education to evolve. Educational leadership began with parents and church leaders, which developed into a single lead administrator, and slowly grew to become the centralized school district model often seen now (Kober & Rentner, 2020; Rousmaniere, 2013; Walter & Glenn, 1986). Many current educators understand the importance of mindset and its link to achievement (Claro et al., 2016).

Just like any organization, the culture of a school changes based on its leadership (Sankaran, 2020). The mindset and skillset of a school leader, along with their organizational leadership style, can impact the achievements of a school (Gotian, 2022). In situational leadership, the leader adapts their leadership style to the situation, depending on what is occurring and the readiness of the person involved (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977; Zohair et al., 2021). Servant leaders prioritize the needs of others and focus on leaders acting as a servant first and a leader second (Greenleaf, 1998; Patterson, 2003). A transformational leader brings teams together, develops trust with and motivates employees, and effectively shifts practices in an organization (Chiu et al., 2021; Saeed & Jun, 2021). In distributed leadership, organizations rely on collective decision-making and responsibilities among all stakeholders (Samancioglu et al., 2020). Research has

documented whether a leader holds a fixed or growth mindset impacts the achievements of an organization (Dweck & Legget, 1988; Dweck, 2020).

Based on the work of Carse (1986), Sinek (2019) developed the idea of an infinite mindset (i.e., a leader's desire to inspire forward-thinking and continuous improvement for the future). The five essential elements of an infinite mindset are just cause, trusting teams, worthy rivals, existential flexibility, and the courage to lead (Sinek, 2019). A just cause is one's idealized vision for the future that provides an organization with the sense of being part of something bigger than themselves. Trusting teams allow organizations to develop strong ideas and achieve desired results through being vulnerable and providing psychological safety (Lencioni, 2006; Sinek, 2019). Sinek explained worthy rivals as looking at a traditional competitor as someone to learn from and push a leader to become even better at what they do. Existential flexibility is when a leader is willing to take risks and set a new path to their idealized future. Lastly, the courage to lead means having a high standard of ethics and a drive to accomplish a purpose bigger than one person.

Further research is needed on how Sinek's (2019) infinite mindset elements may play a role in the achievements of Title I elementary school principals. An elementary school principal is the lead administrator for a school that serves students in any range between transitional kindergarten and 6th grade. Title I schools are schools that receive additional federal funds due to a significant population of students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Literature has shown students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged are likely to be outperformed by wealthier students (Public Impact & Oak Foundation, 2018). As the leader on campus, a principal of any school, including a Title I school, has the ability to influence student

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achievement (Branch et al., 2013). To create an environment of achievement, it is necessary to understand how effective principals lead with a forward-thinking mindset to achieve extraordinary results. The research conducted in this study explored leaders serving socioeconomically disadvantaged students who achieved extraordinary results through the lens of the infinite mindset framework. School leaders will be able to understand Sinek's five practices of an infinite mindset and how they can be implemented to positively impact achievement for all students.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Chapter III presents the methodology used in this study, which explored how exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practices of the infinite mindset framework are embedded in their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results. This chapter first reiterates the purpose statement and research questions, before describing the research design, population, sample, instrument, data collection process, and data analysis techniques. This chapter ends with a description of the research limitations and a summary.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and describe how exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practices of Sinek's (2019) infinite mindset framework are embedded in their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results. A further purpose of this study was to understand the organizational supports and barriers exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive affect the development of an infinite mindset.

Research Questions

The central research question for this study was: How do successful Title I elementary school principals perceive the practices of an infinite mindset are embedded in their organization to achieve extraordinary results? The research subquestions for this study included the following:

- How do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practice of advancing a just cause is embedded within their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results?

- How do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practice of building trusting teams is embedded within their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results?

- How do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practice of studying your worthy rival is embedded within their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results?

- How do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practice of preparing for existential flexibility is embedded within their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results?

- How do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practice of demonstrating the courage to lead is embedded within their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results?

- What supports and barriers do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive affect the embedding of infinite mindset practices within their organization?

Research Design

A phenomenological qualitative research design was chosen as the best fit for this study. Qualitative methods are descriptive, focusing on depth and detail through interviews, field observations, or documents (Patton, 2015). Qualitative methods put an emphasis on understanding the research topic from the perspectives of the participants. Phenomenological studies are used to focus on the descriptions of human experiences with a phenomenon (Patton, 2015). A phenomenological qualitative research design was used in this study to focus on the lived experiences of exemplary Title I elementary

school principals embedding the practices of an infinite mindset in their organization to achieve extraordinary results.

The purpose of a phenomenological study is to understand the essence of lived experiences of a phenomenon (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The phenomenon in the case of this study was the extraordinary results achieved by these participants at their school sites. In qualitative research, individual experiences and perspectives are used to construct a collective view of one phenomenon (Patton, 2015). A qualitative design allowed the researcher to interview multiple principals who have experienced the phenomenon to find trends in their perspectives. A phenomenological qualitative research design was specifically chosen to better understand the lived experiences of exemplary Title I elementary school principals related to the phenomenon of using the practices of an infinite mindset to achieve extraordinary results.

The research process for this study included personal 1-hour interviews with each participant. The researcher asked participants specific open-ended questions with flexibility for probing and encouragement. These in-depth, yet semistructured interviews took place virtually and were recorded for later analysis.

Population

A population is a group of individuals who "conform to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize the results of this research" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 129). This is the group from which the sample is drawn. The population for this study was Title I elementary school principals in California. A Title I elementary school principal is the lead administrator at a school that receives federal funding to serve socioeconomically disadvantaged elementary-aged students. According to the most

recent data available, there are over 3,000 Title I elementary school principals in California (California Department of Education, 2018).

Target Population

A target population is a small percentage of the total population in a study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A target population is created in a study when it is necessary to narrow the population being studied because a researcher does not have reasonable access to an entire population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). A target population was used in this study due to the large number of Title I elementary school principals in California. The target population is narrowed to define specific study participants based on characteristics outlined by a study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The target population used in this study was the 238 Title I elementary school principals in Orange County, California (California Department of Education, 2018).

Sample

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a sample is defined as the group of participants selected from the population, from whom data are collected. The sample for this study included exemplary Title I elementary school principals in Orange County. In this study, exemplary was defined as receiving an award or accolade in their role as principal, being considered a model principal by other administrators, or finding extraordinary results at their school site.

Purposive sampling is a method of selecting particular participants from the population that will provide more information about the topic being studied (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Purposive sampling was used in this study to select Title I elementary school principals with insight into the phenomenon based on specific criteria.

Participants had to have a minimum of 5 years of experience in the field of education and 2 years in an administrative leadership role. In addition, the exemplary leader must have met at least three of the following criteria:

- The exemplary Title I elementary school principal demonstrated evidence of collaboratively leading an organization fostering creativity and future-orientation improvements.

- The exemplary Title I elementary school principal actively participated in community leadership and shared problem-solving activities.

- The exemplary Title I elementary school principal has had articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings on leadership.

- The exemplary Title I elementary school principal has received recognition by his or her peers as a leader.

- The exemplary Title I elementary school principal has been a member in good standing in professional associations in his or her field.

The purposive sampling selection began with identifying an expert panel familiar with Title I elementary school principals in Orange County, California. The panel members were asked to nominate possible participants based on the study criteria using their knowledge of Title I elementary school principals. Both members of the expert panel have had more than 10 years of experience as exemplary leaders in Title I elementary schools and met the study criteria but were not part of the study.

Convenience sampling was also used in this study to select Title I elementary school principals to participate. Saumure and Given (2008) described convenience

sampling as the selection of research participants based on who is accessible, or easily available, to the researcher. Two of the exemplary Title I elementary school principals were selected based on their employment in the same public school district as the researcher.

The sample size for this study was 10 principals, which was the number of principals who were interviewed. These 10 principals represented seven different public school districts across Orange County. The sample size was selected as fewer participants are needed when such a large amount of data are collected for each participant (Patton, 2015). A model of the population and sample in this study is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Study Population and Sample

Population The group of individuals having specific criteria	>3,000 Title I Elementary School Principals in California

Target Population The population accessible to the research from which to draw a sample	238 Title I Elementary School Principals in Orange County, California

Sample The group of participants selected for the study	10 Title I Elementary School Principals in Orange County, California that meet the specific criteria of the study

Instrumentation

In qualitative data collection, the researcher is the primary instrument used in collecting data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The primary method of data collection in this study was in-depth interviews. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) explained, "To find regularities in the data, the researcher compares different sources, situations, and methods to see whether the same pattern keeps recurring" (p. 379). To find regularities in the data collected through in-depth interviews, the researcher also collected artifacts from all ten of the participants as a secondary data source.

Qualitative Interview

Qualitative interviews were conducted to collect data in this study. In collaboration with seven peer researchers, the researcher developed 12 interview questions to capture how exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practices of Sinek's (2019) infinite mindset framework are embedded in their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results. The interview questions were designed around each of the five infinite mindset practices: just cause, building trusting teams, worth rival, existential flexibility, and courage to lead. An alignment table demonstrating the relationship between each interview question and a correlating research question and variable can be found in Appendix A.

Validity

Validity is the degree to which the researcher's instrument captures what is intended to be measured (Gay et al., 2012). Any potential for subjectivity and bias existing in an interview is a threat to the validity of a study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). To minimize the threat to validity, the researcher took specific steps. To begin

with, the interview questions were developed in collaboration with seven other researchers and then scrutinized by a team of four faculty advisors. In addition, a field test was conducted under the examination of a qualified observer to ensure that questions were not posed with bias. Another method of ensuring the validity of this study was creating specific criteria for the characteristics of an exemplary leader, and thus any participants.

Field Test. It is imperative that instruments for data collection are scrutinized carefully in the context of the study to better understand the appropriateness and usefulness of research questions (Creswell, 2014). Each peer researcher was tasked with conducting a field test on an exemplary leader that met the criteria for their sample but would not be used in the actual study. Under the examination of a skilled observer, the researcher conducted the field test.

At the conclusion of the interview, the researcher first collected feedback from the participant using the Participant Field Test Feedback Form (see Appendix B). This feedback asked for the participant's overall feeling of the interview, opportunities they felt they had to describe their ideas, the timing of the interview, and the interviewer's clarity and comfort in asking the interview questions. The researcher then collected feedback on timing and body language and verbal behaviors from the observer using the Observer Feedback Form (see Appendix C). The researcher also used the Interviewer Reflection Feedback Form (see Appendix D) to note any reflections on the process of the interview. The feedback was then brought back to the team of peer researchers for further analysis. Together, the eight peer researchers and four faculty advisors reviewed and

revised the interview protocol to better target both the purpose of the study and the review of literature.

Reliability

The reliability of this study was ensured by multiple approaches. Reliability is the degree to which the instrument for data collection measures consistently from one time to another (Roberts, 2010). The three approaches the researcher used to ensure reliability in this study were (a) a structured interview protocol, (b) intercoder reliability, (c) the collection of artifacts to triangulate data collected.

Interview Protocol. To ensure reliability in the data collection in the phenomenological interviews, the researcher used a structured interview protocol. This protocol included an introduction, a reminder of informed consent, interview questions, and possible probes to use. The researcher used this interview protocol in each interview conducted to ensure reliability between each interview.

Intercoder Reliability. Intercoder reliability is the protocol of having multiple researchers separately and blindly code the same data collected to ensure the same conclusions are reached from a set of data (Patton, 2015). The researcher used intercoder reliability in this study to ensure reliability in coding. In addition to the researcher, a peer researcher coded one interview, or 10% of the data collected in this study. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the agreement of code between researchers increases the reliability of the data collected. Intercoder reliability is reached when peer researchers reach an 80% agreement of code (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, intercoder reliability was reached when there was a 90% agreement among the peer researchers.

