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Adaptive Leadership During Times of Great Change and Opportunity

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Adaptive Leadership During Times of Great Change and Opportunity

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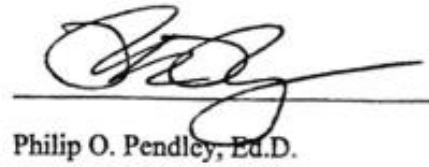

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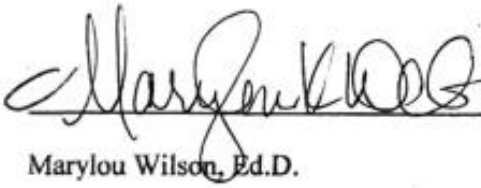

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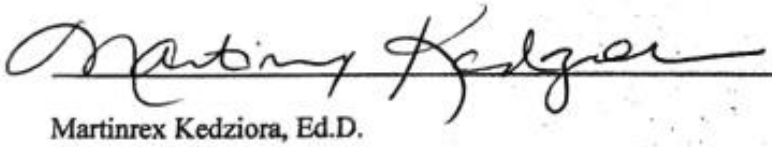

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willingness to share their perspectives and lived experiences leading middle schools during challenging times has been invaluable.

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ABSTRACT

Adaptive Leadership During Times of Great Change and Opportunity

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Purpose: The purpose of this exploratory phenomenological study was to identify and describe the strategies used by middle school principals to build an adaptive capacity based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership identified by Heifetz et al. (2009).

Methodology: Three counties in northern California were selected to conduct a phenomenological study on middle school principals. Of this population, purposeful sampling was applied to identify participants who met specific criteria. Ten participants were selected: four from Contra Costa County, three from San Joaquin County, and three from Stanislaus County. The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews to gather data, which was coded and analyzed.

Findings: Examining qualitative data from the participating exemplary middle school principals who use strategies from the five key adaptive leadership characteristics (Heifetz et al., 2009) to build capacity within their organizations led to various themes and findings. Analysis revealed 422 frequencies and 28 themes. From the 28 themes, 12 key findings emerged.

Conclusions: The study examined and described how exemplary middle school principals use the five key adaptive leadership characteristics to build adaptive capacity within their organizations. The research resulted in four conclusions focusing on dedicating time for reflection and continuous improvement, seeking feedback and staff input, engaging in shared leadership, and establishing a culture of trust.

Recommendations: Based on the findings from this study, six recommendations were put forth for further research to advance the understanding of how middle school principals use the five adaptive leadership characteristics to build adaptive capacity within their organizations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

PREFACE

Following collaborative discussions regarding adaptive leadership during times of great change and opportunity, nine doctoral students, in collaboration with faculty researchers, developed a common interest in investigating how organizational leaders build an adaptive capacity. This resulted in a thematic study conducted by a research team. This exploratory phenomenological methods study focused on Heifetz et al.'s (2009) *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*. The purpose of the study was to identify and describe the strategies used by organizational leaders to build an adaptive capacity based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership identified by Heifetz et al. as perceived by middle school principals.

Participants were selected by each member of the thematic research team from various organizations to examine what strategies leaders use to build an organization's adaptive capacity based on Heifetz et al.'s (2009) five key characteristics. The five key characteristics are (a) making naming elephants in the room the norm, (b) nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization, (c) encouraging independent judgment, (d) developing leadership capacity, and (e) institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning. Next, I interviewed 10 middle school principals to determine what leadership strategies were used to build an organization's adaptive capacity. The team co-created the purpose statement, research questions, definitions, interview questions, survey, and study procedures to ensure thematic consistency and reliability. Throughout the study, the term *peer researchers* was used to refer to the other researchers who participated in this

thematic study. Each researcher studied a different population of experts from the following sectors:

- Community emergency response team (CERT) program managers
- Community-based nonprofit leaders
- Middle school public school principals
- Navy command senior enlisted leaders (CSEL)
- Nurse executives
- On-site multifamily rental property management leaders
- Public school district superintendents
- Public school special education directors
- Small school district superintendents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The United States has experienced challenging times since its inception. The United States and its people have remained resilient through natural disasters, economic uncertainty, and racial tensions. Yet, despite its ability to overcome challenges, it is important to note that each threat unearthed larger problems. For example, the country and its leaders were caught off guard on September 11, 2001, when terrorists hijacked three airplanes and attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon (Balz, 2020). This devastating attack made it clear that the United States was not invincible. Natural disasters such as Hurricane Andrew in Florida in 1992 and Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005 exposed a lack of preparation in disaster response and emergency management systems (Balz, 2020). Events of horrific violence such as Columbine, Sandy Hook, and most recently, Uvalde fuel debate on mental health and the Second Amendment Right to Bear Arms. Brutal attacks on people like Rodney King and George Floyd have inspired mass movements for social and police reforms (Anderson et al., 2021). While each threat brought more significant issues to the surface, one event managed to bring the entire country to a halt.

In March 2020, shelter-in-place orders were mandated in hopes of slowing the spread of the COVID-19 virus, a virulent new flu that rapidly moved across the world. Unfortunately, weeks turned into months, and the virus physically infected millions of people, turning America's healthcare, economic, political, societal, and educational systems upside down (DeMartino & Weiser, 2021). Coupled with the stress of a deadly virus, political unrest, and social injustice, research indicates that lockdown and social isolation "generated significant stress on communities, leading to a multitude

of psychological challenges to many, including children" (Spiteri, 2021, p. 127). As was the case with the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, Hurricane Katrina, and the death of George Floyd, COVID-19 exposed larger issues. Equity and social injustices within the educational system were fully exposed. Regardless of the situation, one fact remained consistent: People turn to leaders for answers and solutions (Boin et al., 2005; Heifetz, 1994; Valeras & Cordes, 2020).

In the early stages of a crisis or technical challenge, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, people look to leaders for their expertise and answers (Northouse, 2022). During this time, leaders address the technical issues regarding the challenge, making decisions to overcome the challenge in the fastest and safest way possible (Heifetz, 1994). In many cases, once they overcome a technical challenge, people are anxious to return to the way they were pre-challenged (Connor et al., 2020). Successful leaders, however, understand that the post-challenge period is the ideal time to dig into adaptive work. They acknowledge that with great challenges comes the opportunity for great change (Valeras & Cordes, 2020). They also acknowledge that adaptive work is not easy and requires the participation of people within the organization (Northouse, 2022; Simmons, 2022).

School administrators are among the many leaders who are at a juncture where, post-COVID-19, it would be tempting to settle back into pre-COVID-19 practices. However, ignoring systemic issues of equity and social injustices exposed during COVID-19 further exasperates issues within the educational system. Addressing systemic issues requires extensive work, which starts with an examination of the root causes and identification of the adaptive challenges (Heifetz & Laurie, 2001). This work, however,

cannot be done in isolation. Instead, school administrators who embrace adaptive leadership characteristics identified by Heifetz et al. (2009) understand the importance of involving the school community, ensuring that their voices are heard and that they are involved in the solutions (Bagwell, 2020). The silver lining of the COVID-19 pandemic is that school administrators can lead their communities to address adaptive challenges and truly change the future of education.

Background

Society is quick to look to leaders during challenging times, yet a manual does not exist to guide leaders on the best way to lead an organization through major events. To further add to the ambiguity of leadership, a single definition of leadership does not exist (Safferstone, 2005). Dating back to 1974, Stogdill claimed that there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are people who have tried to define it (Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Northouse, 2022). Since that time, Rost (1991) has identified over 200 different definitions of leadership from the last century alone. In 1978, Burn noted that "leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth" (as cited in Dodge, 2021, p. 6).

Although there are countless definitions of the term, one area researchers agree on is that leadership is complex and multi-dimensional (Fairholm & Fairholm, 2000; Fowler, 2018; Heifetz et al., 2009). The complexity of leadership is partly due to central components, including the fact that leadership is a process that involves influence, occurs in groups, and focuses on common goals (Northouse, 2022). Given the central components of leadership, and for the purpose of this study, the term leadership will be

defined as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Northouse, 2022, p. 6).

Leadership Theories

It is no surprise, given the vast number of definitions for leadership, that there has been a historical evolution of leadership theories. Dating back to the 1840s, research on leadership emphasized that leaders were born with the personality traits of effective leaders (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Over the decades, numerous leadership theories have emerged, focusing on a variety of leadership traits and characteristics. Among those theories that veer away from focusing on a leader's traits are transactional leadership and contingency leadership, which instead highlight the importance of the relationship between a leader and their followers. Given the complexity of the challenges that surfaced during the pandemic, this study will focus on adaptive leadership. Before diving into the characteristics of adaptive leadership, it is important to understand the theories from which adaptive leadership evolved, including situational leadership, complexity leadership, and transformational leadership (Cojocar, 2008).

Transactional Leadership

Simply put, transactional leadership focuses on the exchanges that occur between leaders and their followers (Northouse, 2022). Typically, the exchange is seen as favorable as the good that is being exchanged is something that benefits both the leaders and the followers. For example, companies may offer employees a bonus for reaching a specific goal. The transaction is based on the follower's motivation to earn a bonus and the employer's desire to increase revenue. Transactional leadership is common and can be seen throughout all levels of an organization (Northouse, 2022), typically showing up in

one of three ways, including management by exception passive, management by exception active, or constructive transactional (Marzano & Waters, 2005).

Contingency Leadership

First introduced by Fred Fiedler in 1967, contingency theory is based on two inter-acting variables. The first variable is the motivation system of the leader, and the second variable is the situational favorableness, the degree to which the situation provides the leader power and influence (Fielder, 1972). Given Fielder's belief that leadership boils down to a relationship involving power and influence, he reasons that a leader's performance is based on a given situation (Fielder, 1972). For this reason, to ensure success, it is important for leaders to be placed in situations that best match their style (Alajmi, 2022; Benmira & Agboola, 2021).

Situational Leadership

First introduced in 1969 by Hersey and Blanchard, situational leadership became a widely known approach to leadership despite its revision and refinement over the years (Northouse, 2022; Raza & Sikandar, 2018). On the surface, the situational approach to leadership is as simple as focusing on situations. The approach, however, grows in complexity given the plethora of situations that take place in an organization because different situations require a different kind of leadership. Effective leaders who utilize a situational leadership approach must be able to adapt their style as their constituents grow in their knowledge, abilities, and skills (Alajmi, 2022).

Complexity Leadership

Recognizing the need for leadership styles to mirror the increasing complexities of the world brought on by the transition from the industrial age to the knowledge era, N.

Uhl-Bien et al. (2007) proposed the complexity leadership theory. Building on adaptive leadership characteristics presented by Heifetz et al. (2009), the complexity leadership theory perceives leadership as "an emergent, interactive dynamic that is productive of adaptive outcomes" (N. Uhl-Bien et al., 2007, p. 299). The knowledge era has increased interconnectivity, creating highly complex social systems that require people to work together to generate potential solutions to adaptive challenges (M. Uhl-Bien, 2021).

Transformational Leadership

Arguably one of the most common approaches to leadership today, transformational leadership has been gaining popularity since the 1980s due to its focus on a process that changes and transforms people (Northouse, 2022). Elaborating on some of the features of situational leadership and complexity theory, transformational leadership places value on "emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals" (Northouse, 2022, p. 185). Further, effective transformational leaders are tasked with assessing motives and needs while treating people in their organizations as human beings (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999).

Educational Leaders

Defining educational leadership poses as much of a challenge as defining leadership in general, which is mainly due to many who approach educational leadership from a business leadership perspective (Dimmock & Walker, 2005). Unfortunately, while there are some overlapping characteristics between business and educational leadership, the differences are significant enough that the definition of educational leadership must stand alone. For example, businesses are largely focused on making a profit, while education exists to shape and educate students (Dimmock & Walker, 2005).

Webster and Litchka (2020) state that the role of educational leaders is to guide their staff to improve the learning experiences for all students, K-12 and beyond, while respecting cultural differences. Educational leaders must possess several characteristics to create an inclusive school culture for all students to thrive. Reading people and situations, building relationships, and seeking feedback are vital for educational leaders (Kirtman & Fullan, 2016). Elaborating on these characteristics, Kirtman and Fullan (2016) identified competencies that highly effective leaders demonstrate, including:

- Building partnerships
- Building trust
- Challenging the status quo
- Focusing on the team over self

Complementing Kirtman et al. competencies, Graham (2018) identified three factors that guide effective leaders, including (a) building communities of trust, (b) increasing the capacity of teachers and learners, and (c) communicating openly and honestly.

Evolution of Educational Leadership

The role of a school administrator has changed significantly over time. In the 1970s, a school administrator was responsible for instructional leadership and creating a management system (Kiral, 2020). Fast forward 10 years, and administrators were also tasked with standardizing teaching, supervising classrooms, coordinating curriculum, and monitoring student progress (Barth, 1986). Moving into the 21st century brought more responsibilities upon administrators, including (a) forming a vision for the school, (b) understanding and developing people, (c) managing learning programs, and (d) reorganizing and teaching the faculty (Leithwood et al., 2008). Traditional top-down

leadership, where organizational decisions are made in isolation by one heroic leader, is no longer conducive to meeting the needs of 21st century schools (DeMarco & Gutmore, 2021; Shava & Tlou, 2018; Sibanda, 2017). Instead, what students, staff, and parents need today are school leaders who are relational, inclusive, and collaborative (Sibanda, 2017). Finally, as change is inevitable, administrators must remain fluid and willing to adapt (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004).

Adaptive Leadership Foundational Theory

Adaptive leadership, first introduced by Heifetz in 1994, was originally developed in the context of business but has since been utilized with positive outcomes in various fields such as health care and the military (Sunderman et al., 2020). Adaptive leadership is a theory that addresses the process of change in response to a crisis, which involves doing more than simply providing a temporary solution to a problem (Heifetz, 1994; Sunderman et al., 2020). Instead, adaptive leadership challenges leaders to guide their constituents by identifying the root causes of issues and working through the steps necessary to ensure change. The goal of an adaptive leader is to engage in activities that mobilize, motivate, organize, orient, and focus the attention of others to tackle tough challenges (Heifetz, 1994). To obtain this goal, Heifetz suggests multiple strategies, including looking at the organization from a balcony view, identifying if the challenge is adaptive or technical, and giving the work back to the people.

Get on the Balcony

Heifetz et al. (2009) identified six pivotal behaviors that play a role in the process of adaptive leadership. These behaviors are general principles that guide leaders through the process of confronting complex challenges and the changes that accompany them.

The prerequisite behavior is the need to remove oneself from the epicenter to see the challenges from a different perspective (Simmons, 2002). Heifetz et al. refer to this behavior as "getting on the balcony," enabling a leader to see the big picture. It is important to note that while leaders must afford themselves the time to observe from the balcony, they must also remain engaged with their people on the ground (Northouse, 2022).

Identify the Adaptive Challenge

In addition to gaining a big-picture perspective from the balcony, Heifetz et al. (2009) state that leaders must first identify the challenge before determining their approach to addressing it. There are three types of challenges. Technical challenges are the easiest to solve for a leader because they are clearly defined. Technical and adaptive challenges are clearly defined yet require input from more than a single leader. Adaptive challenges are not clearly defined and require people beyond the leader to solve because they often evoke emotion, center on values, and have a root cause that is difficult to identify (Northouse, 2022). Adaptive challenges stir emotions as they typically tap into people's core values (Simmons, 2022; Sunderman et al., 2020).

Give the Work Back to the People

Giving the work back to people is crucial in adaptive leadership. Still, there is a fine line between providing enough direction and structure so that people feel supported while giving them enough space to actively participate in problem-solving. For adaptive leaders, this means giving people enough work to empower them to make decisions, expressing a belief in their ability to solve their own problems, and encouraging them to think for themselves (Northouse, 2022). Ultimately, adaptive leadership is follower-

centered. Everyone has a voice and is encouraged to interact and contribute to developing a solution (Sunderman et al., 2020).

Adaptive Leadership Theoretical Framework

The adaptive leadership framework identifies five distinguishing characteristics of an adaptive organization, including (a) elephants in the room are named, (b) responsibility for the organization's future is shared, (c) independent judgment is expected, (d) leadership capacity is developed, and (e) reflective and continuous learning are institutionalized (Heifetz et al., 2009). An organization's ability to implement and truly embrace these characteristics indicates that challenging situations are being addressed.

Elephants in the Room are Named

The first adaptive leadership characteristic Heifetz et al. (2009) identify is that elephants in the room are named. The elephant, or undiscussable, is commonly known as a sensitive, underlying issue that, when left unmanaged, can "contaminate [a] team, choking its problem-solving abilities and capacity to learn and adapt to change" (Toegel & Barsoux, 2019, p. 38). In juxtaposition, Heifetz et al. identifies that in a highly adaptive organization, when a culture exists that provides people the safety and freedom to discuss sensitive topics and raise questions, crises are identified early on and essentially averted. Further, when organizations make naming the elephants in the room the norm and welcome the discomfort of working through the hard questions, Toegel and Barsoux (2019) found that team members experience relief as well as increased energy and goodwill.

Responsibility for the Organization's Future is Shared

Most organizations have an organizational structure that captures work specialization, departmentation, chain of command, and span of control. While a clear structure is necessary to ensure that people in the organization understand their roles and responsibilities, Heifetz et al. (2009) identify a second characteristic of adaptive leadership, which is a commitment to a shared responsibility for the organization's future. Shared responsibility shows up in organizations in multiple ways, such as (a) cross-functional problem-solving, (b) evaluation of the organization, and (c) departments sharing resources and personnel for the good of the organization at large (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Heifetz et al., 2009).

Studies indicate that regardless of how shared leadership manifests in an organization, the outcome is increased overall performance (Bergman et al., 2012; Boies et al., 2011; Carvalho et al., 2020). Carvalho et al. (2020) highlight the relationship between shared responsibility and an organization’s improved performance. First, given the complexity of organizations today, it is nearly impossible for a single person to encompass all the skills and knowledge necessary for effective leadership. Second, leaders who involve their teams in decision-making processes increase innovation. Finally, as people share leadership responsibilities and work towards the success of the organization, team cohesion increases.

Independent Judgment is Expected

An essential component of shared responsibility is the value placed on independent judgment. Adaptive leaders recognize the importance of empowering people throughout all levels of the organization and seek their input in decision-making and the

generation of ideas (Heifetz et al., 2009). To ensure that honest input is provided and all ideas are presented, leaders must create a safe, judgment-free culture where all employees feel valued. Creating a culture where all ideas are welcome requires leaders to relinquish control when they transfer responsibility and decision-making to the people impacted by the solutions or changes (Gyuroka, 2010; Heifetz & Linsky, 2004).

Leadership Capacity is Developed

The ability to empower people who represent all levels of an organization is the initial step in building leadership capacity. Adaptive leaders understand the importance of "getting the right people in the right roles doing the right jobs" (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 104). In addition to securing people in the right jobs, adaptive leaders identify employees with leadership capabilities. A leadership pipeline then fosters the learning and growth necessary to increase employees' potential and capacity (Tobin, 2010).

Reflective and Continuous Learning is Institutionalized

For adaptive work to take place, an organization must foster a culture of openness steeped in a commitment to learning (Heifetz et al., 2009). The ability of individuals and the organization to reflect on adaptive challenges increases the potential for growth and evolution as trust is built and collective creativity is engrained in the culture (Senge et al., 2019). In addition to reflection, many researchers agree that continuous learning positively impacts the quality of an organization (Cojocar, 2008; Heifetz et al., 2009; Kiral, 2020; Yukl & Mashud, 2010). Indicators that organizations encourage their employees to embrace a continuous learning mindset include the opportunity to learn from mistakes, the perspective that lessons can be learned from negative situations, and

the ability to learn from colleagues to better understand the organization (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Adaptive Leadership in Education

An adaptive leadership approach, where essential leadership skills are leveraged, is a style that leaders can adopt to support their schools in navigating ongoing challenges in educational environments (Bagwell, 2020). School leaders are aware that new environments were created because of the pandemic. Still, few were able to leave the dance floor to observe their situations and environments from the balcony. As schools resume a more pre-pandemic normalcy, educational leaders who incorporate adaptive leadership characteristics can assist their staff in adopting a growth mindset when addressing complex organizational challenges (Simmons, 2022).

Complex challenges exist throughout all grade levels in education, requiring leaders to consciously engage in adaptive work. While each phase of schooling is important and poses its own set of challenges, the period of early adolescence and middle school age marks a time of tremendous development socially, emotionally, and intellectually (Lavery & Coffey, 2021). To ensure that school environments remain responsive to the needs of the students, middle school administrators must involve stakeholders, calling upon their input and expertise when making decisions regarding adaptive challenges (Bickmore, 2015). With an awareness of the difficult issues and challenges, school leaders are better prepared to mobilize schools, families, and communities (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004). The path forward for leaders is to work with stakeholders in the adaptive work necessary to make today's challenges tomorrow's routines.

Statement of the Research Problem

Limited research has been conducted on the implications of COVID-19 on education. Still, people are projecting that it will take the educational system years to help students recover from a year of social isolation and trauma (Bond, 2020; Nickerson & Sulkowski, 2021). The research is consistent in recognizing that COVID-19 further exacerbated a handful of educational issues that existed pre-COVID-19, such as equity, access to learning, technology, and inclusion (Marshall et al., 2020; Nickerson & Sulkowski, 2021; Zhao, 2020a), but it has yet to determine how these issues will be addressed. Further, research shows that every crisis provides an opportunity for growth once the crisis has been averted (Zhao, 2020a).

Emerging from a crisis is a crucial time for leaders. There is an abundance of research on various leadership theories and styles (Northouse, 2022), but a playbook for leading an organization through and beyond a crisis does not exist. While there are elements of different leadership theories that would be beneficial, experts in crisis management have linked crisis leadership to adaptive leadership (Leitzke, 2022). Further, Heifetz et al. (2009) stress the importance of adaptive leadership during times of crisis.

In addition to the limited research on the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on education, there is also a void of research on the components of adaptive leadership. Although Heifetz introduced the adaptive leadership foundational theory over 20 years ago, little empirical research has been conducted to test the theory's claims (Northouse, 2022). Further, Heifetz had the business world in mind when he created the foundational theory. Over the last 20 years, fields such as healthcare and the military have embraced

the adaptive leadership framework, leaving countless fields open to explore this style of leadership (Sunderman, 2020).

Teetering on the brink of schools returning to normalcy is the perfect opportunity for educators to embrace adaptive leadership components. Failure to dig into the root causes of the issues that surfaced during the pandemic would result in maintaining the status quo. Given the current state of crisis in education due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it would be beneficial to the future of education to conduct research on middle school administrators who utilized adaptive leadership characteristics and components to guide their staff through challenges that were exacerbated during the pandemic.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this exploratory phenomenological study was to identify and describe the strategies used by middle school principals to build an adaptive capacity based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership identified by Heifetz et al. (2009).

Central Research Question

The central research question was: *What strategies do middle school principals use to build an organization's adaptive capacity based on Heifetz et al.'s (2009) five key characteristics (making naming elephants in the room the norm, nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization, encouraging independent judgment, developing leadership capacity, and institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning)?*

Research Sub-Questions

Five research sub-questions were developed to help determine how middle school principals are addressing each of the adaptive leadership variables.

1. How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through making naming elephants in the room the norm?
2. How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization?
3. How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through encouraging independent judgment?
4. How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through developing leadership capacity?
5. How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because no qualitative studies have been conducted exploring the phenomenon of adaptive leadership characteristics in the context of middle school principals during a time of crisis related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, this study will provide practical and real accounts of how adaptive leadership characteristics are applied by middle school principals through their lived experiences during the pandemic. While not all crises can be predicted, behaviors and strategies for coping effectively with the challenges can be identified (Nuevo-Chow, 2021). The identification and understanding of adaptive leadership characteristics can serve middle school principals in creating a school environment that is ready to handle a major societal crisis and change.

There are several viable implications of this study. First, the adaptive leadership characteristics and actions that middle school principals implemented during the

pandemic could serve as a roadmap for future leaders who are working to navigate an unstable, malleable environment. While the method of instruction in education has been slow to change, the students and their needs have been changing rapidly (Zhao, 2020a). Further, the social and political unrest of the last several years reflects adaptive challenges that leaders must address to ensure that their practices are current and meet the needs of those they work to serve.

Another implication of this study is that the adaptive characteristics exhibited by middle school principals could serve as a guideline for other educators to help break the cycle in education. Change typically evokes fear as people grow anxious about the unknown (Zhao, 2020b). Reimagining education that breaks away from one teacher in a classroom with rows of desks requires a leader who uses adaptive leadership characteristics (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). The results of this study could help administrators who recognize that the one-size-fits-all model in education has not been effective for a long time to work toward developing alternatives that will best serve students (Zhao, 2020a).

Definitions

The following terms are both theoretical and operational terms that are relevant to the study. Theoretical definitions are cited from the literature, and operational definitions are the working definitions for this study.

Theoretical Definitions

Adaptive capacity. Adaptive capacity is an organization's ability to adapt and thrive over time by identifying and addressing the challenges they are currently facing (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 11).

Adaptive leadership. "Adaptive leadership is the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive" (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 14).

Developing leadership capacity. The systemic focus on expanding competencies and resources and intentionally motivating groups or individuals to increase leadership potential proactively (Eade, 1997, 2007; Elmore, 2003; Eyben et al., 2006; Harris, 2011; Heifetz et al., 2009; Sharratt & Fullan, 2009).

Encouraging independent judgment. A leader's capacity to provide an opportunity for team members to make choices based on personal and professional experience, regardless of the position held within the organization (Casavant et al., 1995; Heifetz et al., 2009; Shanbhag, 2002).

Institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning. Providing a culture conducive to the safe exploration of new ideas and sharing of lessons learned both from an individual and organizational perspective and creating a sustainable learning culture driven by a willingness to overcome engrained mental models across all levels of the organization (Cojocar, 2008; Pearson & Smith, 1986; Ramalingam et al., 2020; Senge et al., 2019; Veldsman et al., 2016; Vera & Crossan, 2004;).

Making naming elephants in the room the norm. The act of openly addressing sensitive underlying issues, or undiscussable's, to resolve potential barriers that interfere with an organization realizing its full potential (Baker, 2004; Heifetz et al., 2009; Toegel & Barsoux, 2019).

Nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization. The collective ownership across team member roles for the decision-making of operational goals and outcomes of

the organization's future (Harris & Spillane, 2008; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Heifetz et al., 2009; Northouse, 2016; Tremblay et al., 2016).

Operational Definitions

Constructive conflict. The deliberate engagement of understanding differing viewpoints, attitudes, or beliefs to creatively work toward a solution or resolution through dialogue, curiosity, and collaboration (Schlaerth et al., 2013).

Middle school. While middle grades vary per country, for purposes of this study, they will consist of early-adolescent students in grades six to eight (California Department of Education [CDE], 2022).

Delimitations

This study was delimited to 10 middle school principals in Contra Costa County, San Joaquin County, and Stanislaus County in California who met four of the following six criteria:

- Evidence of successful relationships with stakeholders
- Evidence of breaking through conflict to achieve organizational success
- Five or more years of experience in that profession or field
- Written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings
- Recognized by their peers
- Membership in associations of groups focused on their field

Organization of the Study

This study was organized as a qualitative, phenomenological study based on the voluntary participation of middle school principals who served during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were current middle school principals in the Contra

Costa, Stanislaus, and San Joaquin Counties. The study was guided by a central research question based on Heifetz et al. (2009) adaptive leadership framework. Chapter I provided an overview of various leadership theories, the history and evolution of educational leadership, the role of leadership during times of crisis, and the theoretical framework of adaptive leadership. In addition, it identified challenges the target population and education are facing post-pandemic. Finally, the research problem, purpose of the study, research questions, statement of significance, definitions of terms relevant to the study, and delimitations of the study were stated. Chapter II provides a comprehensive review and analysis of the literature as it relates to leadership, education, and opportunities for change. Chapter III describes the research methodology used to conduct the study. Chapter IV presents the data gathered through interviews with 10 middle school principals, and Chapter V captures the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Shortly after the first outbreak of COVID-19 in China, the rapid spread of the deadly virus caused a global health pandemic. In March 2020, California became the first state in the United States to direct citizens to shelter in place, and by April, 42 states followed California's lead, impacting over 316 million people (Mervosh et al., 2020). Governors throughout the nation promised that the stay-at-home orders were temporary, but two weeks turned into months (Mervosh et al., 2020), and what remained were the long-term consequences of pandemic fatigue (Jorgenson et al., 2022). Research indicates a correlation between pandemic fatigue and Americans' growing discontent with the government, mainstream policy, and social injustice (Jorgenson et al., 2022). Discontent has manifested itself in the form of protest, distrust in the government, and social unrest, as evidenced by the movements challenging systemic racism and police brutality, a contentious presidential election, and the attack on the U.S. Capital Building (Kishi et al., 2021).

Three years after the outbreak of COVID-19, the world is still experiencing pandemic fatigue. As was the case with other crises, such as 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina, the unexpected event of COVID-19 exposed unresolved issues, which manifested into complex problems (Masys, 2021). As America's fragility surfaced, the demand for leaders increased. Decisions, despite great uncertainties, had to be made swiftly, causing the role of leaders to expand in complexity (Jahagirdar et al., 2020). While the pandemic is the most current crisis that has presented junctures for growth for the nation and its leaders, crises throughout history have posed similar opportunities. This literature review

examines how leaders build adaptive capacity in their organizations during times of great change and opportunity.

The literature review will provide a discussion on leadership during times of change. In addition, various leadership theories will be explored, including but not limited to complexity leadership, transformational leadership, and transactional leadership. This section also includes a deep dive into numerous leadership theories, leadership traits, and characteristics of leaders.

Chapter II introduces the theoretical framework of adaptive leadership (Heifetz et al., 2009), which includes the five variables that leaders utilize to build adaptive leadership capacity within their organizations. The chapter then turns to examine how adaptive leadership characteristics show up in education by leaders sharing leadership with their staff, focusing on continuous learning, and developing capacity. Finally, Chapter II discusses middle school site leaders who are at the center of the study. In addition, the gaps in the study regarding leaders implementing adaptive leadership practices to lead their teams through times of great change and opportunity are identified. The literature review will conclude with a connection to the benefits of leading teams through adaptive challenges by embracing the five adaptive leadership variables identified by Heifetz et al. (2009).

Leadership

Leader. Perhaps one of the most widely used terms, yet also wildly ambiguous. Heifetz (1994) illustrates this point through various examples of how the term leader is used. On the one hand, the term is used to refer to leaders as people and actions, yet it is also used to refer to people in authority. In other cases, the term is used to describe

leaders as people with strong values, commitment, and skills (Heifetz, 1994). The lack of clarity on what constitutes a leader creates confusion. Contributing to the confusion could be the history and evolution of the definition of leadership.

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, terms such as supervision, management, and leadership were used interchangeably and left undefined, which did not suffice as work evolved from independent activities such as farming and craftmanship to industries composed of people and machines for the purpose of mass production (Safferstone, 2005). To address the changing workforce needs, definitions of leadership during the first three decades of the 20th century focused on control and centralization of power, often emphasizing domination (Northouse, 2022). Essentially, the role of the leader was to enforce compliance through persuasion and influence (Stogdill, 1975). Scholars such as Munson (1921), Allport (1924), Bingham (1927), and Nash (1929) agreed that leaders served a direct group, and individual leaders emerged due to their ability and characteristics (Stogdill, 1975).

Post-World War II research on leadership shifted away from the traits of a leader and instead focused on their behavior. Attention was paid to the leader's relation to followers in connection with job satisfaction and performance (Stogdill, 1975). While the focus started to look at followers, the essence of the research remained on the leader in relation to the impact the leader had on the group, the behavior of the leader, and the leader’s ability to influence the group (Northouse, 2022).

Building off of the research of Carter (1953) and Startle (1956), Seeman (1960) defined leadership as the behavior that influences people toward achieving shared goals (Northouse, 2022; Stogdill, 1975). Although this was a breakthrough at the time, it was

not until 1978 that Burns introduced a new concept of leadership that encompassed multiple factors. Burns recognized that leadership entails a process of mobilizing people to accomplish both individual and organizational goals (Northouse, 2022). Burns ignited a spark in the world of leadership research. The debate regarding leadership spread like wildfire and burned well into the 21st century (Northouse, 2022) because, for the first time in history, it was recognized that associating leadership to one aspect or trait failed to address the true complexity of the phenomenon (Benmira & Agboola, 2021; Fairholm & Fairholm, 2000).

Kouzes and Posner (1995), as well as Heifetz (1994), are among the many researchers inspired to study the multiple facets of leadership. Both concur with Burns that the heart of leadership is one's ability to not only mobilize people to achieve shared goals but also to tackle tough problems. Further, Fairholm and Fairholm (2000) elaborate that to move people through the process of establishing shared goals and working through problems; a leader must first unite the group by creating a culture based on trust and collaboration. The shift in defining leadership as a process as opposed to a trait or characteristic lends itself to the notion that leadership is an event that occurs between the leader and followers (Northouse, 2022).

The current era of research on leadership focuses on the process of leadership, which entails "complex interactions among the leader, the followers, the situation and the system as a whole, with particular attention dedicated to the latent leadership capacities of followers" (Benmira & Agboola, 2021, p. 4). Elaborating on the theory that leadership is a process, there are three additional components central to the phenomenon as identified by Northouse (2022), including (a) influence, (b) a group, and (c) common

goals. Thus, the term leadership can be defined as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Northouse, 2022, p. 6).

While history shows the need for leaders and leadership, contemporary authors have made it clear that strong leadership is the key to success in an organization (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). The research conducted by Safferstone (2005) identifies that while strong leaders are necessary for the success of an organization, leadership skills can be learned and practiced by all, which enables people, regardless of their position or title, to take leadership roles. Further, Safferstone indicates there is a strong correlation between people embracing leadership opportunities and the positive impact it has on organizational performance. In support of Safferstone et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of current leadership practices that focus on shared, collective, and collaborative practices.

After decades of research and dissonance, one thing is evident: leadership scholars cannot agree on a common definition of the term (Northouse, 2022), yet the term evokes passion because it engages people's values (Heifetz, 1994). Due to factors such as the national pandemic and generational differences, leadership will continue to have different meanings for different people. In today's complex world, organizations are constantly faced with change and uncertainty. As a result, no single definition of leadership is applicable to organizations as they do not fully address all of the concerns facing present-day leaders (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Reflecting on the last decade of research and projecting a future steeped in change, Northouse (2022) predicts that due to the complexity of leadership, a "definition may long be in flux" (p. 5).

Leadership During Times of Change

Despite the inevitable chaos that ensues during a crisis, leaders must remain calm, communicate clearly, work collaboratively, and be adaptive to the change that accompanies any crisis (Marshall et al., 2020). Providing clear communication in a timely manner provides stakeholders with a sense of comfort during uncertain times and makes them feel valued. As Harris and Jones (2020) identify, leading during disruptive times or crises means that leaders must navigate a new course, creating alternative pathways through the disruption. Further, according to Gurr and Drysdale (2020), effective leaders make sense of ambiguous situations and recognize the situation's impact on the organization.

Guiding an organization through a crisis is a stressful process, but it is after the organization emerges from the situation that the real work begins (McLeod & Dulsky, 2021). The issues that surface during or because of a crisis are not small challenges that one person can solve in isolation (Fairholm & Fairholm, 2000). Instead, they are complex challenges that often require an examination of the root causes. Once the issue has been identified, leaders must support people in examining their attitudes, behaviors, and values, which requires leaders to mobilize people to address change across multiple levels (Heifetz, 1994; Northouse, 2022). When change is addressed, and people are afforded the time and space to work through the emotions that surround change, there is a high likelihood that the change will become routine.

Frost (2003) noted that following the tragedy of the 9/11 attack, a new leadership paradigm emerged, requiring individuals to lead with a clear, action-oriented vision that is steeped in compassion and consciousness. Today, more than ever, the role of a leader

continues to grow in complexity (Jahagirdar et al., 2020; Safferstone, 2005), and change is needed as the United States emerges from a national pandemic. Safferstone (2005) claims that this point in history marks the need for an increased focus on organizational leadership. Leaders will be called upon to guide their organizations through the major issues that surfaced during this crisis, which is not easy given the difficulty in identifying what exactly constitutes leadership. Identifying characteristics of various leadership theories supports the argument that leadership is not "in" a leader or "done by" a leader but rather an emerging event that is contingent upon the interactions of those within an organization (Lichtenstein, 2006).

Leadership Theories

Despite decades of research and studies conducted on the phenomena of leadership, it continues to elicit debate due to its complexity and growing importance. The evolution of research regarding leadership theories dates back to the 1840s when it was believed that leaders were born with the necessary personality traits and qualities of effective leaders (Alajmi, 2021; Benmira & Agboola, 2021; Heifetz, 1994). Historical figures such as Abraham Lincoln and Mahatma Gandhi exemplify this theory (Northouse, 2022); however, both men exhibited vastly different traits, making it difficult to pinpoint specific traits. In the 1950s, due to the absence of a consistent set of leadership traits, behavioral theory gained popularity (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). This theory proposes that leaders are made and that the behaviors of effective leaders can be learned (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). A mere 10 years later, theorists acknowledged that the environment plays a significant role in the relationship between leaders and followers (Heifetz, 1994).

In the later part of the 20th century and into the 21st century, theorists recognized that while individual leader traits are important and the environment does play a part in the relationship between leaders and followers, leadership was far more complex given the challenges due to change, innovation, and globalization (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). In looking at the evolution of leadership theories, there are clear parallels between the increasing challenges of society and the growing complexity of leadership.

Situational Leadership

Based on the work of Hersey and Blanchard, the foundation of situational leadership is that leaders adapt to their follower's willingness and ability to perform specific tasks (Alajmi, 2022; Marzano & Waters, 2005). Four leadership styles have been identified that consider the relationship between a follower's willingness and ability to perform a task and the actions of the leader (see Table 1).

Situational leaders understand that no single style of leadership is effective or appropriate for all followers. As a result, leaders must not only be skilled in the four leadership styles but also know their followers well enough to know the situation and style that is most appropriate. In essence, leaders modify their style to meet the needs of followers (Alajmi, 2021).

Table 1

Four Leadership Styles Based on a Given Situation

Four leadership styles based on willingness and ability	
Follower is unable and unwilling to perform the task	"Telling" style where the leader directs the followers' actions with little regard for personal relationships.
Follower is unable but willing to perform the task	"Participating" style that is relationship focused. The leader interacts with followers in a friendly way while still providing concrete direction.
Follower is able but unwilling to perform the task	"Selling" style requires that the leader utilizes persuasion to engage followers in the task.
Follower is able and willing to perform the task	"Delegating" style enables leaders to leave the execution of the task to followers trusting that they will accomplish the task on their own.

Note. The column on the left represents the actions and opinions of followers, and the column on the right captures a leader's response to the situation. From R. J. Marzano and T. Waters, 2005. *School Leadership That Works: From Research to Results*. ASCD.

Contingency Leadership

In 1967, Fred Fiedler proposed the contingency theory of leadership, which emphasized the importance of context in effective leadership (as cited in Benmira & Agboola, 2021). In addition, the efficiency of followers is dependent on the leader's style of interaction with the group as well as their influence and control over situations (Alajmi, 2021). Further, Fielder agrees with many of his colleagues that a single, best set of leadership traits and behaviors does not exist (as cited in Benmira & Agboola, 2021). However, unlike modern-day theorists, Fiedler asserted that a leader's style is fixed, so to

ensure success, it is important that leaders are placed in situations that best match their style (as cited in Alajmi, 2022; Benmira & Agboola, 2021; Heifetz, 1994).

Transactional Leadership

Most leadership models are based on transactional leadership, which focuses on the relationship between the leader and followers. Transactional leadership relies on leaders to motivate followers by rewarding their efforts and holding them accountable for failure to meet their goals (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Forms of motivation typically consist of exchanging things of value that benefit both the leader and the follower. For this reason, transactional leaders are influential because it is in the follower's best interest to do what the leader wants (Northouse, 2022). This type of leadership is incredibly common and can be seen throughout all levels of an organization (Northouse, 2022).

Bass and Avolio (1994) describe three types of transactional leadership (a) management by exception passive, (b) management by exception active, and (c) constructive transactional (Marzano & Waters, 2005). Management by exception passive is a form of leadership that strives to maintain the status quo. Passive managers tend to wait for problems to arise before exhibiting leadership behaviors. Leaders, on the other hand, who exhibit management by exception active style pay careful attention to issues that surface, set standards, and actively monitor behaviors. Followers of this style believe that they should not take risks or take the initiative (Marzano & Waters, 2005). Constructive transactional leaders are the most active and effective of the transactional leadership styles because they set clear goals and outcomes, recognize accomplishments, provide feedback, and give praise where deserved. The distinguishing characteristic that differentiates constructive transactional leadership from the other two forms is that

leaders who exhibit this form of leadership invite followers into the management process (Marzano & Waters, 2005).

Transformational Leadership

In 1985, Bass introduced transformational leadership (Northouse, 2022), in which leaders serve to motivate, inspire, and encourage their followers (Benmira & Agboola, 2021; Northouse, 2022). Bass identified the "Four Is" of transformational leaders (Marzano & Waters, 2005). The first is individual consideration, which is characterized by taking all members into consideration and paying close attention to those who are often marginalized (Bass, 1990). The second behavior is intellectual stimulation. Leaders who create intellectual stimulation among their followers encourage them to think outside of the box to address old problems with new solutions (Bass, 1990). Leaders who communicate high-performance expectations provide the third behavior of transformational leadership, which is inspirational motivation (Marzano & Waters, 2005). Finally, a leader's personal accomplishments and character provide a model for followers, thus exhibiting the fourth I, idealized influence (Marzano & Waters, 2005).

Through personal engagement and connections, transformational leaders raise the level of motivation. Attention to individual needs and motives enables leaders to help followers reach their full potential (Northouse, 2022). Unlike other leadership theories, the emphasis placed on individual values is unique to transformational leadership because "it clearly states that leadership has a moral dimension" (Northouse, 2022, p. 430).

Where transactional leadership is best utilized in organizations that are mature, transformational leadership is seen as the favored style of leadership when an organization "needs to be revitalized, is undergoing significant change, or requires new

direction" (Benmira & Agboola, 2021, p. 4). According to Anderson and Anderson (2010), transformational leaders are aware of complex and dynamic systems that are in place, and they work to design and implement change processes by building commitment with stakeholders and transforming culture, enabling them to achieve sustainable results. Transformational leaders focus on the collective good of all (Northouse, 2022).

Complexity Leadership

Complexity leadership evolved from the notion that leadership is not based on a leader's traits or the actions of a leader. Instead, complexity leadership focuses on the view of the whole system and the interdependent actions among those within an organization (Lichtenstein et al., 2006). Complexity leadership theorists believe that leadership is an emergent event, not a person (N. Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Further, Lichtenstein et al. (2006) state that complexity leadership consists of distributed leadership where, at different times and for different purposes, different leaders will emerge, giving way to the traditional hierarchy of leaders on top of all other subordinates.

At the core of complexity leadership is the encouragement of all members of an organization to be leaders (N. Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Formal leaders must clearly articulate the pathway for downward responsibility of all members of the organization to spark innovation, creating a responsive and adaptive shared leadership environment (Lichtenstein et al., 2006). In essence, this theory emphasizes how leaders and followers work together with intentionality, enabling them to adapt to complex events (M. Uhl-Bien, 2021).

A contribution of complexity leadership is that it "provides an integrative theoretical framework for explaining interaction dynamics that have been acknowledged

by a variety of emerging leadership theories" (Lichtenstein et al., 2006, pp. 3-4), including but not limited to shared leadership, distributed leadership, and adaptive leadership. Due to the shared responsibility throughout an organization, those in authority who practice the characteristics of complexity leadership can help organizations navigate through complex issues that result in adaptive outcomes (M. Uhl-Bien, 2021). Now more than ever, organizations need leaders and followers who are able to respond to complex issues that require adaptive responses (M. Uhl-Bien, 2021).

Educational Leaders

"As is the principal, so is the school" -Cubberly, 1919, p. 351

As educational leaders, principals have a significant impact on school communities (Kiral, 2020). Principals must be responsive to the demands of multiple sources. For example, the State Department of Education demands that schools meet accountability standards, but parents demand that their children are safe and their social-emotional needs are met (Catano & Stronge, 2006). Despite a plethora of demands placed on principals, Catano and Stronge (2006) identify three pivotal responsibilities that fall on the shoulders of principals, including instructional leaders, organizational managers, and community relations.

Principals are instructional leaders, and student achievement is the principal's first priority (Kafele, 2019). Research indicates that principals have a direct impact on student learning, second only to classroom instruction (Gale & Bishop, 2014). Further, DeMarco and Gutmore (2021) found that when principals are engaged in the implementation of curriculum and instructional improvements, student achievement increases. Given the importance of student achievement, it is no surprise that DeMarco and Gutmore found

that a principal's "vision for learning, leadership approach, and mindset are each important facets of principal leadership that have a subsequent trickle-down influence" (p. 19) on teachers, students, and parents. Further, Kafele (2019) identified a key role of an instructional leader is to support teachers and strive for continued improvement.

While great debate exists surrounding the role of a leader versus that of a manager, organizational management is crucial to ensuring that schools are safe places for students and teachers (Stronge & Xu, 2021). The role of a school principal requires organizational management skills when it comes to tasks such as scheduling, building maintenance, and budgeting (Catano & Stronge, 2006). While areas such as building maintenance encompass a wide range of duties from repair to upkeep, a principal may not complete the work themselves, but they are responsible for delegating the work and seeing that it is complete (Kafele, 2019). Successful principals "understand that management responsibilities are vital to school success, and they never neglect these duties" (Stronge & Xu, 2021, p. 141).

Community relations are crucial to the success of a principal, given the increasing importance of the perceptions of those in the school community as well as the community at large (Catano & Stronge, 2006). Further, people in the community have a tremendous amount of knowledge and experience to offer schools and students (Kafele, 2019). Tapping into community members' wisdom not only benefits students but also helps to build strong relations with the community.

Effective school principals must learn to balance the responsibilities of a visionary leader who supports instruction and school improvement and their role as the manager of a school (Catano & Stronge, 2006; Stronge & Xu, 2021). Failure to find a

balance could result in a breakdown of the neglected area. Given the growing complexity of school leadership coupled with the increasing demands, it is no wonder that the role of educational leaders has continued to evolve.

Evolution of Educational Leadership

"There are two types of school: those that prepare kids for the future, and those that allow adults to live comfortably in the past." -Wes Kieschnick

The current educational system was created nearly a century ago with the intent to prepare students for manual work on farms and in factories (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). To accommodate industry needs, schools were designed to produce students who followed the rules, memorized and regurgitated information, and complied without asking questions (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Further, only a handful of students were identified to pursue higher-order skills necessary for work that required one to think. Over the decades, educators and policymakers have worked to evolve this system, yet to date, only small steps have been taken in reforming schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

In contrast to the slow progress in educational reform, the role of school principals has changed dramatically over the last decade (Reid, 2021). In the 1950s, principals had tremendous liberty to interpret and enforce rules and were responsible for building maintenance, addressing community concerns, and maintaining order regarding finances, academics, and other administrative tasks (Rousmaniere, 2013). Fast forward 20 years, and in the 1970s, school effectiveness fell on the shoulders of school principals who were responsible for focusing on basic skills, monitoring curriculum, and promoting high expectations of student learning and teacher performance (Marzano & Waters, 2005). The 1980s brought with it high-stakes testing aimed to hold schools accountable,

but the unintended consequence of placing so much emphasis on test scores was that principals were forced to follow rigid testing protocol while at the same time addressing "educational, legal, fiscal, and cultural dynamics" (Rousmaniere, 2013, p. 134).

At the turn of the century, the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), an initiative formalized on a national level, marked a period of educational reform contingent on high-stakes accountability (Rousmaniere, 2013). With the high stakes and threat of school closures and potential loss of people's jobs, it is no surprise that research overwhelmingly supports the growing demands placed on school leaders (Harris et al., 2020; Martin, 2020; Marzano & Waters, 2005; Simmons, 2022; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). Unlike their predecessors, the responsibilities of current principals are laced with local, district, state, and federal requirements, as well as community expectations (Rousmaniere, 2013).

While the enormity of leadership skills required of modern-day principals continues to increase in complexity, it is important to note that as the scope of administrators' responsibilities increases, the former responsibilities still exist. Further, as was the case a decade ago when the education system was designed to support industry needs, educators today are challenged to meet the current needs of students and the nation at large (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Prior to the pandemic, researchers such as Bennis (2003), Elmore (2000), and Fullan (2001) stressed the importance of leaders embracing multiple characteristics (Marzano & Waters, 2005). Elmore encouraged leaders to empower others to assume leadership roles. Fullan, on the other hand, focused on leading with moral purpose, understanding the change process, building strong relationships, sharing knowledge, and connecting new knowledge to past practices. Bennis (2003) concurred with Fullan's opinion about the importance of moral purpose and adapting to

change, but he included engaging others in developing a shared vision and articulating a sense of purpose.

As a result of the pandemic, educators are addressing new and old challenges surrounding issues of inequities, technological changes, and trauma (Simmons, 2022), and leaders must embrace and create new systems to avoid reverting to old systems. Amid the pandemic, Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) encouraged educators to reimagine education. They proposed a framework for restarting (post-distance learning) and reinventing schools based on 10 key areas that are designed to transform learning for students as well as close opportunity and achievement gaps (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

A Framework for Restarting and Reinventing Schools

Note. Woven throughout the framework is the element of engagement of stakeholders in the creation of equity and quality in school systems. From L. Darling-Hammond, A. Schachner, A. K. Edgerton, and I. Learning Policy, 2020. *Restarting and Reinventing School: Learning in the Time of COVID and Beyond*.

While some of the work proposed in the framework presented by Darling-Hammond et al. relies on decisions made by district office leaders, the responsibility of implementing the framework will fall on principals. Given the heavy lift of reimaging education, it is necessary for effective school leaders to connect, collaborate, create, and respond to one another as a means of support (Harris et al., 2020). The pandemic brought existing issues in education to the surface, as identified by Darling-Hammond et al. (2020), as well as trauma, pandemic fatigue, and a general mistrust in leaders (DeMartino & Weiser, 2021; Jorgenson et al., 2022). To address the complexity of the issues facing school communities, leaders must lead and mobilize others to illicit change (Martin, 2020).

Adaptive Leadership

Adaptive leadership is an emerging leadership theory that shares ties with situational, transformational, and complexity theories (Cojocar, 2008; Northouse, 2022). In 1994, seminal author Heifetz deviated from traditional leadership theories that focused on the traits or characteristics of a leader. Instead, Heifetz focused on a leader's behaviors stating that adaptive leaders engage others in activities. They encourage people to not only confront challenges that are necessary but also learn new behaviors enabling them to grow in the process (Northouse, 2022). Change requires that people examine their values. Adaptive leaders provide a safe environment that supports people in examining their value, thus moving them to address change (Northouse, 2022).

Adaptive leadership addresses how leaders support and encourage followers to adapt when faced with problems, challenges, and changes (Northouse, 2022). One distinguishing characteristic of adaptive leadership is the focus on followers as opposed

to leaders (Sunderman et al., 2020). The role of an adaptive leader is to support and encourage followers by mobilizing them to interact and work toward change (Northouse, 2022; Sunderman et al., 2020). The primary focus of adaptive leadership is on people, specifically how they change and adjust to new situations.

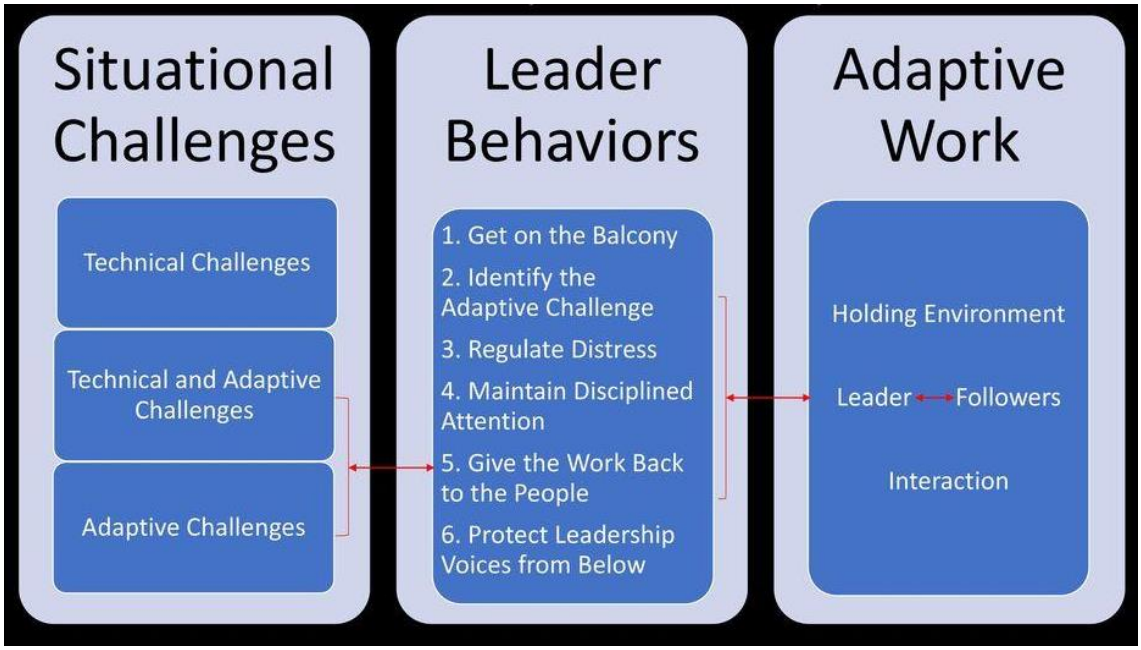
The ability to move people toward change is difficult and certainly not something that can be done every time an issue arises. Instead, leaders who are both active and reflective must first differentiate the challenges as they arise, considering the "severity of the problem, the resilience of the social system, the ripeness of the issue and time" (Heifetz, 1994, p. 126). To do this, Heifetz (1994) states that it is imperative to determine the type of situational challenge.

Identification of Situational Challenges

Northouse (2022) captured the major components of adaptive leadership, as seen in Figure 2. The model of adaptive leadership organizes the components in a way that clarifies the process of identifying challenges. The three major categories include (a) situational challenges, (b) leader behaviors, and (c) adaptive work. The combination of the three categories focuses on how leaders can mobilize people to address change (Northouse, 2022).

Figure 2

Model of Adaptive Leadership



Note. This model captures how the major components of adaptive leadership work together. When leaders can apply the six identified behaviors to situational challenges, adaptive work begins where the leader and followers work together in addressing root cause issues. From "Leadership: Theory & Practice" (9th ed.), by P. G. Northouse, 2022. Sage.

When a challenge is complex and requires adaptive work, six leader behaviors play an important role in leading adaptive work (Heifetz & Laurie, 2001; Northouse, 2022). These behaviors require a leader who is willing to "frame and ask tough questions, to confront reality, draw out issues, challenge current procedures, and… transfer the responsibility for solving the problems to the people who need to learn and who have to do the change" (Gyuroka, 2010, p. 2). To do this, Heifetz (1994) created a recipe of sorts for leaders to reference, including the six behaviors described below.

Get on the Balcony

The analogy of a dance floor and balcony lends itself to two perspectives of the same scene. When in the midst of the work, on the dance floor, one has the perspective of

what is directly in front of them. On the other hand, when one steps away from the dance floor and action, one sees the scene from a big-picture perspective (Northouse, 2022). To identify emerging patterns, it is important for leaders to be fluid in their movement between the balcony and the dance floor (Heifetz & Laurie, 2001). After gaining a big-picture perspective, leaders must identify the challenge facing the organization (Sunderman et al., 2020).

Identify the Adaptive Challenge

In addition to gaining a big-picture perspective from the balcony, Heifetz et al. (2009) state that leaders must first identify the challenge before determining their approach to addressing it. The adaptive leadership model is based on three types of situational challenges (a) technical challenges, (b) technical and adaptive challenges, and (c) adaptive challenges. Technical challenges are the easiest to solve for a leader because they are clearly defined. Technical and adaptive challenges are clearly defined yet require input from more than a single leader. Adaptive challenges are not clearly defined and require people beyond the leader to solve because they often evoke emotion, center on values, and have a root cause that is difficult to identify (Northouse, 2022). With the last two challenges, leadership behaviors are required of an adaptive leader. Adaptive challenges stir emotions as they typically tap into people's core values (Sunderman et al., 2020; Simmons, 2022).

Regulate Distress

Psychologically, people find comfort in routine and consistency, which is one reason people hold tight to their beliefs, attitudes, and values (Northouse, 2022). One can deduce that when adaptive challenges are present, people feel unsettled and stressed due

to the lack of consistency. Further, to regain consistency, change is typically required, but its unpredictability often elicits stress. An adaptive leader must then work to create a safe environment where all individuals can share, be heard, and feel supported (Sunderman et al., 2020). The leader then asks difficult questions while maintaining enough tension that people do not revert to the status quo but continue to work towards a solution (Heifetz & Laurie, 2001). Monitoring the level of stress and providing support is crucial to adaptive work, and effective leaders work to find that balance.

Maintain Disciplined Attention

Maintaining disciplined attention requires adaptive leaders to support and encourage people to do the hard work. People often resist change and avoid it for fear of the unknown. While it is easier for leaders to let people remain in their comfort zone, they must continue to nudge people into addressing the problem (Northouse, 2022; Sunderman et al., 2020).

Give the Work Back to the People

Giving the work back to the people is the heart of adaptive leadership. Leaders who support rather than control their followers empower them by building their self-confidence in problem-solving (Heifetz & Laurie, 2001). Further, followers should be encouraged to take risks and assume responsibility.

Protect Leadership Voices from Below

For adaptive leadership to work, leaders must ensure that everyone in the organization has a voice and is heard, even those historically marginalized (Sunderman et al., 2020). Adaptive leadership encourages everyone to interact and be a part of developing a solution. To do this, leaders must listen and be open to the ideas of others.

Protecting voices from below and honoring input from all stakeholders is often difficult for leaders because it requires them to relinquish some control to the hands of other members of the organization (Northouse, 2022).

Adaptive Leadership Theoretical Framework

The model for adaptive leadership designed by Heifetz et al. (2009) provides the theoretical framework for this study. Heifetz first introduced the theory of adaptive leadership in 1994 and has collaborated with numerous scholars since that time to develop a theoretical framework (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz & Laurie, 2001; Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Leitzke, 2022). Their goal was to design a different approach to leadership where the leader, instead of playing the starring role in the organization, plays the supporting role in helping others address tough problems (Northouse, 2022). To play this part, leaders challenge others to face difficulties and support them in the hard work that is required when dealing with change.

Adaptive leadership requires leaders to intervein with followers within the organization to address challenges. To put adaptive work in motion, multiple factors must be put into play, including identifying interventions to diagnose challenges, engaging the appropriate individuals at various points in the process, and working toward long-term solutions (Heifetz et al., 2009). To ensure that organizations are equipped to meet ongoing adaptive challenges, Heifetz et al. (2009) identified five characteristics of an adaptive culture, described below.

Elephants in the Room are Named

Undiscussables are perceived as views that people do not share in public and are often referred to as the elephant in the room, the 800-pound gorilla, or the dead moose

(Toegel & Barsoux, 2019). When viewed in this light, it is no wonder that people approach undiscussables from a place of fear and would rather suffer in silence than discuss the issue. Toegel and Barsoux (2019) identify that undiscussables exist because avoiding conflict and embarrassment is often easier than addressing it. Unfortunately, when the culture or the organization does not make addressing these issues a priority, the results are often toxic (Toegel & Barsoux, 2019).

Organizations that make addressing elephants in the room a part of the culture are typically exceptional at adaptability (Heifetz et al., 2009) because discussing undiscussable's provides people relief and builds a strong sense of team (Toegel & Barsoux, 2019). To build this characteristic into an organization's culture, Heifetz et al. (2009) suggest several techniques. First, leaders must model the desired behavior. Second, leaders must protect contrarians.

Leaders must lead by example because people follow cues from authority. In the case of addressing undiscussable's, when leaders are willing to be vulnerable and discuss sensitive issues, they cue their followers that it is acceptable to initiate and engage in these conversations (Heifetz et al., 2009). Building on this cue, leaders must work to create a safe, inclusive culture where everyone has a voice (Clark, 2020). Further, leaders need to be explicit in encouraging people to discuss and share concerns removing the fear of repercussions (Toegel & Barsoux, 2019).

In alignment with providing a safe, inclusive culture where all voices are heard, leaders must protect contrarians who are typically perceived as difficult (Heifetz et al., 2009). These individuals commonly go against the momentum of the group suggesting ideas that appear unrealistic (Heifetz et al., 2009). Further, when comments are made by

contrarians that interrupt the equilibrium of the group, leaders can ensure future participation by acknowledging them and asking them to elaborate on their idea. Maintaining a healthy culture with contrarians in the mix requires leaders to diminish tensions that arise when others feel personally challenged (Toegel & Barsoux, 2019).

Leaders who create a culture that eliminates fear and normalizes engaging in difficult, uncomfortable conversations open the door to mobilizing the team to tackle adaptive challenges (Heifetz et al., 2009). Asking people to be vulnerable and open is necessary when looking to them to share responsibly in the future of the organization.

Responsibility for the Organization's Future is Shared

Sharing responsibility for an organization is a form of distributed leadership in which multiple leaders interact in both formal and informal leadership roles for the sake of improving the organization (Harris & Spillane, 2008). Leadership of this nature is fluid and beneficial to organizations in that when leadership responsibilities are shared, organizations can respond faster to complex issues (Heifetz et al., 2009). Further, the burden of addressing complex issues does not fall on a sole person. When followers within an organization step into and out of leadership roles depending on the situation, organizations thrive.

Shared responsibility in organizations entails more than sharing leadership opportunities. Organizations that make cross-functional problem-solving the norm encourage people to own issues that surface in the organization and work together to address them (Heifetz et al., 2009; Senge et al., 2019). When all members take responsibility for the organization's future, the organization increases its capacity to adapt to challenges (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Independent Judgment is Expected

Highly adaptive organizations value the judgment of employees and foster a culture where decision-making and idea-generating are encouraged throughout the organization (Heifetz et al., 2009). Encouraging independent judgment requires leaders to pause before making decisions that someone else in the organization can make. The intention is not to delegate work they should be doing but rather to delegate work that empowers others within the organization to make decisions (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Another unique feature of adaptive leadership is that leaders aim to make themselves dispensable (Heifetz et al., 2009). While this may seem counterintuitive to job security, the goal is to distribute leadership in which all members of the organization are comfortable embracing opportunities to initiate adaptive work in their department (Heifetz et al., 2009). To create a culture where it is the norm for people to go beyond their job description, leaders must be diligent about giving work back to others. Providing people with opportunities in decision-making and critical thinking builds their skills and capacity (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Leadership Capacity is Developed

Having a succession plan in place ensures that organizations continue to thrive and that progress is not thwarted by a change in leadership (Heifetz et al., 2009). Heifetz et al. (2009) stress that building a leadership pipeline is "essential to long-term adaptability because the key bottleneck to growth is so often the quantity and quality of leadership available in the organization" (p. 170). In alignment with Heifetz et al., Harris (2011) states that without intentional capacity building, implementing change is typically short-lived. To grow leadership capacity within an organization, followers need

leadership opportunities where they gain experiences that affirm their potential in the organization (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Reflection and Continuous Learning are Institutionalized

Research indicates that organizations that institutionalize reflective practices and continuous learning exhibit adaptive capacity (Cojocar, 2008; Heifetz et al., 2009). Further, Senge et al. (2019) state that providing space and time for individuals to reflect is critical to building a culture of trust and fostering continuous learning. In addition, Heifetz et al. (2009) and Simmons (2022) recognize that creating time for people, often without a rigid agenda, to discuss, share, and reflect on experiences is critical to addressing adaptive work.