Collection of Artifacts. To collect reliable data, the researcher collected artifacts related to the five practices of an infinite mindset from all 10 study participants. This collection of artifacts was done to triangulate common themes from the collected artifacts with common themes from the interviews. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described the triangulation of data as a way to enhance reliability by cross validating the data collected through multiple data sources.

Data Collection

An expert panel of two members familiar with Title I elementary school principals in Orange County, California was assembled to nominate possible participants for this study. The expert panel used their knowledge of Title I elementary school principals and exemplary leaders that achieve extraordinary results to nominate possible participants. The researcher ensured that the expert panel clearly understood the selection criteria prior to making recommendations. The researcher screened every principal that recommended to them for eligibility using the following guidelines.

Selection Criteria

The leader must have had a minimum of 5 years of experience in the field of education and 2 years in an administrative leadership role. In addition, the exemplary leader must have met at least two of the following criteria:

- The exemplary Title I elementary school principal demonstrated evidence of collaboratively leading an organization fostering creativity and future-orientation improvements.

- The exemplary Title I elementary school principal actively participated in community leadership and shared problem-solving activities.

- The exemplary Title I elementary school principal has had articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings on leadership.

- The exemplary Title I elementary school principal has received recognition by his or her peers as a leader.

- The exemplary Title I elementary school principal has been a member in good standing in professional associations in his or her field.

Methods of Data Collection

Qualitative data were collected in this study through phenomenological interviews and the collection of artifacts. Each participant was assigned a letter and their interview transcript and artifacts were associated by that letter.

Interviews

The researcher planned and scheduled an in-depth interview with each participant individually. Prior to the interview, the participant was provided with the interview questions (see Appendix E), definitions related to the study (see Appendix F), an infographic to provide a basic understanding of an infinite mindset (see Appendix G), the University of Massachusetts Global Informed Consent document (see Appendix H), and the university's Participant's Bill of Rights (see Appendix I). Participants acknowledged receipt and understanding of the informed consent and the Bill of Rights prior to responding to a demographics survey (see Appendix J), which preceded the interviews.

Each interview was recorded through Zoom and transcribed to create the final record. The verbatim accounts from the interviews conducted with participants were the primary data collected in this study. Transcriptions of the interviews were generated from

the recordings and given to the participants to review for accuracy. All qualitative data collected in the form of recordings and transcriptions were stored in the researcher's password-protected computer. Data will be stored securely in the password-protected computer until 3 years after the publication of the study, when the data will be deleted.

Artifacts

Artifacts that supported and aligned with the research purpose and questions were collected from each participant in the study. The collection of artifacts served to enrich the data collected in the phenomenological interviews (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Participants were asked to email the researcher with any documentation they had that supported the five practices of an infinite mindset. The researcher collected artifacts, including principal communication, vision and mission statements, meeting slide decks, and other documents used in daily work.

Data Analysis

The data collected through in-depth interviews and the collection of artifacts in this study were analyzed in tandem using qualitative methods. It is the goal of qualitative data analysis to categorize data and identify patterns (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Due to the significant amount of information collected from each participant, data analysis began with inventorying and organizing the data collected (Patton, 2015). The data were then reviewed and coded for themes.

Inventorying and Organizing Data

The researcher began data analysis by inventorying and organizing the data collected. Recordings for each interview were converted into transcripts, researcher notes

were typed, and relevant artifacts were connected with the related interview data. The data were then organized in digital folders using the letter associated with the interview.

Reviewing and Coding Data

Once the data were organized, the researcher reviewed and then coded the data collected. The researcher read each interview transcript multiple times to familiarize themselves with the data. After reading each interview transcript a second time, the researcher noted potential codes that were common in the data. These potential codes were organized by the study's research questions.

The interview transcripts and artifacts were uploaded into the qualitative software NVivo for coding. The purpose of coding the data is for the researcher to understand the vast amount of data collected and constantly refine any interpretations (Tehmina, 2003). Codes were created in NVivo to relate the interview responses to specific variables identified in the review of literature. At the completion of the coding process, the codes were turned into themes and the researcher found both the overall frequency and number of sources for each theme. The overall frequency of each theme was found by counting the number of times the theme identified was present throughout all the data collected as a whole. The number of sources was found by counting the number of interview transcripts or artifacts mentioning the theme.

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Limitations

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Just like with any research study, limitations exist in this study. In qualitative studies that use the researcher as the instrumentation, it is common for bias to exist. A structured interview protocol, field test, and intercoder reliability are three ways the researcher decreased the potential bias in this study. In addition, it is possible the

participants interviewed had their own biases in interpreting interview questions and providing responses. The researcher assumed participants had similar interpretations of interview questions. The researcher also assumed participants responded honestly and that their responses were not influenced by anything other than factual experiences.

Another limitation of this study is that the sample was not inclusive of schools representing all public school districts in Orange County, California. According to the Orange County Department of Education (2022), there are 25 public school districts in the county that serve elementary school students. The scope of Title I schools in each of these public school districts would not be practical for this study.

Summary

The goal of this study was to understand how exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practices of the infinite mindset framework are embedded in their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results. This chapter described the purpose statement, research questions, population, and sample for the study. This chapter also explained the research instruments used, the qualitative methods used for data collection and analysis, and the limitations of the study. The methodology detailed in this chapter provided information that future studies could use in reproducing this research. These outcomes and findings are discussed in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

This chapter begins with a review of this study's purpose, research questions, methodology, data collection procedures, population, and sample. The data collected in this study are then presented by research question, followed by a detailed report of the findings. Finally, the key themes found in the overall data are shared as major findings.

Overview

This qualitative study explored and described the lived experiences and perceptions of 10 exemplary Title I elementary school principals in relation to the five practices of Sinek's (2019) infinite mindset framework. The variables for this study were the five practices of the infinite mindset framework: (a) just cause, (b) trusting teams, (c) worthy rivals, (d) existential flexibility, and (e) the courage to lead (Sinek, 2019). Data for this study were collected through in-depth interviews with each principal. The research also collected artifacts to triangulate the data gathered in the interviews.

The data collected were analyzed and coded into themes by variable and research question. The findings have been presented by research question to address the purpose of the study. Findings from the first five research questions described how the principals perceived the infinite mindset practices embedded in their organization. Findings from the sixth research question responded to the secondary purpose of the study, understanding the supports and barriers principals perceived to be embedded in their organization that affected the organization's infinite mindset.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and describe how exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceived the practices of Sinek's (2019)

infinite mindset framework embedded in their organization to inspire achievement of extraordinary results. A further purpose of this study was to understand the organizational supports and barriers exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceived that affected the development of an infinite mindset.

Research Questions

The central research question for this study was: How do successful Title I elementary school principals perceive the practices of an infinite mindset are embedded in their organization to achieve extraordinary results? The research subquestions for this study included the following:

- How do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practice of Advancing a Just Cause is embedded within their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results?

- How do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practice of Building Trusting Teams is embedded within their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results?

- How do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practice of Studying Your Worthy Rival is embedded within their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results?

- How do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practice of Preparing for Existential Flexibility is embedded within their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results?

- How do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practice of Demonstrating the Courage to Lead is embedded within their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results?

- What supports and barriers do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive affect the embedding of infinite mindset practices within their organization?

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

The research design used for this study was phenomenological qualitative research. This design was selected to allow the researcher to find trends in the perspectives of multiple principals. Each participant engaged in a one-on-one interview with the researcher, responding to 12 open-ended, semistructured questions. These in-depth interviews were the primary method of data collection used in this study. In addition, the researcher collected artifacts from study participants to be used as a secondary data source.

The researcher interviewed 10 exemplary Title I elementary school principals that met the set criteria for the study. The interviews were conducted and recorded virtually through Zoom. Each interview lasted between 45–60 minutes. The researcher used a structured interview protocol to ask each principal the exact same 12 questions. Transcripts were created from the recordings and then analyzed for themes in the responses.

The researcher also collected and analyzed artifacts related to the five practices of Sinek's (2019) infinite mindset framework. The researcher requested each principal provide at least three artifacts. In all, the researcher analyzed 36 artifacts from the 10

principals. Artifacts included principal messages, vision and mission statements, school handbooks and websites, and a slide deck from a staff meeting. Common themes were found between the interview transcripts and artifacts to better understand the data collected.

Population

The population used in this study was Title I elementary school principals in California. Title I elementary school principals are the site administrators of schools that receive federal funding to serve elementary-aged students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged. Because reasonable access to California's over 3,000 Title I elementary school principals was not feasible, the population was narrowed down to a target population. The target population used in this study was Title I elementary school principals in Orange County, California. According to the last available data from the California Department of Education, there were 238 Title I elementary school principals in this southern California county in 2018.

Sample

The sample used in this study was 10 exemplary Title I elementary school principals in Orange County, California. For the purpose of this study, exemplary was defined as a leader receiving an award or accolade in their role as principal, being considered a model principal by other administrators, or finding extraordinary results at their school site. Specific criteria were developed by the team of researchers to purposively select particular participants with greater insight into the phenomenon.

Participants had to have a minimum of 5 years of experience in the field of education and 2 years in an administrative leadership role. In addition, the exemplary leader must have met at least three of the following criteria:

- The exemplary Title I elementary school principal demonstrated evidence of collaboratively leading an organization fostering creativity and future-orientation improvements.

- The exemplary Title I elementary school principal actively participated in community leadership and shared problem-solving activities.

- The exemplary Title I elementary school principal has had articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings on leadership.

- The exemplary Title I elementary school principal has received recognition by his or her peers as a leader.

- The exemplary Title I elementary school principal has been a member in good standing in professional associations in his or her field.

In addition to purposive sampling, convenience sampling was also used in this study. The researcher used convenience sampling to select Title I elementary school principals employed within the same public school district as them to participate in the study.

Demographic Data

Demographic data were collected from each participant in the research study. The sample population included 10 elementary school principals selected from a target population using a set of criteria as previously described. Fifty percent of the principals

interviewed identified as white or Caucasian, 30% identified as Asian American or Asian, and 20% identified as Hispanic or Latinx (see Table 1). Eight of the 10 participants identified as females, and 2 of the 10 participants identified as male. All of the principals interviewed in this study worked in the field of education for 13 or more years. Eighty percent of the participants held a master's degree and 20% earned a doctorate degree. Only one of the principals was currently enrolled as a student to further their education.

Table 1

Description of Sample

Participant	Race/ethnicity	Gender	Experience (years)	Degree	Current student
Principal A	White or Caucasian	M	13+	MA/MS	N
Principal B	White or Caucasian	F	13+	MA/MS	N
Principal C	White or Caucasian	F	13+	MA/MS	N
Principal D	White or Caucasian	F	13+	EdD/PhD	N
Principal E	Asian American or Asian	F	13+	MA/MS	Y
Principal F	White or Caucasian	F	13+	MA/MS	N
Principal G	Hispanic or Latinx	F	13+	MA/MS	N
Principal H	Hispanic or Latinx	F	13+	MA/MS	N
Principal I	Asian American or Asian	M	13+	EdD/PhD	N
Principal J	Asian American or Asian	F	13+	MA/MS	N

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Data were collected in this study through interviews and collection of artifacts; data were then analyzed qualitatively in tandem for the purpose of understanding how exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceived the practices of Sinek's (2019) infinite mindset framework embedded in their organization. An additional purpose of collecting and analyzing these data was to understand the organizational supports and barriers that exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceived as affecting the

development of an infinite mindset. To categorize data and identify patterns, the researcher began data analysis by inventorying and organizing the data collected. Transcripts were created from each interview recording and relevant artifacts were connected with the related interview data. Transcripts and related artifacts were assigned a letter based on the participant connected to the set of data.