In a world where innovation and change are the norm, organizations must be open and committed to learning to ensure that those within the organization are able to adapt to new situations (Heifetz et al., 2009). People at all levels within an organization must be willing to engage in continuous learning and maintain an open mindset that there is always something new to learn (Heifetz et al., 2009; Simmons, 2022). While learning can occur outside of an organization, there is a wealth of information within organizations, and who better to learn from than people immersed in the organization.

Experimentation and risk-taking are encouraged by organizations where continuous learning is valued (Heifetz et al., 2019; Veldsman et al., 2016). Learning, however, occurs as a result of the experiment or risk, regardless of the outcome. For individuals to act freely, fear of repercussions must be eliminated. Organizations that want people to take risks must recognize and value that great learning occurs from mistakes and failures (Rheaume et al., 2021; Veldsman et al., 2016). Further, when

failure does occur, it is important for leaders to engage people in reflection so that the situation is used as a learning opportunity (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Adaptive Leadership in Education

School leaders today are facing unprecedented challenges surrounding student achievement, persistent inequities, and student and staff health (Bagwell, 2020; Simmons, 2022). One of the most pressing challenges is the responsibility of preparing students for a world that is changing due to innovations in technology and globalization (DeMarco & Gutmore, 2021). To address these new and challenging times in education, school leaders who embrace an adaptive approach to leadership can "build resiliency and capacity for their school communities to weather future disruptions" (Bagwell, 2020, p. 31).

To start, school leaders must first identify the type of challenge as described by Heifetz (1994). Technical challenges are those that experts can solve, while solutions to adaptive challenges come from people themselves (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004). The role then of educational leaders is to mobilize the school community in finding solutions to adaptive challenges, which entails helping stakeholders work through difficult choices, address frustrations, and capitalize on opportunities for growth (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004).

There is limited research on adaptive leadership specific to education. While the theory is still in a formative stage with higher education (Northouse, 2022), it seems that there is more research on the implementation of adaptive leadership characteristics in higher education than in other educational settings. Leitzke (2022), Wolfe (2015), and Sunderman et al. (2020) focus on the impact of implementing the adaptive leadership framework in higher education. Wolfe elaborated on how a team at Nebraska Wesleyan University used the adaptive leadership framework for the process of curricular reform.

Others, such as Bagwell (2020) and Simmons (2022), address the need for adaptive leadership in education to address challenges brought forth by the pandemic. Simmons urged school leaders to apply adaptive characteristics while supporting stakeholders in the opportunities to address complex challenges to ensure growth and sustainable change.

The adaptive challenges facing education today are as important as they are difficult (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004). Given the complexity of the challenges, educators at all levels must partake in adaptive leadership to ensure changes are made that improve student learning (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Simmons, 2022). Leading adaptive work is not easy, but "the best leaders challenge themselves to tackle the most difficult issues their students and staff face" (Simmons, 2022, p. 72). Tackling difficult issues happens when school leaders are flexible, assess the current complexities, and motivate their followers (Khan, 2017). In addition, they need to build a culture that supports and encourages shared leadership opportunities, continuous improvement and reflection, capacity development, and communication.

Shared/Participatory Leadership

Schools are facing adaptive challenges that cannot be resolved by a single heroic leader (Harris & Spillane, 2008; Heifetz et al., 2009). Instead, school principals need to share leadership opportunities with the staff (Bickmore, 2015). One way leaders can accomplish this is to facilitate the process of collective problem-solving, which, when done well, has profound results. A leader's role in this process is to foster a culture built on collaboration, relationships, ownership, and innovation (Bagwell, 2020). The presence of trust, flexibility, and freedom for staff encourages expertise to flourish authentically and motivates others to take risks with challenges that arise (Kuntz et al., 2017). Further,

ideas generated from collective problem-solving are often far more diverse than those created by a single person, which leads to greater organizational adaptability (Brown et al., 2020; Harris & Spillane, 2008). In addition to increasing organizational adaptability, including staff in leadership opportunities helps them feel more involved, connected, and committed to the school (Bickmore, 2015). When staff feel connected and committed to the school, research supports positive impacts on organizational outcomes and student learning (Harris & Spillane, 2008).

The world of education is becoming increasingly more complex, requiring the role of school leaders to adapt. Scholars agree that the old organizational structure found in education no longer serves the requirements of 21st century learners (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Harris & Spillane, 2008). New leadership approaches are necessary to support school leaders who are trying to traverse the growing demands placed on them. Thus, it is vital that leaders participate in continuous improvement and learning.

Continuous Improvement

The term continuous improvement is derived from the Japanese term *kaizen* (Marzano & Waters, 2005). Kaizen, although roughly translated, means continual and ongoing improvement by all members within an organization, including leaders. According to Yukl and Mahsud (2010), leaders play a pivotal role in continuous improvement and must be intentional in making it a part of the school culture. Principals must model an openness to learning new ideas, learning from experience, and welcoming feedback (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). In agreement with this claim, Deming (1986) stressed the importance of leaders integrating continuous improvement into the organization and

keeping it at the forefront of the minds of employees (as cited in Marzano & Waters, 2005). Failure to engage in continuous learning and improvement, as well as welcome constructive feedback, can be detrimental to an organization, often resulting in little growth (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).

Capacity Development

Capacity building, "the investment in the development of knowledge, skills, and competencies of individuals or groups" (Sharratt & Fullan, 2009, p. 8), is viewed by many leaders as the key to school improvement. Harris (2011) argues that capacity building requires "collective responsibility where professionals are working together to improve practice through mutual support, mutual accountability and mutual challenge" (p. 627). One platform that provides the space for the collection of support, accountability, and challenge is professional learning communities (PLC), where teachers with a broad range of experience and knowledge collaborate (Rheaume et al., 2021; Sharratt & Fullan, 2009). Research indicates that for PLCs to be effective, principals must not only build context for the work but also distribute leadership opportunities to teachers who are capable of leading (Harris, 2011).

Communication

Communication, some would argue, is the glue that holds a school together or the foundation upon which all leadership responsibilities are built (Marzano & Waters, 2005). Regardless of the analogy, good communication, both verbal and non-verbal, is critical when people are working together (Lavery & Coffey, 2021). For principals who are adaptive leaders, clear communication is crucial with all stakeholders ensuring that they are aware of what is being done to address complex challenges as well as the plan to

move forward (Simmons, 2022). In addition, it is important that stakeholders are confident that the leader's words are backed by their actions (Lavery & Coffey, 2021). Sharing leadership, building capacity, and building a culture of continuous learning and reflection require that leaders communicate effectively.

Adaptive Leadership in Middle Schools

While there is a lack of research regarding middle school educators who have adopted an adaptive approach to leadership, research does exist on several characteristics of adaptive leadership surrounding effective leadership. For instance, research conducted by Brown and Anfara (2002) as well as Petzko (2004) found that effective leadership was not only collaborative but inclusive of teachers regarding shared decision-making and planning for improvements in student learning (Bickmore, 2015). In 2015, Bickmore conducted a replication study of Brown and Anfara's work and found similarities, but also discovered that alignment with the importance of shared leadership was the significant role of continuous improvement and learning. The components found in these studies are characteristics of adaptive leadership.

Lack of Literature on Leadership at the Middle School Level

Despite extensive research and analysis of school leadership, few studies have looked specifically at middle school leadership (Gale & Bishop, 2014), and there is a lack of research on adaptive leadership in middle schools. Research specific to middle school leadership is important because leading schools for adolescent middle school students presents challenges not seen in elementary or high school (Gale & Bishop, 2014; Lavery & Coffey, 2021). The developmental nature of 10- to 14-year-old students requires "middle school principals to lead schools characterized by a unique set of programs,

practices, and curricula" (Gale & Bishop, 2014, p. 2). Given the minimal research that has been conducted on middle school leaders, those interested in studying the impact of adaptive leadership at the middle level are left to identify correlations between adaptive leadership characteristics and effective leadership strategies.

Synthesis Matrix

A synthesis matrix outlines the academic and professional literature used in this study. It shows how the research was categorized according to leadership, leadership theories, and adaptive leadership in education (see Appendix A).

Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the world. Not only in its immediate impact due to the rapid spread of the virus and shelter-in-place orders but also the long-term implications such as trauma, pandemic fatigue, and discontent as well as distrust in the government and policies (Jorgenson et al., 2022; Simmons, 2022). The long-term implications, coupled with unresolved issues, have manifested into complex issues (Masys, 2021), resulting in an environment that is both volatile and complex as well as uncertain and ambiguous (Martin, 2020). The current myriad of challenges facing the nation and organizations are what Heifetz et al. (2009) call adaptive challenges, and the ability to adapt is crucial to the effectiveness of organizations (London, 2022). To navigate adaptive challenges, leaders are needed who provide direction, protection, and order to the people in the organization (Leitzke, 2022). Chapter II opened with an exploration of the evolution of leadership and the role of leaders during times of change which led to the examination of numerous leadership theories.

Fielder (1967) proposed the contingency theory of leadership, emphasizing the importance of context in effective leadership (as cited in Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Twenty years later, Hersey and Blanchard (1988) elaborated on Fielder's idea that context plays a significant role in one's leadership by stating that leadership is contingent upon given situations (Marzano & Waters, 2005). Hersey and Blanchard (1988) identified four leadership styles contingent upon the actions of followers (Marzano & Waters, 2005). Regardless of the driving factor, the situation, or the context, Fiedler, Hersey, and Blanchard agree that leadership cannot be defined as a single style (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Both situational and contingency leadership are examples of transactional leadership in that leaders influence followers who are motivated to follow, given that both parties typically benefit from the transaction at hand (Northouse, 2022). While transactional leadership is seen throughout all levels of the organization (Northouse, 2022), the approach to leadership is not indicative of practices needed to address challenging issues.

Bass' (1985) seminal work in transformational leadership encompasses the complexities of leadership, recognizing that leaders serve to motivate, inspire, and encourage their followers (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Transformational leaders go beyond context, situations, and quid pro quo. Instead, the primary focus is on the symbiotic relationships with the followers, who, together with the leader, work through challenging issues to ensure that sustainable changes are made for the collective good of all (Northouse, 2022). Complexity leadership builds upon Bass' ideas focusing on leadership as an emerging event as opposed to a person (N. Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Further, complexity leadership gives way to the traditional hierarchy of the leader on top

in favor of distributed leadership, where individuals assume leadership roles at different times and for different purposes (Lichtenstein et al., 2006). In both transformational and complexity leadership, the result of leaders working closely with followers is the ability to address and adapt to complex issues (M. Uhl-Bien, 2021).

Adaptive leadership folds characteristics of situational, transformational, complexity, and transactional leadership theories into the framework, starting with the focus on followers and how they change and adapt to new situations (Cojocar, 2008; Heifetz et al., 2009; Northouse, 2022; Sunderman et al., 2020). Chapter II dives into the three different types of situational challenges and the leader behaviors that are required when dealing with adaptive challenges. Heifetz (1994) stressed the importance of leaders being fluid in their movement between the dance floor and the balcony, enabling them to see all perspectives of the organization. Further, Heifetz identified that an essential element of effective adaptive leadership is giving the work back to the people. Giving work back to the people does not diminish the importance of a leader but rather changes the role of a leader (Lichtenstein, 2006). Instead, the leader supports and encourages followers by helping to identify the challenge and regulate stress while maintaining a safe environment where all voices are heard (Heifetz & Laurie, 2001).

Research also explores the five characteristics addressed in the adaptive leadership theoretical framework designed by Heifetz et al. (2009). The characteristics identified by Heifetz and his colleagues provide leaders with the tools to navigate uncertain times. Organizations that make naming the elephants in the room a part of the culture are typically equipped to adapt to challenges because they communicate without reservation (Heifetz et al., 2009). Further, leaders who empower followers by sharing

responsibility for the organization, encouraging independent thinking, building leadership capacity, and institutionalizing continuous learning and reflection create a team-based climate and culture (Heifetz et al., 2009). When people feel that they are a valued part of an organization or team, they are far more likely to engage in the challenging work (Clark, 2020) that is necessary for adaptive challenges.

Education did not escape the challenges that surfaced due to the pandemic. To understand the implications of the challenges on education, Chapter II also looked at the role of educational leaders as well as the evolution of the responsibilities of school leaders. According to Reid (2021), the role of school principals has changed dramatically over the last decade. Where the majority of responsibilities were once managerial in nature, 21st-century principals must not only manage but also lead. Opinions vary on what exactly school leadership includes. Seminal authors such as Bennis (2003), Elmore (2000), and Fullan (2001) have identified several key characteristics (Marzano & Waters, 2005). Elmore stresses the importance of shared leadership and empowering others to assume leadership roles. Fullan highlights numerous characteristics, including leading with moral purpose, understanding the change process, building strong relationships, sharing knowledge, and connecting new knowledge to past practices. Bennis, in alignment with Fullan, emphasized the importance of engaging followers in developing a shared vision and articulating a sense of purpose. To address issues that surfaced during the pandemic, school leaders are going to have to exhibit all of these characteristics and more.

The growing complexities and challenges in education and educational leadership are not only stemming from the pandemic but also from student achievement, persistent

inequities, and innovations in technology (DeMarco & Gutmore, 2021). These challenges are as important as they are difficult (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004), and tackling the issues happens when school leaders are flexible, assess the current complexities, and motivate their followers (Khan, 2017). To traverse the growing demands placed on school leaders, Harris et al. (2020) state that leaders are going to have to embrace shared leadership. Further, school leaders need to model continuous learning and reflection to ensure that all members of the organization embrace the mindset that learning and growth are necessary for change (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). Finally, capacity development and communication were discussed in relation to school leadership. Without effective verbal and non-verbal communication, the other characteristics of adaptive leadership are virtually impossible to do effectively.

While some research exists that looks at adaptive leadership in education, most of it is either general to education (Bagwell, 2020; Simmons, 2022) or specific to higher education (Khan, 2017; Leitzke, 2022; Marshall et al., 2020; Sunderman et al., 2020). Perhaps the lack of research is due to the fact that when Heifetz first introduced adaptive leadership in 1994, it was in the context of the business industry. Further, over the last 25 years, the concept has been studied with positive outcomes in relation to a variety of fields, including health care and military (Sunderman et al., 2020), but not education. In 2020, Bagwell scratched the surface of adaptive leadership in education, suggesting that leaders address the extraordinary challenges stemming from the pandemic with adaptive leadership characteristics. Further, he embraces the heart of adaptive change in his view that the pandemic has provided school leaders with an opportunity to address old and new issues, such as inequalities. However, he acknowledges that further research is necessary

to investigate "how school leaders engage in adaptive leadership practice as they address the tensions and distress caused by change" (Bagwell, 2020, p. 33). In addition, Yukl and Mahsud (2010) concur with Bagwell, stating that many aspects of flexible and adaptive leadership have yet to be studied and that more research is needed.

Given the minimal research that exists on school leadership at the middle school level (Gale & Bishop, 2014), it is not surprising to find that there is little to no research on adaptive leadership practices for middle school principals. The research that does exist recognizes that due to the unique challenges of adolescent middle school students, the role of a middle school principal is different from that of an elementary or high school principal (Gale & Bishop, 2014; Lavery & Coffey, 2021). At this point, those looking to implement the adaptive leadership framework at the middle school level are left to adapt and modify the tools identified by Heifetz et al. (2009) to meet the unique needs of the students, teachers, and school community.

Harris et al. (2020) identified that the change that occurred during the pandemic is unprecedented. Further, Valeras and Cordes (2020) describe it as a period marked by uncertainty and destabilization due to rapid and expansive changes. As the nation emerges from the critical period of the pandemic, people are looking for stability, and leaders will have to work to reestablish trust with all stakeholders and followers to ensure that issues, old and new, will be addressed collectively (Harris et al., 2020; Valeras & Cordes, 2020). In 2012, Ritchie identified leaders' main currency as their ability to influence and motivate people, focusing more on what they do. However, Martin (2020) stated that a leader’s ability to adapt is more important than "technical knowledge, communication skills, or problem-solving" (p. 31). The implementation of adaptive

leadership framework created by Heifetz et al. (2009) provides leaders with the necessary tools to lead an organization through adaptive challenges.

Much has been said about the state of education prior to the pandemic. Educators such as Darling-Hammond et al. (2020), as well as Zhao (2020a, 2020b), have encouraged educators and educational leaders to seize the opportunity to reimagine education presented by the pandemic. While many people prefer to revert to the way things were, Zhao (2020b) challenges leaders to avoid managing the crisis and instead examine educational practices and embrace innovative pedagogy. Educational leaders can guide stakeholders through the adaptive leadership framework, as Wolfe (2015) did with her institution of higher education, to ensure that challenges are addressed and that education meets the needs of 21st century learners (Zhao, 2020b). Harris and Jones (2020) predict that the role of a school leader during disruptive times is in the throes of being redefined and will likely set a new precedence moving forward. Time will tell if adaptive leadership characteristics are at the heart of the new definition.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The goal of research methodology is to gain new information and understanding of a topic using a systematized process (Patten & Newhart, 2018). Further, McMillian and Schumacher (2010) identify that the selected procedures should aim to produce the most "valid, credible conclusions from the answers to the research questions" (p. 20). Thus, it is critical to identify strategies and techniques for collecting and analyzing data that enable the study's consumers to determine the overall validity of the findings (Patton & Newhart, 2018). Three faculty researchers and nine doctoral students collaborated to identify the strategies used by various industry leaders to build adaptive capacity based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership identified by Heifetz et al. (2009). The researcher used a phenomenological research design to identify and describe the strategies used by middle school principals to build adaptive leadership capacity at their school sites during times of great change and opportunity.

Chapter III presents the research methodology used to conduct this qualitative study beginning with the purpose statement and research questions and sub-questions. A description of the research design is followed with an explanation of the population, target population, and population sample. The instrumentation selected for this study is explained, as well as a description of the methods used to develop and test the instrument. Finally, the reliability and validity, data collection process, and data analysis methods are described in detail. Wrapping up this chapter is an account of the study's limitations and a summary of the chapter.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this exploratory phenomenological study was to identify and describe the strategies used by middle school principals to build an adaptive capacity based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership identified by Heifetz et al. (2009).

Central Research Question

The central research question was: *What strategies do middle school principals use to build an organization's adaptive capacity based on Heifetz et al.'s (2009) five key characteristics (making naming elephants in the room the norm, nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization, encouraging independent judgment, developing leadership capacity, and institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning)?*

Research Sub-Questions

Five research sub-questions were developed to help determine how middle school principals address each adaptive leadership variable.

1. How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through making naming elephants in the room the norm?
2. How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization?
3. How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through encouraging independent judgment?
4. How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through developing leadership capacity?

5. How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning?

Research Design

There are countless research designs to select from, but what researchers must consider when selecting a specific design is the study's purpose and the question it intends to answer (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Further, the research methods for gathering, analyzing, and interpreting the data must be determined (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The methodology selected for this qualitative study is phenomenology. Tuckman and Harper (2012) state that qualitative research is appropriate when events must be studied in natural settings and involve a study of occurrences as seen through the eyes of those experiencing them. Further, Patton (2015) elaborates on the focus of individual experiences as "how they perceive [the identified lived experience], describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others" (p. 115). A phenomenological methodology is effective since the purpose of this study is to identify and describe the strategies used by middle school principals to build an adaptive capacity within their organizations.

Unlike quantitative research, which aims to collect and analyze numerical data, qualitative research explores and understands the meaning individuals attribute to social or human issues (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). While qualitative and quantitative are both systematic designs, it is important to recognize that the primary goal of a qualitative design is to collect data on phenomena that occur naturally (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). Qualitative methods that study human beings use inquiry frameworks that are rooted in the discipline of philosophy. A phenomenological inquiry approach focuses on

understanding an individual or shared experience on phenomena related to the research question.

Method

The peer researchers selected a qualitative methodology because the study aimed to identify and describe the strategies leaders use to build an adaptive capacity within their organization. The participants selected for this study have and are living this phenomenon, affording them the knowledge to provide information and insight into the research questions. Phenomenology is the most appropriate methodology for this study for multiple reasons. First, the research questions were focused on gaining information about the strategies middle school principals used to build an adaptive capacity based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership (Heifetz et al., 2009) during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, the research questions sought to learn about the lived experiences of each principal who was interviewed. There is no single way to lead a school community through crisis and change. The goal of this study was to identify if common themes emerged from the participant's lived experiences. Finally, according to Patton (2015), using a phenomenological methodology enables the researcher to understand the nature or meaning of everyday life.

Population

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) define a population as a group that "conform[s] to specific criteria and to which [the intention is] to generalize the results of the research" (p. 129). In essence, the population includes all possible participants from which results can be generalized. However, qualitative research relies on a purposeful sampling of

participants to ensure that their experiences will help the researcher understand the research question (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

The California Department of Education (CDE) (2022) reported that in the 2021-22 school year, there were 1,258 middle schools in California. The total population for this study included middle school principals throughout California. Logic follows that there is a minimum of 1,258 middle school principals, given the total number of middle schools. Further, while there may be more middle school administrators when considering vice principals at the middle school level, this study focused solely on principals as they are usually responsible for the school.

Sampling Frame

The sampling frame is a subset of the general population from which data is used to make inferences. Thus, the selection of participants must be intentional to ensure that the information provided will enable the researcher to gain a clear understanding of what is being studied (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). Due to the enormity of a given population and the detail that qualitative data collection entails, researchers rely on and draw upon a sampling frame from the population (Patten & Newhart, 2018).

Given that there are more than 1,258 middle school principals in California, the researcher narrowed the population by identifying a subset of the general population (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). The sampling frame for this study was public middle school principals from three counties in California, including San Joaquin, Contra Costa, and Stanislaus. Per the CDE (2022), during the 2021-22 school year, there were 44 middle schools in Contra Costa County, 23 in Stanislaus County, and 13 in San Joaquin County. The sampling frame is 80 middle school principals from these three counties.

Sample

According to McMillian and Schumacher (2010), a sample is often selected from the total population. While the nature of qualitative research is characterized by a small number of participants as opposed to quantitative research, which aims to gather large volumes of data, a sample is often necessary due to time and monetary constraints (Patton, 2015). The selection of participants is typically made through either probability or nonprobability sampling. For the purposes of this study, nonprobability sampling was utilized to select participants who represented identified characteristics (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). Purposeful sampling is often used in qualitative research because it provides a sample of individuals from which rich data can be collected and analyzed to address the purpose of the research (Patton, 2015).

Although researchers agree that qualitative research focuses on smaller samples, there are a variety of perspectives on the ideal number of participants or sites (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Patten & Newhart, 2018). As Patton (2015) points out, there are no rules to determine the sample size in a qualitative study. Instead, he states that determining an adequate sample size depends on what the researcher wants to know, "the purpose of the inquiry, what’s at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with the available time and resources" (Patton, 2015, p. 311). That said, Creswell and Creswell (2023) recommend 3 to 10 participants for a phenomenological study. Purposeful criterion sampling was used to select participants who met predefined criteria (Tuckman & Harper, 2012). The researcher relied on recommendations from superintendents and district office personnel in Contra Costa, Stanislaus, and San Joaquin Counties to identify possible participants who met four of the following six criteria:

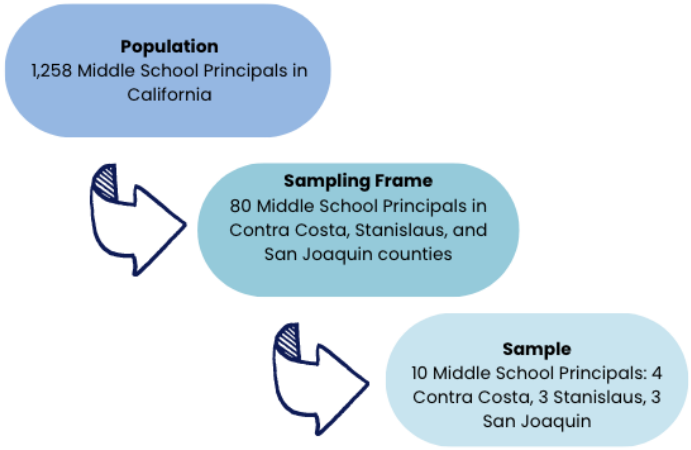
- Evidence of successful relationships with stakeholders
- Evidence of breaking through conflict to achieve organizational success
- Five or more years of experience in that profession or field
- Written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings
- Recognized by their peers
- Membership in associations of groups focused on their field

Sample Size

Given the purpose of the study, the sampling, albeit smaller in size, enabled the researcher to spend more time with each participant through extended, in-depth, semi-structured one-on-one interviews (Patten & Newhart, 2018). For purposes of this study, 10 public middle school principals were interviewed. Four of the 10 middle school principals were selected from Contra Costa County, three from San Joaquin County, and three from Stanislaus County. Figure 3 illustrates the process used to determine the sample of middle school principals for the study.

Figure 3

Population, Sampling Frame, and Sample of Middle School Principals



Sample Selection Process

The researcher used the following steps to identify and select the participants for this study:

1. Identified districts in Contra Costa, Stanislaus, and San Joaquin Counties with middle schools.
2. From the districts with middle schools, administrators with at least five years of experience were identified.
3. Once middle school principals with at least five years of experience were identified, an email will was sent to the district superintendent seeking permission to conduct research in their district.
4. Following UMass IRB approval, superintendents were emailed requesting recommendations for potential administrators who meet the criteria.
5. Once permission was granted by district superintendents, emails were sent to individuals whom superintendents recommended.
6. Four administrators were selected from Contra Costa County, three from Stanislaus County, and three from San Joaquin County.
7. Potential participants were provided with the purpose of the study, a request for their voluntary participation, and informed consent materials (see Appendix B and C).
8. A verbal agreement to participate was recorded before the formal interview started.
9. Interviews were scheduled and conducted via Zoom.

Instrumentation

Qualitative research studies focus on the relationships among variables, enabling the researcher to address specific research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). One means of obtaining information about the identified variables is through interviews which allow a researcher to obtain data with maximum efficiency (Tuckman & Harper, 2012). In-depth interviews are a common method of data collection used in qualitative research. By utilizing a semistructured, open-ended sentence frame, interviewees are free to respond with their specific experiences, opinions, and feelings based on their individual experiences (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

The nine peer researchers, with guidance from three faculty advisors, worked in teams of two to develop semistructured, open-ended questions for each adaptive leadership variable identified by Heifetz et al. (2009). A table was created to ensure that the interview and research questions were aligned (see Appendix D). Probing questions were created if the interviewer needed to draw out additional information from the participant (Patton, 2015). The peer researchers and faculty advisors collaborated in an iterative process of revising the interview questions and probes as the group deemed necessary.

The peer researchers and faculty team designed an interview protocol developing an interview script that the researcher agreed to dictate to each interviewee. The script provided participants with an overview of the study, a demographic questionnaire, definitions of key terms, and interview questions (see Appendix E). To maintain consistency and integrity in the data collection process, all nine peer researchers agreed to follow the protocol to fidelity.

Field Test

Field tests are used in qualitative research as a prequel to the final interviews to refine the research instrument (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). The nine peer researchers conducted a field test of the instrument by interviewing an individual within their sample framework who was deemed an adaptive leader but was not included in the study. The participants were interviewed using a virtual platform such as Zoom and were provided with the interview questions. A third-party observer was present during the interview to provide feedback to the researcher. The individual was selected based on two criteria: first, experience in the collection of qualitative interview data, and second, holds a terminal doctorate.

After the field test, the researcher, interviewee, and observer completed a survey (see Appendix F). Each survey was designed to garner information that could help the peer researchers solidify the clarity of the interview questions, ensuring that the data was both rich and reliable (Maxwell, 2013; Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). As McMillan and Schumacher (2010) state, a research instrument must be proven reliable and valid before research is conducted.

Validity

According to McMillian and Schumacher (2010), validity in qualitative research is the degree to which the explanations of the phenomena and the reality of the world agree. Creswell and Creswell (2023) acknowledge that validity is based on the determination that the findings are accurate from multiple perspectives, including the researcher, participant, and readers. To ensure that researchers can develop trustworthiness and credibility, Creswell and Creswell recommend using more than one strategy to check the

accuracy of the findings. The strategies utilized in this study to increase the validity of the data include input from the team of peer researchers, the three faculty, field-test feedback, and interviewee feedback.

The researcher took additional steps to increase validity. Interviews were conducted on a virtual platform that recorded the audio and visual content. In addition, Temi, a speech-to-transcription program, was used to transcribe the recorded interview. The use of a semistructured intelligence software tool to transcribe speech-to-text has proven effective in both accuracy and efficiency (Da Silva, 2021). The researcher verified the content of the Temi transcriptions and provided participants with a copy of the transcripts to review for accuracy.

Reliability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify that reliability is demonstrated by replication of the study within conventional studies. Further, when a study can be replicated with similar findings two or more times, the study is deemed reliable. Reliability in qualitative research can be obtained in numerous ways, including "taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account" (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). With the support of three faculty advisors, the peer researchers agreed to use multiple measures to increase reliability. First, the peer researchers used the same probing questions during interviews to elicit more participant information. In addition, participants were provided transcripts of the interview to check for accuracy.

Data Collection

The researcher collected data through interviews. Prior to initiating the data collection process, the researcher completed the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) training course on human subject research for social-behavioral-educational researchers (see Appendix G). In addition, the researcher applied for and received approval from the UMass Global University Institutional Review Board, which serves to ensure the research conducted on human subjects follows both ethical and legal guidelines (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

This study collected data through one-on-one interviews with middle school site principals who worked with their school communities during the COVID-19 pandemic and the return to in-person learning. "To gather such data, one must undertake in-depth interviews with people who have directly experienced the phenomenon of interest" (Patton, 2015, p. 115). The team of peer researchers agreed that in-depth interviews were ideal for collecting rich data from those with lived experiences in leadership during the pandemic. The format of the semi-structured, open-ended interview, as well as the probing questions, led to in-depth data, enabling researchers to gain a deeper understanding of how leaders build adaptive capacity.

Before each interview, respondents were emailed information regarding the purpose of the study and a copy of the interview questions. Interviews were scheduled for 60 minutes and took place in August and September 2023. The interviews were held on Zoom and recorded by Zoom. At the conclusion of each interview, the recordings were transcribed with the use of a software program called Temi. All recordings, audio and

visual, were downloaded to a password-protected thumb drive and, along with the transcriptions, were stored in the researcher's safe.

Interview Process

Each middle school site administrator who participated in the study agreed to be interviewed via Zoom for the study. Participants received identical copies of the 10 interview questions, UMass Global University IRB, the research Participant's Bill of Rights (see Appendix H), and the informed consent with the recording release form. The research Participant's Bill of Rights, as well as the informed consent with recording release form, were used to communicate participant privacy and research confidentiality. Before partaking in the interview, the researcher asked for verbal consent from each participant.

The researcher followed the agreed-upon protocols determined by the team of peer researchers. Before asking the first interview question, the researcher reviewed the purpose statement and thanked the interviewee for their willingness to participate in the study. The interview questions were then asked, and when necessary, probing questions were used to gain clarification or additional information.

Data Analysis

Data generated from qualitative research is extensive (Patton, 2015). The large quantities of raw data must be prepared and organized for analysis before the researcher can reduce the themes through a coding process (Creswell, 2013). The data was collected from 10 semistructured, open-ended interviews with middle school principals. The structure of data analysis and representation of the data was conducted through multiple interconnected steps (Creswell, 2013).

Data Analysis Structure

1. The researcher prepared the data by transcribing the video recording of each interview and cross-referencing it with the audio transcription from Read AI.
2. The researcher sent each participant a copy of the transcription to ensure the accuracy of the data.
3. The researcher uploaded the transcribed interviews to NVivo qualitative analysis software.
4. The researcher coded the data within NVivo and reviewed the codes for duplication.
5. The researcher grouped the codes into themes.
6. The researcher created a frequency table to organize the coded themes.

Data Coding

Data coding is a process used in phenomenological research to generate categories of information (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). After interviews were transcribed and verified by participants, data coding was initiated by identifying and labeling small pieces of data (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010), which are used to draw connections between the data and the research questions. Due to the laborious and time-consuming task entailed in hand-coding data, a qualitative computer software program, NVivo, was used to analyze the data. Despite the assistance of technology, the researcher plays an instrumental role in creating codes and accurately analyzing the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; McMillian & Schumacher, 2010).

With the assistance of NVivo coding, common responses were identified and sorted into themes. A table was created to help track the frequency of each theme and its

source. A benefit to using a software program is the ease of sorting data to validate relationships between the data and the research questions to better understand how leaders build adaptive leadership capacity.

Intercoder Reliability

Qualitative researchers use a coding system to monitor the frequency of identified themes. To ensure the reliability of the data analysis, Creswell and Creswell (2023) recommend that single researchers have someone cross-check their coded data for inter-coder agreement. For solid qualitative reliability, 10% of the collected data should be cross-checked with an 80% consistency rate (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Miles & Huberman, 1994). A UMass Global colleague served as an inter-coder for this study, and adjustments were made until an 80% consistency in coding was reached.

Limitations

Limitations, also referred to as methodological weaknesses, are unavoidable and can potentially affect a study's results (Patten & Newhart, 2018). Researchers must identify how limitations could affect the interpretations and generalization of the data. Roberts and Hyatt (2019) emphasize the importance of transparency, stating that researchers must communicate the study's limitations to ensure that future researchers do not experience the same issues. The study of middle school principals was limited due to the sample size, time constraints, geographic area, and the researcher serving as the instrument.

Sample Size

Qualitative research intends to identify themes in information regarding the research questions. While opinions vary regarding an ideal sample size (Creswell, 2013),

a strong indicator of an adequate sample size is when the researcher is confident that the data is saturated (Patton, 2015). Qualitative studies aim to collect rich, detailed, and varied accounts of participants' lived experiences (Maxwell, 2013). With guidance from faculty advisors, the nine peer researchers agreed on a sample size of 10 participants.

Time Constraints

The researcher sought to capture a specific time frame for this study, given the focus of the study was on adaptive leadership during times of great change and opportunity. The COVID-19 pandemic was seen as a time of great change, and the return to school campuses was a prime opportunity to adapt to issues that rose to the surface during the pandemic. The intent was to conduct the study while participants were amid the changes in time constraints.

Geographic Area

There are 58 regions in California and over 1,000 school districts. The study participants were selected from three counties in the northern California region. San Joaquin County is the smallest of the three counties, with 14 districts, followed by Contra Costa County, with 19. Stanislaus, albeit smaller in size, has 25 school districts. The vast difference between the three counties represents variables that could impact the participants' leadership experiences, such as funding, district support, and resources.

Researcher as an Instrument

The researcher, as the instrument of the study, could result in limitations of the study. The researcher's perspectives, experiences, and background could have influenced each step of the process, such as the construction of the interview questions as well as the collection, coding, and analysis of the data. Although the researcher worked to limit bias

and preconceptions, the fact that qualitative inquiry is the intersection between personal and professional experience, the researcher as the instrument may have limited the generality of the findings.

Summary

Chapter III described the design and specific procedures used to conduct the study (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). The chapter restated the purpose of the qualitative study, the central research question, and the research questions based on the five variables of adaptive leadership introduced by Heifetz et al. (2009). The researcher articulated the research design, study population, sample of the study, instrumentation, and the data collection process. Specific steps to ensure validity and reliability were presented along with an account of the field-testing process. Finally, details were provided on analyzing the data and identifying possible limitations of the study.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

This phenomenological study describes how exemplary middle school principals build adaptive capacity based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership identified by Heifetz et al. (2009) within their organizations. Chapter IV presents the qualitative results collected through the semistructured, open-ended interview process held in a virtual setting. The interview data were collected from the qualitative interviews conducted with 10 sample subjects. The peer researchers generated definitions for the five characteristics that were used to develop the interview questions, which were designed to address each research question.

The data are presented in a narrative format, supported by figures and tables to illustrate the analysis and significant themes. The qualitative phenomenological presentation of the data includes direct quotes from the 10 exemplary middle school principals interviewed. Chapter IV includes qualitative data, and it concludes with a summary of the study's findings.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this exploratory phenomenological study was to identify and describe the strategies used by middle school principals to build an adaptive capacity based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership identified by Heifetz et al. (2009).

Central Research Question

The central research question was: *What strategies do middle school principals use to build an organization's adaptive capacity based on Heifetz et al.'s (2009) five key characteristics (making naming elephants in the room the norm, nurturing a shared*

responsibility for the organization, encouraging independent judgment, developing leadership capacity, and institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning)?

Research Sub-Questions

Five research sub-questions were developed to help determine how middle school principals are addressing each of the adaptive leadership variables.

1. How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through making naming elephants in the room the norm?
2. How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization?
3. How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through encouraging independent judgment?
4. How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through developing leadership capacity?
5. How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning?

Research Methods and Data Collection Process

The study used a qualitative phenomenological research design. Tuckman and Harper (2012) state that qualitative research is appropriate when events must be studied in natural settings and involve a study of experiences as seen through the eyes of those living them. The qualitative phenomenological study captured the lived experiences of 10 exemplary middle school principals who are building adaptive capacity within their organizations by making naming the elephants in the room the norm, nurturing shared

responsibility, encouraging independent judgment, developing leadership capacity, and institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning.

Interview Process and Procedure

The study involved semistructured, open-ended interview questions aimed at seeking information about the lived experiences of each exemplary middle school principal interviewed. There is no single way to lead a school community. Thus, the goal of the study was to capture the participant's lived experiences via carefully constructed interview questions that are aligned with the five characteristics identified by Heifetz et al. (2009). This study and its findings are part of a team of peer researchers who are contributing to the building adaptive leadership thematic, and the data contributions are the thematic shared interest in exploring ways exemplary leaders build adaptive capacity within their organizations during times of great change and opportunity.

Interview questions for the study were semistructured and open-ended. In alignment with Patton's (2015) emphasis that interviews must be conducted with individuals who have directly experienced the phenomenon of interest, the team of peer researchers wrote 10 semistructured, open-ended interview questions aimed to capture the concrete details of the phenomenon lived by the participants. The peer researchers of the study developed the interview questions with the assistance and guidance of three faculty advisors. The peer researchers were divided into five teams to construct a draft of open-ended interview questions for one of the five characteristics identified by Heifetz et al. (2009) that align with the purpose statement. The peer research team critiqued and revised the interview questions with the assistance of faculty advisors, and the approved

interview questions were chosen based on their alignment with the research questions and the objective of understanding the experiences of those living the phenomenon.

The interview questions designed for the study were written by the adaptive leadership peer researchers. Reliability and validity of the semistructured, open-ended interview questions were completed using field test interviews. Each peer researcher was observed by a scholar who has earned an Ed.D. Upon completion of the field test, the field test interviewee, as well as the observer and researcher, provided feedback on several questions. Responses helped to ensure the interview questions designed by the peer researchers were clear and elicited meaningful content from the participants that would provide sufficient data for analysis.

Ten exemplary middle school principals who met the criteria of the study were identified for the study by district personnel. Each middle school principal received an email introduction, the interview questions with definitions of key terms, and a Participant Bill of Rights form. During each interview, the researcher asked interviewees semistructured, open-ended questions in sequential order to maintain consistency and reliability. If a response did not elicit enough data during the interview, the researcher posed a probing follow-up question to prompt the interviewee to elaborate on their initial response. Probing questions are used with the intention of capturing more detailed information from the participant regarding their lived experience (Patton, 2015).

Interviews of all 10 middle school principals were conducted via Zoom between August 29, 2023, and September 18, 2023. Zoom provided scheduling flexibility to both the researcher and participants, given the participants are from three different counties. Interviews ranged in length from 30 to 90 minutes, and all were recorded and transcribed.

After reviewing and editing each transcript, the researcher emailed the appropriate interviewee a copy of the transcript to review and provide feedback to ensure the reliability of the data.

After the interviews were transcribed and verified by participants, the researcher analyzed the data and identified recurring themes. NVivo, a computer software program, was utilized to assist the researcher in creating codes and tracking the frequency of each theme. The software enabled the researcher to validate relationships between the data and the research questions to better understand how middle school principals build adaptive capacity within their organizations. All codes presented in Chapter IV are organized first by the respondents coded and then by the frequency to illustrate the occurrences of the responses.

Population

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) define a population as a group that "conform[s] to specific criteria and to which [the intention is] to generalize the results of the research" (p. 129). In essence, the population includes all possible participants from which results can be generalized. Qualitative research relies on a purposeful sampling of participants to ensure that their experiences will help the researcher understand the research question (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The CDE (2022) reported that in the 2021-22 school year, there were 1,258 middle schools in California. The total population for this study includes middle school principals throughout California. Logic follows that there is a minimum of 1,258 middle school principals, given the total number of middle schools. The population for this study was middle school principals in California.

Sample

According to McMillian and Schumacher (2010), a sample is often selected from the total population. For the purposes of this study, nonprobability sampling will be utilized to select participants who represent identified characteristics (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). Purposeful sampling is often used in qualitative research because it provides a sample of individuals from which rich data can be collected and analyzed to address the purpose of the research (Patton, 2015). Further, criterion sampling, a process by which specific criteria are identified, was used in the selection of participants who met predetermined criteria (Tuckman & Harper, 2012). Superintendents and district office personnel recommended possible participants who met four of six criteria, of which the number of years of experience was required:

- Evidence of successful relationships with stakeholders
- Evidence of breaking through conflict to achieve organizational success
- Five or more years of experience in that profession or field
- Written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings
- Recognized by their peers
- Membership in associations of groups focused on their field

The sample for the study was 10 middle school principals. Four of the 10 middle school principals serve in Contra Costa County, three in San Joaquin County, and three in Stanislaus County, California.

Demographic Data

The phenomenological study included 10 middle school principals who were selected using predetermined criteria. Each participant verified their experience in an

administrative position. Four of the participants have over 10 years of administrative experience, while seven have more than 10 years of experience in the district.

The participant population was 60% female. Although there were only four male participants, both male, and female- identifying participants were represented in the three different counties. While an administrative credential is required for an individual to serve as a public school administrator in California, 80% of the participants earned a master's degree in addition to their Preliminary Administrative Services Credential. Further, all participants have served in an administrative position for at least six years, with four serving over a decade (see Table 2).

Table 2

Overview of the Participants Interviewed

	Gender	Years in administration	Years in District	Education	County
Respondent 1	Female	8	13	M.Ed.	Stanislaus
Respondent 2	Female	10	20	Admin Cred.	Contra Costa
Respondent 3	Male	9	5	M.Ed.	Stanislaus
Respondent 4	Male	6	12	M.Ed.	Contra Costa
Respondent 5	Female	9	5	M.Ed.	Contra Costa
Respondent 6	Female	8	20	M.Ed.	Contra Costa
Respondent 7	Female	17	33	Admin Cred.	San Joaquin
Respondent 8	Male	16	10	M.Ed.	Stanislaus
Respondent 9	Female	8	>6	M.Ed.	San Joaquin
Respondent 10	Male	>10	23	M.Ed.	San Joaquin

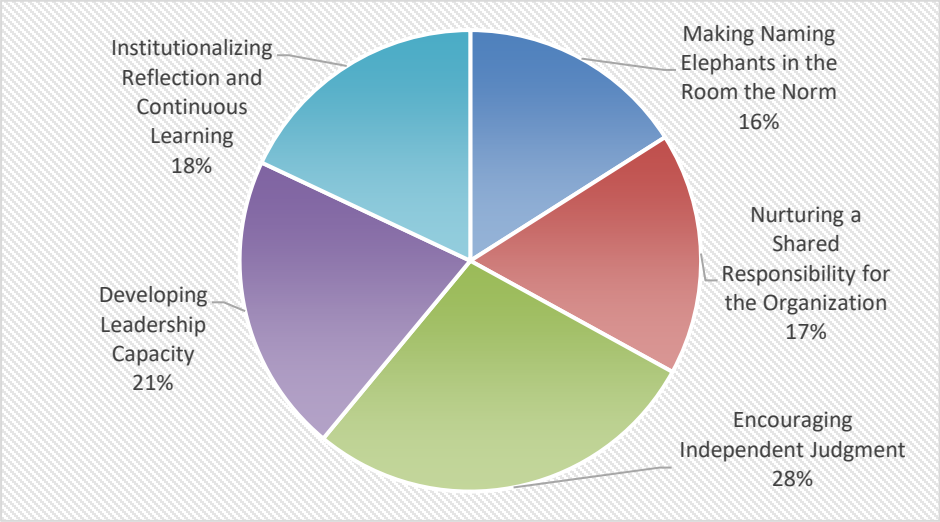
Presentation and Analysis of Data

Presenting the analysis of data enables the researcher to share the interpretation of the data as it serves to answer the research questions, thus contributing to the outcomes of the study (Patton, 2015). The data were collected using virtual interviews, which provided a description of how exemplary middle school principals build adaptive capacity within their organizations in relation to the five characteristics identified by Heifetz et al. (2009). The data presentation and findings align with the five research questions. The data were coded and analyzed to capture the lived experience of middle school principals who work to build adaptive capacity within their organizations. NVivo, a computer software, was utilized to assist the researcher in analyzing the data as well as organizing the data by identifying themes and codes for analysis. Each theme serves as a major finding for the study and is followed by perspectives shared by participants.

The five adaptive leadership characteristics identified by Heifetz et al. (2009) are presented, and themes are provided based on the data collected from the open-ended semistructured interview questions (see Figure 4). A total of 422 frequencies were identified, and the frequencies were categorized into 28 themes. Each major theme is presented and summarized.

Figure 4

Total Data Frequencies of the Five Adaptive Leadership Characteristics



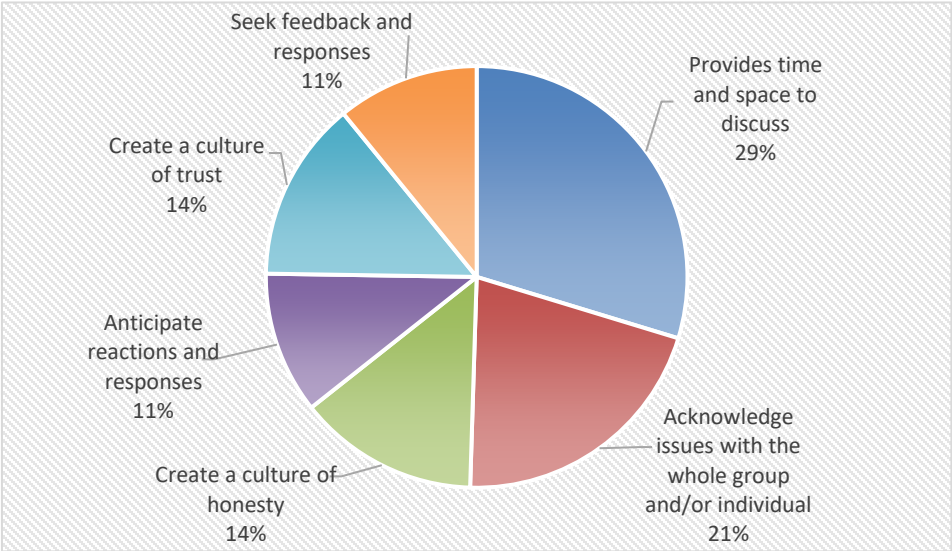
Data Results

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was as follows: *How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through making naming elephants in the room the norm?* The goal of Research Question 1 was to identify and describe how middle school principals make naming the elephant in the room the norm to build their organization's adaptive leadership capacity. For the purpose of this study, making naming the elephants in the room the norm was defined as the act of openly addressing sensitive underlying issues, or undiscussables, to resolve potential barriers that interfere with an organization realizing its full potential (Baker, 2004; Heifetz et al., 2009; Toegel & Barsoux, 2019). Each middle school principal was asked both corresponding interview questions that aligned with the research question. The data were grouped into six major themes analyzed from 66 frequencies (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Frequency of Codes for Making Naming Elephants in the Room the Norm



Two interview questions were crafted to provide deeper insight into making naming elephants in the room the norm. Each middle school principal was asked both corresponding interview questions that aligned with the research question. The data were grouped into six major themes analyzed from 66 frequencies.

At the conclusion of inputting the data, the highest frequency that contributed to making naming elephants the norm was providing time and space to discuss issues, with a frequency of 20, which comprised 30.3% of the total coded data. The second highest frequency was acknowledging issues with the whole group and/or individuals, with a frequency of 14, comprising 21.21% of the total data. Creating a culture of honesty and creating a culture of trust tied with a total frequency of nine, accounting for 13.63% of the total coded data. It is interesting to note that while the two themes share the same frequency, seven respondents highlighted the importance of creating a culture of honesty, whereas five mentioned creating a culture of trust. The same situation is seen with the

shared frequency of anticipating reactions and responses and seeking feedback and responses. The frequency for both is seven, accounting for 13.63% of the total data. However, six respondents mentioned anticipating reactions and responses to make naming elephants in the room the norm, as opposed to five respondents mentioning seeking feedback and responses.

Interview questions were designed in alignment with how middle school principals make naming elephants the norm in their organizations to build adaptive leadership capacity. The goal of the interview questions was to gain a deeper understanding of how middle school principals build a culture that makes addressing sensitive underlying issues the norm to ensure that the organization is working to its full potential.

Provide Time and Space to Discuss

Providing space and time to discuss sensitive, underlying issues had an overall frequency of 30.3% and was identified by all 10 respondents. Leaders who normalize engaging in difficult, uncomfortable conversations open the door to mobilizing the team to tackle adaptive challenges (Heifetz et al., 2009). In contrast, Grenny et al. (2022) state that at the heart of almost all issues in an organization is the failure to address the elephants in the room. Given that all 10 respondents recognize the importance of providing time and space to discuss sensitive, underlying issues indicates that they acknowledge the value of providing a safe space to openly discuss issues.

According to research conducted by Clark (2020), individuals perceive psychological safety when they are both shown respect and granted permission to participate in the organization. Further, Clark found that people flourish when they

engage in a cooperative system with psychological safety. Respondent 3 focuses on creating psychological safety with his staff by modeling authentic vulnerability during challenging conversations. He "elicits discussion and information" (Respondent 3) and provides time and space for honest conversation. Further, Respondent 2 provides psychological safety to the staff by allocating time and space for discussion to ensure that people "feel like their voices are being heard."

Respondent 8 mentioned that providing time and space to have tough conversations is the heart of his organization. He shared the vital importance of having tough conversations and approaching them as a team from the perspective that "we're working together to find a solution" (Respondent 8). Respondents 1, 2, and 4 also spoke about having various teams in place and the value they have on ensuring that students, parents, and staff have a safe place to openly discuss tough issues.

In summary, Respondent 3 said, "You have to be able to have those conversations. Sometimes there are awkward conversations, but I don't think there can be a resolution unless we have those conversations, [and are] able to talk and try to figure out what it is they need." To stress the importance, Respondent 3 also acknowledged that ignoring and failing to address underlying issues will result in creating bigger issues.

Acknowledge Issues with the Whole Group and/or Individuals

Acknowledging issues with the whole group and/or individuals was the second highest theme frequency identified with 21.21% of the overall frequency and the frequency was identified by 80% of the respondents. The consensus was that if an underlying, sensitive issue surfaced with one individual, someone from the administrative team would talk directly to the individual. On the other hand, if the staff in general had an

issue, it would be addressed in a whole staff setting. This approach is captured by Respondent 9, who stated,

> If it is an individual issue, I meet as an administrator for the one-on-one tough conversations, and I try to model that with my admin team so that they're able to have those one-on-one tough conversations. Then, if it's something that involves a group of staff members or the whole staff in general, we meet as a whole staff or a group, and we have those tough conversations [with the intention to] work together to find a resolution.

Respondent 1 acknowledges issues in a similar way to Respondent 9. Respondent 1's administrative team works to identify sensitive topics that need to be addressed openly and determine if they need to be handled as a "whole staff conversation" or a conversation with an individual. She finds that in most cases it is "best to have individual conversations when [sensitive issues] come up and just be transparent" (Respondent 1)

Respondents 4 and 5 both stressed the importance of building relationships, which are the essential foundation for having successful conversations about challenging topics. Respondent 4 works hard to make people feel comfortable by "paying attention, being visible, and feeling it." Further, she states that "the energy is very clear when you are paying attention, and if you know your people, you know something is going on" (Respondent 4). Once an underlying issue is discovered, Respondent 4 states, "It’s just communication." She stressed the importance of talking to people about the issue.

Respondent 5 focused on building relationships with the staff so that when issues arise, "you're able to have those conversations" that, given a relationship, "may not be as awkward" (Respondent 5). When the situation presents itself with an individual, she

prefers to "have an open discussion with [the person to] try to figure out the best way to [move forward]."

Create a Culture of Honesty

Creating a culture of honesty comprised 13.63% of the overall response frequency, and 70% of the respondents spoke about the importance of a culture steeped in honesty. At the heart of successful conversations is the free flow of information (Grenny et al., 2022). A free-flowing conversation consists of dialogue that is an open and honest account of people's opinions and feelings.

According to Graham (2018), communicating openly and honestly is one indicator of an effective leader. Respondent 4 stressed the importance of honesty when he described the act of addressing sensitive underlying issues as the heart of the administrative team stating, "We don't really hold back." While the administrative team serves as an example, departments are also required to "question things and question each other, and also share information that might make [people feel] vulnerable" (Respondent 4).

Kirtman and Fullan (2016) identified four competencies that highly effective leaders demonstrate, including challenging the status quo. Further, they also recognize building trust as a crucial leadership competency. Respondent 10 builds trust with his staff by embedding "honest conversations" into the culture and stressing the importance of having "conversations that challenge ourselves."

Anticipate Reactions and Responses

Anticipating reactions and responses had an overall frequency of 10.60%. A total of 60% of the respondents spoke about their efforts to anticipate reactions and responses

from stakeholders. White et al. (2016) speak to common missteps leaders make when they move too fast toward implementation or change. To avoid falling into a potential pit of organizational resistance, White et al. note the importance of taking time to analyze potential blind spots, which can be done by anticipating reactions and responses and then bringing people together to discuss.

Respondent 2 spoke about the importance of frontloading conversations with people by acknowledging or "addressing [the issue] or putting a name to it before we start [the discussion]." As well as going so far as to openly state, "this next topic is heavy" (Respondent 2). Further, Respondent 2 works to anticipate the "impact the elephant in the room would have, both emotionally and mentally [on the staff]."

In alignment with Respondent 2, Respondent 4 acknowledges "being intentional is important," as is getting out ahead of issues, which is why Respondent 4 meets with groups such as the district teacher association representatives to "see if anything is coming up or if they're hearing anything." Going slow to go fast, as White et al. (2016) point out, more often than not results in increased success for the team.

Create a Culture of Trust

Creating a culture of trust accounted for 13.63% of the overall frequency, which mirrors the frequency of creating a culture of honesty, yet 50% of the respondents stressed the importance of trust as opposed to 60% who focused on the value of honesty. White et al. (2016) acknowledge that in the high-stakes environments in which people work and live today, it is vital, yet challenging, to build trust within organizations. Despite the challenge, White et al. also note that without trust, leaders only have "fleeting power" (p. 13). There are four components at the heart of trust, with one being

believability or honesty (White et al., 2016). Respondent 1 recognizes the fact that trust and honesty are intertwined. Respondent 1 states that she thinks her staff "has trust in [the] administration" and knows that they are "not trying to push buttons with them but are trying to be honest and transparent."

Respondent 4 captured another element of trust, as identified by White et al. (2016), which is connectedness or building relationships. Peeling back the layers that enable people to enter discussions about sensitive issues, Respondent 4 recognizes the vital importance of building trust, stating:

> I think it is important to build trust. I think that when you build trust, then people know your intention. And when they know [your] intention, then they are able to participate in a situation or a discussion where they know they have to be vulnerable. But you have to build trust. You have to allow your coworkers to know where you're coming from, who you are, and what you stand for. Once you do that, then [you] can have those hard conversations.

Seek Feedback and Responses

Seeking feedback and responses from stakeholders accounted for 10.60% of the overall frequency, and it was identified by 50% of the respondents. Adaptive leadership requires leaders to intervein with followers within the organization to address challenges. To put adaptive work in motion, multiple factors must be put into play, including identifying interventions to diagnose challenges, engaging the appropriate individuals at various points in the process, and working toward long-term solutions (Heifetz et al., 2009).

According to Heifetz et al. (2009), when leaders can eliminate fear by normalizing and engaging in difficult, uncomfortable conversations, they create a culture that mobilizes the team to tackle challenges. Respondent 3 mobilizes his administrative team by "elicit[ing] discussion and information" and engaging in role-play with his administrative team and staff. When sensitive issues surface, his team "plays through [them] in a role-play format" (Respondent 3). While the team initially felt "awkward at first, they now ask for it" (Respondent 3) because they went from being uncomfortable discussing sensitive topics to having the tools to feel "prepared for what is going to come" (Respondent 3).

Leaders must work to create a safe, inclusive culture where everyone has a voice (Clark, 2020). Further, leaders need to be explicit in encouraging people to discuss and share concerns removing the fear of repercussions (Toegel & Barsoux, 2019). Respondents 6 and 7 encourage people to share their voices by having an open-door policy. Respondent 6 welcomes "voluntary meetings [with staff] to discuss issues that might come up instead of waiting for them to get out of control."

Table 3 displays the data from Research Question 1.

Table 3

Themes Related to Ways Middle School Principals Make Naming Elephants in the Room the Norm

Theme	Respondents coded	Interview frequency	Frequency percentage
Provide time and space to discuss	10	20	30.30%
Acknowledge issues with the whole group and/or individuals	8	14	21.21%
Create a culture of honesty	7	9	13.63%
Anticipate reactions and responses	6	7	10.6%
Create a culture of trust	5	9	13.63%
Seek feedback and responses	5	7	10.60%

Note. Total frequency = 66.

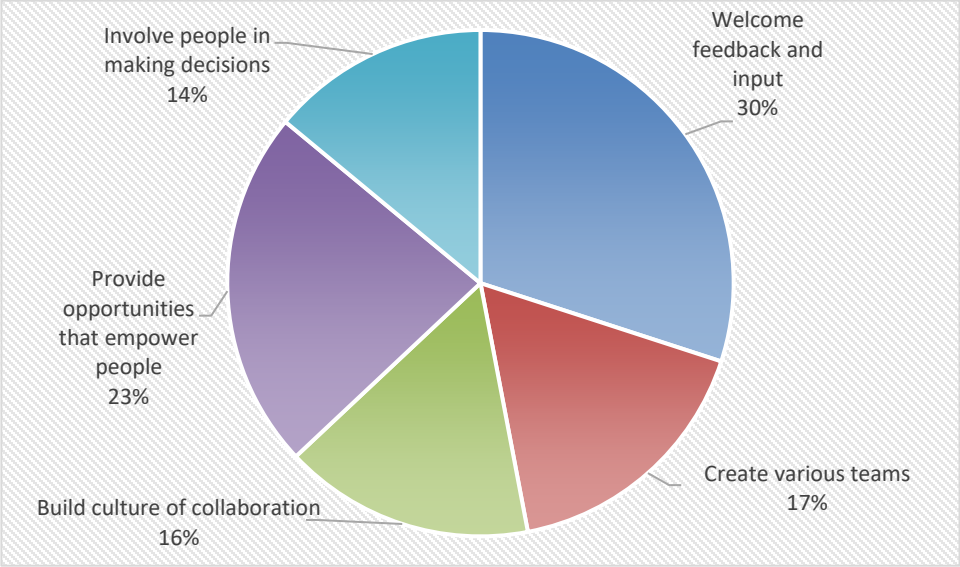
Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was: *How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization?* The question was designed to identify and describe how middle school principals nurture a shared responsibility for their organization to increase adaptive capacity. For purposes of the study, nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization is defined as the collective ownership across team member roles for the decision-making of operational goals and outcomes of the organization's future (Harris & Spillane, 2008; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Heifetz et al., 2009; Northouse, 2016; Tremblay et al., 2016). Two interview questions were written to gain a deep understanding of the strategies participants utilize to nurture a culture of shared responsibility in the organization. Each middle school principal was asked the two corresponding interview

questions that align with Research Question 2. The data were grouped into five major themes analyzed from 70 frequencies (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Frequency of Codes for Nurturing a Shared Responsibility for the Organization



Upon analysis, five themes emerged with a frequency of 10 or more. For purposes of identifying the strategies that participants use to nurture a shared responsibility within their organization, the themes have been organized by the respondent's code as opposed to the interview frequency. The identification of the theme, in this case, seemed more impactful to the study than the frequency. With that said, the theme of welcoming feedback and input was identified by nine participants with the highest frequency of 21, or 30% of the total coded data. Creating various teams and building a culture of collaboration were both identified by 80% of the participants. However, creating various teams had a higher frequency of 12, or 17.14%. Building a culture of collaboration had a frequency of 11, or 15.71%. Providing opportunities to empower people was the second highest frequency of 16, accounting for 22.86% of the overall data, but only 70% of the

participants identified it as a strategy to nurture shared leadership within their organization. Appearing by the same number of respondents, involving people in making decisions was identified by 70% of the participants, yet had a frequency of 10, six less than providing opportunities that empower people, accounting for only 14.29% of the overall data.

Two interview questions were asked of each participant on how they nurture shared leadership within their organization. The goal of the interview questions was to gain an understanding of how middle school principals nurture shared leadership within their organization to build adaptive capacity.

Welcome Feedback and Input

Research indicates that when leaders create a culture that welcomes feedback and input, there are more opportunities for the organization to grow (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). Bickmore (2015) concurs with Yukl and Mahsud (2010), pointing out that to ensure that school environments remain responsive to the needs of the students, middle school administrators must involve stakeholders, calling upon their input and expertise when making decisions. The participants of this study also echoed the importance of welcoming feedback and input as it was identified by 90% of the respondents with a total frequency of 21, with an overall frequency of 30%, and was identified by 90% of the respondents. Respondent 1 captures the spirit of welcoming feedback and input from stakeholders, stating, "If you see something, say something." She continued by recognizing that the administration cannot see everything, nor can they address what they do not know, thus stressing the vital importance that if stakeholders "see something," they need to let the administrative team know.

Respondent 2 emphasized the importance of receiving constructive feedback from stakeholders, stating, "Good, bad, ugly, whatever it may be, we would like to hear about it." Respondents 3, 7, and 10 also encourage and welcome feedback and input by maintaining an open-door policy where people are welcome at any time. Respondent 10 vocalized that in addition to an open-door policy where people physically come into his office, he also welcomes feedback via email and phone calls ensuring that there are not any barriers for stakeholders.

Respondent 6 also has an open-door policy, and through her description, a deeper understanding of how she welcomes feedback and input is gained, stating,

> I listen to the teacher. I let [the person] know that I am happy that they're sharing their opinions, and I am happy that they have a heart for that and a passion for that. I never dismiss my teachers.