The researcher then reviewed and analyzed the data to determine common codes for each study variable. The qualitative data analysis software, Nvivo, was used to code for themes and to find the overall frequency and number of sources for each theme. Nineteen themes were identified as trends in the collected data, and there were 871 total frequencies of all themes. The total frequency of themes was high in this case because each time a principal mentioned a theme, the researcher tallied the mention as a frequency. A second researcher separately and blindly coded the same data to ensure reliability of the findings.

Central Research Question

The central research question asked, how do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practices of an infinite mindset are embedded within their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results?

The central research question was answered by the findings of each subquestion. These data are presented based on the subquestions' findings and discussed in detail in the following section. Findings are organized by research question.

Research Question 1: Just Cause

Research Question 1 asked, how do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practice of advancing a just cause is embedded within their

organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results? A series of two

questions were asked during each of the 10 qualitative interviews to collect data for

Research Question 1. The first of the two questions asked the principals to share how

their organization ensured priorities were connected to their organization's visions and

aspirations. The second question asked the principals to explain how their organization

connected values and sense of purpose to advance the organization's just cause.

The data collected were clustered into three overarching themes based on the

interview responses from the Title I principals and artifacts collected. The three themes

that emerged related to the practice of advancing a just cause were (a) Focusing on

Students First, (b) Referring Back to the Vision, and (c) Developing the Vision

Collaboratively. Table 2 shows the number of sources mentioning each theme and the

frequency of these mentions.

Table 2

Research Question 1 Themes

Theme	Interview count	Interview frequency	Artifact count	Artifact frequency	Total frequency
Focusing on Students First	9	69	22	29	98
Referring Back to the Vision	8	42	18	20	62
Developing the Vision Collaboratively	8	35	0	0	35

Focusing on Students First. The theme with the highest frequency for the

practice of advancing a just cause was Focusing on Students First. After examining the

interview responses and artifacts, the responses for this theme included 69 interview frequencies and 29 artifact frequencies for a total of 98 frequencies.

Ninety percent of the principals interviewed spoke constantly about students and the need for students to achieve. Principals were concerned not only with academics, but also with students finding success in social-emotional learning and behavior. When analyzing the mission and vision statements collected as artifacts, all 10 of the principals' statements centered on students. The vision statement that Principal J shared as an artifact read:

> School Staff is committed to and accepts responsibility for providing a comprehensive and integrated educational experience for all students. The staff and community are dedicated to providing a learning environment that will ensure students become successful, lifelong learners.
>
> The goals and priorities of our school emphasize a "Learner Centered" school by focusing on instructional programs driven by analyzing student assessment results. The staff believes all students are capable of learning and that they have the ability to influence student achievement; parents and the community are in integral part of ensuring student success; and that all staff, students, parents, and community members share the responsibility for meeting the rigorous academic goals.

A common pattern in focusing on students first was the idea of meeting the needs of the whole child. Principal G explained:

> We have established our school to be the hub of the community where we really do have to serve the whole child and to provide the supports that are needed to

help our students be successful. . . . So everything is centered around why we're

here, which is making sure that our students have every opportunity afforded to

them and that we open up more doors for them so they will be successful. Not just

academically, but socially, socioemotionally, as well as having a great sense of

well-being and belonging.

Two other patterns found within the theme of focusing on students first was the

shift to using asset-based language when talking about students and a focus on the

achievement of *all* students. Principal J explained, "A lot of our focus has been shifted to:

How do we make sure that every single student is achieving? Not just students without

IEPs [individualized education program], but also students with IEPs."

Referring Back to the Vision. The theme with the second highest frequency for

the practice of advancing a just cause was Referring Back to the Vision. After examining

the interview responses and artifacts, the responses for this theme included 42 interview

frequencies and 20 artifact frequencies for a total of 62 frequencies.

The principals in this study collectively shared multiple ways they referred to

their organization's vision. They promoted their vision to make all stakeholders aware of

it and referred to it when making decisions about moving forward. All 10 principals

clearly stated their organization's vision on their school website. Principal D's message

to families that she shared as an artifact included her organization's full vision. In the

parent and student handbook, an artifact from Principal F's organization, although the

school's vision was not explicitly identified, the ideas within the vision—which was

provided as a separate artifact—were clearly embedded throughout the introduction letter

the principal wrote. Principal A explained how his school made their vision known, stating:

I think the vision is very important. I think that to ensure that everything we are doing aligns with it, we try to promote it as much as possible. Our current vision is posted in every classroom. It's on all of our weekly bulletins. It's in all of our Sunday messages. We try to make sure that everyone knows our values, so it is on our social media and everywhere we present ourselves.

When making decisions about supplemental programs, instruction, and events, many of the principals spoke of how they referred to their vision to see how the idea presented aligned with the vision. Principal E described the way they always went back to the goals aligned to their vision to ensure their decision matched their vision of doing what was best to get students ready for their futures.

Developing the Vision Collaboratively. The theme with the third highest frequency for the practice of advancing a just cause was Developing the Vision Collaboratively. After examining the interview responses and artifacts, the responses for this theme included 35 interview frequencies. This theme was not represented in any of the artifacts collected for this study.

Eight of the 10 principals discussed the idea of developing the organization's vision as a collaborative effort. Principal F described this collaboration in developing their vision, stating:

We make sure we always go back to our vison. When we look at it at the beginning of every year, we always get input from parents, teachers, everyone, and just say "How are we doing? What needs to change?"

Research Question 2: Trusting Teams

Research Question 2 asked, how do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practice of building trusting teams is embedded within their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results? A series of two questions were asked during each of the 10 qualitative interviews to collect data for Research Question 2. The first of the two questions asked the principal to share the practices their organization used to create a trusting and mutually supportive team environment. The second question asked the principal to explain how their organization promoted a psychologically safe space that fosters trust.

The data collected were clustered into three overarching themes based on the interview responses from the Title I Principals and artifacts collected. The three themes that emerged related to the practice of building trusting teams were (a) Providing Opportunities for Open Communication, (b) Building Relationships With and Between Staff Members, and (c) Dedicating Time for Teamwork. Table 3 shows the number of sources mentioning each theme and the frequency of these mentions.

Table 3

Research Question 2 Themes

Theme	Interview count	Interview frequency	Artifact count	Artifact frequency	Total frequency
Providing Opportunities for Open Communication	10	65	9	11	76
Building Relationships With and Between Staff Members	9	56	5	6	62
Dedicating Time for Teamwork	10	50	4	6	56

Providing Opportunities for Open Communication. The theme with the highest frequency for the practice of building trusting teams was Providing Opportunities for Open Communication. After examining the interview responses and artifacts, the responses for this theme included 65 interview frequencies and 11 artifact frequencies for a total of 76 frequencies.

All 10 principals interviewed spoke about providing opportunities for open communication within their organization. In a welcome message from the principal, found in a beginning of year packet from Principal F's organization, Principal F expressed the need for open communication with families, and even stated that she would be reaching out to families in the next few weeks to communicate ways that they could be involved in the school community. Principal A told families in a student handbook that they were welcome to come by the office anytime to ask questions and speak with her.

Multiple principals described their open-door policy and the vulnerable conversations they were able to have with teachers. These 10 principals believed in listening to staff members, giving them a voice, and communicating with them honestly. Principal E discussed opportunities given to their teachers to communicate openly and honestly, stating:

> I have an open door policy. Any concerns, anything that comes up that we need to look at, we address them right away. I also meet with what we call a faculty of advisory committee, and we have two or three representatives from the staff meet with me to bring up any concerns that may not be appropriate to bring up during teacher collaboration or at a staff meeting.

A few principals interviewed also shared how they provided opportunities for open communication around data. They believed this gave teachers an opportunity to ask questions and consider next steps without feeling judged or embarrassed.

Building Relationships With and Between Staff Members. The theme with the second highest frequency for the practice of building trusting teams was Building Relationships With and Between Staff Members. After examining the interview responses and artifacts, the responses for this theme included 56 interview frequencies and 6 artifact frequencies for a total of 62 frequencies.

One of the ways principals shared they facilitated relationship building was through celebrating one another. In Principal A's School Site Plan, which they provided as an artifact, one of the major actions to improve their school's environment was listed as promoting positive relationships among adults. In his interview, Principal A stated:

> We start off every meeting with celebrations. We encourage people to celebrate their own accomplishments and celebrate accomplishments of their colleagues. So we start off every single meeting with that type of thing. We also have a shared bulletin that's like a Google slide presentation that we encourage our teachers and staff to also celebrate each other on.

Many of the principals interviewed shared that they looked at each staff member as another human being. They considered the social-emotional well-being of the teachers at their school site just as they did the students. Regarding teachers, Principal C explained:

> I just get to know them, I ask about them, care about them, and make sure that I take the time to listen. Underneath you know who their kids are, what's going on

in their lives, and things like that. It's about treating them like a human. I think it is really important.

Dedicating Time for Teamwork. The theme with the third highest frequency for the practice of building trusting teams was Dedicating Time for Teamwork. After examining the interview responses and artifacts, the responses for this theme included 50 interview frequencies and 6 artifact frequencies for a total of 56 frequencies.

All 10 principals interviewed shared it was a common practice to have a dedicated time for teams to work together. Some of this time was built into the school day, while other times were after school. In an artifact collected from Principal D, a photograph showed teachers working together during a dedicated time to build a community of practice with one another. Principal G explained how this dedicated time worked, stating:

> I guess it's by doing the work, that's how teachers learn to trust each other. . . . When we have grade level team collaborations, they're working together in grade level teams, which is two times a month or sometimes three. You allow them the time to really discuss what they need to discuss. It's not like setting the agenda. So it allows them that open, honest kind of conversation amongst each other.

Research Question 3: Worthy Rival

Research Question 3 asked, how do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practice of studying your worthy rival is embedded within their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results? A series of two questions were asked during each of the 10 qualitative interviews to collect data for Research Question 3. The first of the two questions asked the principal to share how their organization learned from other successful leaders or organizations. The second question

asked the principal to explain how people within their organization learned from successful people who hold the same or similar positions.

The data collected were clustered into three overarching themes based on the interview responses from the Title I Principals and artifacts collected. The three themes that emerged related to the practice of studying your worthy rival were (a) Reaching Out to Other Teachers and Principals, (b) Working With District- and/or County-Provided Supports, and (c) Partnering With Outside Organizations and Experts. Table 4 shows the number of sources mentioning each theme and the frequency of these mentions.

Table 4

Research Question 3 Themes

Theme	Interview count	Interview frequency	Artifact count	Artifact frequency	Total frequency
Reaching Out to Other Principals and Teachers	10	46	0	0	46
Working With District- or County-Provided Supports	9	25	2	3	28
Partnering With Outside Organizations and Experts	9	16	2	2	18

Reaching Out to Other Principals and Teachers. The theme with the highest frequency for the practice of studying your worthy rival was Reaching out to Other Principals and Teachers. After examining the interview responses and artifacts, the responses for this theme included 46 interview frequencies. This theme was not represented in any of the artifacts collected for this study.

Multiple principals spoke of structured principal meetings organized by their district office. They felt these were good opportunities to learn from one another and collaborate together to better their practice as a leader. All 10 principals interviewed described how teachers had similar opportunities to learn from one another during grade level collaboration meetings.