An additional strategy that Respondent 1 implements to ensure that people feel safe and comfortable providing feedback and input is to create an environment where all voices are heard. She described an employee who, during staff meetings, was so vocal in sharing her concerns that she inadvertently shut down any other staff members from sharing their input and feedback. To address this issue, Respondent 1 made two key adaptations. First, she sends the staff meeting agenda two days prior to the meeting. Second, she checks in with the vocal teacher prior to the meeting and asks questions such as, "Did you see the agenda? Do you foresee any concerns arising?" (Respondent 1). The result of her preemptive actions is that the teacher is able to voice her concerns prior to the meeting, freeing up space for other staff members to vocalize their feedback and input. Respondent 1 noted, "Being able to settle [the vocal teacher] down allowed other

people to have a voice in the room… and more people started coming to admin with different things."

Create Various Teams

Creating various teams to nurture shared leadership had a total frequency count of 12, with an overall frequency of 17.14%, and was identified by 80% of the respondents. In most cases, respondents referred to utilizing teams as a way to give the work back to the people. Further, they recognized that creating teams is not merely enough to nurture shared leadership; rather, true sharing comes with ownership and voice.

Respondent 3 captures the importance of ownership and voice in his work with one of his many teams, the Guiding Coalition, which consists of department chairs and the administrative team. The work done by the Guiding Coalition is one based on collaboration where all voices are heard. Respondent 3 sees the impact of providing all members with shared ownership when he observes Collaborative Teacher Team (CTT) meetings, which are department team meetings. During observations, Respondent 3 notes that he is not hearing members of Guiding Coalition, stating, "In Guiding Coalition, they told us that we have to do 'blank' with you." Instead, he reports that they are leading their teams from the perspective of ownership as evidenced by statements such as, "[Guiding Coalition] has talked about this, now we're talking about this with you.' And then I see them working together [because] it’s not something that is being forced down them" (Respondent 3).

Respondent 5 mentioned numerous teams on campus, each having a specific purpose. For example, she identified Collaborative Learning Time (CLT) with grade-level teams, an Academic Team, an Instructional Leadership Team, and a Positive

Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Team. Each team serves a unique purpose, yet each has a team lead that creates agendas and content for meetings as well as facilitates learning for the staff in that given area. When speaking of the PBIS team, Respondent 5 stated, "PBIS is pretty much teacher-run." Further, she captures the ownership of the team in that when the site is working on site goals:

> The teachers are creating those goals. [Administration] is part of the conversation, but they're using the data that they've collected throughout the year; they're creating goals for their team based on what they're seeing and what they think would help get to the next step. (Respondent 5)

Respondents who welcome feedback and input, 90% of respondents from this study, find a way to nurture shared leadership by inviting people to join or start teams in areas of interest. Respondent 1 captures her method of building teams with the right people by securing "the people that [are] actually interested instead of the ones that [feel] like they need to volunteer because nobody else was going to." Respondent 6 also invites people to join teams based on their interests and passions because "those are the people who really want to see the benefit of [the work]." Further, she states, "There are so many ways to [build upon] someone's passion, so don't overlook it, but look at ways to move them, because it is our job to make great leaders" (Respondent 6).

Numerous respondents mentioned that they have PLCs at their sites. Research indicates that PLCs are effective when principals not only build context for the work but also distribute leadership opportunities to teachers (Harris, 2011). Respondent 9 shared that she is moving away from staff meetings in favor of designating that time for teachers to meet in their PLC teams to collaborate and work towards common goals.

Respondent 10 also referred to PLCs as one of many teams on his campus, but instead of identifying all the teams on campus, he focused on how the administrative team empowers teams. For example, he shared that he provides opportunities to teams, where appropriate, to make decisions, recognizing that they are the members of the team who are leading the work and often more knowledgeable about the given topic. He finds that this approach is successful because "people tend to listen to their peers and teammates" (Respondent 10).

Build a Culture of Collaboration

Building a culture of collaboration to nurture shared leadership had a total frequency count of 11, with an overall frequency of 15.71%, and was identified by 80% of the respondents. One method of building shared leadership opportunities is to facilitate the process of collective problem-solving. A leader's role in this process is to foster a culture built on collaboration, relationships, ownership, and innovation (Bagwell, 2020). The presence of trust, flexibility, and freedom for staff encourages expertise to flourish authentically (Kuntz et al., 2017), further generating ideas from collective problem-solving that are often far more diverse than those created by a single person, which leads to a stronger outcome (Brown et al., 2020; Harris & Spillane, 2008).

Respondent 1 captures a prime example of the power of collaboration and the outcome of collective problem-solving in her description of the work the attendance team did last year. The full-court press of the attendance team, comprised of administrators, counselors, and office staff, had an overwhelming impact on increasing student attendance, but the impact of the team's work was magnified when collaboration was

welcomed and extended to other interested stakeholders. Participate 1 described the outcome of teacher collaboration:

> Teachers [asked], 'What are we [going] do for spring break? Are we [going] to do anything over spring break?' And I was like, 'Do you [want] work over spring break?' And they did. I had six teachers volunteer to work over spring break, and we had 113 recovered [attendance] days.

Respondents 8 and 10 speak to a similar situation surrounding the lunch schedule. While Respondent 8 had two lunch periods built into the schedule, Respondent 10 had one lunch period for the whole middle school. The question on the table for Respondent 8 was if it was in the best interest of the students to transition to one lunch period, whereas the long-standing question for Respondent 10 was if it was best to split the lunch period into two periods. Although they potentially had different outcomes, both participants recognized the advantages of collaborating with their staff. Both collaborated with the staff to identify the advantages and disadvantages of changing the lunch schedule, considering topics such as clubs, access to facilities, behaviors during lunch, and garbage. At the end of the collaborative process, after all voices were heard, each staff member decided to make the change. Given that people felt heard and part of the process, the change was accepted without pushback and resistance.

Respondent 2 also spoke about the value and importance of collaboration and providing time for it to happen. She also described that the administrative team sets loose and tight expectations for teams during collaboration. Tight expectations clearly state and identify what the team must do, whereas loose expectations provide the team flexibility and freedom to make decisions. Further, she stated, "We get a long way with looking at

data rather than just saying, I hope that when you're collaborating, some of you are doing this and some of you are doing that" (Respondent 2). Communicating loose and tight expectations helps to ensure that teams have a clear direction. An example of the positive outcome of this approach is the success of the content covered during designated flex periods offered twice a week. Within their departments, "Teachers decide each week what they want to host. If there are five people on [a] team, hopefully, two are hosting an academic tutorial where kids can come in and decide to review if they need to review, retake, or reassess" (Respondent 2). The other three would then determine enrichment tutorials that they want to teach. This collaboration is done weekly, so the work is fluid.

Provide Opportunities That Empower People

Proving opportunities that empower people to participate in shared leadership had a total frequency count of 16, with an overall frequency of 22.86%. Seventy percent of the respondents identified the importance of providing opportunities that empower people in leadership roles, which aligns with research conducted by Heifetz et al. (2009). Heifetz et al. (2009) found that to truly grow leadership capacity within organizations, people need leadership opportunities where they gain experience that affirms their potential.

Respondents 5 and 6 encourage staff to come forth with everyday issues but also involve them in being a part of the solutions. Respondent 5 spoke about her approach to working with someone who brings an issue forward, stating a typical response: "If that’s something you want to do, show me what that would look like. We can take [the idea] to the team, we'll get feedback, and we’ll make some adjustments." Not only does this approach increase people's sense of commitment to the organization, but it also supports

people through the decision-making process, helping them recognize their leadership potential.

Respondent 9 recognizes that her staff "want to have leadership opportunities and want to take leadership roles." As a result, Respondent 9 has "made a conscious effort to step back" and allow her staff to assume some of those leadership roles. While Respondent 9 engages her staff in collaborative conversations, especially surrounding student data, she also provides opportunities for her staff to grapple with the data, empowering them to derive solutions. She spoke specifically about the eighth-grade math teacher who is the only eighth-grade math teacher, stating, "That is his data, so he [needs] to own it" (Respondent 9). Further, Respondent 9 communicates to him, "You analyze [the data] and figure out how to make it better." While she provides opportunities to empower teachers in decision-making, she also makes herself available as a thought partner, ensuring that they have the necessary support.

Respondent 4 speaks to the impact of providing opportunities that empower people, emphasizing, "There's a lot of shared ownership… and everyone seems fulfilled and challenged. I feel like that's why we work well together." He is such a strong proponent of shared leadership that he said, "There are times when you could come on my site, and depending on the day and who's leading what, you wouldn't be able to tell who the principal is right away." Leadership opportunities coupled with trust and support result in individuals who are invested, fulfilled, and confident in their potential.

Involve People in Making Decisions

Involving people in making decisions had a total frequency count of 10, with an overall frequency of 14.29%, and was identified by 70% of the respondents. There are

numerous benefits to an organization when people are involved in decision-making. Bickmore (2015) noted that the inclusion of staff in leadership opportunities helps them feel more involved, connected, and committed to the organization. Further, Senge et al. (2019) identified that when organizations make problem-solving the norm, they encourage people to own issues that surface in the organization and work together to address them. Respondent 5 acknowledged that she makes few unilateral decisions and when "given the opportunity, [the administrative team] wants to give people as much [opportunity] as they can."

One way Respondent 8 works to provide staff with opportunities that connect them to the organization is to involve people in decision-making where structural changes could occur. A major structural change that his organization tackled recently was the bell schedule. He captured his approach by stating:

> We were a seven-period day, with our ELA being a block period. As a whole staff, we came together and made the decision to move to a single period of ELA and go to a six-period day, increasing the instructional time to our other class periods. So, just involving all of them in those types of decisions- looking at what are the positives? What are the negatives? And then, as a team, making that commitment to change. (Respondent 8)

The decision-making process Respondent 7 utilizes with her staff emulates a fluid flow of communication. For example, she shared that when determining school-wide goals, the discussion starts with the administrative team and department heads. The department heads then take the information back to their teams, who have an opportunity to provide their voices. The respondent consolidated the feedback and presented the draft

goals at a staff meeting "where the whole staff was able to engage in discussion and weigh in regarding the final decision on school-wide goals" (Respondent 7).

Table 4 displays the data from Research Question 2.

Table 4

Themes Related to the ways Middle School Principals Nurture a Shared Responsibility Within the Organization

Theme	Respondents coded	Interview frequency	Frequency percentage
Welcome feedback and input	9	21	30%
Create various teams	8	12	17.14%
Build culture of collaboration	8	11	15.71%
Provide opportunities that empower people	7	16	22.86%
Involve people in making decisions	7	10	14.29%

Note. Total frequency = 70.

Research Question 3

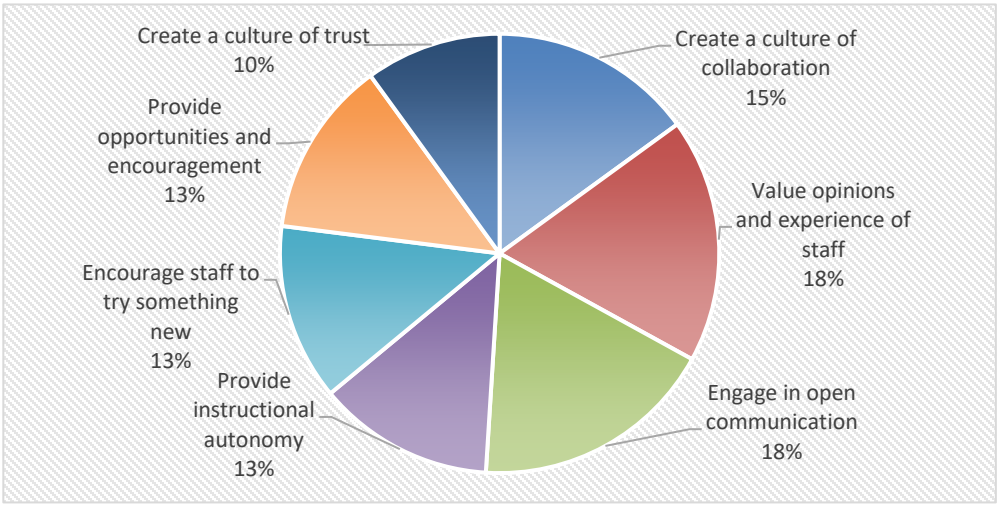
Research Question 3 was as follows: *How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through encouraging independent judgment?* The intention of Research Question 3 was to seek information enabling the researcher to identify and describe ways that middle school principals encourage independent judgment to build adaptive capacity. For purposes of this study, encouraging independent judgment is defined as a leader's capacity to provide an opportunity for team members to make choices based on personal and professional experience, regardless of the position held within the organization (Casavant et al., 1995; Heifetz et al., 2009; Shanbhag, 2002). Two interview questions were crafted to provide deeper insight into how middle school principals encourage independent judgment to build adaptive capacity. Each participant was asked both corresponding interview questions that aligned with the research

question. The data were grouped into seven major themes analyzed from 119 frequencies and organized by the number of respondents coded.

At the conclusion of inputting the data, the theme with 100% of respondents coded was creating a culture of collaboration. The response for creating a culture of collaboration had a frequency of 18, which accounted for 15.13% of the coded data. There were two themes with the highest frequency, including valuing opinions and staff experiences as well as engaging in open communication, which both had a frequency of 21 or 17.65% of the total data coded. Although these two themes account for the highest frequencies, only 90% of participants spoke to them. Proving instructional autonomy had a frequency count of 16 or 13.45% of the overall data. The fourth theme mentioned by 90% of the respondents, which had a frequency of 15 and accounted for 12.6% of the overall data, was encouraging staff to try something new. Providing opportunities and encouragement had a frequency count of 12, or 13.44% of the overall data. Finally, creating a culture of trust accounted for 10.08% of the overall data with a frequency of 12 (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

Frequency of Codes for Encouraging Independent Judgment



Two interview questions were asked of each respondent on how middle school principals encourage independent judgment within their organizations. The goal of the interview questions was to gain a deeper understanding of how middle school principals encourage independent judgment to build adaptive capacity.

Create a Culture of Collaboration

Creating a culture of collaboration had a total frequency count of 18, with an overall frequency of 15.13%, and was identified by 100% of the respondents. Heifetz et al. (2009) identify highly adaptive organizations as those that value the opinions of employees and build a culture where decision-making and idea-generating are encouraged. Every respondent in this study spoke to creating a culture of collaboration as a means of providing staff with a safe place to share their ideas and make decisions. Respondent 3 discussed opportunities for staff to collaborate, including weekly time in their collaborative teacher teams (CTT), and Respondent 8 mentioned weekly PLC time that is built into their schedules.

One of the many benefits of collaboration is the opportunity to engage in the sharing of ideas, brainstorming, and decision-making. Respondent 3 does not require that his staff is in lockstep with their lessons, but in the CCTs, he says:

> They work together. They give common formative assessments, and then amongst their teams, they look at that [data]. They say, okay, well, your kids did better on that common formative assessment than mine did, so what can we do to [help] my [students] do better as well?

Respondent 3's staff works together to ensure that all students are learning and that the content is accessible. Data is used as the foundation for collaborative discussions that focus on sharing effective strategies.

One way Respondent 8 captures independent judgment is by encouraging the work done in PLCs. He acknowledges that members of a PLC work as a team. They collaborate in planning and pacing and focus on "the same curriculum and sometimes the same lessons" (Respondent 8). While there is an effort to work together, "teachers do have the ability to be creative and try something new" (Respondent 8). In cases where teachers exhibit independent choice that steers away from the team, they always share the idea with their PLC. In some cases, "A few PLC members work together [to try something different]" (Respondent 8). After the lesson, members share their experiences and the outcome of the lesson. If it was "effective, then it may be something that the entire team decides, ‘Hey, we all want to do this'" (Respondent 8). Respondent 2 encourages her staff to take chances and try something new in the classroom because learning should be "fun for [teachers] and the kids." To support the staff, Respondent 2 offers opportunities to collaborate and goes so far as to provide them time to "go see another teacher at another school… so they can keep things fresh and exciting." In addition to encouraging staff to collaborate with educators both at the site and at other schools, the administrative team uses staff meetings as a platform to model new strategies in the hopes that teams will take them back and discuss how they can implement them into their classrooms.

Respondent 4 highlights how collaboration, where all participants have an equal voice, creates a culture built on ownership and trust. In planning professional

development (PD) for the year, he creates a skeletal schedule, and then the team dives into the planning together. He shared:

> I like working off the same Google Documents. We [plan] together, and we all get on [the Google Doc], and I'm like, 'Okay, I need you to do this. I'll do this. You do this.' We [all] work [on the document] at the same time, and we talk and ask questions as we go. If I don't do these things now, they'd probably be upset or feel like they're left out. (Respondent 4)

Value Opinions and Experience of Staff

Valuing opinions and experiences of staff had a total frequency count of 21, with an overall frequency of 17.65%. Ninety percent of the respondents vocalized that the staff are the true experts in their respective fields, and they all have strengths. To encourage independent judgment, most of the respondents identified that valuing staff opinions and their experience in the field was crucial. Respondent 9 tied this sentiment back to students, stating, "When we are looking at what's in the best interest of students, I defer to [the staff] as the experts."

Respondent 1 also recognizes that different departments have far more knowledge and expertise in their given fields than she does, so she encourages them to make informed decisions as experts. She shared a story of a math teacher who was working on his master's in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). He came to her and asked about the potential of changing the current STEM classes, to which Respondent 1 responded by granting him the freedom to make the decision. She encouraged him, stating, "I know that you know your department is really aligned with the pacing guide,

but if you feel like there's a unit that you can incorporate more STEM activities or project-based learning around math, do it" (Respondent 1).

Respondent 5 acknowledged the importance of valuing the opinions and experience of the staff from a morale perspective. She shared, "It's important to me to have people feel like they are doing what they need to do and feel validated in their work. Because every day getting up and going to work is a challenge in itself" (Respondent 5). Acknowledging the stress and demands of the job, Respondent 5 lets her staff know:

> If there's something that you're considering or something that you need in order to either make your condition better, more exciting, or more interesting, I want to know about that so that I can see if that's something that we can do.

Respondent 2 encourages her staff to make decisions based on their experience, urging them to trust their opinions. She described a situation this year when teachers were asked to select five students to participate in a designated program. Data was not available to aid the teachers in identifying the student who needed the program the most, and Respondent 2 noticed that this was causing several teachers a great deal of stress, which she addressed by assuring the teachers that they "know [their] kids best, and [they] have a great sense of the five who need the support without looking at any of the data." Further, she shared, "I just want them to feel like they can trust and go with their gut in most situations. It is nice to have data, but they're usually not wrong. They know that what they are talking about" (Respondent 2).

Engage in Open Communication

Engaging in open communication had a total frequency count of 21, with an overall frequency of 17.65%, and was identified by 90% of the respondents. Given the

fast-paced changes facing numerous industries in the world, including education, principals must exhibit the soft skill of effective, open communication (Helton, 2020). Further, when it comes to encouraging staff to grow in their capacity to make independent judgments, it is important to note that one must also be an effective listener and receiver of information. When one listens and engages in open communication, they find opportunities to encourage their staff to practice independent judgment.

Respondent 6 captured the importance of the soft skill of communication in stressing the value of knowing people and "providing them a space to share respectfully and listen." Respondent 9 also spoke to the importance of open communication, stating, "I just really try to have as much transparency as possible."

When working with her staff, Respondent 1 engages in and maintains a culture of open communication while balancing independence and support. She encourages her staff to use their judgment and is there to support them each step of the way. She captured her approach with her staff, stating:

> We're going to come back to the table and talk about [the independent judgment] frequently. So, if you do make your own judgment and choice, we're going to come back and see if it's working or not working, or did it make what we're doing better? Or did it cause a clog in the system? (Respondent 1)

Respondents 4 and 7 spoke to engaging in open communication on a more personal level. Both shared experiences regarding communication with staff that potentially could have left one or both parties feeling rejected. Respondent 7 spoke to situations where she supports and encourages staff to make independent judgments, even

when it results in hardship for her. This has been the case with staff who accept a job elsewhere that is closer to home or better for their family. She shared:

> I always tell them family's first, so if you need this for your family, please make that an opportunity for you to do that. And that's how I've lost quite a few staff members; they did things that were best for their families and what they needed to do. I appreciate it when they come and tell me, and I definitely want to make sure that I encourage them to do that because [family] is the most important. (Respondent 7)

Provide Instructional Autonomy

Proving instructional autonomy had a total frequency count of 16, with an overall frequency of 13.45%, and was identified by 90% of the respondents. To understand the importance of instructional autonomy in education, it is necessary to first understand what teaching is and is not. Knight (2019) proclaims that since teaching does not entail one-size-fits-all solutions or instruction, teachers must be afforded the ability to use discretion to adapt when necessary, as well as the freedom to learn through personal discovery. Research indicates that when people are granted autonomy, they are more motivated, feel that they have more control over their lives, and feel more competent in what they do (Knight, 2019). As 90% of the respondents recognized, to ensure that teachers are engaged and motivated, they must be given the opportunity to make significant choices, which highlights the importance of instructional autonomy.

Respondent 8 captured the importance of motivating teachers and providing them control over significant choices when he discussed how he encourages his staff to teach

to their strengths. Further, he recognizes the impact on classroom instruction when teachers have the freedom to show their competence. He shared:

> We're using the same curriculum; how it's delivered that's up to individual teachers making decisions about instruction. Each teacher has their strengths, and I encourage them to use those strengths. I've had teachers that have really good relationship-building skills with their students. I ask them to use their strengths and what's personal to them to move an initiative forward to improve instruction in their classroom. (Respondent 8)

Respondent 10 highlighted the balance of following district expectations with the designated curriculum and providing teachers the opportunity to learn through personal discovery. He recognizes the value veteran teachers bring to their classrooms and students and encourages them to continue teaching "amazing lessons that have worked for kids over time" (Respondent 10). Further, he supports all teachers in making instruction decisions because he recognizes that they have a strong pulse on the needs of their students. He finds that maintaining this balance has "totally worked for student learning and student engagement" (Respondent 10).

Refraining from micromanaging what teachers do in their classrooms, Respondent 7 acknowledged that there are standards to follow but that her teachers "like to use their individuality of how best to deliver the lessons." In alignment with Respondent 7, Respondent 6 was adamant that instructional autonomy "should not be taken away." In addition to negatively impacting the PLC process, she articulated the need for autonomy, posing the hypothetical question, "If you take autonomy away, how do you differentiate within a team to determine who's [effectively teaching the lesson]?" (Respondent 6).

Stripping a teacher of instructional autonomy could have a negative impact on student learning because the team does not have the ability to learn from one another's strengths and expertise.

Encourage Staff to Try Something New

Encouraging staff to try something new had a total frequency count of 15, with an overall frequency of 12.6%, and was identified by 90% of the respondents. In organizations where continuous learning is valued, experimentation and risk-taking are encouraged (Veldsman et al., 2016). Organizations that want people to take risks must recognize and value that great learning occurs from mistakes and failures (Veldsman et al., 2016). Ninety percent of the respondents spoke specifically to both points that Veldsman et al. (2016) make. They both encourage trying something new and accepting that failure may occur. Further, they recognize that with failure comes growth.

Respondent 1 has worked to build a school climate where staff is encouraged and feels supported in taking risks and trying something new. To build trust and truly make this a part of the climate, Respondent 1 approaches attempts that fail or have a negative impact through the lens of learning. She has conversations with staff to analyze the decision-making process, stating, "Let’s look at that so next time you don't make a decision that is going to negatively impact what we’re doing" (Respondent 1).

Respondent 5 also vocalized her desire that her staff "try new things" because she wants "them to be able to talk about [what they are doing]" and learn from one another. Respondent 2 concurs with Respondent 5, and Respondent 2 went so far as to say that during evaluations, she encourages staff to be creative. She emphasizes,

> I would much rather see them try something really cool that they've never tried before and have it just crash and burn and be able to talk about it than I would to see something that was just a really standard traditional lesson. (Respondent 2)

Respondent 4 agreed with both Respondents 2 and 5 but elaborated on the importance of reflection to ensure that growth is the result of the failure. He shares with his staff, "I don't care if you mess up or [the lesson] is a train wreck. I just want to make sure that you know that it was a train wreck" (Respondent 4). Further, he assures staff that risk-taking is encouraged, stating,

> I don't care if [the lesson failed]. I love that you are trying something new. I am not judging you on that. I just want to make sure you understand when it's working and when it's not so you can grow [from the experience]. (Respondent 4)

Provide Opportunities and Encouragement

Providing opportunities and encouragement had a total frequency of 16, accounting for 13.44% of the total frequencies, and was identified by 80% of the respondents. Most of the respondents in the study perceived encouraging independent judgment as a means of supporting and providing staff with opportunities to grow. Respondent 4 spoke of the symbiotic relationship he has with his staff, stating, "We've built [a culture] together [where] there is freedom in decisions, and there's also me pushing them in areas where they're not strong. They also push me." He highlighted the opportunities for growth and the fact that he encourages and supports the staff, as they do with him.

Like Respondent 4, Respondent 3 provides his staff with opportunities to exhibit independent judgment by identifying individual areas of growth and selecting

professional pathways to support that growth. Staff are able to capitalize on this opportunity when they are "allowed to choose their own professional pathway from a smorgasbord of different PDs" (Respondent 4). The option to self-select from multiple options provides staff the opportunity to gain relevant "knowledge on [a] subject they [feel] that they need more guidance" (Respondent 4).

On a more personal level, Respondent 5 acknowledged ways in which she supports and encourages individuals by providing them with opportunities that contribute to their growth. For example, a teacher shared that she was on the fence about pursuing an administration position, so Respondent 5 provided opportunities for the teacher to work alongside her when appropriate. In addition to providing opportunities for people to grow, Respondent 5 also works behind the scenes to "connect [individuals] to all the people that [they] need in order to [move to a different position]."

Respondent 6 recognizes that all staff bring positive attributes to the table, so it is important to "take advantage of what someone brings." To ensure that opportunities are not missed, she oftentimes seeks out staff, recognizing that many of them "don't even realize their potential, [so I] put them in situations that help them to see it so that they can grow" (Respondent 6). She finds that, in many cases, people struggle to see themselves beyond their assigned role, so she provides opportunities and encouragement to help them see that they are "so much more than that. You [can] push anybody to [fulfill] their potential and when they feel like you believe in them, they meet you there" (Respondent 6).

Create a Culture of Trust

Creating a culture of trust had a total frequency count of 12, with an overall frequency of 10.08%, and was identified by 70% of the respondents. Trust is vital to the success of an organization, and leaders create an environment where people feel comfortable enough to trust each other (Fairholm & Fairholm, 2000). Seven of the 10 participants of this study acknowledged the importance of creating a culture of trust to ensure that people feel safe in voicing their opinions and sharing their ideas.

One way that Respondent 2 fosters a culture built on trust is that she genuinely trusts her teachers and values their knowledge. She finds herself encouraging teachers and pushing back against their self-doubts, stressing her desire for them to "feel like they can just trust [themselves]" (Respondent 2). She finds that when she has trust in them, it boosts their confidence and strengthens their trust.

Like Respondent 2, Respondent 4 spoke about staff who are great at their jobs but also have a sense of humility and need a safe space to talk through situations. He works hard to create a culture where people trust themselves with important decisions but also provides space to support people in those big decisions. Speaking of one employee, he said, "She is great, but there are times when she questions herself. I encourage her to trust herself" (Respondent 4). Further, Respondent 4 was quick to share that he makes himself available to "bounce ideas off of" and assures the individual that he "trusts what she decides." He said that he constantly encourages staff to make decisions but ensures that they understand that they are never alone.

Respondent 6 builds trust with her staff while encouraging independent judgment by being honest and listening. She feels strongly about treating people as the

professionals they are and has high expectations of her staff. To support her staff in meeting the expectations, Respondent 6 makes herself available to "hear [them] out" and welcomes them "to come into my office when they need to." Staff can count on Respondent 6 for her honesty. She listens to people, but "if [she] doesn't really believe it is a direction that they should be going in, [she] just says it" (Respondent 6).

Table 5 presents the data from Research Question 3.

Table 5

Themes Related to the Ways Middle School Principals Encourage Independent Judgment to Build Adaptive Capacity

Theme	Respondents coded	Interview frequency	Frequency percentage
Create a culture of collaboration	10	18	15.13%
Value opinions and experience of staff	9	21	17.65%
Engage in open communication	9	21	17.65%
Provide instructional autonomy	9	16	13.45%
Encourage staff to try something new	9	15	12.60%
Provide opportunities and encouragement	8	16	13.44%
Create a culture of trust	7	12	10.08%

Note. Total frequency = 119.

Research Question 4

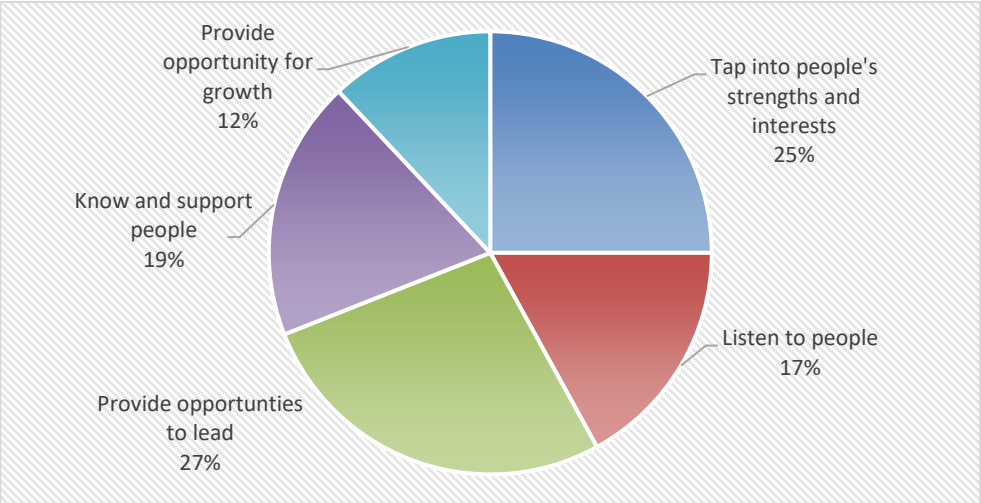
Research Question 4 was: *How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through developing leadership capacity?* The question was designed to identify and describe how middle school principals develop leadership capacity within their organizations to build adaptive capacity. For purposes of the study, developing leadership capacity is defined as the systemic focus on expanding competencies and resources and intentionally motivating groups or individuals to

increase leadership potential proactively (Eade, 1997; Eade, 2007; Elmore, 2003; Eyben et al., 2006; Harris, 2011; Heifetz et al., 2009; Sharratt & Fullan, 2009). Each middle school principal was asked each of the two corresponding interview questions that aligned with the research question. The data were grouped into five major themes from 89 frequencies.

At the conclusion of inputting the data, the data regarding developing leadership capacity was organized by the total number of respondents as opposed to the interview frequency. Tapping into people's strengths and interests was the theme identified by the most respondents, 90% of the total. The total frequency was 22, accounting for 24.73% of the overall data. The second theme, also identified by 90% of the respondents, was listening to people, which had a frequency of 15, totaling 16.85% of the data. The theme with the highest frequency, providing opportunities to lead, appeared 24 times, accounting for 26.97% of the overall data, yet it was only mentioned by 80% of the respondents. Also, 80% of the respondents is knowing and supporting people with a frequency of 17, which was 19.1% of the overall data. Finally, providing opportunities for growth had a frequency of 11, accounting for 12.36% of the overall data, and was identified by 80% of the respondents (see Figure 8).

Figure 8

Frequency of Codes for Developing Leadership Capacity



Each respondent was asked two interview questions regarding strategies of developing leadership capacity within their organizations. The goal of the interview questions was to gain a deeper understanding of ways in which middle school principals develop leadership capacity within their organizations.

Tap Into People's Strengths and Interests

Tapping into people's strengths and interests had a total frequency count of 22, with an overall frequency of 24.72%, and was identified by 90% of the respondents. Educational leaders should support and motivate people to pursue opportunities for growth in areas of individual interests and abilities (Kiral, 2020). Simply stated, leaders need to help people grow and realize their full potential, given their individual strengths (Crowley, 2011). Ninety percent of the respondents referred to tapping into people's strengths and interests to build leadership capacity.

A common misconception of leadership on a school site is that it just involves administrators. Respondent 10 acknowledged the many facets of leadership, including

smaller leadership roles such as leaders of clubs or committees. He had a group of teachers who were passionate about Spanish Heritage Month and wanted to take the lead in organizing school-wide activities to celebrate. Recognizing their passion and interest in the subject, Respondent 10 welcomed and supported their willingness to "step outside of their [comfort zone] and take on a leadership role." In addition to supporting people in smaller leadership roles, he has supported numerous people in developing and building their leadership capacity. In some cases, he is the one to tap staff on the should, sharing with them, "You would be a natural person to move into administration. You've got leadership skills. You connect with families, kids, and the staff. You're a natural at this" (Respondent 10). In other cases, staff come to him voicing their interest in administration, and he works to support them by providing opportunities to learn the role of an administrator.

Respondent 1 also works to build leadership capacity by tapping into people's interests. She stated that when people come to her with ideas, her typical response is, "It sounds like you are interested in this [topic]. Is this something you would like to lead a team around or be part of" (Respondent 1)? She spends the time learning about what her staff is passionate about because she recognizes, "If they’re passionate about it, they grow in it" (Respondent 1).

Respondent 2 also invests time in learning about her staff and their interests and strengths. In working to acknowledge "people's areas of passion," Respondent 2 likes to provide opportunities for people to build their leadership capacity by sharing their passions. For example, Respondent 2 spoke of a teacher who is "super into AI [artificial

intelligence]." To capitalize on her interest, Respondent 2 provides opportunities for her to "share that enthusiasm and knowledge with people" during staff meetings.

Listen to People

Listening to people had a total frequency count of 15, accounting for 16.85% of the overall frequency, and 90% of the respondents spoke about the importance of listening to their people. Effective leaders encourage staff to interact and collectively partake in the organization. To do this successfully, leaders must listen and welcome all voices (Northouse, 2022). Listening encompasses hearing what people say verbally and non-verbally, as well as embracing information that might be difficult to hear. For respondents in this study, truly listening to their people was a top priority, as evidenced by 9 of 10 people speaking on the topic. Further, several referred to listening to their staff and supporting them, even in times that pose challenges for the leader and school.

Many principals realize that one aspect of their job is building the leadership capacity of their assistant principals, enabling them to eventually lead their own school. However, with that knowledge, they also realize that when staff move on, it creates a vacancy that needs to be filled, which is often a challenge. Despite the hardship and inconvenience for the site administrator, Respondents 9 and 10 spoke to helping their staff grow. While Respondent 9 spoke of the staff in general, Respondent 10 focused on his assistant principals. Respondent 9 asks staff questions such as, "Where do you want to be in five years? Where do you see yourself going? How do you get there? What are your goals?" In listening to their responses, a conversation ensues, working to determine how she can best support them in reaching their goals.

Respondent 10 also asks questions such as, "Is this where you want to stay? Do you want to be a principal?" Once he "gets a read" on their goals, he can work more efficiently to support them in building their capacity by "building in time and opportunities" (Respondent 10). Respondent 10 dedicates time to "mentor" people who "want to become a principal or move on."

Respondent 3 spends time coaching staff. In addition to "offering professional development for various interests of employees" (Respondent 3) he makes a point to listen to staff requests. He stated,

> If they come to me and say, 'Hey, I saw this PD that I'd like to go to,' I make sure to get that out to the district office and see if they are able to go to that sort of thing. (Respondent 3)

In advocating for their personal growth, he is also working to build their leadership capacity.

Provide Opportunities to Lead

Providing opportunities to lead had a total frequency count of 24, with an overall frequency of 26.97%, and was identified by 80% of the respondents. Empowering people to lead provides them an opportunity to assume responsibility for an aspect of the organization (Heifetz & Laurie, 2001). Further, when ideas are welcome, people feel more motivated to do their best and are willing to take on leadership roles.

Providing opportunities for individuals to lead is something that Respondent 2 does by naturally tapping into people's interests. One example of this is with a teacher who is knowledgeable and passionate about diversity and equity. To build the teacher's leadership capacity, Respondent 2 "plays to [the teacher's] strengths and area of

expertise" by providing opportunities to lead in the selection and purchase of "new books for our library."

Respondent 7 provides department leaders opportunities to lead and has recently afforded them more leadership opportunities in:

> Asking [them] to have more oversight of the people within their departments. They work with the secretary to set up times that they are going to be working together, or they're working with the secretary to address specific needs. They're now responsible for overseeing their department to make sure that it's running like it should be, giving them that leadership role.

Respondent 8 also empowers staff by providing opportunities to lead. He has established leadership teams "just for about every major function of our school or program that we've put in place." In providing people countless opportunities to lead, whether "teachers are asked to take the lead" (Respondent 8) or they volunteer, his organization has "build trust with [the staff]" (Respondent 8). Further, he recognizes, "We get a lot more teacher buy-in when I have my staff taking the lead" (Respondent 8).

Know and Support People

Knowing and supporting people had a total frequency count of 17, accounting for 19.1% of the overall frequencies, and 80% of the respondents spoke about the value of knowing and supporting their people. Getting to know people often involves asking questions to determine what motivates and inspires them. To motivate and truly support people, leaders must make personal connections with them. As Crowley (2011) captures, "People understand that we give time to things that are important to us. And when people

sense they matter and feel valued, they instinctively become more engaged and more productive" (p. 80).

Eighty percent of the respondents recognized the importance and value of knowing and supporting their people, even in situations that result in people moving on and leaving the organization. Respondent 4 speaks to this, stating, "Even if it hurts, if that's what you want and what's best for you, I'm going to support you, even if it's an inconvenience for me."

Respondent 5 captured Crowley's (2011) sentiments stating:

> I think knowing your people is the most important because if you don't know [them], you run the risk of assuming, and you don't really know how to support them when they need it. I think we all need support, and I think a lot of times, we don't really know how or what that support can look like or what it should look like. We just know we need help, so if you know them, that can narrow your options down a little bit.

Respondent 1 makes a point of getting to know her staff and works to identify their potential and strengths. She shared an example of a teacher who transferred to her school from another school within the district. In getting to know the teacher, she learned that not only was the teacher the PBIS lead at her previous site but also involved in eight other committees, yet she was not involved in anything at the new site. Respondent 1 discovered that the teacher was not "quite sure where she fits in," so she took the time to learn what she was passionate about. She shared with the teacher, "I see nothing but leadership capabilities here" (Respondent 1). As a result of the conversation, the teacher joined the attendance committee, which captured an area of interest for her.

To develop and increase leadership capacity within her organization, Respondent 2 also works to identify people's strengths. Over her tenure as a principal at her current site, she has had four different assistant principals, to which she said, "Every one of them had a different strength" (Respondent 2). Adapting to different strengths, she said, is a matter of "figuring out how to balance our different strengths with each other and model that for our teams" (Respondent 2). In addition to building leadership capacity within her administrative team, she looks for teachers with leadership skills and works to involve them in the leadership team.

Provide Opportunities for Growth

Proving opportunities for growth had a total frequency count of 11, representing 12.36% of the overall frequencies, and was identified by 80% of the respondents. One objective for people who lead others is to make developing the skills and interests of the people in the organization a priority (Crowley, 2011). Not all employees aspire to be promoted to leadership positions, but opportunities for growth still exist. Everyone has strengths and areas for growth, and leaders are responsible for providing individuals with opportunities that increase their enjoyment and boost their commitment to their role (Crowley, 2011).

Respondent 1 recognizes the value of providing opportunities for employees to grow, stating the importance of "creating an environment where [staff feel] like they get enough experience and growth." Often, the growth results in staff "moving on," but as Respondent 1 proudly shared, "everybody that moved on moved into a role that they were passionate about, and they excelled" (Respondent 1).

Respondent 10 extends opportunities for staff to grow by inviting individuals to "step up in front of the whole staff and present. To me, that would be another example of trying to build leadership capacity on site." Further, to support individual growth, Respondent 10 works "to build [people up]," ensuring that they recognize that "they're part of the team [where] everybody is valued."

Respondent 4 spoke of a situation where he was able to support a teacher's growth. A 25-year veteran science teacher applied for a Fulbright Scholarship, and to support her through the process, Respondent 4 "kept encouraging her and wrote up a [recommendation] for her." In addition, during a meeting with the district, he committed to "finding a semester substitute if she were to get [the scholarship]." The teacher, Respondent 4, stated, "ended up getting a Fulbright Scholarship, and we've been celebrating her throughout the district. She's going to be leaving in a few months for Finland." Providing her the opportunity to study in Finland will not only contribute to her personal growth but will also build her leadership capacity when she returns and guides staff through "sustainable practices that the school can embrace."

Speaking to growth opportunities for her administrative team, Respondent 7 provides her vice principals with "ways to increase their leadership." Recognizing that vice principals spend a great deal of their time addressing discipline, Respondent 7 tries to "equal out different opportunities for them to understand the roles of different leadership because that is important." She also acknowledges that teachers who get into administration struggle to see "the overall picture of a school site" (Respondent 7). To broaden their understanding and build the skills required to lead a school, Respondent 7

recognizes that "developing those things to where they see the whole picture is a benefit to everyone."

Table 6 displays the data from Research Question 4.

Table 6

Themes Related to the Ways Middle School Principals Develop Leadership Capacity

Theme	Respondents coded	Interview frequency	Frequency percentage
Tap into people's strengths and interests	9	22	24.72%
Listen to people	9	15	16.85%
Provide opportunities to lead	8	24	26.97%
Know and support people	8	17	19.1%
Provide opportunities for growth	8	11	12.36%

Note. Total frequency = 89.

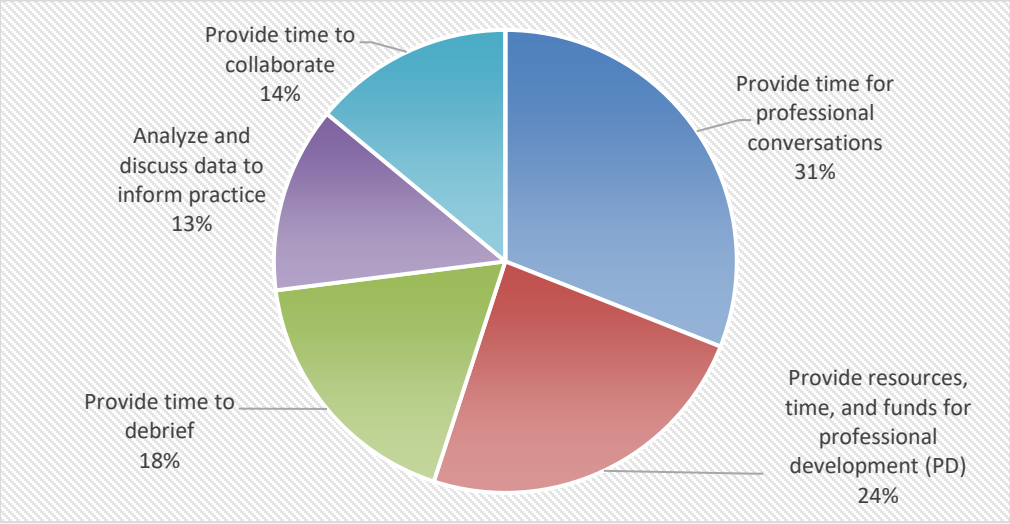
Research Question 5

Research Question 5 was: *How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning?* The aim of the question was to identify and describe how middle school principals institutionalize reflection and continuous learning to build adaptive capacity. For purposes of this study, institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning is defined as providing a culture conducive to the safe exploration of new ideas and sharing of lessons learned both from an individual and organizational perspective and creating a sustainable learning culture driven by a willingness to overcome engrained mental models across all levels of the organization (Cojocar, 2008; Pearson & Smith, 1986; Ramalingam et al., 2020; Senge et al., 2019; Vera & Crossan, 2004; Veldsman et al., 2016). Two interview questions were written to provide deeper insight into

institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning. Each middle school principal was asked corresponding interview questions that aligned with the research question. The data were grouped into five major themes analyzed from 78 frequencies (see Figure 9).

Figure 9

Frequency of Codes for Institutionalizing Reflection and Continuous Learning



At the conclusion of inputting data, the highest frequency that contributed to building adaptive capacity through institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning was providing time for professional conversations. The response for providing time for professional conversations had a total frequency of 24, accounting for 30.77% of the overall data. The second highest frequency was providing resources, time, and funds for PD, which had a total frequency of 19 and was 24.36% of the overall frequency count. Providing time to debrief had the third highest frequency, with a frequency count of 14, which accounted for 17.95% of the overall frequency. Analyzing and discussing data to inform practice had a frequency of 10, accounting for 12.82%, which had a lower frequency than providing time to collaborate. Analyzing and discussing data was positioned higher than providing time to collaborate due to the higher respondent rate of

analyzing and discussing data. Finally, providing time to collaborate had a frequency of 11, accounting for 14.1% of the overall data.

Provide Time for Professional Conversations

Providing time for professional conversations had a total frequency of 24, representing 30.77% of the overall frequency, and was identified by 100% of the respondents. For the purposes of this study, professional conversations are defined as "a space for professional learning where professionals listen carefully and can invoke reflection and think about practice" (O'Keeffe et al., 2021, p. 266). Further, O'Keeffe et al. (2021) noted that intentional planning of opportunities must be designed to enable professional conversations to take place where participants share, discuss, and reflect on practice. Senge et al. (2019) state that providing space and time for individuals to reflect is critical to building a culture of trust and fostering continuous learning. In addition, Helton (2020) identified an essential element of effective communication, which is welcoming others in the organization to reflect on successes, failures, and ideas.

Respondent 2 recognizes the value of providing time and space for professional conversations to institutionalize reflection and continuous learning. To rebuild staff collegiality and a sense of community on campus, Respondent 2 has "purposely added in a lot more discussion time and a lot more exploration time into staff meetings."

Respondent 3 feels that professional learning plans and professional pathways help create natural environments for professional conversations to take place. He revealed:

> Some [staff] get together in their CTTs and say, 'We're all going to do this. We're all going to focus on this one effective instructional practice from Marzano, and

here's how we're going to do it. We're all going to attend the same professional pathway together, and then we can talk about it as we go through the year'.(Respondent 3)

To foster a culture where professional conversations are the norm, Respondent 4 provides staff members time at staff meetings to share what they are learning. He highlighted an example of the work that a science teacher is doing as a result of the training she received. He said:

> I give her at least 15 minutes every other staff meeting to do an activity with the staff. When we talk about continuous learning, if people want to do these things, they see four or five leaders on our staff with our teaching staff who are doing these things. Reinventing themselves, changing how they do things. I think that ripple effect on staff is really infectious. (Respondent 4)

Respondent 9 stresses the importance of a growth mindset with her staff, steering them away from becoming stagnant. With a growth mindset perspective, she encourages her staff to strive for continuous improvement. In addition to PD, Respondent 9 believes that professional conversations set the stage for growth. She provides time for staff to engage in conversations that aim to find ways to "make instruction and learning better," stating that "[these ways] will be better for you. They will be better for your kids" (Respondent 9). In addition to providing time during staff meetings, she was "really looking at times where I could work the schedule so that they would have more time to work and reflect and see how we could do things better in our classrooms" (Respondent 9).

Provide Resources, Time, and Funds for Professional Development

Providing resources, time, and funds for PD had a total frequency of 19, which represented 24.36% of the overall data and was identified by 90% of the respondents. Research shows that when there is a focus on continuous improvement from leadership, organizations experience success (Kiral, 2020). Nine of the 10 respondents spoke of multiple levels and opportunities for staff to participate in continuous learning.

Respondent 3 spoke about the professional development that is provided by the district. Resources, time, and funds are allocated by the district for district-wide PD. Before the school year started, Respondent 3's district provided PD on "PLCs because the district is really hammering it hard."

Respondents 1, 5, 8, and 9 all spoke about allocating resources, time, and funds to school-wide PD. While Respondent 1 finds PD offered by the county more accessible for her staff since "they offer to bring someone [to the school site]," Respondent 9 allocates funds and resources to "send staff to AVID conferences" and engages her staff in "book studies." Respondent 5 provides school-wide PD to staff based on overall school needs. She stated, "Last year was rough behavior [wise], so right now we're doing a lot of tier 2 behavioral trainings with staff about de-escalation and ways to interact with students to prevent further behavior issues" (Respondent 5). Respondent 8 recognizes the importance of providing time for continuous learning and is working to steer his staff meetings away "from the sit-and-get of information towards [participation in] instructional professional development during those meetings."

Respondent 4 spoke at length about providing resources, time, and funds for PD within departments. In speaking about the math department, he shared:

> Our entire math department is doing building teaching classrooms. They read and discussed the book and loved it. We paid a math guru to come in and work with the team. I supported the team's decision to move forward with *Building Thinking Classrooms [in Mathematics]* and got them the materials they needed, including whiteboards. I think I seriously spent $5,000 on whiteboards. I didn't know they were that expensive! They committed, and to watch what happened, literally on the first day when they [were] going over the syllabus and having kids go around and [engage in math] was just so impressive. (Respondent 4)

Respondents 1, 2, 6, and 9 all spoke about allocating resources, time, and funds to individuals interested in attending PD to enhance their continuous learning. Respondent 1 sends individuals to "AVID, CADA, and PBIS" training. Respondent 9 sends individuals to conferences and feels so passionate about individual learning that she said, "I've never said no to training. If I don't have the money in my budget, I go to the district. I write grants. If teachers want training, we figure out a way to make it happen."

Respondent 2 recognizes the importance of supporting PD and growth, stating, "I think [it] is probably the best thing that we can do for [staff]." She feels that self-selected PD provides staff with an opportunity to "keep [them] inspired and excited."

Respondent 6 prefers an individualized approach to PD, recognizing that everyone has different professional needs. She engages in conversations with staff members, and depending on their needs, she makes suggestions such as, "Here's a great conference or a great meeting you could go to. Why don't you go and visit this teacher and take the opportunity to learn from them" (Respondent 6). She stressed the importance of providing people with what they need when they need it.

Provide Time to Debrief

Providing time to debrief had a total frequency of 14, represented 17.95% of the overall frequency, and was identified by 80% of the respondents. To ensure that organizations and those in them continue to grow, leaders must continue to engage people in continuous learning and improvement, welcoming constructive feedback (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). Respondent 1 acknowledges the importance of providing time for people to debrief, stating, "We're making a clear, dedicated time for it."

Respondent 3 highlighted the emphasis his site places on debriefing by describing the process of individual staff reflection. Each year, staff members select a goal based on a designated pathway, and they reflect on their progress and growth after each pathway-specific PD session. To further increase accountability, Respondent 3 meets with individuals to discuss their goals. He reflects on this process sharing:

> They go back, and they say, 'This is what I learned during this pathway.' They share it with me. I looked through it, and we talked about it. We have conversations on it every trimester. There are steps in there. It says like, 'One, I don't know what's going on with this. Two, I'm emerging.' [The scale] goes up through five. And they pick where they are for the first trimester, and then they look back, at the end of that trimester, and say, 'Okay, well, where am I now? Have I grown?' So there's a growth element to it as well. (Respondent 3)

From a team perspective, Respondent 4 provides time for teams to debrief as a means of improvement and growth. He stated, "We like to rehash how we handled something. It's almost like there's pure enjoyment in it. Even when we make a huge

mistake, we will call it out, and we play it out. We do that with our staff too" (Respondent 4).

Like Respondent 4, Respondent 8 also values debriefing and is intentional in providing teams time to conduct post meetings. He shared an example from back-to-school night, stating:

> There were various parts to back-to-school night, including the principal's welcome, information provided in advance to parents, the content that was presented in the classroom, and even the fundraisers. Once we've gone through an event like that, we always have a post-meeting, and we talk about what worked, what didn't work, and what we need to do for the next time. (Respondent 8)

Analyze and Discuss Data to Inform Practice

Analyzing and discussing data to inform practice had a total frequency of 10, which represented 12.82% of the overall frequency and was identified by 80% of the respondents. Among the many evolutions in education is the expectation that school principals effectively analyze student achievement data and use it to guide improvements to instructional practice (Fowler, 2018). As school leaders embrace the expectation of being data-driven instructional leaders, they recognize the value of analyzing and discussing data with a group of educators. Many have created data teams composed of educators who analyze data and use it to inform instructional practice (Fowler, 2018). Eighty percent of the respondents emphasized the importance of analyzing and discussing data as a means of reflecting on and modifying instructional practice.

In planning topics for PD for the year, Respondent 1 relies on data. While she roughly lays out "the scope for the year," she intentionally "does not plan everything out

to the T. [She has a] general idea of what we're going do every month and then tweaks it along the way" (Respondent 1). Further, she provides an example of how this flexibility enables students to get the specific help they need with writing, stating:

> It's not about the writing. They're all doing writing in their classrooms, all the contents are, but now we need to go in-depth on evidence and elaboration because that's our weakest score on the PAW or whatever on our writing assessment. Something along those lines where we're really tweaking based on what the need is of the site at the moment. (Respondent 1)

Respondent 5 shared that her staff works "on cycles of inquiry," focusing on student data. Further, she said, "When we're looking at student data, we talk about reflection on their progress that we're seeing. We'll also look for trends in the data" (Respondent 5).

Respondent 6 commented on the importance of using data to drive continuous learning and reflection, stating, "I think some of our departments [have established trust] and are far more successful at looking at data and recognizing, this is what worked. Here's what we're going to do next to move forward." Other departments are still working to create a culture built on trust, and to those departments, she stresses,

> It's our duty to provide students with the highest levels of learning. That means that when we look at data and when a teacher's data looks different, we have to have those conversations and ask, 'What did you do to help your students succeed?' (Respondent 6)

Provide Time to Collaborate

Providing time to collaborate had a total frequency count of 11, with an overall frequency of 14.1%, and was identified by 70% of the respondents. People at all levels within an organization must be willing to engage in continuous learning and maintain an open mindset that there is always something new to learn (Heifetz et al., 2009; Simmons, 2022). While learning can occur outside of an organization, there is a wealth of information within organizations, and who better to learn from than people immersed in the organization.

Respondent 2 recognizes that time is a precious commodity, and without allocating time for staff to collaborate, there is a likelihood that it may not happen. Yet, the value of learning from one another is so significant that she is making an intentional effort to:

> Give them a lot more time in staff meetings to either like work on something or time to explore something. I feel like there were so many things coming at us a couple of years ago that [staff] never really got a chance to look at it. So [this year we are] purposely adding in a lot more discussion time and a lot more exploration time into our staff meetings themselves. (Respondent 2)

One of the many reasons Respondent 3 supports PLCs is the emphasis on collaboration, which he deems "the most important aspect" of continuous learning and reflection. In his opinion, the collaborative aspect of PLCs is:

> Where we're getting the most bang for our buck in having teachers [have time] to talk to each other and say, 'This is working for me. What's working for you?' Instead of just sitting in their own little silos and not getting any better.

Not only does Respondent 3 value time for his staff to collaborate, but the teachers in the district also hold collaboration in the same regard, as evidenced by the fact that "they've signed into the contract that they want that time for collaboration."

Respondent 7 spoke about the difficulty of getting his staff to participate in reflection conversations during COVID-19. With a few years of increased stability under their belt since the pandemic, he said,

> At this point, we're going back to having those opportunities to have reflective [conversations]. We look at things and see what they need to do. We look at our culture and ask, 'What can we do better for our students on campus?' (Respondent 7)

Table 7 displays the data for Research Question 5.

Table 7

Themes Related to the Ways Middle School Principals Institutionalizing Reflection and Continuous Learning

Theme	Respondents coded	Interview frequency	Frequency percentage
Provide time for professional conversations	10	24	27.91%
Provide resources, time, and funds for professional development (PD)	9	19	22.09%
Provide time to debrief	8	14	16.28%
Analyze and discuss data to inform practice	8	10	11.63%
Provide time to collaborate	7	11	12.79%

Note. Total frequency = 78.

Summary

Each of the five research questions for the study sought to investigate the five characteristics of building adaptive leadership capacity as identified by Heifetz et al. (2009), including making naming the elephant in the room the norm, nurturing a shared responsibility, encouraging independent judgment, developing leadership capacity, and institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning. Chapter IV presented the complete list of themes established by the respondents. In total, 422 frequencies were identified from five research questions. The frequencies were categorized into a total of 28 themes. Each major theme was presented and summarized. Appendix I contains all 28 themes in descending order as a percentage of the total frequency. The 10 interviews conducted for this study were transcribed, and the interview transcripts were coded. Of the 28 themes, the themes with a frequency greater than 17% are presented for further examination as major findings.

In summary, Chapter IV provided an overview of the purpose of the study, the research questions, the study methodology, the data collection process, the study population, and the sample. Chapter IV also captured the presentation of the data collected through semistructured, open-ended interview questions. The data instrumentation included 10 interview questions designed by the thematic peer research team. Participants who met the criteria of being exemplary middle school principals addressed the interview questions, which were crafted to identify how middle school principals build adaptive capacity within their organizations by implementing the five characteristics of adaptive leadership as identified by Heifetz et al. (2009).

In addition, Chapter IV presented the subsequent findings from the data as they relate to the research questions. Chapter IV captured the established themes found in the five research questions. The researcher narrowed the 28 themes presented to 12 significant key findings based on the themes representing more than 17% of the frequency per research question. Table 8 presents a summary of the major findings. Chapter V provides a summary of the major findings in the study, conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for further research.

Table 8

Summary of Key Findings

Key Finding	Respondents coded	Interview frequency	Frequency percentage
Characteristic 1: Making naming elephants in the room the norm			
Provide time and space to discuss	10	20	30.30%
Acknowledge issues with the whole group and/or individuals	8	14	21.21%
Characteristic 2: Nurturing a shared responsibility			
Welcome feedback and input	9	21	30%
Provide opportunities that empower people	7	16	22.86%
Create various teams	8	12	17.14%
Characteristic 3: Encourage independent judgement			
Value opinions and experience of staff	9	21	17.65%
Engage in open communication	9	21	17.65%

(continued)

Table 8

Summary of Key Findings

Characteristic 4: Develop leadership capacity			
Tap into people's strengths and interests	9	22	24.72%
Provide opportunities to lead	8	24	26.87%
Know and support people	8	17	19.1%
Characteristic 5: Institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning			
Provide time for professional conversations	10	24	27.91%
Provide resources, time, and funds for professional development (PD)	9	19	22.09%

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

This phenomenological study has described how exemplary middle school principals build adaptive capacity based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership identified by Heifetz et al. (2009) within their organizations. The study consisted of five research questions that aligned with the five characteristics of adaptive leadership (Heifetz et al., 2009). Chapter IV presented the data that was obtained from conducting semistructured, open-ended interviews as well as the analysis of the data collected. Ten exemplary middle school principals representing three different counties in California were identified as meeting the criteria. Chapter V captures a review of the purpose of the study, the research questions, the analysis of the 12 findings, the unexpected findings, the conclusions from the study, the implications for action, the recommendations for future research, and the concluding comments with reflections from the researcher.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this exploratory phenomenological study was to identify and describe the strategies used by middle school principals to build an adaptive capacity based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership identified by Heifetz et al. (2009).

Central Research Question

The central research question was: *What strategies do middle school principals use to build an organization's adaptive capacity based on Heifetz et al.'s (2009) five key characteristics (making naming elephants in the room the norm, nurturing a shared*

responsibility for the organization, encouraging independent judgment, developing leadership capacity, and institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning)?

Research Sub-Questions

Five research sub-questions were developed to help determine how middle school principals are addressing each of the adaptive leadership variables.

1. How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through making naming elephants in the room the norm?
2. How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization?
3. How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through encouraging independent judgment?
4. How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through developing leadership capacity?
5. How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning?

Research Methods and Data Collection Process

The study used a qualitative phenomenological research design. Tuckman and Harper (2012) state that qualitative research is appropriate when events must be studied in natural settings and involve a study of experiences as seen through the eyes of those living them. The qualitative phenomenological study captured the lived experiences of ten exemplary middle school principals who are building adaptive capacity within their organizations by making naming the elephants in the room the norm, nurturing shared responsibility, encouraging independent judgment, developing leadership capacity, and

institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning. The study was conducted using semistructured, open-ended interviews with exemplary middle school principals as the sole source of data collected in the study. Study criteria designed by the thematic team of peer researchers provided guidelines for selecting respondents from the target population. The researcher selected 10 exemplary middle school principals based on superintendent and district office personnel recommendations of participants who met four of six criteria, of which the number of years of experience was required:

- Evidence of successful relationships with stakeholders
- Evidence of breaking through conflict to achieve organizational success
- Five or more years of experience in that profession or field
- Written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings
- Recognized by their peers
- Membership in associations of groups focused on their field

Population and Sample

The population for this study was exemplary middle school principals in California. Given that in 2022, the CDE reported that there are 1,258 middle schools in the state, the logic follows that there is a minimum of 1,258 middle school principals. The research narrowed down the population by identifying a subset of the general population (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010) composed of middle school principals from three counties in northern California. The sampling frame included 80 middle school principals from Contra Costa County (44), Stanislaus County (23), and San Joaquin County (13). The peer researchers agreed to interview 10 participants for this phenomenological study,

from which the researcher selected four participants from Contra Costa County and three participants from both Stanislaus and San Joaquin Counties.

Key Findings

Five research questions were created based on the key characteristics of building adaptive capacity within an organization (Heifetz et al., 2009), and 10 semistructured, open-ended interview questions were designed to support the five research questions. Analysis of the data collected revealed 12 key findings that relate to Heifetz et al.'s adaptive leadership characteristics.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was: *How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through making naming elephants in the room the norm?* Two key findings that emerged from the analysis of data related to Research Question 1 included leaders build adaptive capacity by providing time and space for discussions as well as leaders build adaptive capacity by acknowledging issues with the whole group and/or individuals.

Leaders Build Adaptive Capacity by Providing Time and Space for Discussion

During the interviews, all 10 respondents addressed the value of providing time and space to discuss sensitive, underlying issues so that staff feel that their voices have been heard. Further, the respondents recognize that the alternative to addressing issues more than often results in them manifesting into larger problems. To reduce potential toxicity in their organizations, respondents show stakeholders that they value and welcome their opinions by making themselves available as well as modeling the desired behavior.

Respondent 4 speaks to providing time and space with his administrative team, stating,

> We challenge each other and play devil's advocate. Sometimes, there is no right answer, but we dig in with each other and support where there is a need. We have differences of opinion, but I don't shut people down. After I've heard [people] out and [they] have heard me, I make the decision, and we move forward together with no splintered actions because our staff has to see us as one. We are really good at that, and there is a lot of love there, but it doesn't mean that we don't fight like a family, too.

When leaders make addressing elephants in the room the norm, they provide people comfort, resulting in creating a strong sense of team (Toegel & Barsoux, 2019). Further, leaders who are willing to be vulnerable and discuss sensitive issues show people that it is acceptable to enter these conversations (Heifetz et al., 2009). In turn, they create a safe, inclusive culture where everyone has a voice. Participants of this study, as exemplified by Respondent 4, model the desired behavior and protect the voices of contrarians. The result of explicitly encouraging people to discuss and share their concerns while providing the time and space to do so is the creation of safe, inclusive cultures.

Leaders Build Adaptive Capacity by Acknowledging Issues With the Whole Group and/or Individuals

The consensus of 80% of the respondents was that if a sensitive issue surfaced with an individual, someone from the administrative team would address the issue directly with the individual. On the other hand, in situations where an issue permeates

across the staff, administrators address the issue and enter a tough conversation with the whole staff, regardless of whether the audience is one person or a larger group. Eight of the 10 respondents spoke of their commitment to acknowledging issues highlighting that the intention is to not only acknowledge the issue but work towards resolution and a mutual understanding.