Principals interviewed also mentioned the importance of observations and walkthroughs for both principals and teachers to learn from one another. Principal C described an instance when they used their principal meeting time as a district to observe one of the principals teaching a fifth grade math lesson. This observation was used to grow the team's understanding of cognitively guided instruction. Principal B described principal walkthroughs that their cohort did together throughout multiple classrooms, to understand the new adopted curriculum. She also discussed how her teachers learn from each other through observations, stating:

> Tomorrow, for example, my fifth grade team is going to watch another fifth grade class teaching math. It's a good chance to reflect and say, look you are doing this too so that's really good, and look they're doing this that is different, is that something we could incorporate into our day?

In addition to principal meetings, observations, and walkthroughs, principals and teachers also learn from one another through book studies. Principal G described book studies for principals in her district by sharing, "Our superintendent is really into book clubs. He's having us read all sorts of leadership books that will help us in the work that we are doing."

Working With District- and/or County-Provided Supports. The theme with the second highest frequency for the practice of studying your worthy rival was Working With District- and/or County-Provided Supports. After examining the interview responses and artifacts, the responses for this theme included 25 interview frequencies and 3 artifact frequencies for a total of 28 frequencies.

Some principals interviewed discussed professional development opportunities offered by teachers on special assignment in their district. Principal I's School Accountability Report Card detailed the opportunities for professional development offered by their district office before school began each year. It also described opportunities for targeted in-class support and a new teacher training program. Principal E explained in her interview:

> So in addition to the weekly collaboration meetings and things like that, our teachers are continuously able to attend after school professional development that's provided by our district. One of the most recent ones was working with our teachers who work with paraprofessionals in their classroom and they were able to work with other teachers who have paraprofessionals in their rooms. They also brought all of the paraprofessionals in together for a training, which was really neat.
>
> Those opportunities are very centralized, and district led, but the opportunities are kind of endless. Our instruction department has a calendar that they put out every month with all of these opportunities to go collaborate and do professional development with other colleagues.

In addition to working with district-led professional development, a couple of the principals interviewed discussed work with the local county office, the Orange County Department of Education (OCDE). According to the principals, OCDE offered professional development for teachers and administrators, especially when implementing a new program at their school site.

Partnering With Outside Organizations and Experts. The theme with the third highest frequency for the practice of studying your worthy rival was Partnering With Outside Organizations and Experts. After examining the interview responses and artifacts, the responses for this theme included 16 interview frequencies and 2 artifact frequencies for a total of 18 frequencies.

Several outside organizations were mentioned throughout multiple interviews, when describing ways administrators and teachers grow their practice. Principals explained that the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) hosted conferences and other opportunities for professional development for leaders. Principal G described her own experience with the National Institute for School Leadership, stating:

> I have to tell you what's helped me a lot was that we participated in the National Institute for School Leadership and it really helped guide my vision and my plan, seeing what's successful in other places and then thinking about why we aren't doing it here. Why can't we replicate what they're doing? And it's not exactly the same, but it helped us to have a clearly defined plan with a focus on excellence, equity, and efficiency.

The Cotsen Foundation for the Art of Teaching was provided as an example of professional development for both administrators and teachers. Principal A described:

I'm with a lot of principals in our district in our principal network. We have

Cotsen, so Cotsen also offers a lot of professional development, offers a lot of

opportunities for teachers to observe other teachers during high-research based

math lessons. So we have a lot of opportunities for that and actually teachers from

other schools come to watch our Cotsen teachers as well.

In addition to outside organizations, a couple interviews also mentioned

partnering with experts outside of their school district. Two principals from the same

district described partnering with educational consultants. These experts joined their

principal meetings but were also available for personalized one-on-one sessions. In

addition, Principal D provided a Twitter post as an artifact that showed pictures of an

ACSA event she attended. She posted she was excited to be there learning from a well-

known expert.

Research Question 4: Existential Flexibility

Research Question 4 asked, how do exemplary Title I elementary school

principals perceive the practice of preparing for existential flexibility is embedded within

their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results? A series of two

questions were asked during each of the 10 qualitative interviews to collect data for

Research Question 4. The first of the two questions asked the principal to share how their

organization identified new opportunities to achieve the organization's vision. The

second question asked the principal to describe a time when staying on the same path was

not going to fulfill their organization's just cause.

The data collected were clustered into three overarching themes based on the

interview responses from the Title I Principals and artifacts collected. The three themes

that emerged related to the practice of preparing for existential flexibility were (a) Being Open to Ideas From Others, (b) Reflecting on What Works and What Does Not Work, and (c) Using Early Adopters. Table 5 shows the number of sources mentioning each theme and the frequency of these mentions.

Table 5

Research Question 4 Themes

Theme	Interview count	Interview frequency	Artifact count	Artifact frequency	Total frequency
Being Open to Ideas From Others	10	56	4	5	61
Reflecting on What Works and What Does Not	10	44	2	2	46
Using Early Adopters	8	33	0	0	33

Being Open to Ideas From Others. The theme with the highest frequency for the practice of preparing for existential flexibility was Being Open to Ideas From Others. After examining the interview responses and artifacts, the responses for the theme of being open to ideas from others included 56 interview frequencies and 5 artifact frequencies for a total of 61 frequencies.

Principal D described their own existential flexibility, stating:

I like to think of myself as an outside of the box person. I definitely try to

innovate. So I am not a status quo person because I don't believe in life anything

really stays the same. We have to sometimes get out of our comfort zone.

Although some of the initiatives and ideas principals described throughout the interviews came straight from the principal, many of these ideas were brought to them by

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others, especially their own teachers. Many of the principals interviewed described their openness to new ideas from teachers. Principal B described:

I am big on teachers being able to come to me with almost anything. I am like, yes, let's try it. You know what I mean? Because I'm not the type of leader that thinks it's my way and it's only my vision. I feel like you have to take the strengths of all your staff . . . because I feel like collectively, we know our school and we know our needs, so I'm a huge proponent of let's think outside the box. If it is what's going to be best for our kids, then let's try it.

An artifact collected from Principal H—a parent and family engagement policy letter sent home to all families and posted on their school website—invited parents and guardians to share their ideas and provide input to school and district staff. This letter demonstrated Principal H's openness to the ideas of others in her school community.

Reflecting on What Works and What Does Not Work. The theme with the second highest frequency for the practice of preparing for existential flexibility was reflecting on What Works and What Does Not Work. After examining the interview responses and artifacts, the responses for this theme included 44 interview frequencies and 2 artifact frequencies for a total of 46 frequencies.

Whether principals were using the information to make a decision, or just reflecting on data or instruction, all 10 principals discussed how they were constantly looking at what worked for their students and what did not. Principal C described their process of reflecting for improvement, stating:

I feel like we are always looking to improve. We think, "Is this working okay? How can we tweak it? How can we make it better? How can we do it so that we are supporting kids in a better way?"

Principal A shared a welcome letter to families that was sent out at the beginning of the school year, where he reflected on successes over the last 5 years and upcoming changes to better meet the needs of their children. This artifact demonstrated how principals might communicate what works and what does not work with the school community after their own reflection.

Using Early Adopters. The theme with the third highest frequency for the practice of preparing for existential flexibility was Using Early Adopters. Early adopters are those who understand the need for change and embrace new opportunities without needing to be convinced (Boston University, 2022). After examining the interview responses and artifacts, the responses for this theme included 33 interview frequencies. This theme was not represented in any of the artifacts collected for this study.

For example, Principal F described how some teachers can be role models for others, stating:

It's really celebrating those who have done the change and have been doing the work. I would call them dreams, dreaming big, and when we celebrate that, we give others the thought that they could try it too. So I think it kind of rubs off slowly and I've seen more teachers then try it.

Research Question 5: Courage to Lead

Research Question 5 asked, how do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practice of demonstrating the courage to lead is embedded within

their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results? A series of two questions were asked during each of the 10 qualitative interviews to collect data for Research Question 5. The first of the two questions asked the principal to share how their organization stayed aligned with its values and goals when pressured to take a different path. The second question asked the principal to explain how their organization modeled the willingness to take risks.

The data collected were clustered into two overarching themes based on the interview responses from the Title I Principals and artifacts collected. The two themes that emerged related to the practice of demonstrating the courage to lead were (a) Modeling Being a Lifelong Learner and (b) Pushing Back Against Others When Necessary. Table 6 shows the number of sources mentioning each theme and the frequency of these mentions.

Table 6

Research Question 5 Themes

Theme	Interview count	Interview frequency	Artifact count	Artifact frequency	Total frequency
Modeling Being a Lifelong Learner	10	76	5	5	81
Pushing Back Against Others When Necessary	7	31	0	0	31

Modeling Being a Lifelong Learner. The theme with the highest frequency for the practice of demonstrating the courage to lead was Modeling Being a Lifelong Learner. After examining the interview responses and artifacts, the responses for this

theme included 76 interview frequencies and 5 artifact frequencies for a total of 81 frequencies.

All 10 principals interviewed demonstrated being a lifelong learner at multiple points in their interview. Some discussed how they felt it was okay to try something new and make mistakes, and others discussed organizations, leaders, and programs from whom they continued to learn. Principal A exemplified the former, by explaining:

I will be the first one to do a demo lesson and have the teachers give me feedback on it. Anytime we are trying to do something new, I want to make sure that I am learning alongside them and trying it out, and really being that instructional leader. . . . So I think we just have that model where we're all there to support each other, not to judge, or make people feel bad. If someone's taking a risk, we want to make them feel good about taking that risk. Even if it was a bomb, give them the support they need to do better. So I think that starts with the leader and the evaluator.

Principal D described the nature of educators as one that adapts and pivots. She stated that when trying something new does not work then one can just pull back. She went on to state, "So we just can't stagnate. We've got to be willing to step out and try something new."

Principal H explained how when something was not working at her school site, she would reach out to other principals to see what was working for them. Principal B disclosed:

There's a couple principals that I can always go to. There's a couple people at the district that I feel safe enough to go to and say that I don't know how to do

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something. . . . Just like our teachers, you find the ones that you feel safe to ask

your questions to and not feel like you're going to be judged and you just have

time to learn from them. I try to go to some of the ACSA stuff too.

Principal F even had a podcast posted on her school's website that focused on learning

from innovators and risk takers. This demonstrated her promotion of lifelong learning.

Pushing Back Against Others When Necessary. The theme with the second

highest frequency for the practice of demonstrating the courage to lead was Pushing Back

Against Others When Necessary. After examining the interview responses and artifacts,

the responses for this theme included 31 interview frequencies. This theme was not

represented in any of the artifacts collected for this study.

Principal A described a time he was faced with a district initiative to focus on the

science of reading when his school had found success with balanced literacy. Principal A,

along with some of his colleagues, pushed back against the new district initiative and

were able continue with teaching using reading and writing workshops.

Principal B explained the importance of knowing one's organization's vision

when pushing back on a district initiative, stating:

And so, when they ask you why, if you have a clear understanding of what your

vision is and what your path is, then you can explain it. I think the problem you

run into is if you don't have a clear vision and you don't know why you're doing

the things that you're doing. Then when somebody asks you why you are doing

something and you don't know, then they are going to say you have to do their

idea. But if you are able to explain it and why it doesn't match with your vision

and mission, then you can explain it to the point where, they still might not agree,

but they're going to understanding that you know where you are headed with your

school.

Research Question 6

Research Question 6 asked, what supports and barriers do exemplary Title I

elementary school principals perceive affect the embedding of infinite mindset practices

within their organization? A series of two questions were asked during each of the 10

qualitative interviews to collect data for Research Question 6. The first of the two

questions asked the principal to share the supports they felt existed within their

organization that fostered embedding infinite mindset practices. The second question

asked the principal what barriers existed within their organization that hindered

embedding infinite mindset practices.

Supports for Embedding an Infinite Mindset. The data collected were clustered

into three overarching themes based on the interview responses from the Title I Principals

and artifacts collected. The three themes that emerged as support that fostered the

embedding infinite mindset practices were (a) Collecting and Using Student Data, (b)

Receiving Supplemental Funding, and (c) Using Leadership Teams and/or Teacher

Committees. Table 7 shows the number of sources mentioning each of these three themes

and the frequency of these mentions.

Table 7

Research Question 6 Themes: Supports

Theme	Interview count	Interview frequency	Artifact count	Artifact frequency	Total frequency
Collecting and Using Student Data	7	47	6	16	63
Receiving Supplemental Funding	6	12	6	8	20
Using leadership Teams and/or Teacher Committees	7	17	0	0	17

Collecting and Using Student Data. The theme with the highest frequency for supports for embedding an infinite mindset was Collecting and Using Student Data. Seven of the principals referenced how their organization analyzed student data to inform decisions. Some of the principals spoke about collecting and using data at the school site level. Principal G explained that having data was helpful because if the data supported what the school was doing then she knew they were moving in the right direction. Principal D stated her organization used data to inform everything they did. In Principal A's School Accountability Report Card, which was collected as an artifact in this study, data on chronic absenteeism were collected and organized to inform decisions related to student chronic absenteeism. Other principals shared how data were collected and used at the classroom level. Principal H described having dedicated time twice a week for teachers to look at data and discuss their students together. Principal I explained how his school relied on data as a support, stating:

> We've implemented a screening program called Fast Bridge and with that, we are
>
> getting a ton of information. Fast Bridge helps us to categorize our data and our

student scores, and then focus on the high-risk students. We can then provide a diagnostic to see what kinds of interventions we need to put in place during real time . . . Teachers can use the screeners and talk about their data.

Receiving Supplemental Funding. The theme with the second highest frequency for supports for embedding an infinite mindset was Receiving Supplemental Funding. Six of the principals referenced Title I money and ways in which they spent those funds. These principals emphasized this money allowed them to provide more resources to meet the needs of the students at their schools. Principal I described:

I have to pour resources and support into it [instruction]. So I'm pumping in all this money for instructional technology and all this money in for professional development. I'm also pouring in a lot of money into things like after school interventions. And then we pay for teachers to go attend conferences.

An artifact collected from Principal F's organization was their School Plan for Student Achievement. In this plan, state program funds were listed by local control funding formula budgets and instructional materials, and then federal program funds were listed, which included supplemental Title I funds in excess of $200,000.

Using Leadership Teams and/or Teacher Committees. The theme with the third highest frequency for supports for embedding an infinite mindset was Using Leadership Teams and/or Teacher Committees. Principal F explained:

One thing that we've established at our organization is a leadership team and that leadership team revisits our vision at every meeting so that when we are talking about next steps or moving forward, we are always going back to that vision that

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we have set forth. Now I kind of hand-picked those people and encouraged them to be on my leadership team because of their mindsets.

Although most principals described one leadership team for their school site, a few principals also explained how they created multiple teacher committees to take on specific goals. Principal I shared he created separate teacher committees for positive behavior intervention and supports, technology, gifted and talented education, and student council. Principal I explained that these committees distributed leadership responsibilities among more teachers.

Barriers to Embedding an Infinite Mindset. The major theme that emerged as a barrier to embedding infinite mindset practices was feeling overloaded with too many tasks and initiatives. Table 8 shows the number of sources mentioning each of these two themes and the frequency of these mentions.

Table 8

Research 6 Themes: Barriers

Theme	Interview count	Interview frequency	Artifact count	Artifact frequency	Total frequency
Feeling Overloaded With too Many Tasks and Initiatives	7	28	0	0	28

Throughout the interviews, there were 28 mentions of teachers or principals feeling overloaded with too many tasks or initiatives. Principal A explained that learning new opportunities to achieve the organization's vision was never the issue, but instead the issue was in narrowing the tasks down to what was actually doable. Later in the interview, Principal A stated:

It's a little overwhelming sometimes. A lot of my day is spent chasing elopers [students who run out of class or off campus] around campus and other things that keep us busy. I would say that's a big barrier because a lot of the teachers are feeling overwhelmed which makes me anxious, because I don't want them to feel overwhelmed. I want them to feel invigorated and excited especially about where we're going. I think that many teachers, not just in my school, are feeling really more overwhelmed than normal.

There were many mentions of not having enough time to complete everything there was to do as educators throughout seven of the interviews. Principal D described how their teachers were impacted by this feeling of being overwhelmed, stating:

I am listening and hearing that some of the staff concerns are that they are just inundated with initiative after initiative and feeling overloaded. We are just coming off conference week and there is a lot of sickness, whether it is flu or whether it's COVID still, whatever is going around. We are getting a lot of newcomers, a lot of refugees coming in. So there's just a lot going on, which there always is.

Principal I echoed this sentiment by stating that many of his teachers were very tired and veteran teachers that had been around for many different initiatives. When they heard a new idea brought to the school, they reacted with comments such as, "Oh, here comes another new initiative."

Summary

Many themes were found throughout the 10 interviews with the exemplary Title I elementary school principals. Table 9 summarizes the themes found in relation to each research question and variable, providing frequency counts for interviews and artifacts.

Table 9

Summary of All Themes

Related research question and variable	Theme	Interview count	Interview frequency	Artifact count	Artifact frequency	Total frequency
Research Question 1: Just Cause	Focusing on Students First	9	69	22	29	98
	Referring Back to the Vision	8	42	18	20	62
	Developing the Vision Collaboratively	8	35	0	0	35
Research Question 2: Trusting Teams	Providing Opportunities for Open Communication	10	65	9	11	76
	Building Relationships With and Between Staff Members	9	56	5	6	62
	Dedicating Time for Teamwork	10	50	4	6	56
Research Question 3: Worthy Rivals	Reaching out to Other Principals and Teachers	10	46	0	0	46
	Working with District- or County-Provided Supports	9	25	2	3	28

Related research question and variable	Theme	Interview count	Interview frequency	Artifact count	Artifact frequency	Total frequency
	Partnering with Outside Organizations and Experts	9	16	2	2	18
Research Question 4: Existential Flexibility	Being Open to Ideas From Others	10	56	4	5	61
	Reflecting on What Works and What Does not Work	10	44	2	2	46
	Using Early Adopters	8	33	0	0	33
Research Question 5: Courage to Lead	Modeling Being a Lifelong Learner	10	76	5	5	81
	Pushing Back When Necessary	7	31	0	0	31
Research Question 6: Supports	Collecting and Using Student Data	7	47	6	16	63
	Receiving Additional Funding	6	12	6	8	20
	Using Leadership Teams and/or Teacher Committees	7	17	0	0	17
Research Question 6: Barriers	Feeling Overloaded With too Many Tasks and Initiatives	7	28	0	0	28

These exemplary Title I elementary school principals embedded the practice of advancing a just cause in their organization by focusing on students first, referring back to the vision, and developing the vision collaboratively. They embedded the practice of

building trusting teams in their organization by providing opportunities for open communication, building relationships with and between staff members, and dedicating time for teamwork. Exemplary Title I elementary school principals embedded the practice of studying a worthy rival in their organization by reaching out to other principals and teachers, working with district- and/or county-provided supports, and partnering with outside organizations and experts. They embedded the practice of preparing for existential flexibility in their organization by being open to ideas from others, reflecting on what works and what does not work, and using early adopters. Finally, these elementary school principals embedded the practice of demonstrating the courage to lead in their organization by modeling being a lifelong learner and pushing back against others when necessary.

Exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceived collecting and using student data, receiving supplemental funding, using leadership teams and/or teacher committees, and feeling overloaded with too many tasks and initiatives affected embedding infinite mindset practices within their organization. Principles perceived student data, supplemental funding, and leadership teams as supports for embedding infinite mindset practices, while feeling overloaded with too many tasks and initiatives was perceived as a barrier.

Key Findings

In analyzing the 18 themes coded from interviews and artifacts, eight key findings were found to describe how exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceived how practices of Sinek's (2019) infinite mindset were embedded in their organization. These are the right key findings discovered through this study:

Key Finding 1: Using a Student-Centered Vision as a Guide for Decision Making

Exemplary Title I elementary school principals embed the infinite mindset practice of just cause by collaboratively developed a school vision that focused on what was best for students. They continuously referred back to the vision when making decisions within their organization.

Key Finding 2: Prioritizing Relationships, Open Communication, and Teamwork

Exemplary Title I elementary school principals embed the infinite mindset practice of trusting teams by intentionally built relationships with staff members. They had a policy for open communication and provided time for teachers to work in teams.

Key Finding 3: Being Open to Learning From Others

Exemplary Title I elementary school principals embed the infinite mindset practice of worthy rivals by demonstrating openness to learn from their peers, experts in the field, and other educators within their school district. Teachers were encouraged to share new ideas with them and principals did not feel that every idea needed to come from them.

Key Finding 4: Constantly Striving for Improvement

Exemplary Title I elementary school principals embed the infinite mindset practice of existential flexibility by frequently reflected on what worked and what did not work for their students and teachers. When something was not moving toward the desired results, these principals figured out how to make improvements.

Key Finding 5: Focusing on Growth

Exemplary Title I elementary school principals embed the infinite mindset practice of courage to lead by demonstrating a growth mindset for their own professional

learning. They also focused on growth when analyzing data and evaluating the effectiveness of programs. They knew that achievement did not happen overnight and that growth was worth celebrating.

Key Finding 6: Taking Risks When It Is What Is Best for the Organization

Exemplary Title I elementary school principals also embed the infinite mindset practice of courage to lead by taking risks and pushing back against pressures to change course when it was not right for their students. They listened to new ideas, implemented new programs, and did not back away from the risk of failure.

Key Finding 7: Strategically Using Available Resources

Exemplary Title I elementary school principals used student data, Title I funds, and leadership teams effectively as supports for embedding an infinite mindset in their organization. They aligned these resources with their school vision and used them to increase student achievement and well-being.

Key Finding 8: Overloaded With too Many Tasks and Initiatives

Exemplary Title I elementary school principals recognized educators were overloaded with too many tasks and initiatives, which was viewed as a barrier to embedding an infinite mindset in their organization. They considered their teachers' level of fatigue when determining roll outs of new initiatives and making schoolwide decisions.

Conclusion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and describe how exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceived how the practices of Sinek's (2019) infinite mindset framework were embedded within their organization to inspire

the achievement of extraordinary results. A second purpose of this study was to understand the organizational supports and barriers exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceived that affected the development of an infinite mindset. This chapter provided an analysis and summary of the qualitative data collected through 10 interviews and 36 artifacts. Five key findings were described in this chapter to better understand the perceived experiences of the exemplary Title I elementary school principals interviewed.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides a summary of the study's purpose statement, research questions, methods, population, and sample. From the eight key findings outlined in Chapter IV, seven major findings were discovered for this study. The major findings described in this chapter are expanded to determine conclusions and implications for action. Unexpected findings are also included in this chapter. Recommendations for future research are given and then Chapter V ends with concluding remarks and reflections from the researcher.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and describe how exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceived that the practices of Sinek's (2019) infinite mindset framework were embedded in their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results. A further purpose of this study was to understand the organizational supports and barriers exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceived that affected the development of an infinite mindset. This study focused on answering one central research question and six subquestions. Five of the subquestions aligned to one of the practices of Sinek's infinite mindset, which also acted as the variables for this study. The central research question was: How do successful Title I elementary school principals perceive the practices of an infinite mindset are embedded in their organization to achieve extraordinary results? The subquestions were as follows:

1. How do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practice of advancing a just cause is embedded within their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results?

2. How do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practice of building trusting teams is embedded within their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results?

3. How do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practice of studying your worthy rival is embedded within their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results?

4. How do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practice of preparing for existential flexibility is embedded within their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results?

5. How do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive the practice of demonstrating the courage to lead is embedded within their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results?

6. What supports and barriers do exemplary Title I elementary school principals perceive affect the embedding of infinite mindset practices within their organization?

This study was a thematic study with eight peer researchers and four faculty advisors designed to explore the perceived experiences of exemplary leaders within the education system. The population in this researcher's study was Title I elementary school principals in the state of California. The target population narrowed down the population to Title I elementary school principals in Orange County, California. The sample for this study was exemplary Title I elementary school principals in Orange County, CA that met specific criteria as participants.

Major Findings

Chapter IV presented the key findings of this study by research variable. In analyzing the key findings described in the previous chapter, major findings of this study were found. The 18 themes coded from the qualitative data collected through interviews and artifacts were narrowed down to eight key findings. From these eight key findings, the researcher determined seven major findings from this study. Due to similar themes within the findings, the seven major findings are organized by related clusters of research variables, except for the final finding.

Research Variables: Just Cause and Trusting Teams

In exploring the data collected related to the research variables of just cause and trusting teams, two major findings were discovered. Exemplary Title I principles embedded these infinite mindset practices into their organization by putting people first and using open communication and collaboration.

Major Finding 1: Putting People First

Exemplary Title I elementary school principals in this study put students, teachers, and relationships above all else to embed the infinite mind practices of just cause and trusting teams in their organizations to achieve extraordinary results. All principals interviewed in this study discussed the importance of both a student-centered vision and conveyed a purpose of always doing what was best for the children they served. Nine of the 10 principals also emphasized the importance of building caring relationships with teachers and getting to know them on a personal level.

Putting others first is one of the characteristics of transformational leaders (Saeed & Jun, 2021). Sinek (2019) even described one facet of establishing trusting teams as

having people who truly care about one another. Therefore, close relationships among a team are beneficial to the success of an organization (Salanova et al., 2020).

Major Finding 2: Open Communication and Collaboration

Exemplary Title I elementary school principals in this study used open communication and collaboration to develop their organization's vision and make decisions in line with that vision. They used open communication and collaboration to embed the infinite mindset practices of just cause and trusting teams in their organizations to achieve extraordinary results. Principals used open communication to show they valued the ideas of others, build relationships, and gather input from all stakeholders. All principals interviewed in this study discussed the idea of collaboration with their organization's stakeholders. This collaboration included developing the organization's vision together and dedicating time for teamwork.

Open communication was a crucial element in *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable,* where Lencioni (2002) explained people will not get on board with new ideas if they do not feel like others have listened to them. Both classroom environments and student achievement can improve when open communication exists between a principal and their stakeholders (Zhang & Koshmanova, 2021).

In this study, principals also used collaboration to develop a shared vision and then refer to it in decision making. A shared vision is a significant part of leading in a collaborative style (Lawrence, 2017). With a shared vision all team members believe in, the team is more likely to achieve extraordinary results (Donohoo et al., 2018).

Research Variables: Worthy Rivals, Existential Flexibility, and Courage to Lead

In exploring data collected related to the research variables of worthy rivals, existential flexibility, and courage to lead, two major findings were discovered. Exemplary Title I principles embed these infinite mindset practices into their organization by demonstrating high levels of courage and vulnerability and focusing on growth.

Major Finding 3: High Levels of Courage and Vulnerability

Exemplary Title I elementary school principals in this study demonstrated high levels of courage and vulnerability. They demonstrated high levels of courage and vulnerability to embed the infinite mind practices of worthy rivals, existential flexibility, and courage to lead in their organizations to achieve extraordinary results. They did this by demonstrating high levels of trust and vulnerability in being open to new learning and taking risks for improvement. All principals interviewed for this study demonstrated vulnerability and many described taking opportunities to learn from peers, as well as experts in the field of education.

Sinek (2019) described someone with the courage to lead as someone being able to hold onto a high standard of morals. In addition, having the courage to lead allows a leader to push back if something is not aligned with their organization (Sinek, 2019). Many of the principals in this study described how they demonstrated courage by how they pushed back against ideas that were not right for the context of their school.

In addition to being courageous, it is also important for leaders to be vulnerable (Brown, 2012). A leader modeling vulnerability can create trust within their organization and vulnerability is the foundation of a trusting team (Sinek, 2019). Sinek (2019) further

explained that for one to be vulnerable, trust has to exist within a team and team members need to know they can share without being ridiculed.

Major Finding 4: Focusing on Growth

Exemplary Title I elementary school principals in this study focused on their own professional growth, as well as growth toward achievement within their organization. They focused on growth to embed the infinite mind practices of worthy rivals, existential flexibility, and courage to lead in their organizations to achieve extraordinary results. A second way they did this was by focusing on growth for both them personally or individually and for their organization as whole. Many of the principals interviewed described making decisions to strive for improvement within the organization.

When these principals strive for improvement and focusing on growth, they demonstrate a growth mindset. A growth mindset is their belief that people have the ability to learn and improve, rather than a fixed ability (Dweck, 2020). Bostwick and Becker-Blease (2018) explained that leaders who hold a growth mindset find more success than those who hold a fixed mindset because the focus on growth is connected to a higher level of achievement (Dweck, 2020) and an increase in motivation and self-efficacy (Brunette et al., 2018).

Research Variables: Supports and Barriers

In exploring the data collected related to the supports and barriers to embedding an infinite mindset in an organization, two major findings were discovered. Exemplary Title I principles strategically used available resources and were aware of initiative fatigue.

Major Finding 5: Strategically Use Available Resources

Exemplary Title I elementary school principals in this study strategically used available resources to benefit the school. Exemplary Title I elementary school principals used certain supports to embed the practices of an infinite mindset in their organization. These principals strategically used available resources to benefit the school. Principals especially used student data, Title I funding, and leadership teams or teacher committees to achieve their school vision.

Based on the population criteria for this study, all 10 principals led schools that qualified to receive Title I funding. Throughout the United States, these funds for serving socioeconomically disadvantaged students add up to more than 14 billion dollars (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Based on the population they served and the way their district distributed funds, each organization represented by the 10 principals had a varied Title I budget. As described throughout their interviews, principals used this budget to fund programs, instruction, and supplemental curriculum that they deemed to be high quality.

Another support principals saw as valuable for embedding the infinite mindset practices in their organizations was leadership teams and/or teacher committees. Many school leaders have shifted to a more distributed leadership style on their school campuses (Irvine, 2021; Shava & Tlou, 2018). Teachers hold more active leadership roles to share in the vision, communicate to others, and initiate ideas. For teams of teachers to be successful leaders, trust and collaboration as an organization are both essential (Irvine, 2021). Cultivating teachers as leaders so responsibility does not fall on just one person is connected to more effective school leadership (Goldring et al., 2020).

Major Finding 6: Awareness of Initiative Fatigue

Exemplary Title I elementary school principals in this study were aware of initiative fatigue as a barrier. Exemplary Title I elementary school principals saw certain barriers that impacted embedding an infinite mindset in the organization. Exemplary Title I elementary school principals were understanding of teachers being overloaded with too many tasks and initiatives and took this initiative fatigue into account when making decisions for their organizations.

Over the last few decades, the overabundance of initiatives and mandates in public education has been well documented (Eckert, 2018; Vargo, 2013; Walter & Glenn, 1986). In addition to these initiatives and mandates, the COVID-19 global pandemic has added even more responsibilities for both administrators and teachers. In their interviews, some of the principals even noted the negative impact the pandemic had on student behavior, which added even more to the list of responsibilities.

In 2010, Reeves wrote:

The Law of Fatigue states that when the number of initiatives increases while time, resources, and emotional energy are constant, then each new initiative—no matter how well conceived or well intentioned—will receive fewer minutes, dollars, and ounces of emotional energy than its predecessors. (p. 27)

When organizations take on too much, it is a barrier to their ability to be successful with any new initiatives (Greene & Kramer, 2020).

Research Variable: Just Cause, Trusting Teams, Worthy Rivals, Existential Flexibility, and The Courage to Lead

In exploring the data collected related to all of the research variables in this study, one major finding was discovered throughout all variables. Exemplary Title I principles embedded the infinite mindset practice into their organization by relying on trust with and between teachers.

Major Finding 7: Trust Is Essential

Across all the major findings for each research variable, trust was an essential, reoccurring element on which each infinite mindset practice depended. To embed the practices of an infinite mindset within their organization, principals put trust in both their teachers and their peers in administration. They also relied on teachers trusting one another. With teachers, the 10 principals interviewed discussed trust as a necessity for conversations around student data and instructional improvement. Many of the principals demonstrated trust when they showed vulnerability in asking other administrators for ideas and in empowering teachers as leaders through teams and committees. In *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable,* Lencioni (2002) shared that trust is the foundation for any team to be successful. In thinking about schools specifically, Zhang and Kosmanova (2021) explained that student achievement can be increased when trust is developed within a school community.

Unexpected Findings

Most of the experiences described by the principals interviewed were in line with the researcher's understanding of educational organizations, the review of literature, and responses from all 10 principals. Two of the principals, however, were from a district that

used a top-down approach, which resulted in an unexpected finding: everything these school sites did was dictated by the district office, including what teachers taught every single day. Both principals described how their school's vision and goals had to duplicate the district's vision and goals. Throughout her interview, one of the principal's came to the realization that their approach to leadership did not encourage, or even allow, a truly infinite mindset approach. This was also an unexpected finding because it differed so drastically from the experiences of the researcher and the other eight principals interviewed.

Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and describe the perceptions of how the practices of Sinek's (2019) infinite mindset framework were embedded in Title I elementary schools to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results. Another purpose of the study was to understand the organizational supports and barriers the principals perceived to affect the development of an infinite mindset in their organizations. The following six conclusions were drawn from the findings in this research and literature presented in Chapter II.

Conclusion 1: Principals Who Achieve Extraordinary Results Care Deeply About Students and Teachers

Based on both the review of literature and the finding that exemplary Title I elementary school principals embedded the practices of just cause and trusting teams in their organizations by putting students, teachers, and relationships above all else, the researcher concluded principals who care deeply about students and teachers build relationships that serve as a foundation for achieving extraordinary results.

Conclusion 2: Open Communication and Collaboration Promote a Shared Vision for Achieving Extraordinary Results

Based on both the review of literature and the finding that exemplary Title I elementary school principals embedded the practices of just cause and trusting teams in their organizations by engaging in and encouraging communication and collaboration, the researcher concluded principals who prioritize open communication and collaboration are able to use a shared vision in decision making to achieve extraordinary results.

Conclusion 3: Valuing Courage and Vulnerability Put Principals in a Position to Achieve Extraordinary Results

Based on both the review of literature and the finding that exemplary Title I elementary school principals embedded the practices of worthy rivals, existential flexibility, and courage to lead in their organizations by being open to new learning and taking risks, the researcher concluded, to achieve extraordinary results, principals need to model the courage to take risks and to stand up for what they believe is the right thing to do.

Conclusion 4: Focusing on Growth Is Imperative to Achieving Extraordinary Results

Based on both the review of literature and the finding that exemplary Title I elementary school principals embedded the practices of worthy rivals, existential flexibility, and courage to lead in their organizations by focusing on growth and striving for improvement, the researcher concluded principals must exhibit vulnerability and foster a growth mindset to achieve extraordinary results.

Conclusion 5: Strategically Using Additional Resources Provided to Title I Schools Is Essential to Creating Greater Opportunities for Achieving Extraordinary Results

Based on both the review of literature and the finding that strategically using available resources supports embedding infinite mindset practices to achieve extraordinary results, the researcher concluded principals need to be aware of all available resources and deploy them strategically to create greater opportunities for achieving extraordinary results.

Conclusion 6: Principals Who Achieve Extraordinary Results Are Aware of Initiative Fatigue and Adapt

Based on both the review of literature and the finding that initiative fatigue is a barrier to embedding infinite mindset practices to achieve extraordinary results, the researcher concluded principals must be aware of the level of initiative fatigue they and their teachers are experiencing and adjust accordingly.

Implications for Action

Based on the findings in this study and the alignment with past research presented in the literature review, certain implications for action can be concluded. These implications are actions that would be beneficial to principals, especially Title I elementary school principals, thereby allowing them to embed practices of infinite mindset into their organization and achieve extraordinary results.

Implication 1: Dedicate Time to Building Relationships

To put people first, principals need to dedicate time to building relationships within their school community. Building relationships should be any new principal's top priority. Principals should infuse regular team building activities into both their meetings

and professional development time. They should also make an effort to get to know their staff members on a personal level. Principals should do this by engaging in conversations, asking questions, and showing compassion. Administrative Service Credentialing programs could equip new principals with tools for relationship building. Administrative leaders within a district office could model these tools for relationship building in their work with principals as well.

Implication 2: Use the Shared Vision in Decision Making

Principals need to make it a part of their common practice to refer to the shared vision as part of the decision-making process. Having a shared vision the principal and stakeholders have collaborated on and truly believe in can impact the school's achievement. Once the shared vision is established, principals and any other staff members involved in the decision-making process must refer to the shared vision. By considering the alignment of any new ideas with the organization's shared vision, a principal can ensure the priorities and initiatives of the school are working toward a common vision.

Implication 3: Model and Encourage Taking Risks

Principals need to model and encourage taking risks. Principals have to show courage by taking risks. They cannot be afraid of failure. District office administrators should assign new principals a risk-taking mentor—someone with whom they can engage in a risk analysis. This risk-taking mentor can encourage them to think big and try new things. District office administrators can also encourage risk-taking by viewing failures as a part of the learning process and ensuring there are not negative consequences for taking risks. Principals can mimic this encouragement of risk-taking with teachers at their

school site. They can support teachers in taking risks by communicating that trying something new and failing is how learning and improvement happen.

Implication 4: Learn About Growth Mindset

Principals need to be equipped with the knowledge of a growth mindset and how to model it for all their staff members and students. Principals need to seek out opportunities for and engage in professional development around growth mindset. Both county and district offices should offer workshops on leading with a growth mindset and new principals should be encouraged to attend this professional development. They can also engage in book studies around leading with a growth mindset. All of this professional development will give principals the ability to reinforce a growth mindset with their teachers. Principals can educate their teachers on the idea and benefits of growth mindset and encourage them to teach their students with growth mindset in mind.

Implication 5: Strategically Use All Available Resources

Principals need to strategically use all available resources to meet the needs of the students they serve in a way that aligns with their school vision. When creating their school site plan, principals should strategically assign all funding to initiatives that align with the organization's shared vision. Principals should apply for grants and use Title I funding to supplement learning opportunities for both students and teachers. They need to strategically use personnel and time with staff to maximize the benefits to their organization.

Implication 6: Be Mindful of Initiative Fatigue

Principals need to become mindful of initiative fatigue among teachers to maintain a manageable level of stress. Principals can continually monitor and assess the

level of fatigue of their teachers. When a high level of fatigue is widespread, principals should adapt the rollout of initiatives or the plan for the school to account for initiative fatigue. Principals may need to stand up to district demands when initiative fatigue is widespread at their school site. Principals can support individual teachers when they are feeling overwhelmed by helping them to break down and prioritize their tasks. Principals should also look at ways to align initiatives so they are not in opposition to each other.

Implication 7: Learn About Developing Trust

Principals need to be well equipped to gain the trust of all stakeholders. They also should learn how to show trust in others. Administrative Services Credentialing Programs need to include curriculum around developing trust in an organization. County and district offices should provide professional development to principals for leading with trust at the forefront. Principals should seek professional development opportunities focused on trust, including book studies and any available workshops. Without trust, very little can be achieved on a school campus.

<div align="center">Recommendations for Further Research</div>

The findings in this study have led to six recommendations for exemplary educational leaders and the practices of an infinite mindset. Each of these recommendations for further research would be important contributions to the field of educational leadership.

Recommendation 1: Alternative Regions

This study was conducted in Orange County, California. Further research should explore the experiences of exemplary Title I elementary school principals in other areas of California to see if the same findings can be concluded. This research could help

educational leaders to see if the findings of this study are still accurate when working in different regions.

Recommendation 2: Alternative States

This study was conducted in school districts within the state of California. Further research should explore the experiences of exemplary Title I elementary school principals in different states. This research could help educational leaders and politicians to understand a potential correlation between the level of accountability and initiatives states put on schools and the infinite mindset practices.

Recommendation 3: Teacher Perspectives

This study only considered the perspective of elementary principals. Further research should explore the perspectives and lived experiences of teachers who work with exemplary elementary leaders. This study could be mixed methods, where a survey is created based on principal responses. The survey could then be sent out to teachers to compare teacher perspectives to principal responses.

Recommendation 4: Secondary Schools

This study was conducted in elementary schools. Further research should explore the lived experiences of exemplary Title I principals in secondary schools serving any grade span between sixth and 12th grade.

Recommendation 5: Barriers and the Law of Initiative Fatigue

This study only partially focused on barriers to embedding an infinite mindset in an organization. Further research should focus on these barriers, especially the law of initiative fatigue (Reeves, 2010), and strategies used to overcome any barriers. This could

help educational leaders understand and overcome barriers to achieving extraordinary results in more depth.

Recommendation 6: Non-Title I Schools

This study was conducted in Title I elementary schools. Further research should focus on the practices of an infinite mindset with schools that are not allocated Title I funds or serving a socioeconomically disadvantaged population. This research could help educational leaders understand the differences between successfully leading a Title I school and a non-Title I school.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

It is important for the researcher of any study to reflect on the experience with the research process. In this section, the researcher shares three thoughts: (a) reflections from the experience, (b) what was learned from the experience, and (c) the impact the experience had on the researcher.

Reflections

As the researcher, I had the unique opportunity to conduct in-depth interviews with principals. In a field where there is not enough time to complete all of the tasks that are needed, it was a gift to be able to sit down and take the time to truly understand the experiences and perspectives of these 10 principals. Although each principal had their own individual personality, there were so many commonalities between what they were doing at their school sites and what they hoped to accomplish. I loved how, even though the principals communicated similar messages, who they were as a person still showed through.

What Was Learned

From conducting the interviews with and collecting artifacts from these 10 exemplary Title I elementary school principals, I learned a significant amount about educational leadership. I learned about high morals, strong work ethic, and being approachable.

What really stood out to me in these 10 interviews was the focus on people and trusting relationships. When school years get too busy, it is easy to just jump from one task to the next, but these principals took time for the people they served. They established cultures of trust. They were trustworthy leaders for their teachers and they were trusting of others. They showed these actions through their open communication and willingness to learn. These principals cared about their teachers and knew them on a personal level. They also cared about students and doing what was right for students. The biggest takeaway for me was that exemplary educational leadership was about the people on a school campus.

Impact on the Researcher

The experience of conducting this study has had a significant impact on me. I walked away from each interview feeling inspired to make a difference in Title I schools. I could feel the passion each principal had in serving the students in their school and it was both powerful and uplifting. To know there are principals out there achieving extraordinary results made me want to replicate what they were doing. Their passion reaffirmed my own passion for education and reminded me I was on the right path in choosing educational leadership. I will take what I learned from this experience and apply it on my own journey as an elementary school principal.

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APPENDIX A

Alignment Table

Research question	Variable	Definition	Interview question
How do exemplary leaders perceive the practice of Advance a Just Cause is embedded within their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results?	*Advance a Just Cause*	A just cause is a vision of an idealized, aspirational future, something bigger than ourselves and the organization. It connects to and reflects the values, emotions, and a sense of purpose of the followers, motivating them to make sacrifices to achieve it. (Sinek, 2019; Noghiu 2020; Mascareno et al., 2019; Finnigan & Stewart, 2009; Carse, 1986).	1. **Please share how your school ensures priorities are connected to the organization's vision and aspirations.** • **Probe:** Please share an example of how this occurs in your school? 2. **How does your school connect values and sense of purpose to advance the organization's just cause?** • **Probe:** How do you know your people are motivated and committed to achieving the just cause?
How do exemplary leaders perceive the practice of Build Trusting Teams is embedded within their organization to inspire extraordinary results?	*Build Trusting Teams*	A trusting team is a unit where individuals work together to know each other at a deep level and care about and value one another, while creating a high performing team environment that includes active listening, vulnerability, integrity, and	3. **What practices does your school use to create a trusting and mutually supportive team environment?** • **Probe:** When and how are these practices employed? 4. **How does your school promote a psychologically safe space that fosters trust?**

Research question	Variable	Definition	Interview question
		personal accountability in a psychologically safe space (Sinek, 2019; Lencioni 2006; Fehr, 2018).	• **Probes:** What does a psychologically safe space look like in your school?
How do exemplary leaders perceive the practice of Study Your Worthy Rival is embedded within their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results?	*Study Your Worthy Rival*	Worthy Rivals are successful industry leaders who perform as well as or better than a leader or their organization. Leaders or organizations are inspired to study these players and improve based on the strengths and abilities identified in them. (Sinek, 2019; The Millennial Executive, 2021)	**5. How does your school learn from other successful leaders or organizations?** • **Probe:** Think about a leader or school who you admire, how did you go about learning about what makes them successful? **6. How do people within your school learn from successful people who hold the same/similar positions?** • **Probe:** How do you as a leader support this practice?
How do exemplary leaders perceive the practice of Preparing for Existential Flexibility is embedded within their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results?	*Preparing for Existential Flexibility*	Existential flexibility is a leader's ability to anticipate changing conditions and initiate a potentially risky strategic disruption to set the organization on a new path necessary to achieve the idealized future. (Dhiman, 2011; Sinek, 2019; see also Avolio, 2005; Goleman, 1995; Shankman, Allen,	**7. How does your school identify new opportunities to achieve the school's vision?** • **Probes:** How are people encouraged to develop ideas to adapt to changing conditions? **8. Tell me about the time that staying on the same path was not going to fulfill your school's just cause?** **Probes:**

Research question	Variable	Definition	Interview question
		& Haber-Curran, in press, as cited in Owen, 2015)	• How did the school identify the need to change? • How did the school address the concerns about the potential risks? • How did making the changes affect your school's outcomes?
How do exemplary leaders perceive the practice of the Demonstrating the Courage to Lead is embedded within their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results?	*Demonstrating the Courage to Lead*	The courage to lead is the ability to stand up to pressures or norms that do not align with organizational or individual goals and values and is characterized by the willingness to take risks for sustained success in an unknown, idealized future. (Sinek, 2019; Lassiter, 2017a)	**9.** **How does your school stay aligned with its values and goals when pressured to take a different path?** • **Probe:** Please describe a specific experience. 10. **How does your school model the willingness to take risks?** • **Probe:** Please provide an example.
What are the organizational supports and barriers exemplary leaders perceive affect the development of an infinite mindset?	*Supports and barriers*	An infinite mindset is a leader's desire to inspire their organization to continually learn and grow to achieve profound results that extend into the future without limits. A leader with an infinite mindset follows five essential practices: advance a	**11.** **What supports exist within your school that foster the embedding of Infinite Mindset practices?** • **Probe:** Please give me more details. **12.** **What barriers exist within your school that hinder the embedding of Infinite Mindset practices?**

Research question	Variable	Definition	Interview question
		just cause, build trusting teams, study their worthy rivals, prepare for existential flexibility, and demonstrate the courage to lead. (Carse, 1986; Dweck, 2007; Sinek, 2019)	• **Probe:** Please give some examples of barriers that impede your school.

APPENDIX B

Participant Field Test Feedback Form

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

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

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

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

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

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

APPENDIX C

Observer Feedback Form

Conducting interviews is a learned skill set based on experience and feedback. Gaining valuable insight about interview skills and affect with the interview will support the collection of data gathering when interviewing actual participants. As the interview observer you should reflect on the questions below after the interview is finished. You should provide independent feedback at the conclusion of the interview field test. As an observer you should take notes that will assist the interviewer to be successful in improving their interview skills.

1. How long did the interview take? _____Did the time seem appropriate?
2. Did the interviewer communicate in a receptive, cordial, and encouraging manner?
3. Was the introduction of the interview friendly with the use of commonly understood language?
4. How did the interviewee feel during the interview?
5. Was the interviewer prepared and relaxed during the interview?
6. Did the interviewee understand the interview questions or did they require clarification?
7. What parts of the interview went smoothly and why?
8. What parts of the interview seem to struggle and why do you think that was the case?
9. Did the interviewer maintain objectivity and avoid interjecting value judgements or leading the interviewee?
10. Did the interviewer take the opportunity to discuss or request artifacts that support the data gathered from the interview?
11. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would that part be and how would you suggest changing it?
12. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?

Conducting interviews virtually is different than face-to-face and requires more attention to number 2 & 3 above. As an observer give specific feedback on these items

APPENDIX D

Interviewer Reflection Feedback

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 perspective 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 E

Interview Questions

1. **Please share how your organization ensures priorities are connected to the organization's vision and aspirations.**

   - **Probe:** Please share an example of how this occurs in your organization?

2. **How does your organization connect values and sense of purpose to advance the organization's just cause?**

   - **Probe:** How do you know your people are motivated and committed to achieving the just cause?

3. **What practices does your organization use to create a trusting and mutually supportive team environment?**

   - **Probe:** When and how are these practices employed?

4. **How does your organization promote a psychologically safe space that fosters trust?**

   - **Probes:** What does a psychologically safe space look like in your organization?

5. **How does your organization learn from other successful leaders or organizations?**

   - **Probe:** Think about a leader or an organization who you admire, how did you go about learning about what makes them successful?

6. **How do people within your organization learn from successful people who hold the same/similar positions?**
   - **Probe:** How do you as a leader support this practice?

7.   How does your organization identify new opportunities to achieve the organization's vision?

- **Probes:** How are people encouraged to develop ideas to adapt to changing conditions?

8.   Tell me about the time that staying on the same path was not going to fulfill your organization's just cause?

Probes:
- How did the organization identify the need to change?
- How did the organization address the concerns about the potential risks?
- How did making the changes affect your organization's outcomes?

9.   How does your organization stay aligned with its values and goals when pressured to take a different path?
- **Probe:** Please describe a specific experience.

10.   How does your organization model the willingness to take risks?

- **Probe:** Please provide an example.

11.   What supports exist within your organization that foster the embedding of Infinite Mindset practices?

- **Probe:** Please give me more details.

12.   What barriers exist within your organization that hinder the embedding of Infinite Mindset practices?

Probe: Please give some examples of barriers that impeded your organization.

APPENDIX F

Definitions Related to Study

The following definitions provide clarification on the terms relevant to the study.

Theoretical Definitions

Infinite Mindset

An infinite mindset is a leader's desire to inspire their organization to continually learn and grow to achieve profound results that extend into the future without limits. A leader with an infinite mindset follows five essential practices: (a) advance a just cause, (b) build trusting teams, (c) study their worthy rivals, (d) prepare for existential flexibility, and (e) demonstrate the courage to lead (Carse, 1986; Dweck, 2007; Sinek, 2019).

A Just Cause

A just cause is a vision of an idealized, aspirational future, something bigger than oneself and the organization. It connects to and reflects the values, emotions, and a sense of purpose of the followers, motivating them to make sacrifices to achieve it (Carse, 1986; Finnigan & Stewart, 2009; Mascareno et al., 2019; Noghiu 2020; Sinek, 2019).

A Trusting Team

A trusting team is a unit where individuals work together to know each other at a deep level and care about and value one another, creating a high performing team environment that includes active listening, vulnerability, integrity, and personal accountability in the team in a psychologically safe space (Fehr, 2018; Lencioni 2006; Sinek, 2019).

Worthy Rivals

Worthy rivals are successful industry leaders who perform as well as or better than a leader or their organization. Leaders or organizations are inspired to study these players and improve based on the strengths and abilities identified in them (The Millennial Executive, 2021; Sinek, 2019).

The Courage to Lead

The courage to lead is a leader's ability to stand up against/to pressures or norms that do not align with organizational or individual goals and values and is characterized by the willingness to take risks for sustained success in an unknown, idealized future (Lassiter, 2017a; Sinek, 2019).

Existential Flexibility

Existential flexibility is a leader's ability to anticipate changing conditions and initiate a potentially risky strategic disruption to set the organization on a new path necessary to achieve the idealized future (Dhiman, 2011; Sinek, 2019; see also Avolio, 2005; Goleman, 1995; Shankman, Allen, & Haber-Curran, in press, as cited in Owen, 2015).

Operational Definitions

Principal

The top administrator, or leader, of an individual school site.

Title I Elementary School

A school serving students in any grade span between transitional kindergarten and sixth grade that receives Title I funds to support socioeconomically disadvantaged students (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).
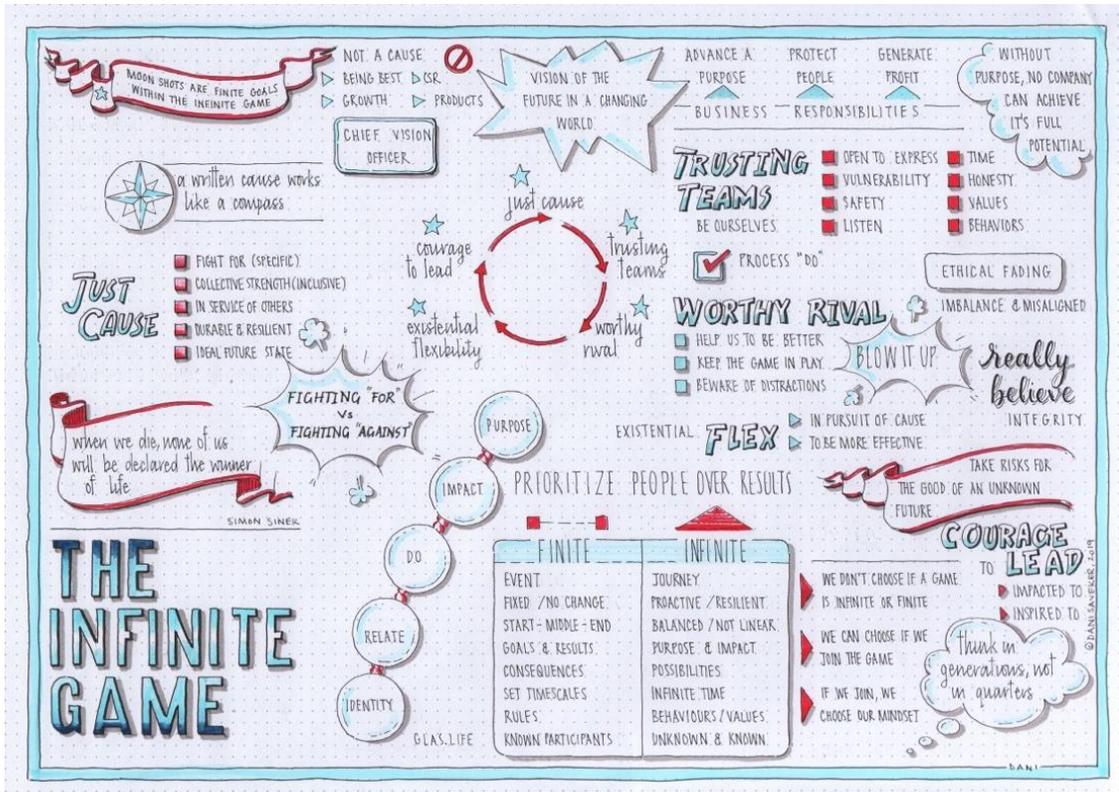
Extraordinary Results

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

Expert

Someone who has knowledge, skill, education, experience, position, or an affiliation with a company or organization in the field of study (Patton, 2018).

Infographic Infinite Mindset

APPENDIX H

UMASS Global Informed Consent Document

INFORMED CONSENT FORM INFORMATION

ABOUT: Title I Elementary School Principals as Exemplary Leaders

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: *Lindsey Gatfield*

PURPOSE OF STUDY: You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Lindsey Gatfield, a doctoral student from the School of Education at University of Massachusetts Global. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and describe how exemplary leaders perceive the practices of Simon Sinek's Infinite Mindset Framework are embedded within their organization to inspire the achievement of extraordinary results. A further purpose of this study was to understand the organizational supports and barriers exemplary leaders perceive affect the development of an infinite mindset.

By participating in this study, I agree to participate in an individual interview. The interview will last approximately 45–60 minutes and will be conducted electronically using Zoom. Completion of the individual interview will take place June 27, 2022.

I understand that:
a) There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. I understand that the Investigator will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes and research materials in a locked file drawer that is available only to the researcher.

b) I understand that the interview will be recorded. The recordings will be available only to the researcher and the professional transcriptionist. The 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 will be destroyed. All other data and consents will be securely stored for three years after completion of data collection and confidentially shredded or fully deleted.

c) The possible benefit of this study to me is that my input may help add to the research regarding the lived experiences of exemplary Title I Elementary School Principals that produce extraordinary results. The findings will be available to me at the conclusion of the study. I understand that I will not be compensated for my participation.

d) If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Lindsey Gatfield at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or by phone at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮; or Dr. Carol Anderson Woo (Advisor) at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮.

e) My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide to not participate in the study and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer particular questions during the interview if I so choose. I understand that I may refuse to participate

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or may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the Investigator may stop the study at any time.

f) No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that 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 informed and my consent re-obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMASS GLOBAL, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

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

_____
Signature of Participant

_____
Signature of Principal Investigator

_____
Date

Participant Bill of Rights

UMASS GLOBAL 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 researcher 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.

UMass Global IRB Adopted 2021

APPENDIX J

Demographics Survey

<u>Ethnicity</u>
With which race/ethnicity do you identify? (Select all that apply)
__ African American or Black
__ American Indian or Alaska Native
__ Asian American or Asian
__ Hispanic or Latinx
__ Middle Eastern or North African
__ Pacific Islander
__ White or Caucasian
__ An identity not listed, self-identify_____

We realize that the racial/ethnic category you selected encompasses many different nationalities. If you are interested in sharing more, please describe your nationality (i.e., Armenian, Puerto Rican, Vietnamese):

<u>Gender</u>
With which gender do you identify?
      __ Woman
      __ Man
      __ Agender
      __ Transgender
      __ Non-binary
      __ Genderqueer or gender nonconforming
      __ An identity not listed, self-identify_____
      __ Decline to state

<u>Years of Experience Field</u>
    1. How many years of experience do you have in the field of education?
        a) 1-4   b) 5–8   c) 9–12 d) 13 or more

<u>Years of Experience in Current Position</u>
    1. How many years of experience do you have in your organization in your current position?
        a) 1-4   b) 5–8   c) 9–12 d) 13 or more

<u>Degrees</u>
What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?
Are there any additional professional certificates or degrees that you have earned?
Are you currently enrolled in any educational programs?