Respondent 1 shared,

> I think it is best to have individual conversations when [underlying issues] come up and just be transparent. I can say things that are at face value without them coming off as rude. Also, I have found that asking the person questions is very helpful to start the conversation rather than going into [the conversation] with an agenda. If you ask a couple of specific questions, you can get a lot of information from that person that helps to guide the conversation from there.

Communication is the glue that holds a school together, and effective communication is critical when people are working together (Lavery & Coffey, 2021). In addition, it is important that people are confident that their leader's words are in alignment with their actions (Lavery & Coffey, 2021). One strategy respondents of this study utilize to ensure that their words match their actions is transparency with their staff. They shared that having open, honest conversations with people while being transparent helps to build trust and relationships as people engage in working through challenges.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was: *How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization?* The three key findings that derived from the analysis related to Research

Question 2 include leaders build adaptive capacity by welcoming feedback and input, leaders build adaptive capacity by providing opportunities that empower people, and leaders build adaptive capacity by creating various teams.

Leaders Build Adaptive Capacity by Welcoming Feedback and Input

To ensure that school environments are responsive to the needs of students, leaders must involve stakeholders, seeking their input and expertise when making decisions (Bickmore, 2015). Nine of the 10 respondents echoed this sentiment, sharing that they welcome feedback and input in decision-making. Further, several respondents shared that they make few unilateral decisions because they recognize that when people are involved in decision-making, there is a greater buy-in when implementing change.

Respondents also emphasized the importance of inclusivity with the staff when changing systems, noting that decisions are made by the collective group. Respondent 2 spoke specifically of changes made to the bell schedule, which impacted the whole staff. Together, the staff weighed the advantages and disadvantages of changing the English language arts block and made the commitment to change. Respondent 10 also shared a significant system change with the lunch schedule, and he, too, opted to give the staff a voice in the decision. While this was the third time revisiting the lunch schedule, the feedback and input from a handful of veteran staff was influential with the whole staff who collectively set their personal feelings aside when deciding that two separate lunches were in the best interest of the students.

Another method of welcoming feedback and input is to maintain an open-door policy. Respondents also make themselves available via email, text, and phone. Once

someone has taken the first step in reaching out, respondents acknowledged the importance of giving them their full attention. Respondent 3 commented,

> One of the biggest things I have found is [it is important] to stop what I'm doing and be present. If I am in the middle of something when they come in, I ask them, 'Can you give me 15 seconds to wrap something up, and I can give you my full attention?'

The ability to be present without distraction while actively listening to a person builds a culture of trust and safety, as it makes people feel valued and heard (White et al., 2016).

Leaders Build Adaptive Capacity by Providing Opportunities that Empower People

Heifetz et al. (2009) claim that to truly grow leadership capacity within an organization, people need leadership opportunities to gain experience that affirms their potential. Seventy percent of the respondents referred to the value of providing people with opportunities that empower them to realize their talents. One realization that veteran respondents shared was that people want opportunities to lead and take leadership roles. Further, in leaning into shared leadership, several respondents understood the need to step back and relinquish some of the control. Respondent 4 has embraced the shared leadership model to the extent that he noted that there are times when it is difficult to tell who the principal is right away.

Leadership opportunities coupled with support empower people by helping to boost their confidence. Shared leadership is not an opportunity for leaders to pawn off their responsibilities. Rather, as many respondents mentioned, it is an opportunity to provide an individual or group with the support and guidance needed to grow in their

leadership capacity. A strong example of empowering others was highlighted by Respondent 5, who spoke of her PBIS team. She stated,

> Our PBIS team is teacher-run. When we do our site goals that we submit to district personnel, our teachers are creating those goals. I am part of the conversation, [but] they [determine the] help [they need to] get them to that next step. (Respondent 5)

She supports the teachers and provides guidance when needed, and in relinquishing control, she empowers them to take ownership in areas that directly impact them.

Leaders Build Adaptive Capacity by Creating Various Teams

Leaders who build capacity within their organizations provide opportunities for individuals to join teams that share professional responsibility where all members engage in mutual support while challenging each other and holding one another accountable (Harris, 2011). Eighty percent of the respondents referred to utilizing teams as a strategy to give the work back to the people. They recognized that when people are afforded opportunities to take ownership and provided a voice, shared leadership is nurtured. In addition, they understand that when people feel they are a part of a valued team, they are more likely to engage in challenging work (Clark, 2020).

One strategy mentioned by respondents when forming teams is to find people who are passionate about the work. When people are interested in the work, they are far more invested. Respondents also referred to the importance of giving teams as much freedom as possible with decision-making. Respondent 2 highlighted the importance of establishing expectations during the initial team meetings and then letting the team

assume ownership of the work. Respondent 10 spoke about the powerful impact of peer leadership on the staff, noting that the staff listens to their peers and values their recommendations and guidance.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 was: *How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through encouraging independent judgment?* Two key findings emerged from the analysis of data related to Research Question 3, including leaders build adaptive capacity by valuing the opinions and experiences of staff and leaders build adaptive capacity by engaging in open conversations.

Leaders Build Adaptive Capacity by Valuing the Opinions and Experiences of Staff

Given the growing complexity and scope of responsibilities educational leaders face today, it is no longer a luxury to involve people in decision-making but a necessity. Nine of the 10 respondents of this study live this necessity, which is why they consciously work to empower their staff by valuing their opinions, knowledge, and expertise. To build adaptive capacity through encouraging independent judgment, respondents spoke of situations where they encouraged their staff to make decisions regarding areas such as instruction and student support. Respondents also referenced the importance of the ongoing support they provide staff, helping them gain confidence in decision-making and embrace their value as true experts in their fields.

In the realm of instruction, respondents acknowledged that district-adopted curriculum exists and teachers must use it. However, they also shared that there is flexibility in how the curriculum is delivered. In the scope where flexibility is available, the respondents give teachers the freedom to determine how they will deliver the

curriculum, recognizing that they are the experts and know what works best for their students. Respondent 9 captured the value of her staff, stating, "When we are looking at what is in the best interest of students, I defer to them as the experts."

Leaders Build Adaptive Capacity by Engaging in Open Conversations

Highly adaptive organizations, according to Heifetz et al. (2009), value the opinions of employees and build a culture where decision-making on all levels is encouraged. Nine respondents in this study addressed the importance of creating a collaborative culture where staff feel safe in sharing their ideas and making decisions.

In building capacity in adaptive leadership, specifically in independent judgment, it is essential to have open, effective communication. To help increase people's comfort in making decisions and confidence in contributing ideas, leaders must provide support. Respondents who referenced the importance of engaging in open conversations rely on the soft skills of effective communication, where they listen to staff with the intent of learning how best to support them. Respondent 6 works hard to create an environment that encourages open communication by "providing... space to share respectfully and listen." Further, she removes the barrier of positionality by urging her staff to engage in open, honest conversations, regardless of someone's title.

As Crowley (2011) recognized, one of the most effective ways to interact with people is to engage with them first as human beings. Respondents 7 and 4 spoke directly to this philosophy and work to engage in conversations with staff on a personal level. Both respondents do this by encouraging and supporting staff to make decisions that are in their best interest and stress the importance of family first, especially when considering employment. Respondent 4 also highlighted the balance his administrative team has

found between work and fun. In speaking of impromptu Sunday night optional virtual meetings, he shared,

> They always join, which I am grateful for because they're taking time away from their family. But I think it makes us all feel less stressed out [during the week]. We are able to cover a bunch of things, and there's a lot of laughter. We share our lives, and we know each other's spouses. It's a nice thing. We are always available to one another.

Connecting first on a personal level is drawing out the team's individual and collective greatness, enabling them to do the hard work of leading an organization.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 was: *How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through developing leadership capacity?* Three key findings surfaced from the analysis of data related to Research Question 4, including leaders build adaptive capacity by tapping into people's strengths and interests, leaders build adaptive capacity by providing opportunities to lead, and leaders build adaptive capacity by knowing and supporting their people.

Leaders Build Adaptive Capacity by Tapping into People's Strengths and Interests

One of the most shameful forms of waste is that of human talent (Crowley, 2011). To ensure that people have opportunities to grow and maximize their talents, 90% of respondents referenced tapping into people's strengths and interests. To understand an individual's strengths and interests, leaders must work to identify and learn what is important to each employee and then put those interests and talents to use (Crowley, 2011; Kiral, 2020).

As previously mentioned, the art of listening is a powerful leadership skill. Leaders who listen and engage in getting to know people on a personal level are better able to identify areas of interest in their staff. Further, being fully present also provides leaders an opportunity to identify an individual's strengths. Coupling strengths with interests provides individuals space to grow. Respondent 1 noted that people excel and advance their leadership capacity when they assume a leadership role in an area of interest. Further, they tend to experience success, which often results in transitioning into positions with greater responsibility where they thrive.

In addition to building leadership opportunities based on individual strengths and interests, 9 of the 10 respondents referenced that they reach out to individuals who are natural leaders. For instance, Respondent 4 goes to individual staff and voices the potential he sees in them, as was the case with a new special education teacher. He shared with her, "You are going to be leading this department. I really see you as a district leader" (Respondent 4). In addition to tapping natural leaders on the shoulder, Respondent 4 also goes a step further in advocating for people, stating, "I go to the people who need to know [the individual], and I give them their name. I say, 'This person, you really need to give them a look.'" In addition, Respondent 6 is a big proponent of building leadership capacity with natural leaders. She makes it a priority to let people know the talents she sees in them and that she believes in them.

Leaders Build Adaptive Capacity by Providing Opportunities to Lead

Leadership roles come in a plethora of shapes and sizes. While some staff aspire to lead schools in an administrative position, others prefer opportunities on a smaller scale. Regardless of the role, 80% of respondents referenced providing opportunities to

lead as a means of building leadership capacity. In addition, respondents spoke about craft and intentionality when providing opportunities for people to grow in leadership positions.

The craft of providing individuals the opportunity to lead balances ownership and responsibility with acknowledgment. Numerous respondents spoke of the importance of removing themselves from the situation so people truly feel that they own the area of leadership. Holding people accountable for results was mentioned by respondents as a way to boost ownership. While many will thrive when put in a position of leadership, most will excel when provided with opportunity and acknowledgment. Respondent 6 captured the often-overlooked balancing component of leadership opportunity, recognizing that acknowledging people "goes a long way" because "they want to be appreciated."

In addition to balancing opportunity, ownership, and support, respondents referenced the value of intentionality when providing individuals with opportunities to lead. As Crowley (2011) identifies, it is crucial that leaders ensure that people are not put in positions that are not naturally suited. While it may not always be clear if someone is a natural fit for a leadership position, respondents in this study spoke about several strategies to determine one's suitability. With novice teachers, Respondent 10 provides small opportunities to lead via presentations to staff or leadership of a club. With individuals aspiring to become an administrator, Respondents 3, 9, and 10 provide opportunities to experience administrative duties while working alongside individuals coaching them in areas of interest.

Leaders Build Adaptive Capacity by Knowing and Supporting Their People

Research indicates that when leaders take time to get to know their people, achievement is significantly impacted (Crowley, 2011). Further, when people feel supported, connected, understood, and appreciated on an individual basis, they tend to be more invested in the organization because consistent and sincere efforts affect people at their core and draw out greatness (Crowley, 2011). Eight of 10 respondents referenced the importance of knowing and supporting their people to help build their leadership capacity.

The key finding of knowing and supporting people goes hand-in-hand with the theme of tapping into people's strengths and interests. It is one thing to know and support people, but truly building leadership capacity means that leaders must use that knowledge to tap into people's strengths and interests, providing them with opportunities to grow in those areas. In addition to tapping into people's strengths and interests, leaders must get to know their staff. One strategy respondents of this study use when working to get to know their staff is to ask questions. Another approach is to make personal connections. Both acts take time, which is a precious commodity, yet eight respondents recognize that while building personal connections takes time, the rewards outweigh the sacrifices.

Many of the rewards reaped from building leadership capacity based on individual interests result in benefiting the organization, as evidenced by Respondent 2's experience with a stellar teacher. She shared,

> One of our core teachers blew us away. She was a natural leader and was great at stepping into the new role of [MTSS liaison] last year. She [is] someone who is going to blow through being an assistant principal and [could] end up being a

> principal next year if she wanted. When she was our MTSS liaison, I coached her and let her watch [what] admin was doing. She ended up getting an assistant principal job this year and she's doing great. (Respondent 2)

Research Question 5

Research Question 5 was: *How do middle school principals build an organization's adaptive capacity through institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning?* Two key findings derived from the analysis of data related to Research Question 5 include leaders build adaptive capacity by providing time for professional conversations and leadership build adaptive capacity by providing resources, time, and funds for PD.

Leaders Build Adaptive Capacity by Providing Time for Professional Conversations

Providing time for professional conversations not only fosters reflection and continuous learning but also helps to build adaptive capacity because people are engaged in dialog focused on growth. All 10 respondents referenced the value of professional conversations, recognizing that professional conversations have a significant impact on student learning. Respondent 10 captured an inspiring situation that occurred with his staff. As a result of professional conversations steeped in data analysis and reflection, his whole staff committed to three days of training before the start of the school year, which he acknowledged was a tremendous commitment, especially for the veteran teachers who "probably needed a refresher but not three days of hardcore beginning [level] training" (Respondent 10).

Respondents 1 and 4 acknowledged that in addition to providing time and space for professional conversations to occur, they also model what those conversations can

look like. Respondent 1 says that she models "what healthy reflection looks like and then the next steps [that should be taken] from there." Respondent 4, on the other hand, models and engages his team in professional conversations where situations are rehashed, mistakes are called out, and scenarios are played out.

While some respondents referenced dedicating time during staff meetings and early release days for professional conversations, Respondent 3 spoke about professional conversations that happen authentically on his campus. In giving his staff agency in selecting a professional pathway to focus on for the year, he finds that staff members collaborate on a pathway and work as a team in their growth and continuous learning for the year. Further, they reflect individually on their progress several times throughout the course of the school year.

Leadership Build Adaptive Capacity by Providing Resources, Time, and Funds for Professional Development

According to Kiral (2020), there is a direct correlation between an organization's success and the focus on continuous improvement. Nine of the 10 respondents in this study recognize that providing resources, time, and funds for professional development is an effective way to grow adaptive capacity. Further, three different types of PD were identified, including those provided by the school district, those provided by the school site, and those provided to individuals. Regardless of the type of PD offered, it was clearly a priority for 90% of the respondents, as captured by Respondent 9, who stated, "I never say no. If I don’t have money in my budget, I… go to the district, I… write grants. We find a way to make it happen."

Unexpected Findings

An unexpected finding from the research was the lingering impact of the COVID-19 virus on school sites. Another unexpected finding was the high turnover rates of employees in one of the three regions selected in the sampling frame. An additional unexpected finding was the respondent's challenge in putting words to Research Question 4, specifically Interview Question 7, which asked about important leadership competencies.

Lingering Impact of COVID-19

Several respondents referenced that their sites are finally feeling more stable, three and a half years after the COVID-19 virus shut schools down. Respondent 7 stated that since COVID-19, "We haven't had time to focus on reflection. For about two years, everybody was just [working] to stay afloat… and survive." For the first time in three years, Respondent 7 is working with her staff to ensure that reflection is taking place. In addition, many districts are just getting back to sending people to conferences and training to boost continuous learning.

High Rates of Turnover in One Region

Respondents from San Joaquin County spoke of the impact high turnover has on the staff. Respondent 7 noted that longevity with staff is beneficial for multiple reasons. First, time provides opportunities to ensure that everyone is on the same page, allowing progress to move forward as opposed to remaining stuck while new staff gets caught up. Also, with time, people gain a better understanding of their roles as well as the scope of their jobs. Finally, when people know each other and trust is established, they are more likely to work as a team. When turnover is high, consistency is often lost. Further, given

that it takes time to build trust and trust is what binds teams together (White et al., 2020), it is difficult to move people through challenges.

Important Leadership Competencies

Respondents in the study had no issues describing ways they motivate individuals and groups to increase their leadership potential, Interview Question 8, but they struggled to identify specific leadership competencies that their organization focuses on. Respondents recognized that there are those who have natural leadership tendencies, but only Respondent 10 elaborated by identifying that one's ability to connect with families, students, and staff is a competency of a natural leader. Given the hundreds of definitions that exist to describe leadership, as well as the fact that scholars are still not able to agree on a single definition, as highlighted in the literature review in Chapter II, in hindsight, it should not have been a surprise that respondents struggled to identify concrete leadership competencies.

Conclusions

Chapter I provided an introduction and background to the study, including the purpose statement, research questions, and the significance of the study. Chapter II captured an in-depth look at leadership and the evolution of educational leadership, as well as the theoretical framework and foundational theories that served as the focus of the research. Chapter III identified and described the research design and methodology and explained the population, sampling frame, and sample. Chapter IV presented the data collected, including the analysis and findings derived from the data. The following conclusions were made to explain how middle school principals build adaptive capacity

within their organizations based on the five key characteristics identified by Heifetz et al. (2009).

Conclusion 1:Exemplary Middle School Principals who Dedicate Time for Reflection and Continuous Improvement Build Adaptive Capacity

Based on the findings, middle school principals understand that given the fact that it is a precious commodity, it must be protected and intentionally planned to ensure that staff has the space to reflect and engage in continuous improvement. It was concluded that individual and organizational growth occurs when an emphasis on reflection and continuous improvement is built into a school culture. The major findings presented for Research Question 5 support the conclusion that in the post-COVID-19 school environment, it is beneficial for middle school principals to approach the allocation of time for reflection and continuous learning from different vantage points and with intentionality.

The first vantage point is with the whole staff and intentionally allocating time for the staff as well as teams to engage in professional conversations. Before expecting teams to engage in productive professional conversations, middle school leaders need to model what these conversations look like and how the information provides opportunities for growth and learning. Leaders who provide space, time, and guidance while modeling an openness to learning new ideas, learning from experience, and welcoming feedback demonstrate the importance of professional conversations (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). Further, leaders who make professional conversations a priority capitalize on the wealth of information and experience within organizations, which provide a rich environment for learning to take place among colleagues who are immersed in the organization.

The second vantage point is the value of learning available outside of the organization. Middle school principals need to provide agency for staff to determine individual areas for growth and support them in accessing the learning available to meet the targeted area. There is a wide array of PD opportunities available, providing countless ways principals can accommodate staff. Providing resources, time, and funds for PD shows staff that continuous learning is valued in the organization.

Regardless of the vantage point, research indicates that institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning build adaptive capacity within an organization (Cojocar, 2008; Heifetz et al., 2009). Further, creating time for staff to discuss, share, and reflect on experiences is critical to addressing adaptive work (Heifetz et al., 2009; Simmons, 2022). Acclimating to the new post-COVID-19 school environment, middle school leaders have found that they must be intentional in designating time for staff to reflect, grow, and address challenges.

Conclusion 2: Exemplary Middle School Principals who Seek Feedback and Listen to Staff Input Build Adaptive Capacity

Based on the findings, middle school principals seek feedback and listen to staff input as a means of building adaptive capacity within their organizations. It was concluded that middle school leaders make few unilateral decisions in cases that affect the staff at large. Instead, they seek feedback and input from staff, recognizing that when staff is given a voice in decision-making, there is greater buy-in when implementing change. Leaders who engage staff in collective problem-solving and decision-making note positive, profound effects on the organization. Ideas generated from collective problem-solving are far more diverse than those created by a single person, which leads

to greater organizational adaptability (Brown et al., 2020; Harris & Spillane, 2008). In addition, the inclusion of staff in decision-making helps them feel more involved, connected, and invested in the school (Bickmore, 2015). When staff feel connected and committed to the organization, research supports positive impacts on organizational outcomes and student learning (Harris & Spillane, 2008).

In addition to seeking feedback and input from the staff at large, middle school leaders also maintain an open-door policy, providing a space for individuals to voice ideas and concerns. To ensure that people feel welcomed and heard, leaders need to be mentally present, free from distractions, and engage in active listening. In addition, leaders need to exhibit vulnerability and openness to discussing sensitive issues. When leaders show staff via their actions that it is acceptable to speak freely in conversations regarding sensitive, underlying issues, they create an inclusive environment where all voices are valued.

Conclusion 3: Exemplary Middle School Principals who Engage in Shared Leadership Build Adaptive Capacity

Based on the findings, middle school principals engage in shared leadership to build adaptive capacity within their organizations. Thus, it can be concluded that the success of middle schools relies on the collective work and leadership of many as opposed to a single individual. The world of education is becoming increasingly more complex, and challenges should no longer be resolved by a single leader (Heifetz et al., 2009). Instead, school principals who embrace shared leadership opportunities strengthen their organization by leading with the collection of the staff's skills and knowledge (Bickmore, 2015).

One manifestation of shared leadership is the development of teams that are comprised of people who are interested in the content, resulting in an effective and valuable strategy to give the work back to the people. Further, providing teams the opportunity to share in professional responsibilities enables leaders to provide support and guidance where needed while relinquishing control and empowering people to take ownership of the work. When people are afforded opportunities to take ownership and are provided a voice, shared leadership is nurtured. In addition, when people feel that they are part of a valued team, the likelihood that they will participate in challenging work increases (Clark, 2020).

As previously stated, the complexity of leadership is evolving, and while decision-making is an important aspect of leading an organization, there are a multitude of additional tasks that require the time and energy of leaders. The role of instructional leader is an equally important aspect of school leadership. When leaders acknowledge that it is not possible to be an expert in all realms of instructional leadership, they welcome the expertise and knowledge of those in the field, thus leading to the manifestation of an additional form of shared leadership, instructional autonomy. Instructional autonomy consists of built-in guard rails such as mandated curriculum and assessment results, but staff are granted freedom in determining how they deliver instruction as well as making decisions in the best interest of students. The leader's role, then, is to provide support while holding staff accountable.

Conclusion 4: Exemplary Middle School Principals who Establish a Culture of Trust Build Adaptive Capacity

Based on the findings, middle school principals recognize that a culture of trust must be established to build adaptive capacity within their organizations. Trust is vital to the success of an organization, and it is leaders who create an environment where people feel comfortable enough to trust one another. Further, to move people through challenges, trust must be present because the work requires people to examine their attitudes, behaviors, and values (Heifetz, 1994).

In a post-COVID-19 school environment, leaders found themselves in a position where their school communities craved stability, which required them to rebuild trust that was lost due to the uncertainty and fear the pandemic evoked. Acknowledging that progress does not occur in unstable settings where there is a void of trust, leaders set out to provide stability by creating a strong foundation steeped in trust. The heart of this work consisted of transparency, honesty, and open communication. Transparency helps rebuild trust because when leaders share information, they remove the element of surprise and uncertainty. In addition, honesty works to solidify trust in an organization because it sets an example for others, encourages feedback, and contributes to healthy relationships with staff. Finally, open communication fosters trust among people in an organization because it increases psychological safety, clarifies expectations, and strengthens teams. Consistently demonstrating transparency, honesty, and open conversations builds trust, enabling organizations to tackle more challenging work.

Implications for Action

The review of literature, the data, and the conclusions of the study reveal that exemplary middle school principals are utilizing the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership identified by Heifetz et al. (2009) in their organizations to build adaptive capacity. Based on the research findings and conclusions, there are several implications school principals can incorporate into their practice as they continue to engage in adaptive leadership characteristics and move towards addressing adaptive challenges that surfaced during the pandemic. At present, students, teachers, and administrators are still adjusting to the consequences of the pandemic. As McLeod and Dulsky (2021) point out, guiding an organization through a crisis is stressful, but it is after the organization emerges from the challenge that the real work begins. The following implications are intended to support school leaders in maximizing their interactions and working with staff while addressing adaptive challenges schools face due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Implication 1: Understanding Adaptive Leadership Characteristics

To best support school leaders who are working to guide their communities with the recent challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, district and site leaders must work together to understand the adaptive leadership theoretical framework as well as the five adaptive characteristics. With a comprehensive understanding of adaptive leadership and its use with organizations, district leaders must model the work by tackling complex, adaptive challenges at the district level. Research on adaptive leadership in middle schools does not exist, indicating the likelihood that educators are not familiar with Heifetz et al.'s (2009) five adaptive leadership characteristics that are necessary to support an organization in addressing complex challenges. However, site leaders, albeit

unknowingly, are using adaptive characteristics in their interactions with staff, but gaining a concrete understanding of how to use them to mobilize an organization through adaptive challenges is absolutely necessary throughout all levels of a district if the benefits of adaptive leadership are realized systemically.

Implication 2: Navigating an Unstable Environment

To navigate instability caused by forces outside of a leader's control, such as the pandemic, leaders must first work to ensure that the basic needs and safety of the school community are addressed. Research shows that during times of unrest and crisis, people turn to leaders for guidance (Boin et al., 2005; Heifetz, 1994; Valeras & Cordes, 2020). In addition, the psychological impact of instability is stress and unrest (Clark, 2020). Providing time, space, and support is the first step to creating stability. People need space and time to process the situation, but they also need support. Since people deal with stress and unrest differently, leaders must recognize the needs and work to provide consistent support. Ensuring that they are providing appropriate support, exemplary leaders invest time in getting to know their staff and keeping their finger on the pulse of the culture (White et al., 2016). One way they do this is by maintaining an open-door policy and being present for staff, which creates a sense of safety and security in staff being able to voice and share their concerns and ideas (Sunderman et al., 2020). In addition, actively listening to staff enables leaders to understand issues that are present on campus. Leaders must mitigate stress and unrest in their organizations, providing room for growth as well as building capacity, and enabling people to tackle more challenging issues.

Implication 3: Recognizing When to Capitalize on Opportunities

An important component of navigating unstable environments is knowing when to support and when to push. When people are barely keeping their heads above water, they need support as opposed to having more work pushed on them. However, when they are able to float, they have the capacity to be pushed. For instance, leaders are recognizing that three years after the pandemic shut the world down, staff are finally able to engage in continuous learning and reflection. Now is the time to identify complex challenges and dig into the discomfort of addressing them. Leaders must work with their organizations to identify, examine, and analyze adaptive challenges and provide people with the tools to do the work (Northouse, 2022). Given that adaptive challenges require people to closely examine their values and opinions, structures must be put in place to ensure that the environment remains safe (Heifetz et al., 1994). Further, leaders must make healthy discomfort the norm, recognizing that growth stems from discomfort. Providing people time and space to wade through complex issues while supporting, safely pushing, and maintaining accountability results in sustainable change.

Implication 4: Breaking the Cycle in Education

Breaking the cycle in education requires leaders to approach the work intentionally. They must create teams with people who are passionate about the work and willing to embrace a growth mindset. Further, leaders must maintain open communication where discussion of sensitive topics is the norm. Research is clear that it is beyond time to reimagine education (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Twenty-first century workforce demands are far different from those of the Industrial Era, yet schools are still aligned to meet the workforce needs of an industrial economy. While educators

have known for decades that the system needs to be revamped to meet the needs of 21st century learners, the pandemic brought many egregious issues to light that can no longer be ignored (Simmons, 2022). Many issues, such as equitable access to education, instructional models, and the adoption of a curriculum that is reflective of the student body, represent systemic issues that will require an interruption in the status quo. To interrupt as opposed to incinerate the narrative and truly unearth practices that address current needs requires leaders to engage people in adaptive work.

Courageous leaders ready to address complex issues that are often part of the fabric of the education system would benefit from the use of the five key adaptive characteristics, as well as the adaptive leadership framework. Practices such as encouraging independent judgment and institutionalizing reflection and continuous growth require that there is a strong foundation of trust, but they also serve as the impetus for open, honest conversation. Reimaging education to address the needs of 21st learners will require stability, consistency, and grit (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Leaders armed with adaptive leadership skills will have the tenacity and knowledge to interrupt the narrative of antiquated systems.

Implication 5: Mobilizing People to Address Adaptive Challenges

To mobilize people to achieve shared goals and tackle tough problems, leaders must create trust, examine issues, provide support, and listen. The first step is to unite staff by creating a culture steeped in trust (Fairholm & Fairholm, 2000). Given that the issues that surfaced during the pandemic are not small challenges, an examination of root causes from the organization at large is necessary. With renewed stability and restored trust, leaders must guide their organizations to identify, examine, and tackle adaptive

challenges. The first step in this work is an examination of issues facing the organization. One must determine if the challenge is technical, technical and adaptive, or adaptive (Northouse, 2022). Challenges that are adaptive require leaders to help staff see the issue from multiple perspectives and identify the specific challenge. In addition, leaders must encourage people to do the hard work, offering support while empowering them and engaging them in problem-solving (Simmons, 2002). Finally, leaders must ensure that everyone in the organization has a voice and there is time provided for discussion. The second step for leaders that it is essential is to continue asking difficult questions while teetering on the brink of creating enough tension that people do not settle for the status quo but continue to work towards a solution (Northouse, 2022). When the foundation of trust and safety is secure, people have the capacity to engage in the hard work of finding solutions to adaptive challenges.

Implication 6: Investing in People

Investing in people requires leaders to lead by example, model a growth mindset, and provide opportunities for people to grow. Research supports that leaders play a pivotal role in continuous learning and must intentionally keep it at the forefront in the minds of people in the organization (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). In addition, leaders must model an openness to learning new ideas, learning from experience, and welcoming feedback (Heifetz et al., 2009). Modeling is a powerful way to show staff what is valued in an organization, but so, too, is the allocation of resources, time, and funding. Recognizing that continuous learning can occur in a wide array of settings, including but not limited to collaborative teams, onsite PD, conferences, and site observations, provides leaders endless opportunities to invest in their staff, and the returns on investment are

significant. Collaborative teams share best practices, data, and plan together. Onsite PD is offered to all staff, supporting training, new curriculum, and inspiration. Conferences and site observations enable individuals or smaller teams to learn about specific content or strategies. Regardless of the vehicle for continuous learning, the return on the investment multiplies when people have time built into the workday to share what was learned, collaborate on ways to implement the new information and discuss different approaches with learners in mind. To prioritize continuous learning, leaders must invest in their people by providing resources, time, and funds to pursue areas of interest as well as areas of growth. The return is increased staff engagement in and commitment to the organization, and the bonus is that students benefit when staff and leaders value a growth mindset.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe how exemplary middle school principals build adaptive capacity within their organizations based on the five key characteristics identified by Heifetz et al. (2009). Based on the implications of the study, the following recommendations are provided for further research:

Recommendation 1: The current study focused on middle school principals from three regions in northern California. A replication study is recommended with middle school principals from regions throughout the state.

Recommendation 2: The current study focused on a population of middle school leaders who work to build adaptive capacity within their organization. Further research is

recommended, focusing on the impact of building adaptive capacity from the lived experience of middle school staff.

Recommendation 3: The current study focused on middle school principals. Given the lack of research on adaptive leadership in education, a replication study is recommended with elementary and high school principals.

Recommendation 4: The current study utilized a phenomenological methodology. It is recommended that a mixed methods study be conducted to triangulate the data. Data collected via a survey could provide more insight into the five adaptive leadership characteristics, including targeted questions on leadership competencies.

Recommendation 5: The current study aimed to gain an understanding of how middle school principals use adaptive leadership characteristics to build capacity during times of great change and opportunity. Given that schools are finally settling into a normal routine post-COVID-19, it would be beneficial to replicate this study in a year or two to identify adaptive challenges that schools have addressed.

Recommendation 6: The current study was a part of a peer research team focused on building adaptive capacity within organizations. It is recommended that a multiple case study be conducted with all nine adaptive leadership capacity studies.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

Witnessing the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the world and the education system, I was anxious to see if educators would seize the opportunity that times of great change can afford. Understanding that reimagining education and transitioning away from the one-teacher classroom model would break decades of tradition, I anticipated that this would not be a quick, easy change. My interest in learning about how

organizations react during times of change and opportunity led me to join the group of peer researchers in this phenomenological study to describe the strategies exemplary middle school leaders use to build adaptive capacity based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership identified by Heifetz et al. (2009). The study of literature highlighted the complexity of leadership as evidenced by over a hundred definitions of the word. In addition, a deep dive into the literature on adaptive leadership revealed that few studies have been conducted on adaptive leadership in education, and no literature on adaptive leadership in middle schools could be found.

In today's complex world, the responsibilities that fall on the shoulders of middle school principals are substantial. Principals are instructional leaders, organizational managers, and community liaisons. In addition, they are tasked with addressing issues of inequities, technological changes, and trauma (Simmons, 2022). Unlike their predecessors, the responsibilities placed on current principals included federal, state, and district mandates, as well as community expectations. Despite the increasing demands and the growing complexity of the job, principals are still showing up and assessing current complexities, taking one step forward at a time while being flexible and working to motivate their staff. They are embracing shared leadership and building leadership capacity while modeling continuous learning and reflection.

Leaders, perhaps unknowingly, are utilizing strategies based on the five adaptive leadership characteristics to build adaptive capacity in their organizations. Instead of being the star of their schools, they often play a supporting role in assisting others to grow in leadership roles. In addition to using adaptive leadership characteristics to support staff, leaders are using strategies to build an adaptive capacity as they navigate

the unprecedented changes due to the pandemic. Time and additional research will determine how leaders use the characteristics of adaptive leadership to address the adaptive challenges that surfaced due to the pandemic.

A major takeaway from the study is that while the pandemic provided an opportunity to initiate change, people were not emotionally capable of shouldering additional change. Given the fact that change rarely withstands the test of time if people in the organization are not on board, it is not a surprise to learn that many educational leaders have not tackled the complex, adaptive challenges that were exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, based on the data collected, it seems that school communities are finally experiencing stability, and staff has the mental and emotional capacity to dive into challenging issues.

By participating in the adaptive leadership thematic, I learned that the term leaders, perhaps one of the most widely used terms, is wildly ambiguous. There is a lack of clarity on what constitutes a leader, and contributing to the confusion is the history and evolution of the definition of leadership. After decades of research and dissonance, leadership scholars cannot settle on a common definition of the term (Northouse, 2022). Due to factors such as the national pandemic and generational differences, leadership will continue to have different meanings for different people. Further, in today's complex world, change is constantly evoking feelings of uncertainty. As a result, no single definition of leadership is applicable to organizations. Reflecting on the last decade of research and projecting a future steeped in change, Northouse (2022) predicts that due to the complexity of leadership, a single definition of leadership will continue to be a work in progress for years to come. Regardless of whether scholars ever agree on a singular

definition of leadership, it seems that adaptive leadership, in conjunction with the five adaptive characteristics, offers educational leaders a valuable framework to address current complex challenges.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Literature Matrix

References	Complexity Leadership	Leadership	Adaptive Leadership in education	Transformational Leadership	Adaptive Leadership	Shared Leadership	Elephants in the room are named	Independent capacity is developed	Independent judgement is expected	Continuous Learning & Reflection	Evolution of K-12 Leadership	Educational leadership	Middle School Leadership	Leadership during change
Alajmi, M. (2022). Leadership Theories: Application in the University Setting [Article]. *Technium Social Sciences Journal, 30*, 194-199.		X												
Bagwell, J. (2020). Leading Through a Pandemic: Adaptive Leadership and Purposeful Action. *Journal of School Administration Research and Development, 5*, 30-34.			X		X					X				
Barth, R. S. (1986). On sheep and goats and school reform. *Phi Delta Kappan, 68* (4), 293–296.		X									X			
Bass, B. M. & Avolio, B. J. (1994). *Improving organizational effectiveness through transformational leadership*. Sage.														
Bass, B. M. (1990). *Bass and Stogdill's handbook of leadership*. Free Press.		X		X										
Bass, B. M., & Steidlmeier, P. (1999). Ethics, character, and authentic transformational leadership behavior. *Leadership Quarterly, 10*(2), 181.				X										
Benmira, S., & Agboola, M. (2021). *Evolution of leadership theory*. BMJ Leader; page leader-2020-000296		X		X							X			
Bergman, J. Z., Rentsch, J. R., Small, E. E., Davenport, S. W., & Berman, S. M. (2012). The shared leadership process in decision-making teams. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 152*(1), 17-42.						X								
Bickmore, D. L. (2015). *Confirming a Middle Grades Leadership Model and Instrument*. In (vol. 34): Informa UK Limited.		X	X	X		X						X	X	
Boies, K., Lvina, E., & Martens, M. L. (2011). Shared leadership team performance in a business strategy simulation. *Journal of Personal Psychology, 9*(4). 195-202.						X	X	X						
Brown, C., MacGregor, S., & Flood, J. (2020). Can models of distributed leadership be used to mobilise networked generated innovation in schools? A case study from England. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 94.			X											

Carvalho, J., Sobral, F., & Mansur, J. (2020). Exploring shared leadership in public organizations: evidence from the educational arena [article]. *Revista de Administração Pública, 54*(3), 524-544.						X					X				
Catano, N., & Stronge, J. (2006). *What are principals expected to do? Congruence between principal evaluation and performance standards*. NASSP Bulletin.												X			
Cojocar, W. J. (2008). *Adaptive leadership: Leadership theory or theoretical derivative?* (Publication Number 3329822) [Ph.D., Capella University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. United States -- Minnesota.				X	X					X					
Darling-Hammond, L., & Hyler, M. E. (2020). Preparing educators for the time of COVID ... and beyond [Article]. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 43*(4), 457-465.			X								X	X			
DeMarco, A., & Gutmore, D. (2021). The Relationship between Distributive Leadership, School Culture, and Teacher Self-Efficacy at the Middle School Level. AASA *Journal of Scholarship & Practice, 18*(2), 27-41.			X			X				X	X	X			
DeMartino, L., & Weiser, S. G. (2021). Administrative leadership in times of a global health crisis: Voices and images from the field [article]. *Frontiers in Education*, 6.						X				X					
Fairholm, M. R., & Fairholm, G. (2000). Leadership amid the constraints of trust. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 21*(2), 102-109.		X													
Frost, P. (2003). *Toxic emotions at work: How compassionate managers handle pain and conflict.* Harvard Business School Press.															X
Fullan, M. (2020). Learning and the pandemic: What's next? [Report Author abstract]. *Prospects, 49*(1-2), 25.											X				
Gale, J. J., & Bishop, P. A. (2014). The Work of Effective Middle Grades Principals: Responsiveness and Relationship [Article]. *Research in Middle Level Education Online, 37*(9), 1-23.		X						X		X		X	X		
Gurr, D., & Drysdale, L. (2020). Leadership for Challenging Times [Article]. *International Studies in Educational Administration (Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration & Management (CCEAM)), 48*(1), 24-30.															X
Gyuroka, T. C. (2010). The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World [review] / Heifetz, R., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership.*					X				X						

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Harris, A. & Jones, M. (2020). COVID 19 – choole leadership in disruptive times. *School Leadership & Management, 40*(4). 243-247.											X			X
Harris, A., & Spillane, J. (2008). Distributed Leadership through the Looking Glass. *Management in Education, 22*(1), 31-34.		X	X			X								
Heifetz, R. (1994). *Leadership without easy answers*. Harvard University Press.		X	X	X	X									
Heifetz, R., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world.* Harvard Business Review.	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X				
Heifetz, R. A. L., D. L. (1997). The work of leadership. *JHarvard Business Review, 71*(1).		X			X									
Heifetz, R. A., & Laurie, D. L. (2001). The Work of Leadership [Article]. *Harvard Business Review, 79*(11), 131-141.		X			X									
Heifetz, R. A., & Laurie, D. L. (2003). Learning to lead: Real leaders say, 'I don't have the answer'. *Ivey Business Journal, 67*(3), 1.		X			X									
Heifetz, R. A., & Linsky, M. (2004). When Leadership Spells Danger [Article]. *Educational Leadership, 61*(7), 33-37.		X	X		X	X			X					
Jahagirdar, S., Chatterjee, A., Behera, S., & Mohapatra, A. (2020). Response to the COVID-19 pandemic in India: Case studies on leadership in crisis situations. *International Journal of Health & Allied Sciences.*														X
Jorgenson, F., Bor, A., Rasmussen, M. S., Lindholt, M. F., & Petersen, M. B. (2022). Pandemic fatigue fueled political discontent during the COVID-19 pandemic. *PNAS, 119*(48).														X
Kafele, B. K. (2019). *The aspiring principal 50: Critical questions for new and future school leaders*. ASCD.												X		X
Khan, N. (2017). Adaptive or Transactional Leadership in Current Higher Education: A Brief Comparison [Article]. *International Review of Research in Open & Distance Learning, 18*(3), 178-183.			X		X									
Kiral, E. (2020). Excellent leadership theory in education. *Journal of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, 4*(1).				X				X		X	X			

Kouzes, J. M. & Posner, B. Z. (1995). The leadership challenge: How to keep getting extraordinary things done in organizations. *Language, 25*(405p), 23cm.		X													
Kuntz, J. R., Malinen, S., & Naswall, K. (2017). Employee resilience: Directions for resilience development. *Consulting Psychology Journal, 69*(3), 223-242.			X												
Laurie, D. L. (2001). Real Work of Leaders [Article]. *Executive Excellence, 18*(3), 18.						X									
Lavery, S., & Coffey, A. (2021). Middle School Students' Views about Leaders and Leadership. *Improving Schools, 24*(2), 152-164.					X									X	
Leadership: Theory and Practice. (2014). *Journal of Educational Administration, 52*(1), 139-142.											X	X			
Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2008). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership. *School Leadership and Management, 28*(1), 27-42.		X									X				
Leitzke, D. L. (2022). *Exercising leadership in response to technical and adaptive challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic: A phenomenological study of leading during a period of crisis in higher education* (Publication Number 29168437) [Ph.D., Cardinal Stritch University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. Ann Arbor.					X										
Lichtenstein, B. B., Uhl-Bien, M., Marion, R., Seers, A., Orton, J. D., & Schreiber, C. (2006). Complexity leadership theory: An interactive perspective on leading in complex adaptive systems [Article]. *Emergence: Complexity & Organization, 8*(4), 2-12.	X				X										
London, M. (2022). Causes and consequences of adaptive leadership: A model of leaders' rapid responses to unexpected events. *Psychology of Leaders and Leadership.*					X										
Marshall, J., Roache, D., & Moody-Marshall, R. (2020). Crisis Leadership: A Critical Examination of Educational Leadership in Higher Education in the Midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic [Article]. *International Studies in Educational Administration (Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration & Management (CCEAM)), 48*(3), 30-37.											X				X
Martin, E. (2020). *Your leadership moment: Democratizing leadership in an age of authoritarianism. Mango.*											X				
Marzano, R. J., & Waters, T. (2005*). School leadership that works : From research to results* [Book]. ASCD.		X		X	X	X		X		X	X	X			

McLeod, S., & Dulsky, S. (2021). Resilience, reorientation, and reinvention: School leadership during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Frontiers in Education, 6*.															X
McCray-Davis, M. R. (2022). *Leading ethically: Advancing educational administrators' leadership for teacher retention* (Publication Number 29065506) [Ph.D., St. Thomas University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. Ann Arbor.				X		X									
McNulty, R. J. (2022). Adaptive leadership for a post-COVID world: Understanding 'polarity strategy' is a useful starting point when advancing new initiatives in a school system. *79*(3), 38					X										
Northouse, P. G. (2022). *Leadership: Theory & practice* (9th ed.). Sage.	X	X		X	X	X									X
Reid, D. B. (2021). US principals' sensemaking of the future roles and responsibilities of school principals. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 1*(49), p. 251–267.											X				
Rheaume, J., Brandon, J., Donlevy, J. K., & Gereluk, D. (2021). An Analysis of Responsive Middle Level School Leadership Practices: Revisiting the Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Leadership Model [Article]. *Research in Middle Level Education Online, 44*(9), 1-16.		X				X		X		X		X	X	
Rousmaniere, K. (2013). *The principal's office: A social history of the American school principal*. SUNY Press.											X				
Sharratt, L., & Fullan, M. (Eds.). (2009). *Realization: The change imperative for deepening district-wide reform*. Corwin Press.								X							
Safferstone, M. (2005). Organizational leadership: Classic works and contemporary perspectives. *CHOICE: Current Reviews in Academic Libraries, 43*. 959-975.	X	X			X	X		X	X	X					
Senge, P., Hamilton, H. A. L., & Kania, J. (2019). The dawn of system leadership [Article]. *Policy & Practice (19426828), 77*(1), 12-19.		X				X				X					
Shava, G. N., & Tlou, F. N. (2018). Distributed Leadership in Education, Contemporary Issues in Educational Leadership. *African Educational Research Journal, 6*(4), 279-287.						X					X				
Sibanda, L. (2017). Understanding distributed leadership in South African schools: *Challenges and prospects. Issues in Educational Research, 27*(3), 567-581.						X					X				
Simmons Sr, K. (2022). Leading Through CHANGE [Article]. *Educational Leadership, 79*(6), 68-72.	-		X		X					X	X				

Stogdill, R. M. (1975, August). The evolution of leadership theory. In *Academy of Management Proceedings, (1975)*1, 4-6.	-	X													
Stronge, J. H. & Xu, X. (2021). *Qualities of effective principals* (2nd ed.). ASCD.	-											X			
Sunderman, H. M., Headrick, J., & McCain, K. (2020). Addressing complex issues and crises in higher education with an adaptive leadership framework. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 52*(6), 22-29.				X	X										
Tobin, D. R. (2010). *Feeding your leadership pipeline* [Book]. Association for Talent Development.		X						X							
Toegel, G., & Barsoux, J. L. (2019). It's time to tackle your team's undiscussables. MIT Sloan Management Review, 61(1). 37-46.							X								
Uhl-Bien, M. (2021). Complexity Leadership and Followership: Changed Leadership in a Changed World [Article]. *Journal of Change Management, 21*(2), 144-162.	X	X													
Uhl-bien, N., Marion, R., & Mckelvey, B. (2007). Complexity leadership theory: Shifting leadership from the Industrial Age to the Knowledge Era. *Leadership Quarterly*, 18.	X	X													
Valeras, A. S., & Cordes, C. C. (2020). Adaptive leadership: Becoming the change. *Families, Systems, & Health, 38*(4), 495-497.					X										
Veldsman, T. H., & Johnson, A. J. (2016). *Leadership: Perspectives from the front line*. KR Publishing.										X					
Webster, K., & Litchka, P. (2020). Planning for Effective School Leadership: Teachers' Perceptions of the Leadership Skills and Ethical Behaviors of School Principals. *Educational Planning, 27*(1), 31-47.											X	X			
Wolfe, K. J. (2015). Curriculum reform as adaptive leadership challenge. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 47*(3), 62-65.		X			X							X			
Yukl, G., & Mahsud, R. (2010). Why flexible and adaptive leadership is essential. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research, 62*(2), 81-93.						X			X	X	X				
Zhao, Y. (2020a). COVID-19 as a catalyst for educational change [Article]. *Prospects (00331538), 49*(1/2), 29-33.											X	X			
Zhao, Y. (2020b). Tofu is not cheese: Rethinking education amid the COVID-19 pandemic. *ECNU Review of Education, 3*.					X						X				

APPENDIX B

Participant Request Letter

STUDY: Identify and describe strategies used by middle school public school principals to build adaptive capacity within their organization based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership.

August ____, 2023

Dear Perspective Study Participant,

You are invited to participate in a qualitative study to identify and describe strategies used by middle school principals to build adaptive capacity within their organization. The main investigator of this study is Danielle Daubin, a Doctoral Candidate in Umass Global University's Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program. You were chosen to participate in this study because you were identified as an exemplary middle school principal.

You will be asked several interview questions over Zoom by the main investigator. Participation in the interview will last about 45 minutes. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this phenomenological study is to identify and describe how middle school principals build capacity in their organization.

PROCEDURES: If you decide to participate in the study, you may proceed with participating in the interview. During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions designed to help me understand the strategies you use at your school site to build adaptive capacity in your organization.

RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS: There are minimal risks to your participation in this research study. It may be inconvenient to spend up to 45 minutes in the interview. However, the interview session will be held on Zoom to minimize the inconvenience.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: There are no major benefits to you for participating; however, your input could help contribute to the research regarding ways for school leaders to build adaptive capacity within their organizations. The information from this study is intended to inform researchers and educators. Additionally, the findings and recommendations from this study will be made available to all participants.

ANONYMITY: Records of information that you provide for the research study and any personal information you provide will not be linked in any way. It will not be possible to identify you as the person who provided any specific information for the study.

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time that will help you better understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. You may contact me at [redacted] or by email at [redacted]. You may also contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Phil Pendley, by email at ppendley@mail.umassglobal.edu. If you have further questions or concerns about this study or your rights as a study participant, you may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Umass Global University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618. 949-341-7641.

Respectfully,
Danielle Daubin
Doctoral Candidate, Umass Global University

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Document

TOPIC: Adaptive Leadership and how organizational leaders build adaptive capacity

STUDY TITLE: Adaptive Leadership During Times of Great Change and Opportunity

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Danielle Daubin, M.Ed.

PURPOSE OF STUDY: You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Danielle Daubin, a doctoral student from the School of Education at UMass Global University. This exploratory phenomenological methods study focused on Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky's (2009) *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (2009). The purpose of the study is to identify and describe the strategies used by organizational leaders to build an adaptive capacity based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership identified by Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky.

The interview(s) will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes and will be conducted in a one-on-one virtual interview setting using Zoom.

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 audio recorded. The recordings will be available only to the researcher. The audio recordings will be used to capture the interview dialogue as a text document 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 how leaders build adaptive capacity. The findings will be available to me at the conclusion of the study and will provide new insights about the study in which I participated. 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 Danielle Daubin at [redacted] by phone at [redacted] or Dr. Phil Pendley (Advisor) at pendley@umassglobal.edu.
e) My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide not to participate in the study and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer particular questions during the interview if I so choose. I understand that I may refuse to participate or 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 all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed and 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

APPENDIX D

Interview Question Development Matrix

Research Question	Variable	Definition	Interview Question and Prompt	Literature Support
#1. How do *leaders** build an organization's adaptive capacity through making naming elephants in the room the norm?	Making naming elephants in the room the norm.	The act of openly addressing sensitive underlying issues, or undiscussable's, to resolve potential barriers that interfere with an organization realizing its full potential (Heifetz et al., 2009; Toegel & Barsoux, 2019; Baker, 2004).	IQ#1 What practices do you use as a leader in your organization to make addressing sensitive underlying issues an organizational norm? **Prompt:** How do these practices facilitate adaptive leadership development? Can you give an example? IQ#2 How does your organization create an environment for individuals and groups to resolve potential barriers that prevent the organization from reaching its potential? **Prompt:** Can you provide some examples of how you create an environment for individuals and groups to identify barriers to the organization reaching its potential?	Baker, A. C. (2004). Seizing the moment: Talking about the "undiscussables". Journal of Management Education, 28(6), 693-706. https://doi.org/10.1177/1052562903252661 Toegel, G., & Barsoux, J.-L. (2019). It's time to tackle your team's undiscussables. MIT Sloan Management Review, 61(1), 37-46. Klonsky, M. F. (2010). Discussing undiscussables: Exercising adaptive leadership (Publication Number 3426112) [Ph.D., Fielding Graduate University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. Ann Arbor. http://UMassGlobal.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/discussing-undiscussables-exercising-adaptive/docview/761367319/se-2?accountid=207169 Schlaerth, A., Ensari, N., & Christian, J. (2013). A meta-analytical review of the relationship between emotional intelligence and leaders' constructive conflict management. Group Processes & Intergroup Relations, 16(1), 126-136. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430212439907

Research Question	Variable	Definition	Interview Question and Prompt	Literature Support
#2. How do *leaders* build an organization's adaptive capacity through nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization?	Nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization.	The collective ownership across team member roles for the decision-making of operational goals and outcomes of the organization's future. (Harris & Spillane, 2008; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Heifetz et al., 2009; Northouse, 2016; Tremblay et al., 2016).	IQ#3 Can you describe a time (in your current role) when you facilitated shared ownership of organizational goals amongst team members? **Prompt**: How would you describe the outcome and its relation to the organization's future? IQ#4 As a leader, how do you provide opportunities for members to comment on and raise issues that are not within their area of responsibility? **Prompt**: How do you encourage participation across teams and roles throughout the organization?	Harris, A., & Spillane, J. (2008). Distributed leadership through the looking Glass. *Management in Education*, *22*(1), 31–34. https://doi.org/10.1177/0892020607085623 Heifetz, R. & Linsky, R. (2002). *Leadership on the line*. Harvard Business School Press. Heifetz, R., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership*. Harvard Business Review Press. Northouse, P. (2016). *Leadership theory and practice* (7th edition). SAGE Publications, Inc. Tremblay, D., Latreille, J., Bilodeau, K., Samson, A., Roy, L., L'Italien, M.-F., & Mimeault, C. (2016). Improving the transition from oncology to primary care teams: A case for shared leadership. *Journal of Oncology Practice*, 12(11), 1012-1019. https://doi.org/10.1200/jop.2016.013771

Research Question	Variable	Definition	Interview Question and Prompt	Literature Support
#3. How do *leaders* build an organization's adaptive capacity through encouraging independent judgment?	Encouraging independent judgment.	A leader's capacity to provide an opportunity for team members to make choices based on personal and professional experience, regardless of the position held within the organization (Heifetz et al., 2009; Shanbhag, 2002; Casavant et al., 1995).	IQ#5 Describe a situation where you encouraged employees to make choices based on personal and professional experience? IQ#6 What are some systems and structures that you have in place for team members to exercise independent judgment and choice? **Prompt:** Could you give me a specific example of teams exercising choice in those structures? What was the result of that? situation? Was the result for one of those examples when the teams exercised choice using the structures?	Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage publications. Vagle, M. D. (2018). *Crafting phenomenological research*. Routledge.

#4. How do leaders build an organization's adaptive capacity through developing leadership capacity?	Developing Leadership Capacity.	The systemic focus on expanding competencies and resources, and intentionally motivating groups or individuals to increase leadership potential proactively (Eade, 1997; Eade, 2007; Elmore, 2003; Eyben et al., 2006; Harris, 2011; Heifetz et al., 2009; Sharratt & Fullan, 2009).	IQ#7 What are the important leadership competencies that your organization focuses on in developing leaders? **Prompt:** Can you give some examples of activities that are encouraged to develop these leadership competencies? IQ#8 As a leader, how do you motivate individuals and groups to increase their leadership potential? **Prompt:** Can you provide some examples of when your strategies to motivate leaders to develop have been effective?	Wicked leadership competencies for sustainability professionals ... (n.d.). Retrieved April 10, 2023, from https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/sus.2018.0008
#5. How do *leaders* build an organization's adaptive capacity through institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning?	Institutional-izing reflection and continuous learning.	Providing a culture conducive to the safe exploration of new ideas and sharing of lessons learned both from an individual and organizational perspective and creating a sustainable learning culture driven by a willingness to overcome engrained mental models across all levels of the organization (Cojocar, 2008; Pearson & Smith, 1986; Ramalingam et al., 2020; Senge et al., 2019; Vera & Crossan, 2004; Veldsman & Madonsela, 2016).	IQ#9 How do you institutionalize or make reflection a permanent part of your organizational culture? **Prompt:** How is reflection used to facilitate adaptive capacity? Can you give an example? IQ#10 How do you institutionalize or make continuous learning a permanent part of your organizational culture? **Prompt:** How is continuous learning used to facilitate adaptive capacity? Can you give an example?	Cojocar, 2008; Pearson & Smith, 1986; Ramalingam et al., 2020; Senge et al., 2019; Vera & Crossan, 2004; Veldsman & Madonsela, 2016

APPENDIX E

Interview Questions/Protocol

Adaptive Leadership Thematic Interview Protocol

My name is Danielle Daubin, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Massachusetts Global in the area of Organizational Leadership. I am a part of a team conducting research to identify and describe the strategies used by organizational leaders to build an adaptive capacity based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership identified by Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) as perceived by middle school administrators in northern California.

I want to thank you for agreeing to participate in the interview on adaptive leadership. The information you give, along with the others participating in this study, hopefully will provide a clear picture of how organizational leaders build an adaptive capacity. The questions I will be asking are the same for everyone participating in the study. The reason for this is to try to guarantee, as much as possible, that my interviews with all participating middle school administrators will be conducted in the same manner.

Informed Consent

I would like to remind you that any information that is obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. All of the data will be reported without reference to any individual(s) or any institution(s). For ease of our discussion and accuracy, I will record our conversation as indicated in the informed consent sent to you via email. I will have the recording transcribed to a Word document and will send it to you via electronic mail so that you can check to make sure that I have accurately captured your thoughts and ideas. The digital recording will be erased.

Did you receive the informed consent and UMass Global Bill of Rights I sent you via email? Do you have any questions or need clarification about either document? Do you consent to move forward with the interview?

We have scheduled an hour for the interview. At any point during the interview, you may ask that I skip a particular question or stop the interview altogether.
Do you have any questions before we begin? Okay, let's get started, and thanks so much for your time.

First, I have some demographic questions to ask you. The input gained from these questions helps to better understand the background of the participants and to provide context to the results. The input gained from these questions helps to better understand the background of the participants and to provide context to the final results. Per the informed consent, your participation in this study will remain confidential, and comments made or demographic information will only be presented in the aggregate to maintain confidentiality. You are not required to answer any question that would be uncomfortable.

Demographic

Please indicate your gender

Male

Female

Non-binary

Other

Please indicate the number of years you have been in your current position

2-3, 4-8, 9-15, 16+

Please indicate the years of experience in your organization

1-3, 4-8, 9-15, 16+

Please indicate the number of years in this position

1-3, 4-8, 9-15, 16+

Please indicate the number of years in this field

1-3, 4-8, 9-15, 16+

Please indicate your highest level of education

CC, BA, MA, MBA, DOCTORATE

Other earned degrees:

Please select your age from the list below

25-35, 36-45,46-55, 56-65, 66+

Please indicate the ethnicity(s) with which you identify.

African American

Asian/Asian American

Filipino

Hispanic/Latinx

Native American/Alaskan Native

Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

White

Five Adaptive Leadership Characteristic Definitions

Making naming elephants in the room the norm. The act of openly addressing sensitive underlying issues, or undiscussables, to resolve potential barriers that interfere with an organization realizing its full potential.

Nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization. The collective ownership across team member roles for the decision-making of operational goals and outcomes of the organization's future.

Encouraging independent judgment. A leader's capacity to provide an opportunity for team members to make choices based on personal and professional experience, regardless of the position held within the organization.

Developing leadership capacity. The systemic focus on expanding competencies and resources, and intentionally motivating groups or individuals to increase leadership potential proactively.

Institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning. Providing a culture conducive to the safe exploration of new ideas and sharing of lessons learned both from an individual and organizational perspective and creating a sustainable learning culture driven by a willingness to overcome engrained mental models across all levels of the organization.

Interview Questions

Characteristic: Making naming elephants in the room the norm.

IQ#1
What practices do you use as a leader in your organization to make addressing sensitive underlying issues an organizational norm?

IQ#2
How does your organization create an environment for individuals and groups to resolve potential barriers that prevent the organization from reaching its potential?

Characteristic: Nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization.

IQ#3
Can you describe a time (in your current role) when you facilitated shared ownership of organizational goals amongst team members?

IQ#4
As a leader, how do you provide opportunities for members to comment on and raise issues that are not within their area of responsibility?

Characteristic: Encouraging independent judgment.

IQ#5
Describe a situation where you encouraged employees to make choices based on personal and professional experience?

IQ#6
What are some systems and structures that you have in place for team members to exercise independent judgment and choice?

Characteristic: Developing leadership capacity.

IQ#7
What are the important leadership competencies that your organization focuses on in developing leaders?

IQ#8
As a leader, how do you motivate individuals and groups to increase their leadership potential?

Characteristic: Institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning.

IQ#9
How do you institutionalize or make reflection a permanent part of your organizational culture?

IQ#10
How do you institutionalize or make continuous learning a permanent part of your organizational culture?

"Thank you very much for your time. If you would like, when the results of our research are known, we will send you a copy of our findings."

APPENDIX F

Field Test Interviewer Survey/Observer Feedback

1. How did you feel about the interview? Do you think you had ample opportunities to describe what you do as a leader when working with your team or staff?
2. Did you feel the amount of time for the interview was ok?
3. Were the questions by and large clear, or were there places where you were uncertain what was being asked?
4. Can you recall any words or terms being asked about during the interview that were confusing?
5. And finally, did I appear comfortable during the interview… (I'm pretty new at this)?

Interview Observer Feedback Reflection Questions

We will discuss the following reflection questions after completing the interview field test.

1. How long did the interview take? Did the time seem to be appropriate?
2. Were the questions clear, or were there places when the interviewee was unclear?
3. Are there any words or terms used during the interview that were unclear or confusing?
4. How did you feel during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous? For the observer: How did you perceive the interviewer in regard to the preceding descriptors?
5. Did you feel prepared to conduct the interview? Is there something you could have done to be better prepared? For the observer: How did you perceive the interviewer in regard to the preceding descriptors?
6. What parts of the interview went the most smoothly, and why do you think that was the case?
7. Are there parts of the interview that seemed to be awkward, and why do you think that was the case?

8. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would it be, and how would you change it?
9. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?

APPENDIX G

National Institutes of Health Clearance

CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 18-May-2022
Expiration Date N/A
Record ID 48899406

This is to certify that:

Danielle Daubin

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Human Subjects Research
(Curriculum Group)
Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

University of Massachusetts Global

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative
101 NE 3rd Avenue, Suite 320
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www.citiprogram.org

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?we4932685-b69e-4082-bfbd-543ffbc36b24-48899406

APPENDIX H

Participant's Bill of Rights

UMASS GLOBAL
A nonprofit affiliate of the University of Massachusetts

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 researchers to answer them. You may also 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 I

28 Themes in Descending Order (as a percent of whole)

	THEME	Total Frequency	Total %
RQ5	Provide time for professional conversations	24	5.687204
RQ4	Provide opportunities to lead	24	5.687204
RQ4	Tap into people's strengths and interests	22	5.21327
RQ2	Welcome feedback and input	21	4.976303
RQ3	Value opinions and experience of staff	21	4.976303
RQ3	Engage in open communication	21	4.976303
RQ1	Provide time and space to discuss	20	4.739336
RQ5	Provide resources, time, and funds for professional development	19	4.50237
RQ3	Create a culture of collaboration	18	4.265403
RQ4	Know and support people	17	4.028436
RQ2	Provide opportunities that empower people	16	3.791469
RQ3	Provide instructional autonomy	16	3.791469
RQ3	Provide opportunities and encouragement	16	3.791469
RQ3	Encourage staff to try something new	15	3.554502
RQ4	Listen to people	15	3.554502
RQ5	Provide time to debrief	14	3.317536
RQ1	Acknowledge issues with the whole group and/or individuals	14	3.317536
RQ5	Provide time to debrief	14	3.317536
RQ2	Create various teams	12	2.843602
RQ3	Create a culture of trust	12	2.843602
RQ5	Provide time to collaborate	11	2.606635
RQ4	Provide opportunities for growth	11	2.606635
RQ2	Build culture of collaboration	11	2.606635
RQ2	Involve people in making decisions	10	2.369668
RQ1	Create a culture of honesty	9	2.132701
RQ1	Create a culture of trust	9	2.132701
RQ1	Anticipate reactions and responses	7	1.658768
RQ1	Seek feedback and responses	7	1.658768

RQ1: Making naming elephants in the room the norm

RQ2: Nurturing shared leadership

RQ3: Encourage independent judgment

RQ4: Develop leadership capacity

RQ5: Institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning