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Phenomenological Study on Adaptive Leadership During Times of Great Change
and Opportunity as Perceived by California Public School Superintendents
in Los Angeles County School Districts

A Dissertation by
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Irvine, California

School of Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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Committee in charge:

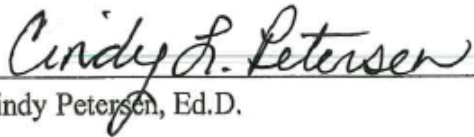
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in Los Angeles County School Districts

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This dissertation is affectionately dedicated to my beloved parents, Eleanor” Jennie” De Knikker and Kenneth De Knikker. My mother instilled in me a passion for reading and learning, emphasizing the love of Christ and the significance of compassion for others. Meanwhile, my father imparted enduring lessons of perseverance, hard work, and standing up for what is right. I deeply wish they could be here to witness the completion of this work.

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ABSTRACT

Phenomenological Study on Adaptive Leadership During Times of Great Change
and Opportunity as Perceived by California Public School Superintendents
in Los Angeles County School Districts

by Darrin De Knikker

Purpose: The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe strategies used by superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County to build an adaptive capacity based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership identified by Heifetz et al. (2009).

Methodology: This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of superintendents serving in public school districts in Los Angeles County. Purposeful, convenience sampling was used to identify 10 participants who met the study's criteria. The semistructured, open-ended interview protocol was developed by a thematic research team of nine peer researchers and three faculty advisors. Data collected from the interviews and artifacts were analyzed to identify themes related to the study's research questions.

Findings: Analysis of the data collected from interviews and artifacts resulted in 614 frequencies across 23 major themes and five key findings. From the themes and key findings, five major findings emerged.

Conclusions: Five conclusions were drawn based on the major findings and supporting literature. Superintendents build organizational adaptive capacity by (a) building trusting relationships that promote open dialogue to strengthen communication (b) emphasizing collaborative ownership using effective communication, (c) decision-making parameters

foster independent judgment and adaptability, (d) supporting professional growth opportunities, and (e) emphasizing reflection and learning.

Recommendations: The researcher recommends a strategic enhancement in leadership methodologies and training programs. This augmentation advocates the incorporation of a community collaboration framework, drawing inspiration from the wealth of best practice from the California County Office of Education repository. To support the integration of shared leadership and autonomy, diverse resources such as materials, presentations, articles, and support documents, can promote an engaged administrative environment. For the optimal outcome, superintendents should construct a comprehensive framework to delineate opportunities for team building, foster collaboration, and establish clear goals aligning with the overarching vision of the district.

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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 the 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. (2009) as perceived by leaders, with this research focusing on superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County.

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 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. Next, I interviewed 10 superintendent leaders to determine what leadership strategies were used to build an organization's adaptive capacity. The team cocreated 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 conducted this thematic study. Each researcher studied a different organization with populations in middle school public school principals, community-based nonprofit leaders, public school special education directors, small school district superintendents, community emergency response team (CERT) program managers, navy command senior enlisted leaders (CSEL), public school district superintendents, nurse executives, and on-site multifamily rental property management leaders.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This study aimed to take the concept of ongoing change leadership as it pertains to the crucible moments or the challenging situations and ask what type of leadership style is required to address the concerns because of the link between the problem and the leadership style implemented (Bennis, 2009). The research will investigate how K-12 leaders influence their educational organizations using adaptive leadership in their practices to mitigate distress and promote the welfare of all.

The rapidly changing and complex world over recent years has faced the coronavirus pandemic, government mandates, wildfires, closures of businesses, civic unrest, and divisive politics that continue to pose challenges for organizational leaders (Arnett & Waite, 2020). Organizations must address the widespread disruption of significant functions, including communication, transportation, and medical infrastructure (Morgan, 2020; Netolicky, 2020). The pandemic's compounding effects interfered with how organizations conducted business, forcing leaders to reconsider the nature and degree of change necessary to operate safely. This fragile state led to an economic recession and damage to the industrial infrastructure (Kaden, 2020). The effect of a significant pandemic striking world organizations and countries resulted in ongoing change, testing the limits of leaders and crisis managers (Morgan, 2020). Additionally, the response to the problem was exacerbated by conflicts between local and national officials. The question of who was responsible for emergency response and recovery efforts paralyzed and eroded public trust in leadership (Carter & May, 2020; Morgan, 2020).

Over time, national and world leaders came under great scrutiny from the public and the media for the government's slow response to aid and release of funds to support ongoing change efforts (Arnett & Waite, 2020; Carter & May, 2020). The conflict between government leaders and medical experts illustrated this. Medical leaders in public presented a different message from the governmental leaders, which included publicly tweeted derogatory comments (Jones & McBeth, 2020). Government leaders worked to understand the change, politicize events, and solidify communication during an emergency. According to Arnett and Waite (2020), the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis demanded a fresh look at leadership to address decision making and action.

One institution impacted by the pandemic was America's schools. School districts across the United States have been impacted by disasters and crises, demonstrating a need for strategic leadership from school leaders (Björk et al., 2018; Kowalski & Brunner, 2011; Williams, 2005). With these complexities and the changes affecting schools today, reviewing the superintendents' leadership role to navigate the impact of the change on their organizations is critical (Netolicky, 2020; Northouse, 2021).

Du Plessis and Keyter (2020) stated, "Challenges are much more complex because of the complexity of human beings and their behaviors" (p. 71). According to Northouse (2021), specific leadership skills are necessary to manage a change or crisis to benefit the organization's members. These complex challenges necessitate school leaders to inspire their institutions to adapt to change. Adaptive work requires evaluating what is required to change while planning how the organization will adapt and succeed in the new circumstances (Heifetz et al., 2009; Northouse, 2019).

Background

Leaders continue to face complex changes that challenge organizations. Organizations must address the potential disruption of these significant changes (Morgan, 2020; Netolicky, 2020). The current environment requires a distinct type of change leadership, decision making, and action (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020). A factor that can influence a change is the leadership approach. The key to this leadership approach is adopting a philosophy of understanding and committing to an execution of a plan while responding to members in the organization. This approach includes a collective effort to change attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Simmons, 2022). Additionally, the response to change must carefully recognize the potential impact on the external environment and consider the best option to support the success of the organization (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).

Organizations face scrutiny over the method of leadership practices to meet the ever-changing challenges (Carter & May, 2020). Most crises present a change opportunity for organizations' leadership to initiate new processes from the lessons learned and previously developed plans, organizational structures, and policies (Boin et al., 2017). The pandemic has highlighted the need for research on change leadership in K-12 schools (Northouse, 2016). Developing leadership styles requires preparation and training to adapt those skills to ongoing change context, which is frequently occurring at schools (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020; Grissom & Condon, 2021).

Traditional Change Leadership and Management

Today's change culture is no longer defined by a local crisis (Boin et al., 2017; Gainey, 2009). Leadership models developed based on traditional crisis and change

leadership from a four phases model that is presented as a cycle of preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation (Baird, 2010). Although this four-phase model developed a common language for crisis management, it is inadequate to meet the new demands of a global pandemic (Baird, 2010; Boin et al., 2017; Gainey, 2010).

Contemporary Crisis Leadership and Management

The world has become interconnected, and crises can impact globally (Boin et al., 2017; Gainey, 2009). Leadership has many conflicting values and is more complex than commonly developed (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). Educational organizations are also complex institutions with internal and external factors that must be considered when leading and making decisions (Gainey, 2010; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). Further, educational institutions must choose a leadership style that addresses leadership difficulties and individual, current, and organizational complexity (Boin et al., 2017; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). It is necessary to have a leadership style conducive to managing an ongoing change issue to maintain the welfare of the organization (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020).

Theoretical Foundations

For this research, four leadership theories were considered foundational to the study after reviewing the literature on leadership. The first is transactional leadership. The second foundation is transformational leadership. The third foundation is servant leadership, and the last is authentic leadership. All four frameworks can be relevant to meeting the needs and providing guidance before, during, and after an ongoing change event (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020).

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership theory focuses on supervision, organization and group performance, and interactions between leaders and followers based on using rewards to promote a desired performance (Avolio, Zhu, et al., 2004). In transactional leadership, the leader creates structures to set the followers' expectations and the consequences of not meeting them (Lamb, 2013). Transactional leadership is likened to management practice and can produce quick results during change (Cherry, 2023). Transactional leaders are in a position of authority, including rewards and punishments as part of the relationship (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is what M. L. Kelly (2003) argued as the most effective style in times of ongoing change because of leaders' quick reaction to change during urgent situations. According to Bass (1985), transformational leaders have qualities that address a problem and mitigate some of the adverse consequences of the problem. The first of such attributes is the set of core values the leader uses to build trust in the organization and to enhance confidence in the decision (Bass, 1985; M. L. Kelly, 2003). A transformational leadership attribute inspires confidence by using inspirational motivation and stimulating a sense of purpose. Transformational leaders promote creativity, intellectual stimulation, and autonomy among their followers, encourage decision making, and ensure the organization's involvement (Bass, 1985; du Plessis & Keyter, 2020; M. L. Kelly, 2003).

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership theory is based on the writings and research of Robert Greenleaf during the 1970s. Servant leadership characteristics or features could be relevant to providing the necessary guidance before, during, and after an ongoing change event (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020; Spears, 2018). Servant leadership greatly emphasizes people's emotional, physical, and mental healing. Leaders seek consensus rather than compliance during the actual stage of change, and servant leaders can conceive solutions to problems before the onset. Servant leadership supports others to realize their personal and professional worth, allowing the followers to rise beyond their known capabilities to deal with extraordinary challenges.

Authentic Leadership

Authentic leadership fosters a behavior that promotes positive psychological capacities and an ethical climate (Walumbwa et al., 2008). This leadership model is driven by self-awareness and unbiased processing, communicating authenticity, and displaying trustworthy behaviors and actions (Gardner et al., 2005). Thus, authenticity is the degree to which leaders are true to themselves despite external forces or influences that are divergent from their beliefs and value. Research by Avolio and Gardner (2005) and Northouse (2016) indicated that authentic leadership offers the internal resources to face challenging events. This awareness directly impacts leadership effectiveness, followers' trust, and team effectiveness (Northouse, 2016).

Adaptive leadership

Adaptive leadership assists leaders and the organization to adapt and thrive in the event of challenge and to prepare them to address the process of change (Simmons,

2022). Adaptive leadership was introduced by Harvard professors Marty Linsky and Ronald Heifetz. According to Heifetz et al. (2009), leadership is a theory that promotes a focus on the change process in response to an ongoing change event. Heifetz (1994) recommended the adaptive framework to organizational leaders during times of change or complex issues. Consequently, adaptive leadership is a critical theory that does not just change the external environment but instead identifies the best path and positively influences the political culture (Khan, 2017). According to Heifetz et al. (2009), today's leaders must understand the political relationships critical to the organizational system. To think politically, the leader must view the organization as a web of stakeholders. Modern stakeholders expect leaders, especially public leaders, to keep them safe and effectively communicate how they plan to move forward (Boin et al., 2017; Gainey, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

According to Heifetz et al. (2009), the purpose of the framework is to help change leaders “assess organizations’ ability to increase their adaptive capacity” (p. 101). In times of change, stakeholders look to leaders to respond to prevent or minimize the damage and harm of the change (Boin et al., 2017). According to Parks (2005), today's organizations and stakeholders require a new kind of leadership that encompasses a mindset and capabilities of a dynamic and active process that addresses the complexities of the changes and communicates them to the organization. This modern organization expects leaders to keep addressing change and share how they plan to move forward (Boin et al., 2017; Gainey, 2010). To support these stakeholder expectations, Heifetz et al. (2009) presented the five characteristics of an adaptive leadership framework for

change leaders. The five critical characteristics are that elephants in the room are named, responsibility for the organization's future is shared, independent judgment is expected, leadership capacity is developed, and reflection and continued learning are institutionalized (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Elephants in the Room Are Named

Ideally, leaders can detect potential change and work to move more favorably (Boin et al., 2017). Nevertheless, many problems come as a surprise to leaders, putting them in a position to respond effectively to deal with the effects. Leaders must determine who is affected and establish cultural norms and procedures to ensure the elephants are acknowledged and discussed (Heifetz et al., 2009). Highly adaptive organizations promote open dialogue, and stakeholders who sense environmental changes that impact current practice are free to communicate that concern. Adaptive leaders develop systems to ensure the hidden perspectives are raised and decide what might be the next issue while trying to assess the political implications of the ongoing change in real-time (Boin et al., 2017; Heifetz et al., 2009).

Responsibility for the Organization's Future Is Shared

Ongoing change is not an everyday event; leaders are called upon to make difficult decisions, usually without much time or with all the information available (Boin et al., 2017). Leaders with a high capacity to adapt are responsible for bringing a wide array of stakeholders together to share the responsibility of the decision-making process, identify roles and functions within the organization to align resources, and coordinate efforts to provide the best possible response (Boin et al., 2017; Heifetz et al., 2009). Moreover, employees must accept and understand the accountability for solving the crisis

and the broader political gain when responsibility is distributed to provide the most effective response (Boin et al., 2017; Heifetz & Laurie, 2001) ensuring this shared structure, for the systematic problem solving increases the organizations' confidence in addressing change while encouraging collective learning and collaboration (Simmons, 2022; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).

Independent Judgment Is Expected

Once leaders determine what adaptive challenges are, why, and what needs to be done, they are expected to communicate effectively with those directly affected (Boin et al., 2017; Heifetz et al., 2009). Further, adaptive leaders must also work to mobilize individuals regardless of their position but rather because of their specific expertise to collectively address challenges (Northouse, 2019; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). To do this, individuals must present factually, show care, and instill confidence in their framing of the change and response procedure (Boin et al., 2017). Adaptive leaders can shift the organizations' practices and mindsets to those by which individuals are valued for their judgment (Northouse, 2019; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).

Leadership Capacity is Developed

Leaders assess the individual's readiness for the change to move beyond the event. This readiness for change begins with the individuals who possess a long-term view and perspective of the organization (Heifetz et al., 2009; Simmons, 2022). Adaptive leaders stress the importance of getting the right people in the right roles, building those people's capacity for on-the-job guidance, and making the most significant contribution to the organization. Critical to this process are managers who identify people with the capacity to do their jobs better than they do and nurture or mentor these individuals.

According to Simmons (2022), adaptive leadership encourages building people's capacity within the organization to demonstrate flexibility and productivity when addressing the most complex challenges. The adaptive leadership approach facilitates organizations to promote capacity building by encouraging collective learning and collaboration (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).

Reflection and Continuous Learning Are Institutionalized

Most crises present an opportunity to clean up and start something new from the lessons learned about previously developed plans, organizational structures, and policies (Boin et al., 2017). This critical task requires learning to interpret what goes on around one and new ways to carry out that work (Boin et al., 2017; Heifetz et al., 2009).

Organizations that focus on developing adaptive capacity are open and committed to learning (Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Laurie, 2001). People at all levels of the organization must be available to learn, and it is critical to enable the organization to adapt (Heifetz, 1994). In educational organizations, adaptive leadership is about adopting a growth mindset to build the institutional learning capacity for all educators, especially school and district leadership (Bagwell, 2020; Simmons, 2022).

The Superintendent as Adaptive Leader in Public Schools

The educational community was faced with adapting to the new methods of constructing instructional services for students following the 2020 pandemic shutdown (Arnett & Waite, 2020; McNulty, 2022). Along with the shutdowns and reopening of schools, school leaders were also faced with financial challenges, employment shortages, wildfires, school shootings, social-emotional learning, and social awareness needs (ten Hove et al., 2021). School leaders are also challenged to develop both the skills and

structures to address the changes and the ability to connect to the community (Grissom & Condon, 2021). Before the pandemic, the public school systems in the United States had not received sufficient attention from school leadership preparation programs or educational leadership researchers to address crises or change (Grissom & Condon, 2021; McNulty, 2022). Public school leaders need preparation, training, and planning to connect those skills to structures to assist them in leading each stage of change management.

The immediate change issues and dynamics of these challenges continue to pose extraordinary needs for school leaders (Bagwell, 2020). According to Khan (2017), educational institutions operate in a complex environment that includes internal and external factors. Today's complex and ever-changing environment in educational organizations requires leaders to inspire school communities to adopt a problem-solving philosophy to address challenges (Northouse, 2019; Simmons, 2022). School districts and superintendents who adapt to challenging environments of change through a capacity-building process will improve the lives of students, teachers, and employees (Heifetz et al., 2009; Simmons, 2022).

Although much has been written to explain crisis leadership and management, it will be some time before people can fully assess crisis leadership in school districts (Grissom & Condon, 2021). Research on the widespread nature of crisis and change in schools and what opportunity exists to gain an understanding of leadership in schools is yet to be determined (Arnett & Waite, 2020; Grissom & Condon, 2021). Research is needed on what factors influenced school and district leadership's response to communities and the continued approach to crisis management (McNulty, 2022;

Sunderman et al., 2020) Learning the impact of leadership styles within the K-12 school setting may prove beneficial in reducing learning loss and other unwanted social and emotional behaviors in students' during times of ongoing significant change (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020; Grissom & Condon, 2021).

Statement of the Research Problem

The world is increasingly interconnected, and change can impact on a global scale (Boin et al., 2017; Gainey, 2009). According to Fortunato et al. (2017), leaders must predict, recognize, detect, and address issues that turn into crises and strategically respond. Although there are no standard guidelines for leaders during an emergency, those affected look to leaders to react efficiently and effectively (Boin et al., 2017).

Times of change are no longer bound by social, geographic, or singular aspects within an organization (Boin et al., 2017). As part of the public sphere, school leaders must diagnose the change trends, ensure they are prepared for the change, and meet the challenges that threaten the school organization's ability to function (Gainey, 2010). Although there is no standard playbook for leaders, changes in operating environments require the ability to lead adaptive work to address uncertain and less predictable conditions (Craig, 2010).

To meet the demands of ongoing change leadership and management, Heifetz et al. (2009) recommended the adaptive framework to organizational leaders during times of change or complex issues. Adaptive leadership does not just change the external environment but instead identifies the best path and positively influences the political culture (Khan, 2017). Modern stakeholders expect leaders, especially public leaders, to

keep them safe and effectively communicate the change and how they plan to move forward (Boin et al., 2017; Gainey, 2010).

Moreover, Heifetz et al. (2009) emphasized the mobilization of stakeholders to engage in the change initiative; leadership must identify the most important values and develop processes to support them. Times of change or crisis are no longer bound by social, geographic, or singular aspects within an organization (Boin et al., 2017). As part of the public sphere, school leaders must diagnose the change trends, ensure they are prepared for the change, and meet the challenges that threaten the school organization's ability to function (Gainey, 2010; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Laurie, 2001).

Although research has been conducted to explain ongoing change leadership and management, it will be some time before researchers can fully assess change leadership regarding the change in school districts (Grissom & Condon, 2021). More research is needed on ongoing change regarding readiness and systems to address it, including research on the widespread nature of the COVID pandemic in schools and what opportunity exists to gain an understanding of change leadership in schools on a large-scale basis (Arnett & Waite, 2020; Grissom & Condon, 2021). This includes an exploration of what local structures and resources improved schools' management of ongoing change including what leadership styles prevented student learning loss and other outcomes (McNulty, 2022; Sunderman et al., 2020). Research on the impact of superintendents' leadership styles within the K-12 school setting may prove beneficial in reducing learning loss and other unwanted social and emotional behaviors in students during times of crisis or significant change (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020; Grissom & Condon, 2021).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe strategies used by superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County to build an adaptive capacity based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership identified by Heifetz et al. (2009).

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What strategies do superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County 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 Questions

1. How do superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County build an organization's adaptive capacity through making naming elephants in the room the norm?
2. How do superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County build an organization's adaptive capacity through nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization?
3. How do superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County build an organization's adaptive capacity through encouraging independent judgment?

4. How do superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County build an organization's adaptive capacity through developing leadership capacity?
5. How do superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County build an organization's adaptive capacity through institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning?

Significance of the Study

The organizational change is an unexpected event for stakeholders. It is a potentially destructive threat to the organization's core (Bundy et al., 2007; König et al., 2020). The rapid change issues and dynamics of the coronavirus pandemic continue to pose extraordinary challenges to leaders (Bagwell, 2020). According to Khan (2017), educational institutions operate in a complex environment that includes internal and external factors. Today's complex and ever-changing pandemic effects on educational organizations require leaders to inspire school communities to adopt a problem-solving philosophy to address challenges (Northouse, 2019; Simmons, 2022). In addition to navigating these complex issues, leaders maintain the well-being of the organization from challenges of legal and political change (Boin et al., 2017).

Amidst times of difficulty and change, those with authority are turned to for guidance and establishment of the norm (Valeras & Cordes, 2020). Individuals who experience adversity look to their leaders for clarity and to understand what happened to place it within the bigger picture (Boin et al., 2017; Stern, 2013a). When schools face crisis and change, the superintendent of the district is the one the community looks to for guidance and leadership (Björk et al., 2018; Domenech, 2020; Hemmer & Elliff, 2020).

The superintendent is tasked with the organization's transformation to meet these required changes (Holla et al., 2018). These leaders must have problem solving and critical-thinking skills to help ease the ongoing changes that require decisive and efficacious responses (de Yarza et al., 2023). For superintendents to be successful, they must overcome the unfavorable situation and confusion in the organization and rebuild the organization in allowance to the changing environmental status (Fener & Cevik, 2015).

This qualitative research study adds to the limited literature regarding school superintendents and their management experiences, strategies, and actions during ongoing changes in an organizational environment. More importantly, this study serves to connect the traditional and contemporary leadership response and management strategies to the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership proposed by Heifetz et al. (2009) in the framework for change leaders. Thus far, there has been limited research on superintendents' strategies to make decisions and coordinate response efforts, accounting for their actions or demonstrating learning from a change event such as a pandemic. Also, this study will benefit professional organizations that support superintendents through professional development, training, coaching, and professional activities.

This phenomenological study provides superintendents with a valuable resource to help them develop comprehensive change response plans to lead during and through a change event. The development of a change response plan can assist to ensure that challenges are being acknowledged by all members of the organization (Simmons, 2022). Change leadership and management support for superintendents is limited (Hemmer & Elliff, 2020). Therefore, this research can add value to university and professional

organizations that train and provide resources to superintendents to address change efforts and mitigate their effects on the organization. Superintendents who can successfully navigate a path forward, maneuver through the challenges, and trust in their colleagues can manage the change (Bagwell, 2020). These leaders will be able to provide closure and learning opportunities to minimize the impacts of future organizational change (Boin et al., 2017).

Definitions

Key terms and variables relevant to the study are defined in this section to provide a clear understanding of the intended meaning used in this research (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019).

Theoretical Definitions

A theoretical definition serves to provide the meaning of a term as a construct in a theoretical context (Ndjama & Joubert, 2020). These definitions are created using other research studies and publications and can provide an understanding for operational definitions.

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

Adaptive leadership. According to Heifetz et al. (2009), “Adaptive leadership is the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive” (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., 2015; Veldsman & Johnson, 2016; Vera & Crossan, 2004).

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 (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 et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Northouse, 2016; Tremblay et al., 2016).

Operational Definitions

Operational definitions define the key terms of the study based on how a researcher has determined to measure a concept. Given the research study's purpose,

these definitions convey the logic, ideas, and perspectives of the variables to avoid misinterpretation of the intended meaning (Ndjama & Joubert, 2020).

Building an organization's adaptive capacity. For this study, building an organization's adaptive capacity refers to the ability of the superintendents to respond to change, challenges, and ongoing change productively so that the school district continues to maintain focus on the organization's vision and positive student outcomes.

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.

Public school districts. For the purposes of this study, a public school district is defined as a district that provides comprehensive academic instruction to students in grades transitional kindergarten through 12, including districts that service K-8 students (elementary districts) and K-12 students (unified districts).

Superintendent. For this study, the superintendent is defined as the organizational and instructional leader of a public California public school district. The superintendent provides leadership and works with all staff, students, and families to develop and maintain a culture of high performance.

Delimitations

This study was delimited to 10 California public school district superintendents in Los Angeles County who met four of the six following 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

- evidence of having written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings
- recognition by their peers
- membership in associations of groups focused on their field

Organization of the Study

This research study comprises five chapters and corresponding references and appendices. Chapter I introduced the adaptive leadership theory, the foundation on which this study was conducted and identified the relevancy of conducting research on the use of adaptive strategies by superintendents to build organizational adaptive capacity in light of crisis, challenges, and change. Additionally, Chapter I revealed the problem statement, purpose statement, research questions, definition of key terms, and the study delimitations. Chapter II gives an in-depth review of the literature discussed in Chapter I. This includes seminal authors and works of adaptive leadership theory as well as more recent and related findings and trends as they relate to adaptive leadership, leadership during crisis, challenge, and change, K-12 educational leadership, and organizational adaptive capacity building. Chapter III reviews the methodological approach to conduct the study and identified reasoning to the phenomenological design and data collection processes and procedures. Chapter IV describes the data collected from interviews and summarizes the key findings through identified themes. Finally, Chapter V provides a conclusion for the study by synthesizing the findings, reviewing implications for action, and outlining recommendations for future research studies.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A literature review was conducted to provide the foundational context for understanding how organizational leaders build an adaptive capacity during times of great change and opportunity. The chapter reviews the literature relevant to the purpose of the study and the historical background and theoretical context to identify and describe the strategies organizational leaders use to build an adaptive capacity based on Heifetz et al.'s (2009) five key characteristics of adaptive leadership. Chapter II introduces, examines, and presents literature on practices and strategies used by superintendents of California public schools in Los Angeles County. The explored literature specifically highlighted how organizational leaders used the five characteristics of adaptive leadership to build the capacity for change. The five characteristics of adaptive leadership identified and explored were 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.

A synthesis matrix of relevant literature was developed to inform the collection and synthesis of the sources reviewed (Appendix A). The synthesis matrix provided a comprehensive guide for investigating the themes raised by the references. This synthesis matrix was used to align the references with the structure of the theoretical framework.

The literature reviewed is organized into five sections. The first section includes the background and identified leadership as the main factor in the success or failure of the organization and a foundation for the framework of this research study. The second section presents the theoretical framework for the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership (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). The third section focuses on K-12 public schools and adaptive leadership. The fourth section concentrates on how superintendents' leadership impacts public schools during times of great change through the development of adaptive capacity adaptive leadership. The fifth and final section concludes with a literature summary and identifies the gap, highlighting the need for this study.

Introduction

Leadership has been identified as the central reason for the success or failure of organizational apparatus, which is the framework for an institution (Veldsman & Johnson, 2016). Superintendents of public schools face the challenges of leading their organizations through diverse student needs, educational policy changes, and financial and political pressures from their respective institutions (Simmons, 2022). At this critical juncture, leaders are seeking to reinvent themselves to be successful in the world of continual change (Veldsman & Johnson, 2016). The experiences and behaviors of these public school leaders can be studied through a set of leadership paradigms and theories. This study centers on adaptive leadership and how leaders adopt a problem-solving belief to guarantee challenges are being perceived and the structures are in place to address them (Simmons, 2022).

Times of Great Change and Opportunity

Organizations are experiencing a more complex, fast-paced, and tumultuous environment than previously experienced, such as artificial intelligence, sustainability in a postpandemic era, natural disasters, educational disparities, social injustice, health

disparities, global economic downturns, and high failure rates for organizational and innovation change (Fredberg & Pregmark, 2021). These situations elicit political and behavioral components with the power to influence how individuals, organizations, governments, polities, and the media act and interact (Ansell et al., 2014). Individuals who face challenges look to their leaders to make meaning of these situations and place them within the greater perspective (Boin et al., 2017; Stern, 2013a). Organizational leaders build an understanding of what it means to lower uncertainty, endorse recognition, and offer confidence (Noordegraaf & Newman, 2011; Pennebaker & Lay, 2002) or to develop resiliency and pride (de Bussy & Paterson, 2012).

For organizations to survive and thrive in constant change, leaders must build and maintain a mindset of change capacity (Albrecht & Roughsedge, 2022). The ability to navigate through organizational change quickly and successfully is a key to competitive and organizational survival (Burnes, 2004; Fugate et al., 2012). Essential to successful navigation is the ability to develop change or adaptive capacity (Costanza et al., 2016). Contemporary organizations must build change competency frameworks and adaptive capabilities to enable them to thrive in volatile, ongoing, and disruptive change (Heckmann et al., 2016; Higgs & Rowland, 2000; Johansen, 2007). To measure success and support the development of change leaders, validation of the leadership framework must take place in the organization (Albrecht & Roughsedge, 2022).

Organizational change leaders recognize the importance of adaptive change capabilities and the ability to respond to a broad range of opportunities and threats (Albrecht & Roughsedge, 2022) quickly and effectively. Cultures are important aspects of adaptive change capabilities and ultimately determine whether sustained change is

accomplished (Costanza et al., 2016). The shared and embedded change values established by organizational leaders increase the likelihood of success in ongoing organizational change (Albrecht & Roughsedge, 2022; Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010). It is also essential that organizational leaders are trained in their roles and responsibilities in leading their organizations through the change and that these leaders reconstruct their skill sets to meet complex issues (Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010). Leadership must have well-developed and well-integrated adaptive capacity capabilities to turn challenges into opportunities for future organizational success (Albrecht & Roughsedge, 2022).

Leadership

Leadership is vital in developing practical and innovative organizations (Dinham, 2005; Leithwood, 2007). Leadership ability provides influence on a group or organization by directing, structuring, and facilitating activities and relationships (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). Leadership definitions have evolved as times of change or complex issues have given rise to new opportunities and the rapid rate of keeping up with them (Bennis & Nanus, 2007). The complexities of natural disasters, financial crises, social injustices, and a global pandemic threaten the organization's very existence (Boin et al., 2017). These challenges highlight the need for effective change leadership to guide and respond strategically in limited informational situations (Fortunato et al., 2017). These change leaders must demonstrate flexibility and an awareness of the needs of self and others to sustain an adaptive capacity under great stress (Avolio, 2005; Boin et al., 2017). Change leaders guide others to new heights or places that they would not otherwise be able to achieve on their own merit (McCloskey, 2015). Furthermore, studies on leadership have

continued to explore the influence of leaders on employees' feelings, perceptions, attitudes, and relationships regarding change in the workplace (Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010).

Over time, the definition of leadership has evolved from a focus on control and power to relationships and influence (Raffo & Clark, 2018). These leadership changes are outlined in Northouse's (2019) book *Leadership: Theory and Practice*. According to Northouse, leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to accomplish a common goal. The meaning of leadership is complex and includes many dimensions. For some people, leadership is a skill or behavior; for others, it is a relationship or a process. Furthermore, leadership has been defined and conceptualized in many ways (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). The common thread in all classifications of leadership is the influence process that assists groups toward goal attainment (Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010). The selected leadership approach influences how leaders can implement adaptive leadership characteristics and impact the change process during times of great need (Heifetz et al., 2009).

The Evolution of Leadership Theories and Practices

Leadership continues to be a primary centerpiece of study in all organizational fields. The space within which leaders function is vital and continues to change in response to external pressures (Leithwood, 2007). In this vital space, an ever-increasing demand from stakeholders for improved performance is required and expected (Robertson & Webber, 2002). According to Heifetz et al. (2004), leadership mobilizes people to tackle challenging issues and do the adaptive work necessary to achieve progress. Gardner (1990) defined leadership as the operation of convincing by which an

individual introduces a group to a position held by the leader or shared by the leader and the followers. According to Gardner, leaders are essential to the organization and perform critical activities for the group to accomplish its purpose. This leadership significantly impacts the organization and its ability to learn and grow (Leithwood, 2007). Given the importance of leadership to the success of the organization, it is expected that numerous theories would be analyzed.

Multiple leadership viewpoints and theories exist to inform the work of organizational leadership. Today's popular approaches to leadership are transactional, transformational, servant, authentic, and adaptive (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020). These have valuable dimensions in conceptualizing and analyzing leadership roles. Each has proponents, and most focus on the people and their roles in bringing change and the mindset of the leaders (Vander Ark, 2021). The examination of the theoretical foundations of leadership highlights the importance of leadership and the relationship of the followers.

Theoretical Foundations

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership theory was introduced in the 1970s to support production by providing incentives and motivation (Bass & Bass, 2008; Stone et al., 2004). Transactional leadership is a style that focuses on results (Bass, 1990). This type of leadership relies on a reward theory to ensure compliance (Bass, 2008) and continues to be practiced widely in organizations (Stone & Patterson, 2005). In the face of organizational change, transactional leaders rely on a reciprocal philosophy of give and take versus transformational leaders who create change via their example (Bass, 1985).

Transactional leaders are in a position of power, enacting rewards and punishments as part of the relationship (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). Though transactional leadership can be effective, there remain situations in which this leadership theory stifles the leaders' ability to take their organization through times of significant change. During times of great change, the transactional exchange of incentives or punishment may not be practical (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020).

Transactional leadership depends on the organization's existing structure and gauges success against the system of rewards and penalties (Bass, 1990). Bass and Avolio (1994) explained transactional leadership as reward leadership, and the exchange between leaders and followers promotes active and positive exchange. The followers were rewarded for compliance with the goals developed. Moreover, transactional leaders set the criteria for their followers based on the defined requirements (Birasnav, 2014). Transactional leadership theory is contingent upon leaders giving employees something they want in exchange for the accomplished task (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). The shift to transactional leadership became practiced by controlling and exchanging one thing for another from employees to employers (Burns, 1978). Transactional leadership involves the leader focusing on managing the organization's day-to-day operations without focusing on overall organizational goals. This misalignment of organizational goals focuses on incentives for production versus how employees can be active contributors to the overall success of an organization or how employees can be active contributors to the organization's overall success (Avolio & Bass, 1998; Bass, 1985, 2008).

Zohar and Luria (2004) suggested that transactional leadership positively impacts organizational outcomes when managing complex operating processes. This would imply

that transformational leaders respond to emergencies and transactional leaders execute the transformational leader's decision (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020). Over time the focus on transactional leadership and the perception of the leaders' power and position became less effective and obsolete; therefore, the move to more of a collaborative decision-making process was born (Burns, 1978; Stone & Patterson, 2005).

Transactional leadership capitalizes on exchanges of rewards and promises of rewards for performance. Leadership that keeps promises during great change will motivate followers to do what is expected (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020). Transactional leadership has three traits that are effective during times of change. These traits or routines focus on the importance of organization, results, process, and the day-to-day progress of the current decisions. These routines assist the transactional leader to attain the organization's goals and support decision making during change action.

The transactional leader upholds traits or routines by managing individual performance and facilitates organizational action during the change phase (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020). To ensure performance, the transactional leader rewards excellent results or withholds rewards during the change action. Transactional leaders use rewards and punishments to gain compliance during the change action to arrange timely, efficient, and pragmatic implementations of mitigating strategies (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020). Avolio (1999) suggested four dimensions of transactional leadership: setting commonly agreed goals with rewards for achieving the goals, clarifying expectations, and providing necessary resources. These traits can be used in prechange, during change, and postchange action (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020). Last, active management is how managers anticipate programs, monitor progress, and issue restorative measures. The trait

of active management is applicable during all three phases of a change action (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020). Transactional leaders are adept at making deals that motivate and benefit the organization during change. These adaptive deals ensure sustainability after the change and when new change opportunities arise (Germano, 2010; Northouse, 2016; Odumeru & Ifeanyi, 2013). Transactional leadership is based on behaviorist views of human activity. In transactional leadership, the power of leader-to-follower relations is the key facet; however, this leadership needs to be more comprehensive in capturing the complexity of current leadership challenges (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).

Transformational Leadership

Early foundations of transformational leadership were examined in the book *Leadership*, by James McGregor Burns. Burns outlined the transformational relationship between the leader and the follower (Bass, 1990). It was Bernard M. Bass's (1985) work that expanded Burns's efforts and introduced the term *transformational leadership*. According to Bass (1990), when leaders expand the interests of their employees, they create acceptance and awareness of the purpose and mission of the group. It is this relationship that shapes the behaviors and actions, therefore having an impact on the organizational culture. Leaders create transformational change by possessing the ability to provide a vision of the possible while transforming the followers' behavior and norms through shared values (Bass, 1985). Bass (1990) described transformational leadership as the method to inspire followers to look beyond their own individual needs and focus on the organization's needs. The transformational methodology can amplify morale and motivation (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). The transformational leadership framework is a process that M. L. Kelly (2003) argued is the most efficient style in times of change

because of leaders' capacity to build trust among the followers and enhance their confidence in the leaders. According to Bass (1985), transformational leaders have attributes that address a problem and mitigate some of the adverse consequences of the problem. The first quality of transformational leadership is the influence on the followers. The transformational leader would set an example regarding the core values, convictions, and ethical principles to use during a period of change (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020). Through this representation, the leader builds trust among the followers, and this in turn creates confidence in the leader. The commitments kept by the leader after a change event ensure that followers retain trust in their leaders.

Farahnak et al. (2020) discovered that transformational practices went beyond the attitudes and promises of the leader. These practices and abilities of the leader stimulate a sense of purpose, enthuse confidence, inspire, and motivate followers in the organization (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020). According to Anderson and Ackerman Anderson (2010), components found in transformational leadership contribute to success across all contexts. Their research indicates that transformational leaders practice a level of mindfulness, positively impacting their efficacy (Carleton et al., 2018). To attain success, the transformational leader effectively and freely communicates all information clarifying the organization's vision (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020). The horizontal power structure created through transformational leadership is when the leader and follower work collectively for the same objective to better the organization based on a shared vision (Humphreys & Einstein, 2004). These behaviors and ultimately, the transformational leader's mindset are vital to address the change needed within the organization.

Bass (1985) indicated that the followers' involvement in decision making is vital to create a culture conducive to innovation. The transformational leader encourages intellectual stimulation, creativity, and autonomy as core elements of the organizational culture (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020). Transformational leaders create a positive culture that assists them as they face organizational change. During times of great change and opportunity, transformational leadership qualities are highlighted, reducing the unfavorable impact of the change on the organization and achieving high performance from the followers (Scheuerlein et al., 2018).

Transformational leaders can cause a fundamental change in followers by raising their need for achievement and self-actualization. This influences followers' self-perception concept and empowers them to recognize the value of their work (Bass, 1985). Bass and Avolio (1994) developed a model of transformational leadership that contains key behaviors to create change: (a) charisma or idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individual consideration (Bass, 1985). First, transformational leaders often provide role models for their followers to emulate. The influence of transformational leaders on their followers is developed from admiration, respect, and trust. In addition, followers are influenced by the leaders' consideration for their well-being (Avolio & Bass, 1998). Second, transformational leaders create inspirational environments that bring meaning to the followers' work. The leader's team spirit and optimism create excitement in the followers. Third, transformational leaders can stimulate their followers intellectually. Transformational leaders promote innovation and creativity, encouraging followers to question assumptions and contribute new ideas for the organization's change opportunity. Last,

transformational leaders individually consider each follower's needs for growth.

Transformational leaders coach and mentor followers and strengthen and encourage followers.

Bass (1985) argued that leaders should by means of observation recognize the needs of the individual and therefore know the group or organizational needs. This understanding of the individual can also motivate the group's belief in change. The leaders using observation recognize and determine the needs of the individual in the group, which can have great impact on the group ability to adapt to change (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020). Transformational leaders' knowledge of the group and the individuals' understanding of the organizational needs can be one of the most precious resources in times of change. The individual consideration of a transformational leadership approach is vital throughout the change process.

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership theory is based on the writings and research of Robert Greenleaf during the 1970s. Greenleaf (1977) developed a theory that a great leader must be a servant to his followers first. Servant leadership is defined as the philosophy of behaviors and practices that focus on the well-being of others within the organization (Greenleaf, 1998). Servant leadership is rooted in the desire to impact others in the organization with the desire to inspire (Heyler & Martin, 2018). Servant leadership greatly emphasizes people's emotional, physical, and mental healing. Covey (2002) described the servant leadership style as seeking to draw out and inspire the best and the highest level within people. Avolio and Locke (2002) discussed the impact of self-sacrificing, altruistic behavior on leaders and how it positively influences follower

motivation and performance. Servant leadership changed the direction of management and leadership from the traditional top-down model to leadership characteristics based on follower empowerment and transformation (Covey, 2002).

The characteristics and features of servant leadership are relevant to addressing the requirements for guidance before, during, and after an ongoing change event (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020; Spears, 2010a). Leaders seek consensus rather than compliance during the actual stage of change, and servant leaders can conceive solutions to problems before their onset (Spears, 2010a). Servant leadership requires a commitment to help people realize their personal and professional development, allowing the followers to rise beyond their known capabilities to deal with extraordinary challenges (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020; Spears, 2010a). Spears (2010a) identified relevant characteristics of leaders or features to address guidance before, during, and after an ongoing change event. The first characteristic is listening, which includes the concept of communication skills and decision-making skills (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020; Spears, 2010a).

The second characteristic refers to the emotional healing of people. This emotional healing, combined with mental and physical healing, is significant during the postchange event (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020; Spears, 2010a). Third, the characteristic is a leader's persuasion, which relates to the leader's skill at seeking consensus rather than conformity from followers during the prephase of an ongoing change event (Spears, 2010a). Fourth, a servant leader can conceive solutions to problems that are not presently viewable. This forecasting requires the leader to look beyond essential day-to-day realities to conceptualize issues that may not usually be visible in the projected new

future (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020; Spears, 2010a). Conceptualization is vital for the prephase and postphase of a crisis or change event (Spears, 2010a).

Servant leaders have the skill to foresee likely outcomes by understanding the past (Spears, 2010a). The ability of leaders to foresee the future incorporates a servant leader's ability to learn from past experiences, identify what is currently happening, and understand the repercussions of specific decisions (Heyler & Martin, 2018). This trait can apply during the postchange event. The attributes of servant leadership imply that leaders take ownership of their teams' actions (Parris & Peachey, 2013). This trait is of specific importance during the prechange action. The servant leadership style is branded by openness as well as persuasion. It is not about controlling actions but instead allowing oneself to be accountable. This accountability is crucial for open and positive communication during the change event (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020; Spears, 2010a).

Servant leadership is about the intrinsic value people hold outside of their contribution as employees. Therefore, servant leaders strive to help others realize their potential beyond the ability to do the job well (Spears, 2010b). In times of significant change, followers face extraordinary challenges, but if followers rise beyond their capabilities, they may positively handle the impact of change. The recognition of a job well done can ensure that people feel their contributions are acknowledged. Servant leadership requires a commitment to assist people in realizing their personal and professional development potential and supporting it (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020; Spears, 2010b).

Parris and Peachey (2013) discussed the aspects of servant leadership that rely on a feeling of togetherness within the organization and developing a sense of belonging

among the followers in the organization. These attributes promoted by Parris and Peachey support the leadership efforts by leaders as they address the change events that face the organization. A skilled servant leader can develop listening, empathizing, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualizing, foresight, growth building, openness, and community building (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020; Spears, 2010b). Servant leaders focus on the current realities and then use their relationships with their followers to lead them through times of significant change.

Authentic Leadership

Authentic leadership is a model of genuine leadership that aids behavior that supports positive intellectual capacities and ethical conditions (Walumbwa et al., 2008). This leadership model is driven by self-awareness and unbiased processing, communicating authenticity, and displaying trustworthy behaviors and actions (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Authentic leaders are true to themselves despite external forces or influences that differ from their beliefs and values. Research by Avolio and Gardner (2005) and Northouse (2016) indicated that authentic leadership offers the internal resources to face challenging events. This awareness directly impacts leadership effectiveness, followers' trust, and team effectiveness (Northouse, 2016).

Authentic leadership is independent of a leadership style in that it is charismatic, directive, participative, transformational, or authoritarian (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). The difference in authentic leadership is aligning personal values and beliefs with the approach to building authenticity and trust among followers (Avolio & Mhatre, 2012). Avolio and Gardner (2005) wrote that authentic leadership is the parallel theme to all positive forms of leadership.

Authentic leaders who are consistent with their values and clearly express them and the reason behind their decision making can be relevant to change strategies when addressing challenging events (Northouse, 2016). Positivity and optimism are values of authentic leadership, and flexibility in style can be helpful when working in changing environments (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020). The flexibility of authentic leadership identifies precise dimensions to ensure strategies will be implemented when leaders address times of change.

Authentic leadership dimensions reported by George (2007) assist in managing change. The five dimensions are (a) leading with the heart, (b) practicing values, (c) understanding the purpose of leadership, (d) establishing enduring relationships, and (e) developing self-discipline. The main aim of authentic leadership is to create an inclusive team of followers to achieve strategies and to make collaborative decisions to address change events (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020).

According to Avolio and Gardner (2005), leaders who use a directive, team, or servant leadership style and transparent communication will encourage growth in followers if they are genuine and remain true to their beliefs and values. The authentic leader acts transparently and is consistently ethical, ensuring followers' trust (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Some of the behaviors exhibited by the authentic leader are bringing individuals together with a shared vision and purpose, empowering others to participate and engage, and leading with authenticity to create a values-based approach (George, 2007). The authentic leader draws from a significant level of self-awareness and a process of self-actualization of their own experiences to align with themselves authentically (Avolio & Luthans, 2006; Gardner et al., 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008).

Embodying authenticity and embracing shared commitments with their followers within the organization, authentic leaders also instill their values and ethics into all aspects of their lives beyond the organization (Erickson, 1995). Through staying authentic, these leaders inspire and empower those they lead. To maintain authenticity, leaders must be self-aware and self-regulate their actions and behaviors that represent themselves within the public perception of their followers (Walumbwa et al., 2008). A leader's self-awareness is connected to understanding who they are and how they lead others (B. Brown, 2018).

Like the servant leader, the authentic leader develops trust with followers. Although the follower's trust in a leader can develop from acts of service within the scope of servant leadership, authentic leaders have a relationship with their followers that has revealed a specific cause or moral commitment through aligned values and ideals (Cavazotte et al., 2021). Additionally, authentic leaders take the time and energy to understand how their followers perceive and receive their actions and behaviors. These leaders show care and commitment to those they lead (Avolio, Gardner, et al., 2004; Walumbwa et al., 2008).

Leaders and followers within the scope of authentic leadership undergo a leadership development process that considers self-awareness and self-regulation while the authentic leader plays a role in positive modeling for their followers (Gardner et al., 2005). Authentic leaders know who they are and what they believe. They display transparency and consistency between their values, ethical reasoning, and actions (Gardner et al., 2005). Authentic leaders are self-disciplined and allow themselves to commit to beliefs and values and follow through on them to fulfill the organizational

mission (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). By understanding their authenticity, members of the organization become empowered to present their values and morals and are open to sharing in decision making (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020).

Adaptive Leadership

The concept of effective leadership practices has been a focal point for years in modern civilization, and it has been linked to positive and negative interactions within human behavior. A successful leader knows how to adapt behaviors of individuals and organizations to success through attention, mobilization, and motivation (Heifetz et al., 2009; Pohan, 2019). Dr. Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky developed adaptive leadership after more than 30 years of research at Harvard University, defining the frontier of leadership training and development. Adaptive leadership theory is a practical leadership framework to help individuals and organizations adapt to their changing environments and effectively respond to recurring problems (Shaw, 2022). Adaptive leaders do not just make changes but are careful to recognize the potential change in the organizational environment and select the optimal path to positively affect the organization (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). Adaptive leadership mobilizes teams to successfully navigate complex and unique challenges at an organizational level (Heifetz et al., 2009). This leadership framework means teams and organizations must consistently analyze their actions, taking note that they must iterate and adapt their interventions as they learn more about the outcomes of decisions (Heifetz et al., 2009). Moreover, adaptive leaders mold the behaviors of their subordinates with encouragement according to the situations with purposeful shared sense and empathy instead of insistence, command, and control that help the individuals enhance self-

confidence (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). The message of adaptive leadership practice is diagnosing a system under stress and fixing it through risk-taking and challenging the status quo to provoke change.

Adaptive leadership theory addresses the change process in response to crisis or stress (Heifetz, 1994). Leaders facing this organizational stress often focus on short-term fixes, such as restructuring, but tend to find that the problems continue to exist (Heifetz et al., 2009). Adaptive leadership challenges organizations to avoid this mistake by taking the opportunity to identify the root causes and motivating the followers to tackle the changes. The motivation process invokes a consideration of all the factors that affect an organization by planning for a changing world, which makes adaptive leadership useful and valid in complex and challenging times (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). The action to adaptive leadership is helpful in that the action and guiding stages assist leaders in working through the process of change and opportunity for the organization (Sunderman et al., 2020).

Adaptive leadership is about change that can enable the capacity to thrive. Adapting to emerging threats or opportunities involves a sequence of actions and decisions by leaders that occur over time. Adaptive change interventions are built on the past rather than on removing past practices (Heifetz et al., 2009). It is imperative the leader be able to explain why a change is necessary and to build confidence and support for a new strategy or initiative solution (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). To build on the past and the why, adaptive leadership explores the followers' values and builds change on experimentation (Heifetz et al., 2009). The new adaptations have the potential to

displace, reregulation, and rearrange old structures, and this takes time to value and build a mindset for change.

Essential to the framework of adaptive leadership is the concept that leadership is not based on authority but instead on the practice that everyone can lead (Heifetz et al., 2009). Northouse (2021) stated that leadership is grounded in a single individual or group of individuals influencing other members and developing personal mindsets.

Therefore, adaptive leadership focuses on the need for change within organizations and encourages actions that disrupt the status quo to create change (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Successful change requires building on the past while observing what is expendable or extraneous as changes are made while recognizing the organization's heritage.

Adaptive leadership targets innovative ways to ensure growth during challenges while discarding old methods and techniques that no longer meet the challenge. Moreover, adaptation relies on experimentation and diversity to succeed. Successful adaptation also recognizes the need for loss and time to make changes while gaining perspective from outside or above the situation (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Adaptive leadership behaviors can help institutions address challenges and make changes (Heifetz, 1994). The adaptive framework discusses three types of challenges: (a) technical challenges that are clearly defined and easily solved by the leader; (b) technical and adaptive challenges that are clearly defined but require people beyond the leader to solve; and (c) adaptive challenges that are not clearly defined and require people beyond the leader to solve (Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Sunderman et al., 2020). Adaptive situational challenges stir emotion, center on values, and have a root cause that can be difficult to identify (Northouse, 2019).

According to Heifetz et al. (2009), leaders must take the time to get on the balcony to see how the organization is reacting to the adaptive changes. Moving from the dance floor to the balcony is part of adaptive leadership development. It describes how leaders need to be in action with their team and clearly focus on how effectively their team is working (Shaw, 2022). Heifetz et al. (2009) used the expression of reflection in action by spending time on the balcony and the dance floor to show how leaders need to take a step back during their daily actions to gain a different perspective and gain insight. Suppose leaders were to stay overfocused on their operational work without seeing the issues and themselves as part of the bigger picture. In that case, they might lose sight of the larger picture for the organization (Shaw, 2022).

Heifetz et al. (2009) promoted this adaptive theory as science from the balcony and art from the dance floor. Science is dealing with technical issues and the art of dealing with adaptive challenges (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Distinguishing Technical Problems and Adaptive Challenges

Kind of Challenge	Problem Definition	Solution	Locus of work
Technical	Clear	Clear	Authority
Technical and adaptive	Clear	Requires learning	Authority and stakeholders
Adaptive	Requires learning	Requires learning	Stakeholders

Technical challenges are described as situations with a proven solution, such as a fix in a timeline to solve a program. The problem can be easily identified and repaired (Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Conversely, adaptive challenges require engaging followers of the issue to become curious and uncomfortable in asking questions and experimenting with ways to address the challenging issues at hand while knowing the process of discovering a solution will not be easy.

Adaptive challenges require the organization to adapt to thrive in a changing environment (Heifetz et al., 2009). This moves the organization beyond what is currently known or understood. Adaptive challenges need to be clarified and require new learning to classify the problem. Solutions demand learning, and followers must change their values, purposes, processes, or norms to rearrange their organizational makeup. Difficult programs do not lend themselves to easy or routine actions but instead require an organizational strategy to deal with the complexity (Heifetz et al., 2009). The COVID-19 pandemic is an example of a global adaptive challenge for all nations and organizations (Dunn, 2020). Adaptive leaders cultivate a diversity of viewpoints to generate many options to address complex challenges (Dunn, 2020; Sunderman et al., 2020).

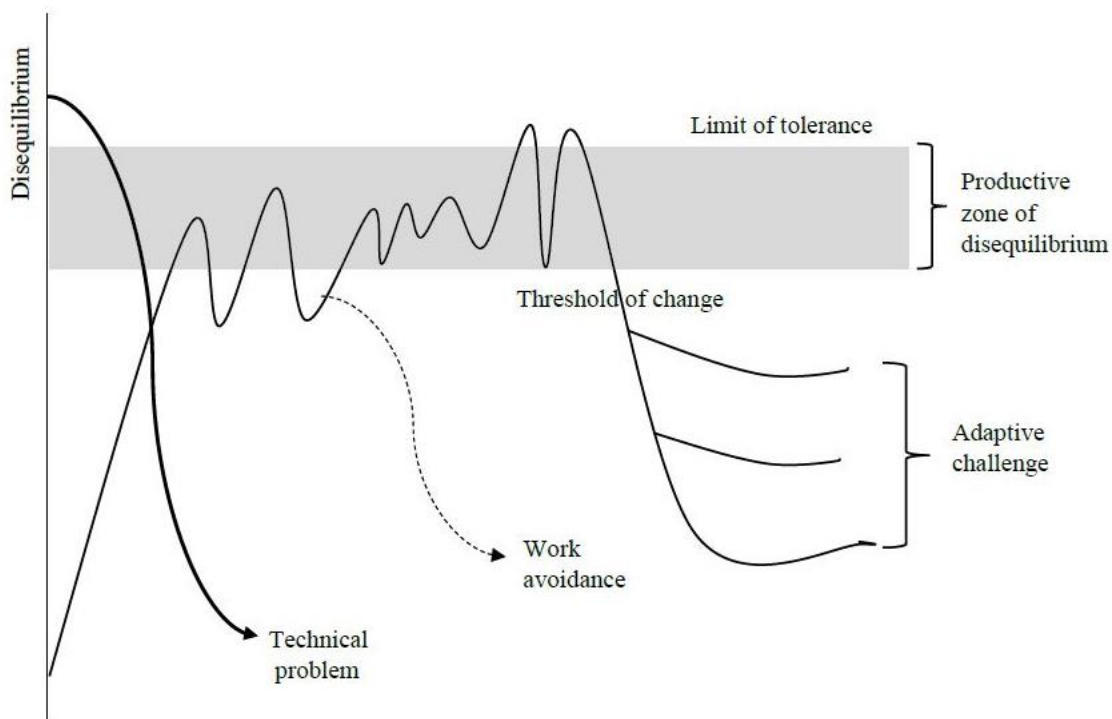
Adaptive leadership can be implemented in complex situations when the leader-follower relationship is attended to but all environmental, cultural, and societal factors that will affect leaders and followers are as well (Glover et al., 2002). An adaptive leadership approach will help organizations adapt to potential changes by encouraging collective learning and collaboration among the organization members (Yukl & Mahsud, 210). This will ensure that everyone, not only the leaders and managers, take

responsibility in dealing with complex issues. Leadership must protect the voices of their leadership from below, meaning that people willing to share original or creative ideas should be heard (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020).

Dealing with complex adaptive change issues requires leaders, specifically public leaders, to be out of the box thinkers leading the followers through a period of disturbance as they sift through what is essential and what is expendable (Heifetz et al., 2009). This level of disequilibrium can encompass everything from conflict to disorientation. Leaders need to manage themselves in that environment, walk followers through the discomfort they are experiencing, and assist everyone to live within the disequilibrium (Figure 2).

Figure 2

The Productive Zone of Disequilibrium



At the same time, leaders must promote the general well-being of their followers (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020). Leading behaviors include getting on the balcony, which allows leaders to step back and find their perspective. Identifying adaptive situational challenges involves recognizing the type of challenge facing the leader (Northouse, 2019; Sunderman et al., 2020). Regulating distress means monitoring the level of stress and offering support. Maintaining disciplined action encourages followers to focus on addressing the problem. Giving the work back to the people is empowering the followers, and protecting leadership voices from below is having marginalized voices heard.

Theoretical Framework

According to Heifetz et al. (2009), the objective of the framework is to assist change leaders to “assess organizations’ ability to increase their adaptive capacity” (p. 101). In times of change, stakeholders look to leaders to respond to prevent or minimize the damage and harm of the change (Boin et al., 2017). According to Parks (2005), today’s organizations and stakeholders require a new kind of leadership that encompasses a mindset and capabilities of a dynamic and active process that addresses the complexities of the changes and communicates them to the organization. This modern organization expects leaders to keep addressing change and share how they plan to move forward (Boin et al., 2017; Gainey, 2010).

Addressing the change requires diagnosing the organizational system (Heifetz et al., 2009). To do this, the leader must diagnose the current adaptive challenge and define the political landscape, which requires time, careful thought, and courage. Leaders must devise creatively and responsibly as they involve followers inside and across the

organization's boundaries (Heifetz et al., 2009; Sunderman et al., 2020). Organizations have assessed their external sensors and internal norms and engaged the critical mass of followers to foster the qualities of an adaptive culture (Heifetz et al., 2009). Building an adaptive culture is a long-term goal and requires daily effort and intention.

Heifetz et al. (2009) identified five characteristics of an adaptive leadership framework for change leaders to support the critical mass of peoples' adaptive culture. Heifetz et al. asked, "How adaptive is your organization" (p. 108; Figure 3).

The five critical characteristics of an adaptive organization are that elephants in the room are named, responsibility for the organization's future is shared, independent judgment is expected, leadership capacity is developed, and reflection and continued learning are institutionalized (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Making Naming Elephants in the Room the Norm

Highly adaptive organizations have a culture in which no issue is too problematic to be brought up at an official meeting, and no questions are off-limits (Heifetz et al., 2009). Ideally, leaders can detect potential crises and work to move more favorably (Boin et al., 2017). Nevertheless, many problems come as a surprise to leaders, putting leaders in a position to respond effectively to deal with the effects (Boin et al., 2017). Leaders must determine who is affected and establish rituals and procedures to acknowledge and discuss the elephants (Heifetz et al., 2009). Highly adaptive organizations promote open dialogue, and stakeholders who sense environmental changes that impact current practice can communicate that concern. Adaptive leaders develop techniques to ensure the hidden perspectives are raised and decide what might be the next issue while trying to assess the political implications of the crisis in real-time (Boin et al., 2017; Heifetz et al., 2009).

Figure 3

How Adaptive Is Your Organization?

Survey: How adaptive is your organization?

Adaptability criteria	Description	Rating (1 means “very low”; 10 means “very high)
Elephants in the room	How long does it take for conversations to get from inside people’s head to the coffee machine and then to meeting rooms? How quickly are crises identified and bad news discussed? Are there structures, incentives, and support for speaking the unspeakable?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Shared responsibility	To what extent do people in your organization, especially those in senior management, act from the perspective of and for the betterment of the whole organization, as opposed to worrying about and protecting their individual groups or silos?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Independent judgement	To what extent are people in your organization valued for their own judgement rather than their capacity to divine the boss’s preferences? And when someone takes a reasonable risk in service of the mission and it doesn’t work out, to what extent is that seen as a learning opportunity rather than a personal failure?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Develop Leadership capacity	To what extent do people know where they stand in the organization and their potential for growth and advancement? Do they have an agreed-upon plan for how they are going to reach their potential? And to what extent are senior managers expected to identify and mentor their successors?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Institutionalized reflection and continuous learning	Does the organization carve out time for individual and collective reflection and learning from experiences? To what extent does the organization allocate time, space and other resources to get diverse perspectives on how work could be done better?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

One such technique is sending out clues indicating which behavior is acceptable. Just as a child takes clues from an adult, the followers need the leader to model naming the sensitive issues (Heifetz et al., 2009). Another technique the leader must use is protecting the troublemaker. The leader should ensure that the troublemaker or dissenter can provide input during meetings. These dissenters often raise questions that only some people dare to address. Although these dissenters can be perceived as rude or annoying, preserving the culture of open dialogue is essential. This open dialogue can cause other followers to become frustrated with the annoyance of those troublemakers; however, modeling curiosity about their ideas fosters equality within the team and supports shared decision-making practices (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Nurturing a Shared Responsibility for the Organization

Shared responsibility means that people share accountability for the entire organization's success and not only their units; in these units, they note that cross-functional problem solving is routine (Heifetz et al., 2009). Crises and change are not everyday events; leaders are called upon to make difficult decisions, usually with little time or with all the information available (Boin et al., 2017). Leaders with a high capacity to adapt are responsible for bringing a wide array of stakeholders together to share the responsibility of the decision-making process, identify roles and functions within the organization to align resources, and coordinate efforts to provide the best possible response (Boin et al., 2017; Heifetz et al., 2009). Moreover, employees must accept and understand the accountability for solving the crisis and the broader political gain when responsibility is distributed to provide the most effective response (Boin et al., 2017; Heifetz & Laurie, 2019); ensuring this shared structure for the systematic problem

solving increases the organizations' confidence in addressing change while encouraging collective learning and collaboration (Simmons, 2022; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).

According to Heifetz et al. (2009), shared responsibility for the organization has many looks, and the team feels responsible for the whole organization. There are five attributes to shared responsibility. First, a reward system is based on the entire organization's performance rather than on one individual performance. Second, people expend their resources to assist others in the organization. Third, ideas, insights, and lessons are shared across all boundaries within the organization. Fourth, people who have advanced in the organization experience many opportunities. Finally, people in the organization take the time to observe colleagues to understand each other's challenges and practices.

Encouraging Independent Judgment

Leaders do not have all the answers and usually have only some of the answers; therefore, they need to seek input from others. Prudent leaders who pursue input from others acting in service of the mission find a palpable norm of pushing decision making and idea generation down deep into the organization (Heifetz et al., 2009). Once leaders determine the adaptive challenges, why, and what needs to be done, they are expected to communicate effectively with those directly affected (Boin et al., 2017; Heifetz et al., 2009). Further, adaptive leaders must also work to mobilize individuals regardless of their position but rather because of their specific expertise to collectively address challenges (Northouse, 2019; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). To do this, individuals must present factually, show kindness, and instill confidence in their framing of the change and response measures (Boin et al., 2017). Adaptive leaders can shift the organizations'

practices and mindsets to those in which individuals are valued for their judgment (Northouse, 2019; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).

Adaptive leaders consistently ask themselves whether another individual can handle a task or decision. The task of the adaptive leader is to develop capacity within the organization by developing the abilities of others (Heifetz et al., 2009). This distributive leadership seizes the opportunity to mobilize the work and generate leadership beyond the job description.

Developing Leadership Capacity

Adaptive leaders, as CEOs, acknowledge that they are the chief development officers and take leadership development seriously (Heifetz et al., 2009). Furthermore, they note that line managers are responsible for developing leaders daily. Leaders assess the individual's readiness for change to move beyond the crisis. This readiness for change dwells in people with a prolonged view and perspective of the organization (Heifetz et al., 2009; Simmons, 2022). Adaptive leaders comprehend the importance of getting the right people in the right roles, building those people's capacity for on-the-job guidance, and making the most significant contribution to the organization (Gyuroka, T. (2010). Critical to this process are managers who identify people with the aptitude to do their jobs better than they do and nurture or mentor these individuals (Heifetz et al., 2009; Simmons, 2022). According to Simmons (2022), adaptive leadership encourages building people's capacity to demonstrate flexibility and productivity when addressing complex challenges. The adaptive leadership approach facilitates organizations to promote capacity building by encouraging collective learning and collaboration (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).

This capacity building of a leadership pipeline is imperative to the long-term adaptability of the organization (Heifetz et al., 2009). People ascertain how to lead on the job. Administrators commit to individual leadership development and provide a clear vision of the individual's potential for leadership. Leaders establish succession plans to ensure leadership development is fostered. The grooming of managers within the followers ensures the organization's life.

Institutionalizing Reflection and Continuous Learning

Being open to learning is a critical competency for anyone seeking to enable the organization to adapt. People across the organization must be open to trial and error, giving up some old truths that have become inapplicable with change in the business, social, or political landscape (Heifetz et al., 2009). Most crises present an opportunity to clean up and start something new from the lessons learned about previously developed plans, organizational structures, and policies (Boin et al., 2017). This critical task requires learning to clarify what happens around a leader and new ways to carry out that work (Boin et al., 2017; Heifetz et al., 2009). Organizations that focus on developing adaptive capacity are open and committed to learning (Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Laurie, 2001). People at all levels of the organization must be available to learn, and it is critical to enable the organization to adapt (Heifetz, 1994). In educational organizations, adaptive leadership is about embracing a growth mindset to build the institutional learning capacity for all educators, especially school and district leadership (Bagwell, 2020; Simmons, 2022).

Heifetz et al. (2009) listed several practices to institutionalize reflection and continued learning. To build a greater adaptive culture, the following questions could be

used to develop the practice: (a) how is our external environment, (b) what internal challenges are mirroring those external changes, (c) what are the gaps between where we are and where we want to be, (d) how we will know whether we are successful, and (e) what challenges might be just beyond the horizon? Creating time for these questions and checking with people on these concepts is critical to adaptability and change (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Another practice to foster reflection and continued learning is to reward learning through experimentation. Risk-taking is important to grow an organization, and experimentation practices support initiative platforms (Heifetz et al., 2009). Implementing multiple small risks versus fewer more significant risk initiatives is less risky and can still provide smart risk learning from these experiments.

Smart risk-taking enables people to extract lessons regardless of the results produced and gain knowledge regardless of the outcomes (Heifetz et al., 2009). Each experiment becomes informed and therefore smarter because of the experience. Heifetz et al. (2009) listed techniques to support the smart risks of the followers: (a) ask subordinates to think of various diminutive experiments in new ways that support the organization's mission, (b) provide additional time for experiments while clearing other items for the to-do list, (c) provide resources and acknowledge the experiment process, (d) evaluate employees' dexterity to take smart risks and encourage them, and (e) model risk-taking and report your lessons.

Adaptive leaders reward smart risk-taking and the individuals who promote these practices and dare to disseminate valuable lessons from experience (Heifetz et al., 2009). Risky experimentation can be complex and requires careful planning; running smaller

experiments has less to lose than larger ones. Therefore, Heifetz et al. (2009) suggested running parallel experiments trying several related strategies in different areas with different targets. Testing several strategies simultaneously provides more data while supporting ongoing adaptability initiatives to promote adaptive capacity building.

Adaptive Capacity

Heifetz et al. (2009) defined adaptive capacity as people's perseverance and systems' capacity to engage in problem-defining and problem-solving work amid adaptive pressures and the resulting disequilibrium. When leaders of organizations see significant revisions on the horizon based on the external environment, they question whether the organization can adapt and thrive in the new reality. Has the organization prepared itself by building adaptive capacity for the new way of life and changing circumstances and a more ambiguous environment? An organization that can successfully move through an adaptive challenge will enhance the capacity of the organization to plan for adaptive change. Addressing deep cultural valued constraints in an organization's capacity to adapt and thrive over time will make it easier to identify and address the organization's current challenges (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Adaptive leadership is the development of a growth mindset while building the capacity of the followers to adapt and be resilient to address complex issues and significant change (Heifetz & Linsky, 2014; Simmons, 2022). This mindset looks beyond the leader's ambition and leads in a way that encourages change for the better of the organization.

An ingredient of adaptive capacity is being deliberately aware of how adults learn (Simmons, 2022). According to Heifetz et al. (2009), adaptive challenges of great

complexity require growth and innovation to maintain the speed at which to survive and thrive. Building *generative capacity* (Castillo & Trinh, 2019) seeks to innovate and capitalize on the learned experiences. A key to adaptive capacity is developing adult awareness of increased cognitive, affective, interpersonal, and intrapersonal capacities that enable people to manage complex demands better (Simmons, 2022).

In short, when an organization determines to address a problematic challenge, leaders should consider specific questions such as How does my organization learn? How does each of the adults in my organization learn? Does the person who usually needs to ask several questions have the space to ask them? Does the person who sits quietly while they process have the time to do so before being asked to execute? Will the information be provided in various formats (Simmons, 2022)? Adaptive leadership is a transformational capacity-building process that can improve the lives of the followers and the entire organization.

The key to adopting an adaptive principle is to understand and commit to the realization that how the challenge has developed in the organization is based on how those individuals will react to issues. It will be solved by their collective commitment to changing their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Heifetz et al., 2009). Understanding the differences between the challenges and having the adaptive capacity to meet those challenges is fundamental (Simmons, 2022).

As organizations explore methods, they can be more adaptive and nimbler in responding to a rapidly changing world. They draw on similar guiding principles and approaches; this looks different from practice (Dunn, 2020). Adaptive is a framework and

a capacity that includes a set of principles and practices (Heifetz et al., 2009). Key tenets to consider for adaptive ways of working have become evident over time.

Advancing a mindset of acceptance requires the acceptance of the complexity of the current environment. Leaders must accept ambiguity and uncertainty and know that nothing remains static and people continually evolve (Dunn, 2020; Heifetz et al., 2009). This mindset allows the leader to deal with the unexpected and accept this as a regular part of working within complexity (Dunn, 2020).

Developing the situation through action requires effective leaders to understand that solutions are being developed from an incomplete evidence base (Dunn, 2020; Heifetz et al., 2009). There is ambiguity in difficult situations that requires school leaders to be prepared and to develop the dilemma through action. An adaptive mindset understands that developing action steps is essential.

Adaptive leaders continually search for barriers that may hinder their teams' growth. The adaptive leader focuses on teams, not individuals, and endeavors to solve team problems (Dunn, 2020; Heifetz et al., 2009). Adaptive leaders support teaching teams to make quick progress by assisting teams to self-organize and make responsive decisions based on the best evidence (Dunn, 2020). Leaders model practices of deep listening, self-awareness, and commitment to others in this process (Dunn, 2020). Leaders stress the development of collective intelligence of individuals and its effects on the team. Heifetz et al. (2009) suggested it is easier to change team behaviors than individual behaviors as a driver for improvement.

Designing a lean improvement process involves prototyping a practice by minimizing the required resources to discover whether the proposed practices will

positively affect the complex context (Dunn, 2020; Heifetz et al., 2009). This is a minimal viable practice (MVP). An MVP is acquired by seeking guiding feedback on the new practices being promoted (Dunn, 2020). Minimize the workload and focus on key areas to get them working before moving on to another area. Working this way can advance improvement, and results are often attained sooner.

Fostering psychological safety is the individual's awareness of the repercussions of taking an interpersonal risk or a belief that a team is safe for risk-taking when it is seen as ignorant, incompetent, harmful, or disruptive (Dunn, 2020; Heifetz et al., 2009).

Teams that feel empowered to take risks around their team members have high levels of psychological safety. They feel assured that no one will shame them or penalize anyone for admitting a mistake, asking a question, or offering a new idea. This practice is evident by expressed definite behaviors such as reassuring followers to express ideas, advancing collaborative decision making, and supporting information sharing and teamwork (Dunn, 2020; Heifetz et al., 2009). This adaptive mindset is nonjudgmental and supportive of innovative thinking to promote the organizational mission (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Establishing an Adaptive Mindset

Sometimes, an adaptive challenge is beyond people's capacity to adjust. Heifetz et al. (2009) identified the importance of encouraging adaptive leadership. Fostering an adaptive mindset would enable the organization to meet an ongoing series of adaptive challenges in the future, requiring the capacity to continue developing new ideas to meet each new challenge. Therefore, Heifetz and Linsky (2002) invited leaders to see themselves as a system.

Understanding a personal system includes a look at one's personality, life experiences, and cognitive and emotional makeup (Heifetz et al., 2009). Knowing the personal system can assist the leader in making a coalition with the followers' competing values and interests, preferences and tendencies, aspirations, and fears. People who lead adaptive change successfully develop a diagnostic mindset about themselves and the challenge. A diagnostic mindset begins with the leader accepting that there are different but authentic selves in each role to be the most effective change leader one can be. According to Heifetz et al. (2009), three distinct settings make up the leaders' system for adaptive change.

The first setting is the leaders' loyalties or sentiments of responsibility toward colleagues, community, and influential persons who come into conflict while dealing with adaptive challenges (Heifetz et al., 2009). Understanding the roles and constraints within the organization can assist the leader to determine which intervention is best for the organization and which personal disposition hinders the efforts or causes the leader to push an initiative. For a leader, an element of the problem stems from organizational beliefs and loyalties. The leader must recognize and inspire associates to face the uncomfortable allegiances to see real adaptive change.

The second system setting is understanding the personal tuning. Heifetz et al. (2009) referred to each person as a stringed instrument, tuned slightly differently than others. Fine-tuning results from childhood experiences, genetic predispositions, cultural background, gender, and loyal identifications with historical groups. Those influences or strings vibrate continually, communicating to those around the leader's priorities, sensitivities, and vulnerabilities (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 195). Leading adaptively requires

knowing one's tuning strings, responding to the present challenges, and not pulling the past into the current change.

Finally, the third system setting is to broaden one's bandwidth. This means the leader's repertoire for leading adaptive change requires a broad bandwidth of techniques (Heifetz et al., 2009). Leaders consider the skills they have learned, understanding their strengths and weaknesses to improve the outcome of the intervention for change. Leading an organization in an adaptive exercise means broadening the bandwidth of skills and will.

Greater adaptability requires leading an organization and developing specific personal skills to enhance adaptive performance. It also requires having attitudes and collaborative structures that enable and support these personal skills (Dunn, 2020; Heifetz et al., 2009). School leaders may need to develop an adaptive mindset, constantly looking for ways to test their knowledge about teaching and learning within their unique school context. The concept of complex adaptive systems provides a valuable tool kit for addressing a broad range of educational issues that are currently arising. There is no doubt that complexity has always permeated the educational space, but there is also no doubt that times of great change have significantly increased the complexity and uncertainty (Dunn, 2020).

An adaptive mindset is an intellectual one that creates the preconditions for being adaptive and particular decision making in complex situations (Grisogono & Radenovic, 2011). Operational adaptability is essential to developing situational understanding and working through complex situations as they arise. Although it is impossible to anticipate the precise dynamics of the future, cultivating adaptive teams should enable schools to

adapt quickly to rapidly changing conditions and seize upon previously unforeseen opportunities. These will be critical attributes for every organization to consider as they continue with increased uncertainty (Dunn, 2020; Heifetz et al., 2009).

K-12 Public Education Today

There have been countless changes and initiatives in public education over the past 40 years. These educational initiatives have led to multiple federal and state mandates to increase accountability and reform the public school system (Gordon, 2018; Grandy et al., 2012). These perceived accountability measures have created a perception of ineffectiveness, and public schools have consequently received undue criticism (Carter & May, 2020; Dzhurova, 2020). These factors have dramatically affected the superintendency and the leadership skills required to navigate these times of great change and challenges.

The traditional leadership skills to meet the changing needs of public schools need to be aligned with the current complexities (Boin et al., 2017; Gainey, 2009). Educational organizations now face the lingering effects of COVID-19 as it continues to impact student attendance rates and achievement levels (Simmons, 2022). Public schools face current issues of the digital divide, student engagement, social-emotional health, mass shootings, and racial disparities (Parmet et al., 2021). The pandemic has added fiscal impact and personnel shortages requiring educational organizations to find innovative and creative solutions to these unprecedented challenges (Starr, 2020).

A change in mindset in how superintendents, principals, and teachers view mistakes is necessary to foster district and school change and innovation (Ainsworth, 2015). Rather than perceived failures, “mistakes need to be seen as opportunities for

growth” (Ainsworth, 2015, p. 93). Organizational leaders who can see that taking a calculated risk in a small intervention, whether perceived as a failure or not, can provide future learning for a successful intervention (Heifetz et al., 2009). Most change initiatives allow leaders to initiate new processes from the lessons learned and previously developed plans, organizational structures, and policies (Boin et al., 2017). Developing leadership styles from lessons learned requires preparation and training and the ability to adapt to times of change (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020; Grissom & Condon, 2021).

With the ability to lead adaptively in complex and rapidly changing situations, educational organizations will be able to meet the challenges of the modern world (Glover et al., 2002). The types of leadership styles, as described, can be found in the characteristics of an adaptive organization. Scholars and researchers of adaptive leadership continue to critique traditional leadership styles from the view of school structures, urging for more significant democratic, interpersonal, developmental, and adaptive approaches (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2015; Heifetz et al., 2009).

Characteristics of Adaptive K-12 Public Schools Districts

Educational organizations’ challenges today have far-reaching implications for the institution’s and its members’ sustainability (Nelson & Squires, 2017). These implications for sustainability are critical to the adoption of a problem-solving philosophy to ensure that the challenges are being interpreted the same way by all followers and that the structures are in place to address them systemically (Simmons, 2022). Educational organizations with the mindset to take on the gradual but meaningful change process can adapt and thrive in challenging environments (du Plessis & Keyter,

2020; Simmons, 2022). Adaptive characteristics bring about real change by discerning the essential from the expendable (Simmons, 2022).

In education, adaptive characteristics are adopting a growth mindset to build the capacity and resilience of all educators to address complex organizational challenges (Carter & May, 2020; Simmons, 2022). The growth mindset is consciously aware of how the adults learn in the organization (Heifetz et al., 2009; Simmons, 2022). Increasing cognitive, affective, interpersonal, and intrapersonal capacities enable the educational organization to manage the complicated demands of today (Nelson & Squires, 2017). The key to adopting an adaptive philosophy is to understand and commit to the realization that the way challenge has evolved in public schools is related to the actions and characteristics and commitment to changing the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of the educational organization (Heifetz et al., 2009; Simmons, 2022). Understanding the differences between the complex challenges presented is fundamental to the educational organization's innovation and collective mindset (Simmons, 2022).

Superintendent Leadership in Times of Crisis, Change, and Complexity

The complexity of the superintendency has increased exponentially over the past 20 years. Public school superintendents must deal with multiple challenges of insufficient financial support, changing priorities in curriculum, high stakes assessments, accountability systems, staying current with technology, constant demand of leadership, community pressures, board members' political motivations, and increased exposure to public criticism (Mountford, 2008). The primary role of the superintendent is to act as the chief executive officer (CEO), which includes advising the school board about educational policies, recommending hiring appointments, ensuring the consistent

implementation of state and federal regulations, budgeting resources, coordination of instructional programs, and developing facility and transportation improvements (Björk et al., 2014; Mountford, 2008). To manage the complex task of leading a school district, superintendents must possess a wide array of leadership and managerial skills and the ability to organize the needs of the school district into a systematic and comprehensible plan for addressing change.

Leading an educational organization during change has become increasingly more complex. Rapidly changing environmental issues continue to pose peculiar challenges for superintendents of public school districts (Bagwell, 2020). The extraordinary challenges have expanded to natural disasters, mass shootings, economic downturns, global health pandemics, and declining enrollment. Superintendents have had to reconsider the level of change necessary to support students, families, and staff in adopting new technical skills in an ever-changing environment (Kaden, 2020). Additionally, superintendents have seen a need to address the emotional well-being of students and staff during and after crisis and change (Netolicky, 2020). These changes require a new approach to leadership, decision making, and action (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020). This new leadership approach includes a collective commitment to changing attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Simmons, 2022).

A superintendent's approach to leadership can impact their ability to lead during times of great change or opportunity. Additionally, the superintendent's response to change must carefully recognize the potential impact on the external environment and consider the best option to positively affect the organization (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). Responding to the challenges threatening the district's survival requires the

superintendent to involve everyone within the organization (Carter & May, 2020). Considering all members of the organization and the external and internal factors before making complex decisions is critical (Gainey, 2010; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). This consideration of the members creates connections and allows the followers to identify with the superintendent's and the organization's shared interests during times of great change (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020).

Superintendents' leadership skills during times of great change and opportunity necessitate that the leadership characteristics, training, and preparation adapt those skills to the organization's change event (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020; Grisson & Condon, 2021). According to Heifetz et al. (2009), adaptive work demands determining what currently needs change while considering how organizations will adapt and thrive in a new environment. The road ahead for superintendents is to learn their way through these challenges and lean on their associates to embrace different strategies than previously taken (Bagwell, 2020). The capacity for organizational members to adapt during times of great change will hinge on the superintendent's ability to maintain a learning-focused mindset, engage in innovative thinking, and launch effective, unprecedented solutions for the educational system (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020; Northouse, 2019).

Superintendent Adaptive Leadership

Superintendents are vital in developing practical, transformative schools and educational systems that promote quality teaching and learning (Dinham, 2005; Leithwood, 2007). The climate superintendents operate in is fluid and continues to change in response to external pressures and societal changes (Bagwell, 2020; Nelson & Squires, 2017). This dynamic environment exhibits an increased demand from followers

for improved performance. Today, superintendents are triggered to lead in complex, politicized, diverse conditions more significantly than ever before (Nelson & Squires, 2017). Given these conditions, Heifetz et al. (2009) proposed that organizational leaders must be more creative and innovative. Organizations need to adopt a problem-solving ideology to ensure that all followers interpret these complex challenges the same way and that structures are in place to address them systematically (Simmons, 2022). The superintendency in education plays a crucial role in navigating the ever-changing environment. When describing the superintendency, C. Kelly and Peterson (2002) pointed out that “in educational administration, the range of problems that present themselves is also large, but procedures for solving them tend to be less routine and unique problems present themselves much more frequently” (p. 373). Owens and Valesky (2014) pointed out that there is a better way to lead under these precarious and uncertain conditions. In offering a solution to this issue, Heifetz and Linsky (2002) posited that, given this complicated environment, superintendents need to lay hold on the practice of adaptive leadership.

The challenges that superintendents and educational organizations face today have expansive significance for the institution’s sustainability (Nelson & Squires, 2017; Simmons, 2022). These challenges include implementing reform for the mutual benefit of all organizational members or overcoming deep-rooted systems that impede the organization’s success. Although Heifetz and his colleagues initially developed the model of adaptive leadership within the business context, they discovered that their model could apply to educational systems because the problems are intricate and versatile. This model provided a prescriptive approach to resolving educational challenges. In this context,

Heifetz and Linsky (2007) proposed that educational leadership means mobilizing schools, families, and communities to deal with complex issues that people often prefer to sweep under the rug. Student achievement, health, and civic development challenges generate real but thorny opportunities for superintendents to demonstrate leadership daily (Nelson & Squires, 2017; Sunderman et al., 2020).

Owens and Valesky (2014) pointed out that the extent of change or stability in the environment should impact the selection of a strategy or intervention for leadership (Heifetz et al., 2009). Superintendents are problem solvers who are expected to address and buffer the technical care of the organization from the immediate and pressing demands of parents and other short-term sources in the system (C. Kelly & Peterson, 2002). Superintendents are also expected to work effectively with diverse, fragmented, and pluralistic communities with vocal individuals while facilitating school reform and improvement. Superintendents are required to rework how leadership is implied and implemented.

Robertson and Webber (2002) called for superintendents to move past the practices that were successful in earlier models of educational leadership to address the ambiguity and complexity of working in a rapidly changing, diverse society. C. Kelly and Peterson (2002) outlined a need for superintendents to have finding and problem-solving skills to address routine challenges and unique emergent issues. In environments with no transparent solutions for many challenges, superintendents need to immerse in adaptive leadership techniques (Nelson & Squires, 2017; Simmons, 2022).

Although researchers of adaptive leadership have contended that this approach applies to all organizations, more needs to be written on this model within the educational

field (Nelson & Squires, 2017). Heifetz and Linsky (2004) indicated that all educational leadership at all levels exercise adaptive leadership to address multiple competing views and ideas on complex issues. Adaptive leadership at the superintendency level provides an alternative approach to identifying complex issues and collaboratively exploring the technical and adaptive elements embedded in the challenge (Heifetz et al., 2009; Nelson & Squires, 2017). The adaptive leadership framework offers a unique means to conceptualize and sustainably address superintendents' unique challenges.

A Gap in the Research

Although research does exist on leadership during a crisis, a wider net needs to be cast on the role of public school superintendents. It is possible that adaptive leadership is the way to cast a wider net regarding people's way of thinking about leadership. The complexity of the superintendent's role is growing because of the postpandemic world, and understanding the necessary practices and characteristics is vital to public school districts. Limited research has been conducted on the strategies and characteristics of adaptive leadership of superintendents during times of great change and opportunity. Specifically, applying the leadership characteristics outlined by Heifetz et al. (2009) in the book *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* would benefit understanding and analyzing how the implementation could impact superintendent training for future leaders.

Summary

Leading an organization in today's educational world has become more complicated. The challenging times in the world have made leadership more difficult because of the potential disruption and change (Morgan, 2020; Netolicky, 2020). Leadership in this context requires a specific type that includes decision making and

action to make it through times of great change (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020). As Heifetz and Linsky (2004) pointed out, educational leaders must exercise adaptive leadership to allow those perspectives to come forward to meet the competing viewpoints and ideas required to examine complex issues (Nelson & Squires, 2017).

Public school superintendents are undergoing the same level of change and have been shifting away from the traditional descriptors, behaviors, and situational contexts in which they operate (Nelson & Squires, 2017). Superintendents have begun to embrace adaptive leadership principles that focus on identifying complex issues and collaboratively exploring the technical and adaptive elements embedded in the problems to construct an appropriate response. The adaptive framework offers a unique means to conceptualize and sustainably address educational institutions' unique challenges today (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Although research has been conducted on leadership models and public school leadership, more needs to be published on adaptive leadership and adaptive capacity. This study could be valuable to the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) as they explore the recruitment and sustaining of public school superintendents in a changing educational world of leadership. This research may be helpful for university doctoral programs and local school boards as they review leaders for the role of superintendent in times of great change in public schools.

Chapter III lays out the methodology taken in this research study. Chapter IV analyzes the data collected and presents the study's findings through tables and narratives. Finally, Chapter V provides a final summary of the study, including

significant findings, unexpected findings, conclusions, implications for action, recommendations for further research, and concluding remarks and reflections.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

The purpose of a qualitative research design is to specify a plan that describes the research procedures and the conditions by which the data will be obtained (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). This study aimed to identify and describe strategies superintendents use in California public school districts in Los Angeles County to build adaptive capacity based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership identified by Heifetz et al. (2009). The research design most appropriate for this study was a phenomenological methods study to capture the lived experiences of the superintendents (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). Interviews were conducted using open-ended, semistructured questions to gain meaning from their experience and to identify their use of the five characteristics of adaptive leadership (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019).

Chapter III delineates the methods and procedures of the study, beginning with a restatement of the purpose, the central research question, and the research questions. This study's team of peer researchers consisted of three faculty and nine doctoral students who share a common interest in identifying strategies leaders use to build adaptive capacity in their organizations. This chapter indicates the research design, the population, the sampling frame, the sample used for the study, and the instrumentation. There is also a description of the steps to ensure validity and reliability, including the field-testing process. The chapter specifies the data collection and analysis process and concludes with a discussion of the study's limitations, providing an overall summary of the chapter.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe strategies used by superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County to build an adaptive capacity based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership identified by Heifetz et al. (2009).

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What strategies do superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County 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 Questions

1. How do superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County build an organization's adaptive capacity through making naming elephants in the room the norm?
2. How do superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County build an organization's adaptive capacity through nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization?
3. How do superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County build an organization's adaptive capacity through encouraging independent judgment?

4. How do superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County build an organization's adaptive capacity through developing leadership capacity?
5. How do superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County build an organization's adaptive capacity through institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning?

Research Design

Research design should align with the purpose of the research and the question it seeks to answer (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Creswell (2014) advised that a research design should be based on the nature of the research problem, the researcher's personal experiences, and the audience for the study. A qualitative research design is the collection of data that can be interpreted and reviewed by analyzing words based on observations, interviews, and artifacts (Newhart, 2015; Patton, 2015). I used a qualitative design with a phenomenological inquiry framework for this study to determine the strategies superintendents in California public school districts in Los Angeles County use to build adaptive organizational capacity based on Heifetz's five key characteristics (Heifetz et al. 2009).

Qualitative research seeks to understand people's behavior and thinking based on their experiences and social structures (Newhart, 2015; Patton, 2015; Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). Research explores the lived experiences and perceptions of the leaders within the organization and their relationship to the subsequent research questions, which leads to a greater understanding of the action (Newhart, 2015; Patton, 2015). To understand how

leaders perceive adaptive capacity in the organization, the research design for this study focuses on the phenomenological approach to explore those leaders' lived experiences.

The phenomenological approach examines individual perceptions by gaining a deeper understanding or meaning of how the phenomenon impacts the lived experience (Patten & Newhart, 2018). The nonexperimental research design examines the conditions as they were perceived by the individuals without manipulating the conditions or their realities (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Using this approach allowed me to understand the lived experiences of superintendents in California public school districts in Los Angeles County and to gather insight into their perceptions of how they build an organization's adaptive capacity.

Method Rationale

Roberts (2010) stated, "The qualitative approach is based on the philosophical orientation called *phenomenology*, which focuses on people's experiences from their perspective" (p. 143). A qualitative phenomenology research design was chosen as the most appropriate methodology by the peer research team because of the intention of hearing the interpretations of the lived experiences of the participants as proposed by the research questions (Patton, 2015). The peer researchers developed a semistructured, open-ended interview protocol as the primary method to capture the lived experiences of organizational leaders to build adaptive capacity based on Heifetz's five adaptive leadership characteristics (Patten & Newhart, 2019). According to Creswell and Báez (2020), qualitative research is the preferred approach for exploring and understanding meaning in the human experience, versus quantitative research, which is used to test theories to examine relationships among the variables. The phenomenology design

allowed me to explore and investigate public school district superintendents' interpretation of building an organizational adaptive capacity.

Population

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined the population as “a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects, or events, that conform to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research” (p. 129). The population is the collective group with similar characteristics to whom a researcher would like to generalize the results of the study (Roberts, 2010). The study population comprises a group of subjects corresponding to a specific set of criteria from which a sample can be drawn to generalize results (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The population for this study was all superintendents in public school districts in California. The California Department of Education's (CDE, n.d.) website reported 1,018 public school districts in the state of California as of 2022. For this study, a K-12 school district is defined as a district that provides comprehensive academic instruction to students in grades kindergarten through 12, including districts that service K-8 students (elementary districts), 9-12 students (high school districts), and K-12 students (unified districts). The CDE (n.d.) lists 1,018 public school superintendents in California representing 517 elementary school districts, 76 high school districts, 345 unified school districts, and 80 other types of school districts. Superintendents are expected to be creators, implementers, facilitators, and motivators for change while increasing student achievement (Van Rooij et al., 2018).

Sampling Frame

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), the target population is the entire group of subjects from whom a researcher wishes to generalize a study's findings. It may not be possible to study large groups of study participants because of geography, availability of funds, or convenience. I determined the population of 1,018 California superintendents was too large a population to effectively study. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) suggested a smaller group in the population to be studied. The Southern California region consists of the following counties: Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, and Imperial. I went to each of the eight county offices of education web pages to gather the number of school districts, which totals 269 public school districts. Because this number would equate to 269 superintendents, it was determined that the population of Southern California superintendents would need to be further narrowed. I then narrowed the sampling frame to superintendents in Los Angeles County. Los Angeles County's Office of Education (LACOE emailserv2022) identified that there were 80 public school districts.

Sample

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a sample is a group of subjects or participants identified from the larger population from whom data are collected. The sample is an aligned subgroup within the larger population that researchers can investigate, allowing for inference about the larger population because the sample population reflects the characteristics of that group (Patten & Newhart, 2018). I narrowed down the sampling frame of superintendents in Southern California to those public school superintendents in Los Angeles County (see Figure 4). Of the 80 Los Angeles County

public school district superintendents, I used purposeful sampling to select 10 superintendents who met the study's criteria to compose the study's sample. According to Patton (2015), "Purposeful samples should be judged according to the purpose and the rationale of the study" (p. 311). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe strategies used by superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County to build an adaptive capacity based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership identified by Heifetz et al. (2009). Purposeful sampling supports identifying elements from the population that reflect the study theme (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated, "Convenience sampling is a nonprobability method of selecting subjects who are accessible or available" (p. 486). Qualitative research sampling can provide profound insight into the studied phenomenon (Patton, 2015). The sample comprised 10 participants selected from the superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County who met the specified selection criteria collaboratively developed by the team of peer researchers. As Patton (2015) stated, "Determining your sample size is a matter of intellectual judgment based on the logic of making meaningful comparisons and developing our explanations" (p. 311).

This study was delimited to 10 California public school superintendents within Los Angeles County who met four of the six following 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

- evidence of having written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings
- recognition by their peers
- membership in associations of groups focused on their field

Figure 4

Sampling Frame



Sample Selection

The sample selection process took place once approval was received from the Institutional Review Board of UMass Global. I enlisted a group of established experts within the field of educational leadership to seek participants for the study. According to Creswell (2003), an expert is a person with extensive knowledge and experience in a particular field or area of study who is called for expert advice. In this study, the experts were two current and retired public school district superintendents within Southern

California who were active members of the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA). I sought nominations and requested the experts to forward the email to superintendents whom they knew met the study criteria. Using email, I contacted each nominee and interested superintendent about their participation interest in the research study and eligibility status based on the study's criteria. The selection of 10 superintendents who met the eligibility were selected as the participants in the study. No more than three individuals who represent similarly sized public school districts were selected to ensure that the study contained a variety of perspectives and experiences.

Upon selection and agreement, I provided the participants the following:

- Invitation to participate letter (Appendix B)
- Informed consent form (Appendix C)
- Research Participant's Bill of Rights (Appendix D)
- Inquiry about availability to schedule the virtual interview

Following the confirmation of the interview, the 10 participants were provided additional communication 1 week prior to the scheduled interview:

- the purpose of the study and the interview data and the time
- a list of interview questions and definitions for the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership identified by Heifetz et al. (2009; Appendix E)

Finally, I sought verbal consent for the study at the start of the interview while using the Zoom recording and transcription features and the use of the audio transcription application.

Instrumentation

I served as the instrument of the study using semistructured, open-ended interview questions as the primary instrument to understand the lived experiences of superintendents in California public school districts in Los Angeles County (Patton, 2015). According to Patton (2015), phenomenological approaches focus on how one makes sense of experiences and transform these experiences into consciousness to develop meaning from them. Further, a phenomenological framework can capture the essence of program participants' experiences and how they describe those experiences. A phenomenological inquiry framework attempted to capture the essence of what superintendents experienced.

Qualitative data collection strategies employ multiple methods, including interviews using open-ended and semistructured interview questions, document review, observations, and review of other artifacts (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). According to Patton (2015), data triangulation aims to test for the consistency of multiple data sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of the issue. Specifically, methodological triangulation was used to identify patterns that emerged from interviews, literature, and artifact analysis to strengthen the study's credibility. To increase validity and strengthen the study, case studies triangulate findings using multiple sources of evidence, including interviews and artifacts from multiple cases (Patten & Newhart, 2018). Furthermore, the peer researchers in the thematic team collaborated with faculty members and developed interview questions for the study using the following steps:

1. Heifetz et al.'s five key characteristics of adaptive leadership were identified.
2. The five key characteristics were divided among research team members.

3. Each research team member defined the characteristics using research from seminal authors; the team met numerous times until there was agreement on the definitions.
4. Each research team member identified the variables within each definition using research from seminal authors.
5. Research team members convened, reviewed, revised, and agreed upon final variables within the definitions.
6. Team members then developed concepts that ground the operational definition for each term or phrase discussed.
7. Each team member wrote a concept paper for each definition and produced two questions and a probe for each question based on these definitions.
8. This process ensured that the thematic team aligned potential questions to the primary definition of each principle and variables within that definition.
9. Each research team member then drafted interview questions from each definition of principles using the variables as a content guide.
10. The team convened, reviewed, revised, and agreed upon final interview questions and probes aligned with research questions and definitions.
11. Following review by the faculty chairs, team members drafted a script for the interview process.
12. The team finalized 10 open-ended questions with two questions for each of Heifetz et al.'s five 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). The questions were based on a review of the literature. The thematic research team met to do a final review and reached an agreement on the final version of the interview instrument and script (Appendix F).

13. An alignment table was created to ensure direct alignment between the purpose statement, the research questions, variables, definitions, interview questions, and probing questions (Appendix G).

Artifacts

In qualitative research, reviewing artifacts is a noninteractive way to obtain data, including emails, photographs, personal documents, and objects (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). I retrieved and gathered artifacts to support the investigative inquiry and for triangulation (Patton, 2015). Artifacts allowed me to corroborate findings across the data sets, reducing potential bias (Bowen, 2009). Additionally, reviewing artifacts concurrently with interviews provided a more significant description of the lived experiences of the superintendent participants (Bowen, 2009; Polkinghorne, 2005). The study participants provided documentation of emails, memos, newsletters, pictures, and presentations to support their lived experiences.

Validity/Reliability

Validity in qualitative research refers to the process a researcher took to ensure the accuracy of the instruments, such as interrater reliability and the use of more than one reviewer (Patton, 2015). Further, McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described the validity of qualitative designs based on unity between the explanations. Finally, Patten and Newhart (2018) referred to reliability related to consistent results. In qualitative

studies, validity is ensured through the trustworthiness of the techniques used by a researcher's ability to convey the specifics of the methods and how they have been used within the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The thematic team of nine peer researchers and three faculty members developed the interview questions to increase the study's validity. Using qualified experts to evaluate instruments and field-test interviews effectively reduces researcher bias and increases a study's trustworthiness and validity (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). Furthermore, the questions were field-tested by all nine peer researchers, and a qualified neutral observer, interview participant, and peer researcher provided detailed feedback on the process after the field test was completed (see Appendices H, I, and J). The nine peer researchers and the three faculty members evaluated the interview process and its intended accuracy in identifying and describing strategies used by superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County to build an adaptive capacity based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership by Heifetz et al. (2009).

Reliability is the degree to which instruments for data collection for a given study are standardized or can produce consistent results across different researchers using the same instrumentation (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). To ensure reliability, the process followed by the thematic team of nine peer researchers used a collaboratively developed script with interview questions. The team developed this study's purpose statement, central research question, questions, and research design. Additionally, the thematic peer researchers and faculty advisors worked together to design the research methodology and protocols to ensure data consistency and verification.

This guidance and expertise by the faculty advisors and the thematic team researchers increased reliability by developing and implementing the same questions and protocols, adjusting only for the population, sample frame, and sample for individual studies. All participants received the same prompting questions from all nine peer researchers.

Each interview was recorded and transcribed for further reliability of the data. Transcripts of the recorded interviews were made available to the participants to confirm their accuracy. Once the participants verified the recordings for accuracy, the data were coded and identified for themes and patterns using the Delve software.

Intercoder Reliability

Intercoder reliability refers to the agreement between two or more individuals on codes used for the same data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Intercoder reliability is an essential step in coding qualitative research data, and it aims to reduce the limitation of the researcher as the instrument of the research (Patton, 2015). Intercoder reliability assists with reducing a researcher's bias by ensuring that codes are not solely a result of personal mental models, ideas, or opinions but are shared across coders (Burla et al., 2008; Lombard et al., 2004). Intercoder reliability is critical for valid and creditable research (Patton, 2015). Furthermore, to enhance research reliability, a qualified research expert analyzed 10% of the sample of the transcribed interview data and aligned codes allowing for a reliability measure of 80% or greater.

The expert and I met virtually on Zoom to review and discuss the consistency of the findings. The research expert has earned a doctoral degree and is skilled in using Delve software. The research expert gave input and assisted in the examination of the

coded data for correlation of results. Furthermore, to ensure the reliability of this study, the team of peer researchers and three faculty members developed one instrument and question script that was used consistently with all participants. The use of the Delve software allowed me to work efficiently and effectively when analyzing the data, which supported my time and energy in discovering significant themes and patterns that described the lived experiences of the superintendents of public schools. Qualitative data analysis requires intellectual discipline and analytical rigor (Patton, 2015). The implementation of the Delve software assists a researcher in the data analysis and therefore supports reliability.

Data Collection

The research study included interviews with 10 superintendents to identify, describe, and explain the development of adaptive capacity based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership identified by Heifetz et al. (2009) within the organization. Data were collected after the approval of the study was determined by the UMass Global Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure federal regulations and ethical criteria involving human research had been successfully met (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The data were collected by developing interview questions aligned with the research question. The following steps were taken to collect the data:

1. To ensure the protection of human research participants, I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) certification (Appendix K).
2. I received approval from the UMass Global IRB to conduct the study (Appendix L).

3. I emailed each participant a letter of invitation to participate in the research with details of the study (Appendix B).
4. Once the 10 participants agreed to the interview, I scheduled a 60-min interview with each participant for a day and time convenient for them.
2. I emailed the following documents to each participant: (a) an invitation/informational letter to participate (see Appendix B), (b) the UMass Global University Research Participants Bill of Rights (see Appendix D), and (c) an informed consent form (see Appendix C).
3. Prior to each interview, I emailed the participants the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership semistructured interview questions and definitions (Appendix M).
4. In addition, prior to the interview, I emailed each participant an artifact sample form (see Appendix N).
5. Prior to the start of the interview questions, the participants were required to provide an audible response with a “yes” as to the informed consent within the recording and captured in the transcript. All participants agreed to the informed consent prior to data collection. I provided the security of all data and the privacy of the participants by securing the data on a password-protected computer and locking all printed documents in a locked office safe. I ensured that it would not be possible to identify participants as the person who provided any specific information for the study. Participants were identified as Participant A, Participant B, Participant C, and so forth. Transcripts and recordings were destroyed 3 years after the publishing of this study.

After the interviews were conducted, the data transcripts were coded for themes to identify the adaptive capacity-building behaviors and actions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Further, artifacts from leadership team meetings were collected to identify how support for adaptive leadership practices was implemented.

This research study used data triangulation to strengthen the study (Patton, 2015). According to Patton (2015), data triangulation aims to test for the consistency of multiple data sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of the issue. Specifically, methodological triangulation identified interview patterns and analyzed artifacts to strengthen the study's credibility (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This research study has the potential to describe the behaviors of superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County and explain how those strategies build and maintain trust while they work with their teaching staff to support adaptive leadership and overall capacity building. Qualitative research is exploratory and seeks to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspective of the people it involves (Patten & Newhart, 2018).

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis involves organizing large amounts of data and converting them into relevant themes and patterns for analysis (Patton, 2015). In this manner, a researcher can transform the data into findings to create an organized structure to communicate those findings. Data analysis is the most credible and valid conclusion to convey the responses to the research questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The analysis began during the interview process. I listened to participants' responses and took notes to identify emerging themes (Patton, 2015). I recorded the notes

and I reviewed and coded them appropriately. Following each interview, the participants were provided their transcripts to review for accuracy, clarification, or omission. Once the participants reviewed the transcripts, I uploaded them into the Delve software. Using the Delve software, I identified themes and patterns and their frequency. As themes and patterns were identified, I created a frequency table for analysis (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). I also reviewed the artifacts obtained from the participants to correlate information from the interviews and describe the lived experiences of the participating superintendents. The artifact data were coded to themes and included in the frequency tables.

Limitations

The strengths of the research study are the interviews with the superintendents of the California public school districts from 10 different districts within Los Angeles County. These interviews identified strategies that promote adaptive leadership within the organization. Further, methodological triangulation enhanced the study's strength by collecting and analyzing artifacts from meetings, planning sessions, and interview transcripts that support an adaptive leadership capacity culture (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Limitations of a study include aspects of a research design and orientation that hinder the effectiveness of the findings, yet a researcher has minimal control over them and may impact the generalizability of the study's outcomes (Patten & Newhart, 2018; Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). Transparency is an obligation a researcher must address as a limitation and its potential impact on the outcomes of the study. Studies are not free of limitations and cannot incorporate the breadth and depth of the experiences of the research participants in each specific population.

Geography

The participants of this research study worked in California public school districts in Los Angeles County. In 2022–2023, California had 1,018 public school districts of which 269 were districts in Southern California (CDE, n.d.). Because of the great size of the state of California, the superintendents who participated were a subset of the public school district leaders within California. Therefore, these findings may not be representative of the larger population of superintendents within California.

Time and Virtual Platform Constraints

The participants of this study were employed superintendents of public school districts. The daily job duties of a superintendent are complex, demanding, and stressful. Their time is spent serving the needs of their students, schools, and community. Therefore, the time allowed for engaging in an interview is limited. These factors may have impacted their ability to engage readily in interview questions that required in-depth responses (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Additionally, the interviews were conducted using a virtual conferencing platform and were time-bound by 1 hr. These constraints may have affected the quality of participant interview responses, which would have influenced the identified themes, findings, and study results.

Sample Size

With only 10 superintendents participating in the study, the sample size was deemed a possible limitation. There are 269 public school districts in Southern California and because each one was presumed to have a superintendent, it was not feasible to interview all within the study. As a result, the small sample size may limit the conclusions and generalization to the larger population of superintendents in Southern

California. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) indicated that “a qualitative sample can range from 1 to 40 or more” (p. 328). According to Patton (2015), “The validity, meaningfulness, and insights generally from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size” (p. 313). As such, qualitative research designs often involve fewer participants with rich data collection.

Researcher as the Instrument of the Study

Finally, the researcher as the instrument of this qualitative study could have been a limitation. Direct interaction while conducting qualitative studies may introduce biases and assumptions because of my experiences and perspectives (Patton, 2015). At the time of the study, I was an associate superintendent of a public school district in Southern California. It is important to note that this professional experience is closely related to that of the study participants and may have had an influence on the research study. I was aware of the potential bias and worked to minimize preconceptions through support from a research expert’s review of interviews and coding analysis; these factors may have limited this study’s generalizability.

Summary

Chapter III discussed the methodology of this qualitative phenomenology study, identifying and describing strategies used by superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County to build an adaptive capacity based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership by Heifetz et al. (2009). The chapter began by restating the study’s purpose and the instrumentation. The chapter then described the research design and the rationale for selecting the qualitative design with a

phenomenology framework. It discussed the specific steps taken to ensure validity and reliability. Finally, the study's limitations and the process of ensuring trustworthiness and transparency were discussed. Chapter IV shares the results of the data collected in this case study and narrates the themes and patterns that emerged through inductive coding. Chapter V presents the study's findings, conclusions, and recommendations to be used for further theory development and future research.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDING

Overview

This qualitative, phenomenological study was conducted to identify and describe strategies used by 10 superintendents in public school districts in Southern California to build adaptive capacity. This study was part of a thematic research project that included nine peer researchers under the supervision of three faculty members. The variables for this study were based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership identified by Heifetz et al. (2009), as (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, (e) and institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning. Data for this study were collected through in-depth interviews with each superintendent. The research also collected artifacts to triangulate the data gathered in the interviews.

The data collected were analyzed into codes and then into themes based on key concept by variable and research question. The findings have been presented by research questions to address the purpose of the study. Findings from the five research questions described how superintendents perceived the adaptive capacity strategies embedded in their organization.

Chapter IV begins with an overview of the purpose statement, research questions, a review of the research design, sample selection, data collection methods, and participant demographic information. This chapter then presents a detailed analysis of the collected data and corresponding themes organized by each of the 10 interview questions,

including direct quotations from participant interviews. The chapter concludes with a summary of the study's findings.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe strategies used by superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County to build an adaptive capacity based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership identified by Heifetz et al. (2009).

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What strategies do superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County 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 Questions

1. How do superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County build an organization's adaptive capacity through making naming elephants in the room the norm?
2. How do superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County build an organization's adaptive capacity through nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization?

3. How do superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County build an organization's adaptive capacity through encouraging independent judgment?
4. How do superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County build an organization's adaptive capacity through developing leadership capacity?
5. How do superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County build an organization's adaptive capacity through institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning?

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

The research design used for this study was phenomenological qualitative research. This design sought to explore and understand individuals' lived experiences involving understanding the perceptions, feelings, and meanings associated with a particular phenomenon (Patten & Newhart, 2018). Qualitative research design provides the researcher with a construct to analyze themes or patterns using collection methods such as interviews and artifacts (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The data collection process used semistructured interviews as the primary data collection method. The interview guide used open-ended questions that allowed participants to reflect on and describe their experiences. Probing techniques encouraged the participants to delve deeper into their experiences. The design allowed to find trends in the perspectives of multiple superintendents. I conducted a one-to-one interview with each participant who responded to 10 open-ended semistructured questions. These in-depth interviews were

the primary method of data collection used in this study. In addition, I collected artifacts from the study participants to be used as a secondary data source.

Primary data collection was through semistructured interviews. In collaboration with nine peer researchers and three University of Massachusetts Global faculty members, I crafted 10 interview questions to address each research question. A field test was conducted to increase the validity of the interview questions and protocols. Based on the feedback from the field tests, slight modifications were made to the interview questions and the interview protocol.

Using the selection criteria developed by the thematic team, I used an expert panel to identify potential superintendents to be included in the study. A list of 25 potential superintendent interview candidates was emailed (see Appendix F). Once an agreement was reached to participate in the study, the superintendents were sent detailed information, including the informed consent document (see Appendix C), the Participant Bill of Rights (see Appendix D), and the background information on the research study. Each superintendent was asked to complete a short demographic information questionnaire before the interview. Once the demographics were completed, the 35-min to 70-min interview was conducted. In addition to the interview questions, I collected artifacts from the 10 superintendents and their district websites. This process allowed me to gather additional information from respondents to triangulate the information collected. The interview transcripts and artifacts were then uploaded into Delve software to begin the process of coding and theming.

Interview Process and Procedure

The primary data source for this study included interviews conducted using semistructured, open-ended questions created to directly address the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership identified by Heifetz et al. (2009). The thematic team developed the interview protocols to ensure consistency of process and questions for all participants. The participants were provided an overview of the interview process, including the collection of the demographic survey. The interview was conducted using a virtual platform, and the participants consented to the interview recording. The interviews were designed to allow participants to provide details of their lived experience for each question. Prompts were occasionally used to explore and provide further information or examples throughout the process to enhance the quality of the meaning of the interview responses (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The interviews ranged from 35 min to 70 min.

After the interviews, participants were provided the following steps and reminded of their bill of rights, confidentiality, and a statement letting them know they would be provided the interview transcript for accuracy. The virtual platform Zoom was used, and the audio memo version was transcribed. I reviewed each transcription by ensuring the audio and video transcription alignment. The transcription document was saved and filed based on the number of participants and the interview date.

The transcription document was then sent to each participant for review and to validate their responses for accuracy. The participants noted no corrections. The minor typo errors were corrected during the alignment process, and participants were provided

with the corrected version. After the responses on the validation from the participants, all documents were secured in a password-protected folder with access only to me.

Population

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), the study population category conforms to a specific criterion and can be generalized by the researcher. A population is a group of individuals who have the same characteristics, such as superintendents, who would then make up the population criteria of superintendents (Creswell, 2003).

According to Roberts, 2010, the population can be referred to as a collective group with similar aspects and generalized by the researcher. The population for this study included superintendents of public schools in Southern California. The overall population of Southern California superintendents is 1,018. It was determined that this number was too broad for the analysis, and therefore, it was narrowed to 80 superintendents in Los Angeles County (California Department of Education, n.d.).

Sample

According to Creswell (2003), a sample, defined as a subgroup, constitutes a small percentage of the total population. This study was delimited to encompass 10 K-12 public school superintendents representing school districts in Los Angeles County, Southern California. The determination of the sample size of 10 was made by thematic peer researchers to ensure the collection of meaningful data and to uphold the feasibility and credibility of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015).

The 10 superintendents were identified through a nonprobability sampling approach using purposeful and convenience sampling. Purposeful sampling allowed researchers to select participants based on specific characteristics or criteria that aligned

with the research questions, facilitating the collection of rich and meaningful information to identify the 10 superintendents (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In this study, the participants were required to be currently serving as superintendents in Los Angeles County and meet at least four of the six specified 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
- evidence of having written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings.
- recognition by their peers
- membership in associations of groups focused on their field

Demographic Data

Convenience sampling was used to identify participants based on accessibility (Patton, 2015). I used the contact from the Los Angeles County Office of Education to identify superintendents and gather their email information. Following the review conducted by an expert panel, 25 superintendents were identified as meeting the established criteria of the study. Invitations were extended to all 25 superintendents, and 11 responses were received. The first 10 respondents who confirmed their participation were selected for the study. To uphold confidentiality and anonymity, the study's findings deliberately excluded participants' names and any identifying information, assigning them pseudonyms such as Participant 1, Participant 2, and so forth (see Table 1).

All 10 superintendents fulfilled the criteria regarding years of experience. The participants' ages ranged from 40 to 65. Among the superintendents, 20% were female. Regarding years of experience in the superintendency, the range was from 3 to 8 years, and all of the participants had over 16 years in the field of education (see Table 2). Sixty percent identified as Hispanic or Latinx, 30% identified as White or Caucasian, and 10% identified as Asian or White. Notably, all participants held a doctorate as their highest level of education. It was also observed that there were only two female participants, and the participants as a whole held less than 8 years in the position. Table 2 provides a comprehensive overview of the demographic information for each participant.

Table 1

Study Participant Criteria

Study criterion	Participant									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Has shown evidence of successful relationships with stakeholders	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2. Has shown evidence of breaking through conflict to achieve organizational success	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
3. Has 5 or more years of experience in the profession or field	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
4. Has had articles written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
5. Is recognized by his or her peers	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
6. Holds memberships in associations or groups focused on his or her field	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Note. Criteria—all participants met the minimum requirement of four of the six areas.

Table 2*Participant Demographics*

Participant	Identified gender	Identified ethnicity	Age range	Years in the organization	Years in current position	Years in the field	Highest level of education
1	Male	Hispanic	56–65	4–8	4–8	16+	Doctorate
2	Male	Hispanic	46–55	16+	4–8	16+	Doctorate
3	Male	White	46–55	4–8	4–8	16+	Doctorate
4	Female	Hispanic	56–65	16+	4–8	16+	Doctorate
5	Female	White/ Asian	36–45	4–8	1–3	16+	Doctorate
6	Male	White	46–55	4–8	1–3	16+	Doctorate
7	Male	White	46–55	4–8	4–8	16+	Doctorate
8	Male	Hispanic	46–55	4–8	4–8	16+	Doctorate
9	Male	Hispanic	46–55	4–8	4–8	16+	Doctorate
10	Male	Hispanic	56–65	16+	4–8	16+	Doctorate

Data Presentation and Data Analysis

The findings as outlined in this chapter were obtained from content generated by the study participants. As indicated in the interview session, the selected superintendents shared their lived experiences as educational leaders related to Heifetz et al.’s (2009) five key characteristics of adaptive leadership.

Presentation of Analysis of Data

A qualitative research design was selected to investigate the strategies employed by public school superintendents in building adaptive capacity. Data were gathered through semistructured interviews conducted with 10 superintendents supplemented by digital artifacts provided by the participants in September 2023. Transcripts generated for each interview recording, as well as pertinent artifacts, were linked to the corresponding interview data. The study focused on identifying and describing the adaptive leadership

strategies employed by superintendents, aligning with the key characteristics outlined by Heifetz et al. (2009). The semistructured interview questions were intentionally designed to elicit information about the lived experiences and leadership strategies pertaining to adaptive capacity. Subsequently, the collected data, encompassing both participant responses and digital artifacts, underwent analysis to uncover emerging patterns and themes related to the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership. The presentation and organization of findings are structured according to the research questions within the framework of the study's theoretical design.

Data Analysis

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) suggested the position that qualitative research serves to assist in transforming raw data through examination into meaningful findings. The process of data analysis, as emphasized by Patten and Newhart (2018) and Patton (2015), is geared toward addressing specific research questions and uncovering valuable insights. To facilitate the analysis for this study, all transcripts and artifacts were uploaded into the Delve tool.

Employing the Delve tool, I conducted a systematic coding process based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership, as outlined by Heifetz et al. (2009): (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.

Coding involved a thorough examination and cross-analysis of the transcripts to categorize participant responses. Both deductive and inductive coding strategies were employed to discern emerging themes within the participant responses. According to

McMillan and Schumacher (2010), the themes are in relationship to the conceptual framework of the research. These themes were subsequently organized by conceptual tendencies and recognizable patterns. This process of coding led to an understanding of the traits and behaviors in which the superintendents lead their organizations in an adaptive culture. The themes included in the study used a standard of being referenced by a minimum of seven or 70% of the participants. Additionally, a theme represented a minimum of 20% or more of all data coded within a research question. These criteria resulted in 23 themes and are represented in the tables for each research question.

Frequency tables were generated to provide a quantitative overview. These tables delineated themes, sources, and their corresponding frequencies, offering a comprehensive breakdown of the data associated with each key characteristic of adaptive leadership. This analytical approach was aligned with addressing the research questions and clarifying the aspects of each adaptive leadership characteristic.

Intercoder Reliability

A systematic approach was undertaken to ensure the reliability of the study. The interview protocol was meticulously developed and consistently applied among all research participants. The reliability measures were further strengthened through field tests conducted by nine peer researchers. Additionally, intercoder reliability, a critical aspect of data coding, was assessed with the involvement of a peer researcher processing qualitative data coding expertise.

Intercoder reliability, as defined by McMillan and Schumacher (2010), is achieved when two or more coders consistently rate their observations of the research data at similar conclusions, thereby affirming the accuracy and validity of the data

analysis. In this study, a peer researcher proficient in qualitative data coding undertook the coding of transcripts and artifacts from one participant, representing 10% of the overall data.

The results revealed an 85% agreement level between coders. As asserted by Patton (2015), intercoder reliability is considered satisfactory when there is an 80% agreement level that surpasses the recommended threshold, affirming the interrater reliability of this study's data coding process. I used Delve as the instrument to document and code the findings.

Data by Research Question

A total of 614 coded entries were obtained from the 10 interviews and 18 artifacts collected, 538 associated with interviews and 76 associated with artifacts. The coded data resulted in 23 emergent themes. Figure 5 shows the themes identified for each of the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership being studied.

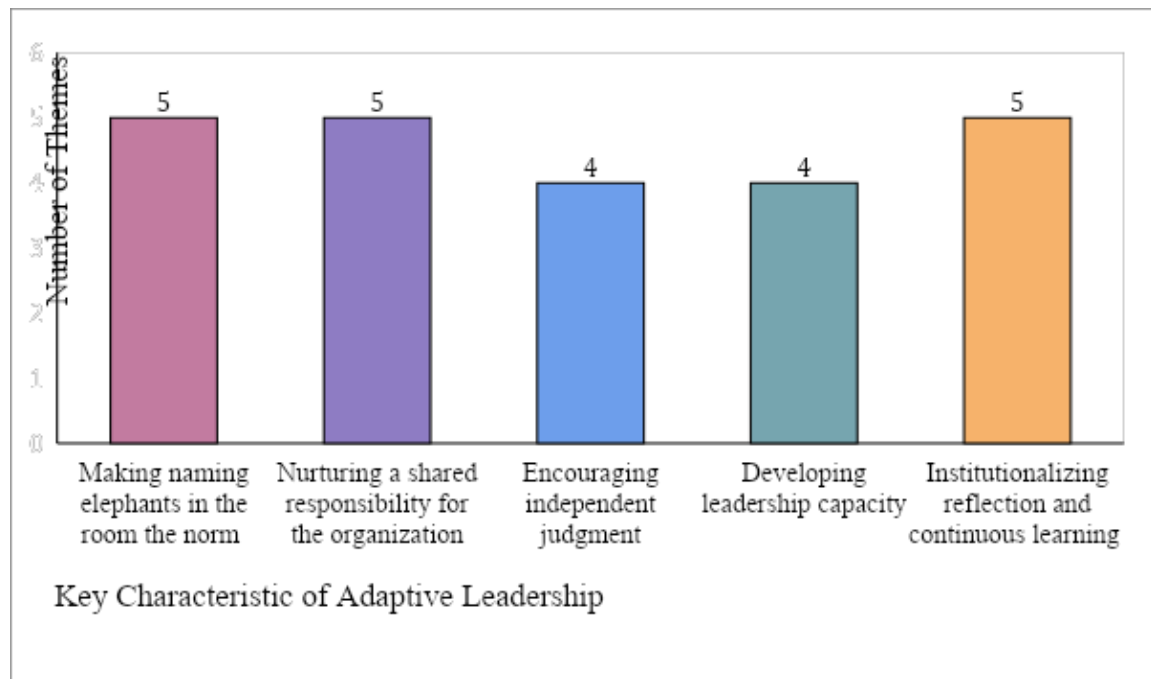
Of the 23 emergent themes, five themes were discerned for each of the specified characteristics, namely: making elephants in the room the norm, nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization, and institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning. Four themes were identified for encouraging independent judgment and developing leadership capacity. Regarding the frequency total within the themes identified, the practice of making elephants in the room the norm and nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization received the greatest frequency.

Table 3 delineates the distribution of all coded data corresponding to each research question, presenting both total frequency counts and the percentage of coded data frequency categorized by the key characteristics. Additionally, Figure 6 visually

illustrates the frequency count and percentage of all identified codes associated with each key characteristic of adaptive leadership, aligning with the research questions posed in the study.

Figure 5

Distribution of Themes Per Key Characteristics of Adaptive Leadership



The practice of making naming elephants in the room the norm exhibited the highest overall frequency count, totaling 156 and accounting for 25% of the data. Following closely, institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization is the second-highest frequency with 147 occurrences, constituting 24% of the data. Nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization held a frequency of 128, representing 21%, and developing leadership capacity had a frequency of 98, comprising 16% of the data. The key characteristic with the lowest frequency in

adaptive leadership was encouraging independent judgment, a total of 85 instances, making up 14% of the data.

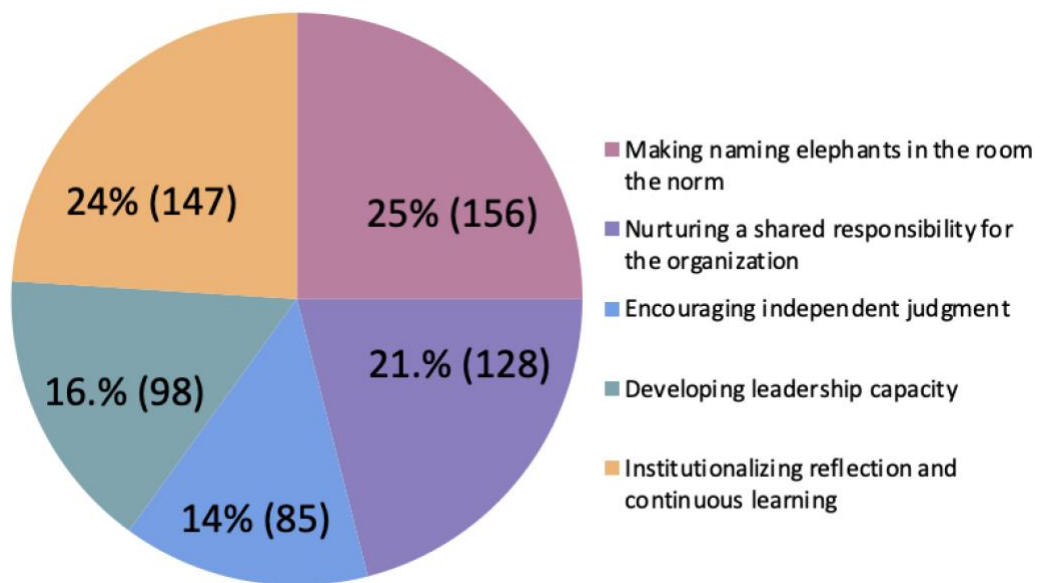
Table 3

Tabulation of All Coded Data

Key characteristic of adaptive leadership	Research question	Interview frequency	Artifact frequency	Total frequency	Frequency %
Making naming elephants in the room the norm	1	140	16	156	25
Institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning	5	134	13	147	24
Nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization	2	105	23	128	21
Encouraging independent judgment	3	74	11	85	14
Developing leadership capacity	4	85	13	98	16

Figure 6

Frequencies and Percentages: Data by Key Characteristics of Adaptive Leadership



The subsequent sections provide a comprehensive analysis of the collected data, organized according to research questions, and thoroughly examine the corresponding definitions and interview questions. The emergent themes are presented based on their frequency.

Data for Research Question 1

A series of two questions was asked during each of the 10 qualitative interviews to collect data for Research Question 1. The first question asked the superintendents to share how they build an organization's adaptive capacity through making naming elephants in the room the norm. The focus was on leadership practices to address sensitive underlying issues as an organizational norm. The second question contributed to comprehending the strategies in establishing an atmosphere conducive to enabling individuals or groups to overcome potential obstacles that may hinder organizational success. For this study, making naming elephants in the room the norm was defined as the act of openly addressing sensitive underlying or undiscussable issues, to resolve potential barriers that interfere with an organization realizing its full potential (Baker, 2004; Heifetz et al., 2009; Toegel & Barsoux, 2019). The responses from the two questions totaled five themes: community relationship development, fostering open dialogue for effective communication, creating safe places with trust and safety, inclusive collaboration, amplifying every voice, barrier resolution, and setting parameters. Table 4 describes the total frequency count of each of the following coded themes:

Table 4*Themes for Research Question 1: Making Naming Elephants in the Room the Norm*

Theme	Sources	Interview frequency	Artifact frequency	Total frequency	Frequency %
Community relationship development	9	37	5	42	27
Fostering open dialogue for effective communication	10	35	5	40	26
Creating safe places with trust and safety	9	29	1	30	19
Inclusive collaboration: amplifying every voice	9	22	3	25	15
Creating environments and structures that resolve barriers	8	17	2	19	12

Theme: Community Relationship Development

The recurring theme most frequently alluded to in response to superintendents' strategies for normalizing the acknowledgment of challenging issues was the development of community relationships. Among the provided artifacts, documents such as agendas, videos, and calendars served as evidence during the review. The interview and artifacts examination process brought to light more comprehensive insights into these strategies. The theme of Community Relationship Development was noted in nine of the interviews with an interview frequency of 37. Additionally, it was coded with five artifacts for a total frequency of 42. This theme accounted for 27% of the data garnered in response to Research Question 1 on the topic of naming elephants in the room.

Ninety percent of the superintendents interviewed spoke repeatedly and consistently about the development of relationships. Superintendents were concerned about organizational relationships that promoted a community approach. When asked about the strategies employed to foster open discussion about challenging issues within

their organizations, Participant 2 emphasized the paramount importance of relationships. Community relationship development was referenced in response to the strategies used by superintendents to make naming elephants in the room the norm. Of the artifacts provided, agendas, videos, and calendars were part of the evidence provided in the review of documents.

The interview and artifacts review process revealed more in-depth details for each of these strategies. When prompted about what strategies they used in their leadership practice to naming elephants in the room as the norm within their organizations, Participant 2 emphasized the paramount importance of relationships. He stated,

I believe my top priority is building relationships because challenges and changes will arise, and people need to feel comfortable speaking openly with me.

Participant 6 underscored the interconnection between hard skills, noting,

We focus less on hard skills and more on soft skills such as communication, relationship building, trust establishment, empathy, and prioritizing student-centric approaches.

Participant 2 also highlighted the significance of relationships within the staff, labor (including union relationships), and the broader school community, encompassing parents, students, and external partners. Participant 2 stated,

We focus less on hard skills and more on soft skills like communication, building relationships, building trust, establishing empathy, and elevating or being student-focused or centered.

Participant 10 shared insights on navigating conversations, emphasizing the importance of addressing sensitive issues without judgment. He stated,

Those conversations involve unraveling and unpacking sensitive issues for conducive learning conditions focusing on student achievement and community engagement.

Participant 5 discussed the value of formal and informal opportunities when addressing sensitive matters.

We emphasized the leaders' role in discerning when to listen and when to avoid reactive responses, it is critical to our leadership team that we take the time to listen to our community before making any decisions.

Theme: Fostering Open Dialogue for Effective Communication

The theme with the second highest frequency for the strategies for adaptive capacity was Fostering Open Dialogue for Effective Communication. After examining the interview responses and artifacts, 10 of the interviews referenced this theme with an interview frequency of 35. In addition, it was coded with five artifacts for a total frequency of 40. This theme accounted for 26% of the data garnered in response to Research Question 1 on the topic of naming elephants in the room.

Participant 10 highlighted the significance of being visible and available to all staff and open for any conversation.

I think just having those conversations with people and letting them ask as many questions as they want then that's just the way to go about creating open dialogue and not shying away from anything. We might not like the interaction or the answers, but it is necessary to build communication.

Participant 9 discussed the ideas of trust and communication going hand in hand. He stated,

Transparency and open communication are linked, but we must also not fall into the trap of harmful harmony. We should not agree just to agree; if someone brings something forward, we need to review that and determine whether that is an actual issue or a problem and then reply to the person who brought that forward. When you do that in that fashion where you give people an opportunity to first tell you what's going on, they feel a little more comfortable telling you challenging areas we can work on together.

Theme: Creating Safe Places with Trust and Safety

The theme with the third highest frequency for the strategies for adaptive capacity in naming elephants in the room was Creating Safe Places with Trust and Safety. The theme was noted in nine of the interviews with an interview frequency of 29. Additionally, it was coded in one artifact with a total frequency of 30. This theme accounted for 19% of the data garnered in response to Research Question 1 on the topic of naming elephants in the room.

Superintendents discussed establishing the organization's culture of trust and safety. The superintendents in this study shared multiple ways they referred to their organizations' trust culture. They promoted their practice to make all stakeholders aware of safe and trustworthy places. Participant 4 described how trust is built through safety and intentional training within identified groups:

We conduct deliberate training and discussions on communication and conflict resolution.

Participant 3 highlighted the significance of individual voices, even in an elementary district, and the impact of including students' perspectives in shaping district

goals. Participant 3's district strategic plan outlined an "atmosphere of mutual trust and respect" as a fundamental value along with cultivating safe spaces for collective growth among students' families and staff. Participant 1 shared his thoughts on safe places and trust in the organization's culture. He stated,

It really must start with the establishment of a trusting environment where everybody knows you can have a safe, confidential space to share ideas and thoughts, like what I say to my cabinet, we call my meeting Las Vegas because the ideas and thoughts stay there. Everyone understands that all ideas whether too big or too small are essential to consider without judgment. We must have an environment where we trust each other.

Participant 8 highlighted that the leader's strength is not taking things personally. He commented,

We are focused on a safe environment where we sit together and understand that we are tough on issues, not on each other. If there is something I am doing that you don't agree with or think we should look at differently, then bring it up.

Artifacts collected referenced the importance of trust to create safe places and an established value or organizational success. Participant 3's district strategic plan outlines an atmosphere for mutual respect as a core value; in fact, Participant 3 stated,

We meet, and I ask my team what things are happening in these areas that, based on your moral compass, your true north, is an absolute value we must have. The response is overwhelmingly on the topic of trust and open communication.

Theme: Inclusive Collaboration; Amplifying Every Voice

The theme with the fourth highest frequency for the strategies for adaptive capacity in naming elephants in the room was Creating Safe Places with Trust and Safety. The theme of Inclusive Collaboration; Amplifying Voice was noted in nine of the interviews with an interview frequency of 22. Additionally, it was coded in three artifacts with a total frequency of 25. This theme accounted for 15% of the data garnered in response to Research Question 1 on the topic of naming elephants in the room. Superintendents discussed developing the organization's inclusive culture of every voice. Superintendents shared various inclusive collaboration strategies to incorporate all voices within the organization.

Participant 7 shared,

At those times in collaboration, we have a message of trying to solidify that everyone is a part of this process and that we all own it. The message is to positively influence our culture and hopefully show we have a part in the solutions. We meet every Tuesday across the entire district, allowing all stakeholders to delve into all topics.

Participant 6 described a process to discuss challenging issues in which all groups have a voice:

We encounter all, for example, when we come together regularly, and anyone can bring up any topic for conversation. So, it is not the board's vision, it's not the superintendent's vision, but the vision of our parents, students, community members, and staff who are coming together and saying, this is what we want to accomplish.

Participants 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 also revealed the importance of meeting regularly to include all stakeholders in a process to hear all voices.

Theme: Creating Environments and Structures that Resolve Barriers

The theme with the fifth highest frequency for the strategies for adaptive capacity related to naming elephants in the room was Creating Environments and Structures that Resolve Barriers. The theme of Creating Environments and Structures that Resolve Barriers was noted in eight of the interviews with an interview frequency of 17. Additionally, it was coded in two artifacts with a total frequency of 19. This theme accounts for 12% of the data garnered in response to Research Question 1 on the topic of naming elephants in the room. Superintendents discussed developing the organization's goal setting. Superintendents shared creating structures based on goals and collaboration strategies within the organization.

Participant 10 shared,

To create that environment to remove all the barriers, it is holding those conversations and coming together and going back the why for each person.

Participant 7 described a process to discuss challenging barriers:

So, I think and this is just a generalization, but in education, I think a lot of times there's a reluctance to sometimes engage in conversations that might be controversial or where some people might not be happy, or we don't feel good, and I think that it can be a barrier to success and just supporting kids ultimately.

Participants 2, 6, 7, and 9 also revealed the importance of continuing that relationship with all stakeholders to resolve potential barriers within the organization.

Data for Research Question 2

The second research question asked, “How do superintendents build an organization’s adaptive capacity through nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization?” A subsequent pair of interview inquiries were dedicated to comprehending the adaptive leadership characteristic of nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization. Nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization, defined by the thematic team as the collective ownership among team member roles for the decision-making operational goals and outcomes of the organization’s future (Harris & Spillane, 2008; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Northouse, 2016; Tremblay et al., 2016). The responses revealed five predominant themes: shared ownership, embracing collaborative norms, establishing common organizational goals, maintaining transparency, and shared responsibility and accountability. Artifacts submitted included agendas from divisional meetings and work plans, including cabinet-level development of organizational goals. Of the five identified themes, shared ownership and embracing collaborative norms were cited by every participant. Moreover, the strategies for nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization yielded 128 codes, which was 21% of the total themes. Table 5 details the themes and their respective frequencies.

Theme: Shared Ownership

All five themes are closely related in nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization, but the theme of shared ownership was the most frequently discussed by participants. After examining the interview responses and artifacts, 10 of the interviews noted this theme with an interview frequency of 31. In addition, it was coded with six artifacts for a total frequency of 40. This theme accounted for 29% of the data garnered in

response to Research Question 2 on the topic of nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization.

Table 5

Themes for RQ 2: Nurturing a Shared Responsibility for the Organization

Theme	Sources	Interview frequency	Artifact frequency	Total frequency	Frequency %
Shared ownership	10	31	6	37	29
Embracing collaborative norms	10	25	5	30	23
Maintaining transparency	8	18	4	22	17
Establishing common organizational goals	9	16	5	21	16
Shared responsibility and accountability	9	15	3	18	14

All 10 superintendents interviewed spoke about the importance of shared ownership within the organization. In the preplanning with the administrative team before the new school year, Participant 6 expressed the need for open discussions about goal setting and reviewing the achievement data to adjust organizational goals. Participant 6 stated,

Shared ownership is the process where we come together with our administrative team to review organizational goals within the strategic plan, and we want principals and assistant principals to review data from the school sites with school departments and translate or adjust our practices based on those data points for all in the organization.

Participant 7 commented,

Shared ownership begins with me messaging to all staff at the beginning of the year about our students' needs and how we will act around those needs. It's easy

at a school to hear the district, but we are all the district, and we are all a part of the solution.

Participant 4 stated,

When I facilitated shared ownership, it meant giving people some ownership of our goals. It distills down to a nexus, I think: one, you invite people outside of their area, and you set them up as equal and create conditions where they will have the ability to question and add.

Theme: Embracing Collaborative Norms

The theme with the second highest frequency for comprehending the adaptive leadership characteristic of nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization was embracing collaborative norms. After examining the interview responses and artifacts, 10 of the interviews spoke to this theme with an interview frequency of 25. Additionally, it was coded with five artifacts for a total frequency of 30. This theme accounted for 23% of the data garnered in response to Research Question 2 on the topic of nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization.

The superintendents shared that they facilitated norms as part of celebrating their culture. In one district, the superintendent listed norm setting as a priority for labor relationships. In his interview, Participant 2 stated,

Within our norms, we highlight our history and the culture of our district, and respecting that history is also embracing new ideas in a challenging situation through collaboration.

Participant 10 expressed,

If we truly believe in collaboration, we must establish those practices or culture of norm setting, and we foster that idea by ensuring that everything we do is focused on collaborative cultures.

Theme: Maintaining Transparency

The theme with the third highest frequency for comprehending the adaptive leadership characteristic of nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization was maintaining transparency. After examining the interview responses and artifacts, 8 of the interviews noted this theme with an interview frequency of 18. Additionally, it was coded with four artifacts for a total frequency of 22. This theme accounted for 17% of the data garnered in response to Research Question 2 on the topic of nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization. The concept of maintaining transparency was expressed throughout the theme of nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization. Participant 10 stated,

I try to be as transparent as possible, so I talk with our parent groups, our classified staff, and our certificated staff and managers to cover what is going on. Constantly referencing that idea, wanting people to know that we are trying to be as transparent as possible and intentional as possible to have all voices heard collaboratively.

Participant 8 noted,

Transparency begins in all forms, and we get our people together to share stories so we can understand each other and why or what we are made of, this help to understand the decisions that is made and the positions people may hold on how they work.

Participant 5 added,

It is essential to be upfront with your people, letting them know the facts and that there will be multiple solutions and not that everyone may be successful.

Last, Participant 1 shared,

Transparency is critical in a small district; you must be an open book because if you don't, you could sink the entire ship in one small action. Each year I address everyone, all employees in the district, and I go through those things that are expected, these are the things the board expects as an organization, and these are the things our mission and vision are built on.

Theme: Establishing Common Organizational Goals

The theme with the third highest frequency for comprehending the adaptive leadership characteristic of nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization was establishing common organizational goals. After the interview responses and artifacts were examined, nine of them spoke to this theme with an interview frequency of 16. Moreover, it was coded with five artifacts for a total frequency of 21. This theme accounted for 16% of the data garnered in response to Research Question 2 on the topic of nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization.

These collaborative cultures were embedded within the norms, as stated by Participant 2:

Within all of our norms, we highlight our district's culture and respect its history and embrace new ideas that can be challenging as we face change.

The superintendents stressed the importance of establishing organizational goals that create conditions of learning, student achievement, and engagement. Participant 6 stated,

We are actively engaged in the process of creating organizational goals. This process brings us together with our teams as these organizational goals are indicated in the strategic plan, we emphasize the importance of our teams reviewing data from their site, departments, as this translates our work and our roles within the organization.

Theme: Shared Responsibility and Accountability

The theme with the lowest frequency for comprehending the adaptive leadership characteristic of nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization was shared responsibility and accountability. After examining the interview responses and artifacts, nine of the interviewees noted this theme with an interview frequency of 15. Furthermore, it was coded with three artifacts for a total frequency of 18. This theme accounted for 14% of the data garnered in response to Research Question 2 on the topic of nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization. Ninety percent of the participants spoke about the importance of shared responsibility and accountability as part of the conversation. The superintendent stressed student input as a key component of developing a shared responsibility and plan to accomplish organizational goals.

Participant 2 added,

We find it essential to see how our students perceive our actions and hear what they say on how that compares to other organizations and schools across the United States.

Participant 3 emphasized the importance of shared ownership in their leadership structure:

This shared ownership goes back to the work plan concept by working with the board to interpret their vision and mission, aligning it to the comprehensive goals they have for the district but bringing back to them some key metric areas gathered from the staff.

Participant 6 stated that

accountability is about how we monitor the data and interpret success on a goal; it is looking at some quantitative data regarding formal and informative assessments.

Data for Research Question 3

The third research question was designed to explore strategies for encouraging independent judgment. The research question asked, “How do superintendents build an organization’s adaptive capacity by encouraging independent judgment?” The thematic research team defined encouraging independent judgment 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). As per Heifetz et al. (2009), independent judgment involves cultivating an individual’s capacity to mobilize organizational decisions.

The participants were asked two interview questions. The first question focused on employees being encouraged to make decisions based on personal and professional choices. The second question asked about the systems and structures to support employees using independent judgment and choice. The interviews identified 97 individual codes, making the smallest count among all the characteristics examined. The

predominant theme, constituting 27% of the codes for this characteristic, revolved around creating trustworthy spaces with clearly defined choice parameters. All participants represented two themes, and nine of the 10 participants represented two additional themes. One theme garnered the lowest representation, 7% of respondents acknowledging it. Artifacts supporting these themes, encompassing graphic organizers, organizational charts, and annotated agendas, were submitted. The strategies derived from the data are arranged in descending order of frequency and are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Themes for RQ 3: Encouraging Independent Judgment

Theme	Sources	Interview frequency	Artifact frequency	Total frequency	Frequency %
Establishing trustworthy spaces	10	24	3	27	32
Fostering autonomy via organizational expectations	7	18	3	21	25
Responsibility and judgment	9	19	2	21	25
Providing avenues for individual choice	10	13	3	16	19

Theme: Establishing Trustworthy Spaces

The theme most frequently referenced for encouraging independent judgment was establishing trustworthy spaces. After examining the interview responses and artifacts, 10 of the interviews referenced this theme with an interview frequency of 24. Additionally, it was coded with three artifacts for a total frequency of 27. This theme accounted for 32% of the data garnered in response to Research Question 3 on the topic of Encouraging Independent Judgment.

A typical example of participants building trust through establishing trustworthy spaces was clarified by Participant 7, who stated,

As leaders, we must keep reminding people, including ourselves, that our role is more to trust and inspire than it is to command and control. You can't just say this you must live it; it is a radical shift that you couldn't just tell people, but it is what you do every day.

Participant 6 said,

You have got to be able to create the space for trust, and you feel and show you are part of a team, and you're not hesitating to ask for that help for everyone.

Participant 1 emphasized,

One thing I pride myself on is that I am not a micro-manager. We have a standard set of equipment that we get everybody, but you know we give a little discretionary amount where you know, you need better than we do, so pick it out and explain your position.

Participants 2, 3, and 6 contributed supporting artifacts to enhance individual decision-making capacity. These artifacts included agendas, norms, and notes. Each of these instances highlighted possibilities for users to exercise independent judgment and make choices while offering valuable data and contextual information to establish a solid foundation of knowledge and understanding.

Theme: Fostering Autonomy via Organizational Expectations

The second most frequently referenced theme for encouraging independent judgment was fostering autonomy via organizational expectations. After examining the interview responses and artifacts, seven of the interviews referenced this theme with an

interview frequency of 18. Additionally, it was coded with three artifacts for a total frequency of 21. This theme accounted for 25% of the data garnered in response to Research Question 3 on the topic of Encouraging Independent Judgment.

Participant 5 added,

As the leader and superintendent, you need to have enough faith in the fact we have provided the professional development and training, with the set expectations and with proper clarity that regardless of the choice your team makes, that they are going to make a decision that is aligned with our mission statements and the goals that are in place for the organization.

Finally, Participant 3 said,

While setting the organization's parameters, we conduct this work through a coherent framework.

Organizational autonomy is critical to individual judgment, as indicated by Participant 7:

So, we must as an organization promote that reasonable level of autonomy and flexibility so that you can go out there and do that, so you can say, hey, I've got this great thing that I think is going to work, and here's why it's going to work.

The three superintendents discussed the importance of flexibility and autonomy to empower their leaders to make decisions with their staff to address their various challenges. They stressed that the amount of work that the leadership team places on goals and strategic plans sets the stage for autonomy within the framework.

Theme: Responsibility and Judgment

The third most frequently referenced for encouraging independent judgment was responsibility and judgment. After examining the interview responses and artifacts, nine

of the interviews with an interview frequency of 19. Additionally, it was coded with two artifacts for a total frequency of 21. This theme accounted for 25% of the data garnered in response to Research Question 3 on the topic of Encouraging Independent Judgment.

Each of the contributing participants spoke about the need for a focused approach to leadership responsibility and judgment. They also listed how they go about identifying the critical steps for improvement. Participant 2 stated,

We look at how we are incorporating professional judgment in our decision making every day. You know making a judgment on students as to how to discipline a student based on certain protocols, rights, and moral understanding when it comes to penalizing students. Make sure leadership is using policies, and not making a decision on the fly because you're upset about something.

Participant 2 commented on the importance of building a professional team to guide practice:

We created an extensive group of professionals for support, as a segue, as a really check-off list about how we are looking at our responsibility as educators to make sound decisions, whether it's a teaching moment or whether it's something that a leader has to make an independent decision and what is it based on.

Theme: Providing Avenues for Individual Choice

The final theme referenced for encouraging independent judgment was providing avenues for individual choice. After examining the interview responses and artifacts, I found that 10 of the interviews referenced this theme with an interview frequency of 13. Additionally, it was coded with three artifacts for a total frequency of 16. This theme

accounted for 19% of the data garnered in response to Research Question 3 on the topic of Encouraging Independent Judgment.

Participant 7 went on to say,

There is a way to elevate individual choice that does not mean that organizational goals are deviated from but rather giving the flexibility to tweak it to fit the need.

Participant 5 commented,

It knows the personal and professional experienced leader that can come to me and say I want to add some new stuff/ideas and members to a program to meet students' needs.

Participant 4 added that

individual choice can motivate leaders to improve their performance and allow them to make decisions at their site rather than waiting for the district.

Providing avenues for individual choice provides growth for leaders. Participant 2 stated,

Providing avenues for individuals to make personal and professional choices can provide growth experiences and create an open dialogue. These dialogues support and encourage employees to take leadership roles, and we look forward to investing in their careers.

Participant 9 concluded the theme by stating,

Outside the school's general operations, we give our leaders a lot of autonomy and flexibility to administrate their site and shift as change takes place.

Each superintendent commented on the importance of creating environments in which leaders and their teams can be free to make personal choices in addressing site and

departmental issues. The strategies unveiled by study participants align directly with these observations. As per Heifetz et al. (2009), distributed leadership seizes the chance to propel adaptive work by fostering individual choice for organizational leaders.

Data for Research Question 4

The fourth research question was designed to explore strategies for developing leadership capacity. The research question asked, “How do superintendents build an organization’s adaptive capacity through developing leadership capacity?” For this study, developing leadership capacity was defined by the thematic research team as 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; Sharratt & Fullan, 2009).

The participants were queried two interview questions and accompanying prompts, delving into their perspectives on crucial leadership competencies for nurturing emerging leaders and their approaches to inspiring others to enhance their leadership capabilities. The responses revealed four themes, including building honest and trust-based structures, leadership strategies, engaging in book studies, and offering professional growth opportunities and book studies. Moreover, the strategies for developing leadership capacity for the organization yielded 98 codes, which was 14% of the total themes. Table 7 presents these themes and their respective frequencies.

Theme: Building Honest, Trust-Based Collaborative Structures

Among the responses concerning developing leadership capacity, building honest, trust-based collaborative structures was the predominant theme identified by participants. The theme of development of building honest, trust-based collaboration structures

garnered 25 frequencies from interviews and three artifacts. This total frequency count accounted for 33% of the data on developing leadership capacity. Notably, eight participants recognized building honest, trust-based collaboration structures as a support element for enhancing a leader’s capacity, emphasizing the importance of intentionality and the integration of reflection after each leadership meeting.

Table 7

Themes for RQ 4: Developing Leadership Capacity

Theme	Sources	Interview frequency	Artifact frequency	Total frequency	Frequency %
Building honest, trust-based collaboration structures	8	25	3	28	33
Leadership strategies	8	22	5	27	32
Book studies to develop leadership capacity	9	21	3	24	28
Offering professional growth	7	17	2	19	23

Participant 9 shared a successful experience in which he provided a story on the reopening of schools after the pandemic and the importance of having honest conversations with parents and staff:

Once the lockdown was lifted and we started returning students to school, multiple honest conversations with parents and staff had to take place before we could put all the operational pieces back together. A simple aspect of the school is arrival and dismissal, this process took many conversations and planning sessions with our leadership and staff to create trust during a very challenging time. We had to try many things differently to try to help people be more aware of what was happening and how the first few days went wrong, I do believe this builds trust.

Another participant spoke about developing collaborative leadership teams based on trust and honesty. Participant 1 stated,

that our organization's other key aspect is developing leaders and their teams based on honesty and trusting relationships. In this way, we can make decisions that are supported.

Participant 8, who spoke on building comfort levels within the organization, stated,

I have told our leaders that we need to check on our staff because we need to build that comfort level and trust we are on the same page. This includes checking on each other's work and holding each other accountable. At the end of the day, if people can trust what you say and do, they will have a problem, and the school will have a problem.

Participant 6 was very clear regarding his expectations of his leadership team. He stated,

If you are not trustworthy as a leader, if you don't have the relationship skills or the relationships and that social capital in your community, at the school site, or your department when it comes down to rolling out a new initiative, to deal with some discipline and make some difficult choices, that is very debilitating or almost incapacitated individuals because they don't have those trusting collaborative relationships.

Theme: Leadership Strategies

The second highest frequency theme about developing leadership capacity was in Leadership Strategies. After examining the interview responses and artifacts, I found eight of the interviews that referenced this theme with an interview frequency of 22. Additionally, it was coded with five artifacts for a total frequency of 27. This theme

accounted for 32% of the data garnered in response to Research Question 4 on the topic of developing leadership capacity. Commonalities among participants included structured meetings, sharing our why, and developing growth plans.

Participant 5 shared that investing in leadership development must be intentional. She stated,

I feel very strongly that if you are deciding to put someone in a specific seat, for example, you know, an administrative seat on a panel or principal in a school, I ‘ve made that decision and the board has supported it, we’re saying this is the person for that job then this means we need to build capacity enough capacity to empower them to feel that they can do the job.

Participant 2 stated,

When we instill leadership within our school district, and currently, districts are struggling with this, we must support and sort of breed or shape our leadership by providing them with appropriate tools or strategies to be successful. So we need to ensure we have the avenues for individuals to make personal and professional choices and experiences and have an open dialogue about professional growth with each leader.

Participant 7 commented,

So when I meet with my cabinet, including my assistant superintendents, we’re constantly discussing leadership tools or skills to support our team. We discuss the power of communication and how relationships and communication are the leaders’ greatest strategy; however, I think a lot of times there is a reluctance to engage in conversations that might be controversial, where some people might not

be happy, or we just don't feel good. This is where success for the leader can show through.

The collected artifacts included meeting agendas, training flyers, and calendar events that highlighted a variety of activities that fostered leadership strategies. There were examples of workgroup presentations on leadership development.

Theme: Book Studies to Develop Leadership Capacity

After analyzing the interview responses and artifacts, I found the theme with the third highest frequency under leadership capacity was using book studies to Develop Leadership Capacity. The responses for the book study included 21 interview frequencies and three artifact frequencies, a total of 24, which accounted for 18% of the coded data associated with developing leadership capacity. Ninety percent of the participants concluded that book studies with specific strategies on leadership development and building organizational values lead to the development of leadership capacity.

Participants discussed the importance of professional conversations about leading people and managing skills. Participants found value in developing leadership capacity through guided reflection on book studies throughout the year. Participant 10 shared,

We constantly discuss our leadership team's book studies. The book study allows people to come together and share about a topic. I provided the book *The Multiplier* to all of our team, and I inscribed on the front page: "I give this to everyone because I truly believe that our job is to tap into the unique expertise, experiences, and passions of our people."

Participant 3 shared,

I anchored our book this year around Fullan's book *Coherence*, which talks about finding direction, finding ways to have collaborative cultures, then talking about how you deepen the learning in the organization, and then, at the very end, how you secure accountability to be able to make sure that all of those things are continuing happening.

Similarly, Participants 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, and 9 shared that they value book studies not because they solve all problems but because they create a scholarly approach to leading and organization. This scholarly approach reminds everyone that the organization values lifelong learning and that the leadership team must model that value.

Theme: Offering Professional Growth for Leaders

The fourth most referenced theme for developing leadership capacity was offering professional growth for leaders. This theme had 17 frequencies for interviews and two frequencies from artifacts to 19, representing 23% of the data collected for the variable. Seven of the 10 participants discussed professional growth opportunities as a strategy for developing leadership capacity.

Participant 10 shared how offering professional growth supports leadership capacity by sending leaders to education academies:

So some of the ways that we have done that: we pay right now through Educator Effectiveness, I pay for people to go to the ACSA academies, we pay for people to go to the CASBO academies, we've sent people to school services academies.

Participant 7 commented,

For years, we've focused on professional growth on the teaching side of things; however, we are now focusing on the instructional leader through an institutional

practice of collective data analysis, unit planning, review of assessment results, sharing what's working, what's not working, and doing that in a PLC-like environment.

Participant 6 shared how professional growth in his district occurs throughout the school year, and his cabinet provides training for his principles:

It is not necessarily before or after because it just depends on the time of the year, and I do a miniretreat with the cabinet and principles during the summer before I do it with the school board

Participant 2 reported varied steps to provide professional growth opportunities:

As a board, trustees, and the superintendent, we invest in professional development sessions for our administrators through ACSA. For individuals looking to move up in the ranks and leadership capacities, we support and ask them, encouraging them to be part of these professional development sessions so that we can also see the investment they are making for professional or personal growth. So ACSA is a membership provided by our school districts, all dues so that the individuals and leaders can attend ACSA workshop experiences and academies, for example.

The artifacts aligned with this theme demonstrated the commitment of Participant 5's organization so that "access to relevant professional growth and learning" is integrated into the district's System Design Plan to "support employees in the continuous pursuit of skills to enhance their effectiveness."

Data for Research Question 5

The fifth research question inquired, “How do superintendents build an organization’s adaptive capacity through institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning?” The thematic research team defined institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning as providing a culture conducive to the safe exploration of new ideas and sharing of lessons learned both from an individual and an organizational perspective and creating a sustainable learning culture driven by willingness to overcome engrained mental models across all levels of the organization (Cojocar, 2008; Pearson & Smith, 1986; Ramalingam et al., 2020; Senge et al., 2015; Veldsman & Johnson, 2016; Vera & Crossan, 2004). To explore the key characteristics of adaptive leadership, two interview questions were employed to examine how participants, particularly superintendents, incorporated reflection and continuous learning into the organizational culture to enhance adaptive capacity and foster success.

Establishing reflection and continuous learning as a pivotal aspect of adaptive leadership emerged as the third most frequently occurring characteristic among the identified five key attributes. These themes encompassed creating avenues for sharing and collaboration, employing deliberate processes and practices, demonstrating reflective habits as a leader, and participating in professional learning opportunities. Moreover, the strategies for reflection and continuous learning for organization yielded 147 codes, which was 24% of the total themes. Refer to Table 8 for a detailed presentation of these five themes and their corresponding frequency counts in institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning.

Table 8*Themes for RQ 5: Institutionalizing Reflection and Continuous Learning*

Theme	Sources	Interview frequency	Artifact frequency	Total frequency	Frequency %
Focused reflection and practice	10	35	3	38	26
Modeling reflective leadership	10	31	3	34	23
Fostering growth and reflective coaching	9	25	2	27	18
Cultivating lifelong learning	8	22	3	25	17
Emotional IQ and affective skills	10	20	3	23	16

Theme: Focused Reflection and Practice

Among the responses regarding institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning, Focused Reflection and Practice was the highest theme that participants most frequently referred to. This theme garnered 38 frequencies from interviews and three artifacts. This total frequency count accounted for 26% of the data on institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning. Notably, 100% of all participants recognized reflective practices as a support element for enhancing continuous learning, emphasizing the importance of intentionality and the integration of reflection after each leadership meeting.

Participant 10 discussed the importance of structuring reflection time:

We institutionalize reflection time in every single one of our meetings. These meeting times are vital to our classified and certificated management team as they galvanize our practices.

Participant 8 added,

Reflection time is something that we started putting into all our team meetings. I wanted our people to reflect upon the information presented and hear situations and examples being shared.

Participant 7 continued,

If we are going to tell everyone we are an institution of learning, then we must instill those reflective practices, which include a collective process that involves principals, cabinet, and our board. Our team uses a reflective process to provide space for discussion on the teaching and learning process we observe in our schools.

Finally, Participant 2 added,

When there are external factors that are hitting the district, whether it is a serious issue in the community or something that happened, I also reflect on the messaging to our community about where our district stands and what we are doing next to support or to respond to what has happened.

Participants 3, 6, and 7 provided artifacts to triangulate the theme via email. Examples were the meeting agendas and notes.

Theme: Modeling Reflective Leadership

The second most frequently mentioned theme among participants regarding the integration of reflection and continuous learning into institutional practices was the use of reflective leadership modeling. After analyzing the interview responses and artifacts, the theme with the second highest frequency under institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning was modeling reflective leadership. The responses for the reflective leadership included 31 interview frequencies and three artifact frequencies, a total of 34,

which accounted for 23% of the coded data associated with developing leadership capacity. All 10 of the participants concluded that modeling reflective leadership with specific strategies on leadership development and building organizational capacity supported continuous learning. Superintendents elaborated on the diverse processes and practices to foster a culture of reflection and learning. Group and individual sharing emerged as deliberate strategies to support institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning among participants. Participant 10 discussed how modeling reflective leadership begins with him:

I constantly model reflective conversations around leadership practices in a group or individual setting with cabinet and principals. I will use my misgivings as an example and how I learned from those mistakes.

Participant 9 shared how he would discuss reading others' reactions as part of his conversational reflection:

As a leader, modeling how to reflect on reading others' reactions or facial expressions is important. Understanding why they react or interact in a certain way.

Participant 6 stated,

We work on getting our new leaders' coaches to model reflective principles and actions. We want them inspired to be comfortable asking questions when they are going through tough times and reflecting on the best leadership practices to proceed or navigate the political situation that may be blocking them.

The three collected artifacts that triangulated the data revealed during the interviews included meeting agendas listing cabinet meeting times and topics. The cabinet agenda

with community building of modeling reflection by Participant 3 showed a planned, intentional practice.

Theme: Fostering Growth and Reflective Coaching

The theme of fostering growth and reflective coaching emerged as the third most frequently mentioned aspect among participants when addressing the implementation of reflection and continuous learning in institutional settings. After analyzing the interview responses and artifacts, I found that the responses for fostering growth and reflective coaching included 25 interview frequencies and two artifact frequencies, a total of 27, which accounted for 18% of the coded data associated with developing leadership capacity. Ninety percent of the participants concluded that fostering growth and reflective coaching on leadership development builds organizational values. The emphasis on fostering growth and reflective coaching by superintendents was observed to extend beyond professional development, encompassing personal growth. Participants discussed the need to grow their leaders in the organization. The participants all agreed that they wanted individuals to grow within the organization professionally and personally. Participant 7 stated,

We have this large group of staff outside the classroom and at the district level responsible for others and students. This person needs growth opportunities, whether staying strict with research, staying networked and hooked, or knowing the best practices at the school sites. We need to make a point of defining our ability to evolve with the needs of our community. Growth matters to me, and you feel like you are a part of the team by knowing that we are investing in your personal and professional growth.

Participant 4 stated,

We have comprised ourselves into growth clusters to support and coach each other. We have a considerable induction process for our leadership team. Even after your first year, we stay connected, where everyone is a coach empowered to support each other with new ideas and thoughts.

Participant 3 added,

I go to sites to walk classrooms with principals and directors. I meet with them individually, and I coach them on what I see at their sites. I also provide each new administrator with a coach for the first year in their position.

Theme: Cultivating Lifelong Learning Culture

The theme of cultivating a lifelong learning culture emerged as the fourth most frequently mentioned aspect among participants when addressing the implementation of reflection and continuous learning in institutional settings. The responses for cultivating a lifelong learning culture included 22 interview frequencies and three artifact frequencies, a total of 25, which accounted for 17% of the coded data associated with developing leadership capacity. Eighty percent of the participants concluded that lifelong learning with specific strategies on how to cultivate that culture was critical to building organizational values. Participants discussed continuous learning and continuous improvement as lifelong qualities needed by leadership. Participants were adamant that leadership must possess thorough attributes to lead effectively. Participant 8 stated,

We want our people to know that continuous learning is our conversation and that we are going to make sure our culture reflects that practice. Another big aspect for us is the concept of continuous improvement, which begins with us.

Participant 8 continued,

A piece of continuous learning is not stepping in to solve everything all at once from the top down, but instead learning to handle conflict even if you become frustrated or uncomfortable. It is at this time that the most learning takes place. Learning to learn together to solve issues.

Participant 6 said,

We have goals and set them at the school, department, grade level, cabinet level, and board. This is a process of setting a learning culture with continuity and alignment, instituted at every level from July to June.

Participant 5 shared,

We emphasize focusing on learning opportunities every day and everywhere. We look for additional training, whether it's you going back and getting an SED credential or going back and getting a language authorization and we then provide the opportunity to make it possible too.

The four collected artifacts that triangulated the data revealed during the interviews included meeting agendas and administrative expectations. The administrative expectation handout by Participant 3 showed a planned, intentional practice.

Theme: Emotional IQ and Affective Culture

The fifth highest referenced theme for institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning was emotional IQ and affective culture. After analyzing the interview responses and artifacts, responses for emotional IQ and affective culture included 20 interview frequencies and three artifact frequencies, a total of 23, which accounted for 16% of the coded data associated with developing leadership capacity. Seven of the 10 participants

discussed emotional IQ as having a positive effect on the culture in their organization.

Participant 10 shared,

Emotional intelligence research is critical to the leader's development. Each leader needs to be aware of their own emotional intelligence. When we as leaders have self-awareness, it can empower us to be more effective in the cultures we can create.

Participant 9 commented on how emotional intelligence goes along with this idea of adaptive leadership. He commented,

It's knowing your emotional intelligence that you may be coming in with. Just because, let's say, you are shorter than I am, does that mean I am less patient or not as friendly as I should be, and how can we manage our emotions by knowing who you are and how you may or may not perceive the situation.

Participant 3 commented,

We've extended our development on emotional intelligence and have continued to focus on this as a leadership competency. We are learning how to be aware of our own working styles and how to be aware of others we are working with. It is challenging as we need to be aware of even the facial expressions and body language and tap into the personal space that is often closed off to others.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe strategies used by superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County to build an adaptive capacity based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership identified by Heifetz et al. (2009). The study focused on a cohort of 10

superintendents from Los Angeles County, selected through purposeful and convenience sampling techniques. Recommendations for participants were actively sought through the Los Angeles County Office of Education LACOE Administrators email listserv. All participating superintendents satisfied the eligibility criteria for inclusion in the study.

The qualitative data collection involved semistructured interviews tailored to each of the five research questions and the corresponding gathering of relevant artifacts. These interviews and collected artifacts formed the basis for the findings of the study, shedding light on the strategies employed by the superintendent to cultivate adaptive leadership in the context of public education.

The data collection produced 614 individual frequency counts, which included 538 frequencies resulting from interviews and 76 from collected artifacts. The coded data were sorted based on emerging patterns and themes by research question. From the analyzed data, 23 themes emerged for the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership. Five themes emerged for the variables of making naming elephants in the room the norm: nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization, encouraging independent judgment, and institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning. Four themes emerged for the variables of encouraging independent judgment and developing leadership capacity. Making naming elephants in the room the norm had the highest frequency count as a variable and represented 25% of the total data collection. The variable with the lowest frequency count was encouraging independent judgment, which represented 14% of the total data collection. Table 9 shows the total frequency count and total frequency percentage for each of the 23 themes presented in descending order.

Table 9*Overview of Frequencies for Themes*

Theme	Research question	Characteristic	Frequency	
			Total	%
Community relationship development	1	Making naming elephants in the room the norm	42	6.8
Fostering open dialogue for effective communication	1	Making naming elephants in the room the norm	40	6.5
Focused reflection and practice	5	Institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning	38	6.2
Shared ownership	2	Nurturing a shared responsibility	37	6.0
Modeling reflective leadership	5	Institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning	34	5.5
Creating safe places with trust and safety	1	Making naming elephants in the room the norm	30	4.8
Embracing collaborative norms	2	Nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization	30	4.8
Building honest, trust-building collaborative structures	4	Developing leadership capacity	28	4.5
Leadership strategies	4	Developing leadership capacity	27	4.4
Establishing trustworthy spaces	3	Encouraging independent judgment	27	4.4
Fostering growth and reflective coaching	5	Institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning	27	4.4
Inclusive collaboration amplifying every voice	1	Institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning	25	4.1
Cultivating lifelong learning	4	Institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning	24	4.0
Book studies to develop leadership capacity	5	Developing leadership capacity	23	3.8
Emotional IQ and affective skills	2	Institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning	22	3.6
Maintaining transparency	2	Nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization	21	3.4

Table 9 (continued)

Theme	Research question	Characteristic	Frequency	
			Total	%
Establishing common organizational goals	2	Nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization	21	3.4
Fostering autonomy via organizational expectations	3	Nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization	21	3.4
Responsibility and judgment	3	Nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization	21	3.4
Offering professional growth	4	Developing leadership capacity	19	3.1
Creating environments and structures that resolve barriers	1	Making naming elephants in the room the norm	19	3.1
Shared responsibility and accountability	2	Nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization	18	3.0
Providing avenues for individual choice	3	Encouraging independent judgment	16	2.6

The analysis of data revealed the emergence of three predominant themes in response to Research Question 1, two themes of Research Question 2, no discernible themes for Research Question 3, one theme for Research Question 4, and four themes for Research Question 5, all of which exhibited a frequency equal to or greater than 5% of the total data collected. Among the top nine themes, two were centered on reflective strategies emphasizing the creation of practice opportunities, and an additional two focused on strategies that highlighted effective communication and shared decision making. Each of these top nine themes was cited by at least 80% of the study's participants, had a total frequency count of 30 or more, and was supported by at least one artifact.

When expanding the scope to encompass all 23 themes, I found three were explicitly related to reflective practices, three were tied to professional collaboration and

shared leadership and growth opportunities, and two were dedicated to professional growth opportunities and learning. As previously mentioned, two themes centered on trust and honesty in communication. The 23 themes and cut points were established to arrive at the top nine themes, and these were combined to arrive at nine key findings. Table 10 outlines these key findings, their corresponding research questions, and the total frequency percentages. As previously noted, two were centered on trust and honesty in communication. Using the parameters surfaced by the top nine themes from Table 9 (5% of total data collection, 80% of study participant responses, 30 frequencies or more, and a minimum of one artifact), nine key findings resulted when combining overlapping themes from the research questions. Table 10 provides the key findings, aligned research question, and total frequency percentages.

Table 10

Key Findings of the Study

Theme	Research question alignment	Frequency total	Frequency %
Creating safe and trustworthy space with trust-based collaboration	1, 3, 4	85	14.6
Reflective leadership and practice	4, 5	80	13.7
Learning culture	4, 5	77	13.1
Effective communication for promoting collaborative ownership	1, 2	70	13.1
Inclusive community culture	1	67	11.0
Shared responsibility, parameters, and strategies	1, 2, 4	64	11.0
Shared ownership and responsibility	2	55	9.4
Individual growth and development	1, 2, 4, 5	49	8.3
Engaging in professional learning	4, 5	37	6.3

Chapter IV delved into the study's objective; the study's purpose, central research question, research questions, methodology, population, sampling frame, and sample were reviewed. The process of data collection and analysis was described. Aggregate demographic information was presented as representative of the study's participants. The collected data were presented by research question through narration and frequency tables. A summary of the data with key findings concluded the chapter. In Chapter V, an overview of the major findings is reviewed, including the conclusion, implications for action, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATION

Overview

This phenomenological qualitative study was conducted to explore and articulate the approaches employed by leaders in developing adaptive capacities, drawing from Heifetz et al.'s (2009) five key characteristics of adaptive leadership. Explicitly focused on superintendents' data collected from 10 semistructured interviews and 18 artifacts, comprehensively presented and synthesized in Chapter IV. Chapter V encapsulates a comprehensive summary of the study, encompassing the purpose statement, research questions, methodology, population, and simplicity. Moreover, this chapter unveils the primary and unforeseen discoveries, draws conclusions, suggests actionable implications, and recommends prospective research endeavors. The chapter concludes with final remarks and reflective insights.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe strategies used by superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County to build an adaptive capacity based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership identified by Heifetz et al. (2009).

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What strategies do superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County 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 Questions

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

Methodology

This qualitative research study involved conducting personal, in-depth interviews with 10 superintendents overseeing public school districts in Los Angeles County. The primary aim was to uncover and identify the strategies employed by these organizational leaders to cultivate adaptive capacity grounded in the five key characteristics of adaptive

leadership as delineated by Heifetz et al. (2009). After careful consideration, the nine peer researchers and three faculty advisors collectively concluded that a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach would be the most suitable method for gaining insights into these organizational leaders' lived experiences and perspectives (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015).

Population

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined the population as a set of elements or cases, including individuals, objects, or events, that meet specific criteria for which the research results are intended to be generalized. The population represents a cohesive group with shared characteristics, and the research aims to extend the study findings to this group (Roberts, 2010). In the context of this study, the population consists of subjects meeting specific criteria from which a sample can be selected to generalize results (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

In this study, the population encompassed all superintendents within public school districts in California. According to data from the California Department of Education (CDE, 2022), there were 1,018 public school districts in California as of 2022. Superintendents in this context are individuals tasked with roles such as creators, implementors, facilitators, and motivators for change, primarily focusing on enhancing student achievement (Przybylski et al., 2018).

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), the target population encompasses the entire group of subjects from whom a researcher aims to generalize the findings of a study. However, practical limitations such as geographical considerations, funding constraints, or convenience may make it impractical to study the entire

population. Given the challenges of reaching all identified participants in this study, a sampling frame was established.

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) further defined a sampling frame as a means of narrowing characteristics to maintain alignment and generate relevance while considering feasibility. In this study, the sampling frame specifically focused on superintendents serving public school districts in Los Angeles County. According to the California Department of Education (n.d.), Los Angeles County has 80 public school districts.

Sample

The sample represents a subgroup within the broader population that researchers can investigate, enabling inferences about the larger population because the sample population mirrors the characteristics of that group (Patten & Newhart, 2018). I employed a purposeful sampling technique to select the 10 participants who met the criteria outlined in the study, forming the study's sample. This study was delimited to 10 K-12 public school superintendents representing Los Angeles County in Southern California school districts who met four of the six following 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
- evidence of having written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings
- recognition by their peers
- membership in associations of groups focused on their field

Major Findings

This study aimed to uncover and clarify the approaches used by superintendents. The primary objective was to recognize and delineate the strategies employed by these superintendents in fostering adaptive capacity, drawing upon Heifetz et al.'s (2009) essential characteristics of adaptive leadership. Specific research questions correspond to each of the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership: 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. The data collected through interviews and artifacts underwent analysis as explained in Chapter IV, identifying 23 themes, creating cut points for the top nine themes, and combining overlapping themes to arrive at nine key findings. The five major findings addressed in this chapter arose directly from the key findings that were arrived at through synthesizing data from this study, existing research, and a comprehensive literature review. The subsequent sections presents the five major findings.

Major Finding 1 for Research Question 1

Research Question 1: *How do superintendents build an organization's adaptive capacity through making naming elephants in the room the norm?*

Major Finding 1: *Superintendents make naming the elephants in the room the norm by creating a safe and trustworthy space with trust-based collaboration establishes positive relationships to develop community involvement.*

The study's superintendents emphasized the significance of fostering safe and trustworthy spaces with trusting relationships within the organization to ensure the

engagement of all members in discussions about sensitive issues. Understanding that trust building was fundamental for building adaptive capacity, eight superintendents provided examples of developing community collaboration by being accessible, building trust, collective brainstorming, establishing empathy, institutionalizing labor-management collaboration meetings, and being student-focused. When addressing potential obstacles, participants emphasized the crucial role of intentional process to foster open dialogue for effective communication within an inclusive culture. The emphasis on promoting safe and trustworthy spaces throughout the district community was critical to the superintendents' ability to lead the organization through times of change. These processes encompassed hard skills such as setting agendas, establishing communication structures, and defining meeting norms and soft skills such as vulnerability, transparency, and honesty. The strategies outlined in this study mirrored those highlighted by Kuntz et al. (2017), emphasizing the significance of laying the groundwork for collaboration through deepening relationships built on trust and communication. Superintendents also underscored the necessity of creating meaningful professional and personal collaboration and team-building opportunities. Their feedback underscored the importance of fostering trust building to unite individuals for collaborative efforts.

Superintendents emphasized the crucial role of establishing clear organizational expectations during inclusive discussions in this study. These conversations revolved around organizational goals and strategic plans, ensuring a transparent understanding of expectations within the organization. Participants actively fostered open dialogue to collaboratively determine the execution of goals and expectations, considering the impact on students, staff, and community. DuFour and Fullan (2013) advocated for fostering

inclusive dialogues that explain the nonnegotiables and underscore the moral imperative of the task. This clarity enables team members to venture into uncharted territory, embrace creativity, and innovate to discover novel approaches to achieving goals. The study highlighted the significance of empowering individuals closest to challenges, encouraging active participation in discussions in which all perspectives are respected and heard.

The study's findings align with those of Northouse (2019) and Yukl and Mahsud, (2010), suggesting that creating opportunities for collective problem solving empowers school leaders to reshape existing practices in response to change. Drawing on strategies identified by Heifetz et al. (2009), participants discussed transforming organizational challenges into collaborative conversations. This approach allowed members to address concerns comfortably while acknowledging the organization's values and goals.

Major Finding 2 for Research Question 2

Research Question 2: How do superintendents build an organization's adaptive capacity through nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization?

Major Finding 2: Superintendents nurture a shared responsibility for the organization and foster collective ownership by developing shared ownership through collaborative teams to ensure input on goal creation and organizational direction.

Superintendents' interviews emphasized the importance of fostering a collective sense of responsibility. All 10 participants highlighted shared responsibility, underscoring the significance of establishing and reassessing organizational goals through goal setting and data review. The superintendents discussed creating a shared purpose, emphasizing that it cannot be imposed but must be cultivated through shared ownership toward a

common goal. The collaborative ownership within the team hinges on analyzing data and adapting practices accordingly. These practices enable team members to contribute input and feedback, fostering a sense of shared ownership, responsibility, and accountability during times of challenge.

Mulder (2017) observed that adaptive leadership enhances problem identification by engaging the entire organization in the quest for solutions. Leaders foster a variety of perspectives to generate a range of organizational options. Phillips (2019) highlighted that a crucial factor for organizational success lies in individuals' deep belief and commitment to the relationships. Superintendents engaged in dialogue via committees encompassing diverse perspectives, enabling various groups to offer input for guidance. They aimed to steer the district by fostering open communication and listening attentively to diverse opinions believed to contribute to addressing issues throughout the district. Superintendents stated the goal was to enfranchise the district to make good decisions for students.

Major Finding 3 for Research Question 3

Research Question 3: *How do superintendents build an organization's adaptive capacity through encouraging independent judgment?*

Major Finding 3: *Superintendents encourage independent judgment and build adaptive capacity by establishing shared ownership and responsibility defined by choice while fostering organizational parameters for decision making.*

In this research, all 10 participants contributed to the data collected on this theme. These superintendents pinpointed the creation of shared ownership of organizational expectations built on trust, concurrently elevating shared responsibility and autonomy in

decision making. These decisions were nurtured by valuable data and contextual information, forming a robust basis of knowledge and comprehension. Within the broader context of promoting independent judgment, superintendents conveyed their provision of professional development and training. These initiatives include clear expectations and proper guidance to facilitate decision making aligned with mission statements while promoting autonomy and independent choice.

According to du Plessis and Keyter (2020), the leader builds trust among the followers, and in return, this creates confidence in the leaders. This study's superintendents expressed the organizational culture's core elements that encourage creativity and autonomy. Scheuerlein et al. (2018) discovered that fostering an organizational culture centered on autonomy correlates with elevated performance and successful outcomes. In advocating for autonomy and authority, superintendents outlined their strategies to transform the organization's procedures and perspectives, emphasizing the importance of considering individual judgment (Northouse, 2019; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).

Major Finding 4 for Research Question 4

Research Question 4: *How do superintendents build an organization's adaptive capacity through developing leadership capacity?*

Major Finding 4: *Superintendents develop leadership capacity by encouraging leadership strategies that develop effective communication for promoting collaborative leadership growth.*

Superintendents in this study identified the importance of effective communication structures to promote collaborative leadership as a critical aspect of

developing leadership capacity. Eight participants recognized building honest, trust-based collaborative structures as a support element for enhancing a leader's capacity, emphasizing the importance of intentionality and the integration of open dialogue for leadership meetings. Superintendents discussed creating a trust culture based on honest communication. The leadership capacity among leaders must be based on trustworthiness through honest relationships and communication that build social capital with all groups and individuals. This trusting professional collaborative relationship develops leadership capacity through strategies of structured meetings, shared purpose, and institution of growth plans for leaders. Superintendents' conversations also included strategies for supporting, shaping, and providing leaders with appropriate tools to be successful, including having the right people in the right seat. They continue to review leadership structures and growth opportunities for developing leadership capacity.

These approaches align with Heifetz et al.'s (2009) perspective, acknowledging that adaptive leaders understand their role as primary developers and place significant emphasis on leadership development. In line with Heifetz et al. (2009) and Simmons (2022), adaptive leaders enhance an individual's capabilities to exhibit adaptability and productivity in the face of intricate change. The participants' feedback supports the conclusions drawn by Yukl and Mahsud (2010), underscoring that adaptive leadership facilitates organizational capacity building by fostering leadership strategies and collaboration.

Major Finding 5 for Research Question 5

Research Question 5: *How do superintendents build an organization's adaptive capacity through institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning?*

Major Finding 5: *Superintendents institutionalize reflection and continuous learning by establishing a culture of growth development through modeling reflective leadership and focused practice.*

Superintendents described modeling reflective leadership using focused practice as a strategy by which they institutionalized reflection and continuous learning. Each of the 10 participants provided instances of demonstrating reflective practice to cultivate a culture of ongoing learning within the organization. The establishment of a culture of growth based on reflective leadership and focused practice was not only addressed throughout Interview Questions 9 and 10 but also referenced again by participants in Interview Questions 7 and 8 in response to developing leadership capacity. The instances included both professional and personal aspects. Participants discussed bringing leadership together for retreats with the primary goal of reflection on practices and how activities are getting done. Reflection is ingrained in agendas, norms, and meeting debriefs. Superintendents emphasized that they actively demonstrate reflective practices during leadership meetings. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of coaches assigned to leadership team members, modeling and coaching the integration of reflective practices for both the leader and their staff. Heifetz et al. (2009) underscored the significance of making precise interpretations, emphasizing the capacity to recognize when individuals are not progressing toward either technical or adaptive interpretations. The practice of reflection can assist in the interpretation of unproductive understanding. Schön (1992) emphasized the cultivation of dispositions that harness individuals' capacity for reflective practice, enabling them to adapt the process to suit the specific needs of their context. As per Boggs and McPhail (2016), maintaining receptiveness to

learning is a crucial capability for individuals aiming to facilitate adaptability within their organization. Leaders must exemplify courage, continuous learning, and reflection to effectively navigate through change. Superintendents collectively dedicated themselves to fostering a culture of reflection by critically examining their professional practices.

Unexpected Findings

Three unexpected findings emerged from the research study. The first unexpected finding arose from the diverse responses among the participants when addressing interview question eight, which delved into the adaptive leadership trait of enhancing leadership capacity. This question sought insights into how participants motivate individuals and groups to elevate their leadership potential and competencies for fostering future leaders. Although responses to the question on developing leadership were consistently centered on honest and trust-based collaborative structures, there was an unexpected prevalence of mentions related to using book studies for leadership development.

Exploring the use of book studies to elevate leadership skills proved intriguing, and eight of the 10 participants emphasized the advantages of such studies in fostering collective discussions. The unexpected prevalence of 80% of superintendents who used leadership book reads to develop leadership capacity was refreshing to me as a researcher. The level of commitment to reading research-based leadership practices was noteworthy during a time of high-tech learning platforms. The participants delved into a range of leadership-oriented books, citing examples such as *The Multiplier*, *Coherence*, and *Primal Leadership* while also elucidating the underlying reasons and goals behind their selection. They articulated that incorporating book studies aimed to bolster

concentration, encourage collaborative approaches, establish accountability, and foster reflection on leadership strategies.

The second unexpected finding was that superintendents focus on creating avenues for fostering individual growth journeys. Six of 10 participants highlighted the significance of supporting individual growth opportunities in response to Interview Question 5. This question delved into how superintendents encourage employees to choose growth opportunities based on personal and professional experiences.

The superintendents underscored that the benefits of individual growth experiences extend beyond the leader to positively impact the entire organization. These experiences uplift those around them because leadership has a pervasive influence. Participants provided instances illustrating how the motivation enhances the performance of their management staff and refines their leadership skills. Furthermore, it empowers leaders to make decisions that contribute to the overall betterment of the organization.

This approach creates a pathway for employees to proactively invest in their careers by making informed choices. Superintendents regularly discuss personal growth with their leaders, urging them to seek improvement opportunities and step out of their comfort zones. This study underscored the imperative for continuous learning, revealing a clear preference among superintendents for leadership competencies centered on ongoing education. This aligns with established research highlighting the crucial connection between leadership development and continuous learning. Anderson and Ackerman Anderson (2010) emphasized the significance of developing the knowledge base of both senior and front-line leaders regarding their roles and responsibilities in the change process. Morgan (2020) further elaborated on the necessity for school leaders to

reconsider the extent and nature of required changes, emphasizing the importance of new learning to support the emotional well-being of staff in evolving learning environments. Northouse (2019) exposed that leadership demands reevaluating how organizations adapt and thrive in new environments, stressing the need for school leaders to embrace innovative approaches and mutual learning to navigate emerging challenges. By prioritizing professional learning competencies as an organizational objective, the strategies employed by superintendents remained consistent with the principles of leadership development.

The third and final unexpected finding in this study pertains to the demographics of the participants. Strikingly, 60% of the individuals involved in the study self-identified as Hispanic or Latinx. This percentage deviates significantly from the demographic composition of California where only 7.7% of superintendents are Hispanic or Latinx (Freedberg, 2016). Nationally, the representation of Hispanic or Latinx superintendents stands at 14.5%. This unexpected demographic makeup is remarkable, offering insights from an underrepresented group of leaders who formed the majority in this research. The findings hold the potential to authentically reflect how leaders of color navigate and guide organizations amid challenging and dynamic circumstances. The implications for organizations with diverse needs, particularly within the context of adaptive leadership, are of special interest, shedding light on how these leaders shape and develop their respective organizations.

Conclusions

The primary discoveries of this research, coupled with relevant literature, were employed to conclude the approaches adopted by superintendents in cultivating adaptive

capacity, aligning with the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership outlined by Heifetz et al. (2009). These key characteristics include 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. The five conclusions are discussed in the following sections.

Conclusion 1: Creating a Safe and Trustworthy Space to Promote Community Collaboration

Based on the findings of this study and a review of the literature, it is concluded that superintendents who build trust and relationships establish the key adaptive capacity of safe and trusting space for collaboration. Superintendents exemplified collaboration building by being accessible, fostering trust, engaging in collective brainstorming, demonstrating empathy, institutionalizing labor-management collaboration meetings, and prioritizing students, staff, and community. Leaders who openly express personal feelings during challenges cultivate trust, addressing their and others' emotions (Bell, 2018). Positive communication, direction, gratitude, and behavioral qualities like honesty, loyalty, and equality contribute to trust-building (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

Open dialogue, characterized by free expression and safe and trustworthy spaces for sharing ideas, facilitates learning and minimizes resistance to opposing viewpoints (Laurie, 2001). Superintendents must actively promote open dialogue to continually strengthen trusting relationships and enhance adaptive capacity by addressing unspoken issues. Normalizing discussions about challenging topics will solidify trust and boost the teams' adaptability.

Conclusion 2: Collaborative Teams Foster Collective Ownership

Based on the findings of this study and a review of the literature, it is concluded that superintendents who use collaborative teams for input and direction create shared ownership and build adaptive capacity.

Participants provided instances that resonate with teachers, staff, and leadership teams, exemplifying their contribution to organizational goals and strategic plans. Furthermore, participants emphasized creating opportunities for collective input, ensuring that everyone can contribute to discussions, regardless of their specific area.

Aligning with Northouse (2019), the study advocates a pivotal step in leadership: returning the responsibility to the individuals. Leaders are urged to step back and empower their followers, safeguarding the voices of those in subordinate positions. Addressing the importance of amplifying marginalized voices, leaders should actively work to ensure that these perspectives are heard. When individuals are given chances to assume responsibility and are empowered with a voice, it fosters a culture of shared ownership.

As highlighted in the study, shared ownership fosters a team dynamic characterized by a unified voice, interconnectedness, and shared influences. As outlined by Northouse (2019), the principles of adaptive leadership underscore a follower-centered approach that encourages interactive problem-solving and solution development.

The study recommends leveraging team members' influence through a collective leadership approach for superintendents seeking to instill shared ownership for organizational goals. Adopting shared and collective ownership enhances the organization's overall effectiveness in addressing its challenges. Adaptive challenges

require innovation in the collective mindset of all staff; therefore, everyone must be a part of the solution (Simmons, 2022).

Conclusion 3: Shared Responsibility and Parameters for Decision Making

Based on the findings of this study and a review of the literature, it is concluded that superintendents who establish shared responsibility and decision-making guidelines are more inclined to nurture independent judgment and choice, thereby enhancing adaptive capacity. Participants agreed that standardizing systems and structures would allow for discretionary actions by leadership. Superintendents emphasized setting parameters so the work could provide a coherent framework (Heckmann et al., 2016; Higgs & Rowland, 2000; Johansen, 2007). The applicable systems can assist leaders in navigating difficult situations. The responsibility of the leaders is to establish the course, offering the necessary support and organizational framework to meet the organization's needs. This aligns with Albrecht and Roughsedge (2022), who argued that organizations with well-defined and developed capabilities are better equipped to face ongoing challenges and opportunities associated with constant organizational change.

Adaptive leadership requires adjusting the lens and the ability to refocus the goals and/or direction of the inequitable policies and conditions with flexibility to create the best outcomes for staff and students (Simmons, 2022). Although superintendents in this study are system thinkers, they align with leading in a way that encourages and allows the people to have independent judgment regarding the lens that has been established, thus encouraging them to lead flexibly and productively.

Conclusion 4: Supporting Professional Growth Opportunities

Based on the findings and a review of the literature, it is concluded that superintendents who foster professional development are more likely to create adaptive capacity within their organization. An organization's success heavily relies on its members' continual professional growth, necessitating leaders to actively facilitate opportunities for everyone to broaden their expertise and experiences. Additionally, overcoming organizational challenges requires leaders and their team members to have avenues for learning from each other, as emphasized by Heifetz et al. (2009).

Superintendents in this study discussed the diverse pathways available to foster the professional development of individuals within their organization. They actively endorse financial backing for leaders to join professional organizations, emphasizing a commitment to ongoing opportunities for professional growth. The organizational vision underscores the imperative for leaders to consistently engage in professional reading and research, cultivate connections with fellow educational leaders through networking, and visit classrooms and other school sites. The unanimous consensus among superintendents is that leadership within their organization should demonstrate a continual willingness to enhance and refine their knowledge and skill sets. Adaptive leadership represents a transformational capacity-building process. The participants unanimously agreed that the development of leaders closely aligns with the process observed among the superintendents in this study.

Conclusion 5: Modeling and Creating a Culture of Reflection and Learning

Based on this study's findings and a literature review, it is concluded that superintendents institutionalize reflection and continuous learning by establishing a

culture of growth through modeling reflective leadership and focused practice. Participants also expressed the value of reflection to expand their knowledge and deepen their understanding to better serve the community. They stressed the need to institutionalize the practice of reflection with classified and certificated managers to bond the practice. Participants noted that they want their leaders to reflect upon the information they're hearing or situations being shared to engage in creative thinking.

The ability of educators, students, and administrators to adjust in rapidly changing times relies on school leaders maintaining a focus on continuous learning, encouraging creative thinking, among others, and implementing innovative solutions (Northouse, 2019). Effective leadership involves intentionally learning from challenges or situations and drawing insights from the organization's experiences and lessons learned (Grissom & Condon, 2021). Participants underscore the importance of prioritizing reflection, fostering a learning environment in which upper management is not merely attempting to solve every issue but rather nurturing leaders capable of handling conflicts and challenges.

Conclusion 6: Book Studies to Facilitate Leadership Development

Based on the findings of this study and the review of the literature, it is concluded that superintendents who place significant emphasis on book studies within the organization develop leaders to face challenging times. The book study was an unexpected finding because 80% of superintendents through the intentional use of book studies built adaptive capacity. The use of book studies works to develop a professional growth and collaborative culture. Cultures are important aspects of adaptive change

capabilities and ultimately determine whether sustained change is accomplished (Costanza et al., 2016).

Implications for Action

This research outlined approaches employed by superintendents to enhance adaptive capacity, drawing from Heifetz et al.'s (2009) five key characteristics of adaptive leadership. The primary findings confirmed that participants consistently applied common strategies to foster adaptive capacity within their public school districts. Central to leadership is the mobilization of people to address immediate adaptive challenges. Adaptive leadership strategies play a pivotal role in augmenting an organization's adaptive capacity (Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). The actionable implications derived from this phenomenological study are rooted in the identified findings and conclusions. The ensuing recommended actions have the potential to positively assist superintendents in building organizational adaptive capacity and emerging as successful and effective leaders.

Implication 1

Based on the findings, superintendents intentionally build relationships through collaborative dialogue to promote safe and trustworthy spaces. Superintendents of public schools must cultivate relationships using a community collaboration framework. The development and implementation of a community collaboration framework will provide structured opportunities for ongoing dialogue between schools and community stakeholders. The principles of the framework will foster collaboration and engagement between school leadership and the broader community of staff, students, parents, and community members. Funding from the state should be provided to the California county

superintendents organization to designate and award one California county office of education to create a repository of best practice research, examples, and templates. Additionally, the designated county office must provide mentors who have successfully done the work to support other leaders in the work.

An implication of building relationships within a school community is creating a positive and supportive community that significantly influences the well-being and academic success of students, educators, and other stakeholders. Superintendents should develop the framework on the defined mission, objectives of the purpose for the community collaboration, and the desired outcomes. The processes for the community collaboration framework program development and implementation involve input to shape educational programs, extracurricular activities, and support services. This openness fosters high levels of trust in a school community and extends to creating an environment that encourages positive interactions and serves as foundational support for an enriching learning environment (Bagwell, 2020).

These actions will demonstrate a commitment to acknowledging achievements and fostering a positive community spirit. These approaches encompass a comprehensive and multifaceted strategy to build and sustain meaningful relationships with the school community (Grissom & Condon, 2021). These strategies will support building adaptive capacity and organizational success through building relationships within the community.

Implication 2

Based on the study's findings and conclusions, that superintendents create shared leadership opportunities to develop leadership capacity in others. The findings of this study, as well as the literature, are ripe with strategies to create shared leadership and

autonomy with engagement. I will use the research findings to create materials such as presentations, articles, templates, and support documents on the topic of shared leadership. The materials will be shared with superintendents at ACSA Superintendents Symposium as well as being shared with the California county superintendents.

Superintendents must establish leadership teams that bring together individuals with diverse skills, expertise, and perspectives. This diversity enhances the richness of ideas and promotes a collaborative culture. It is recommended that superintendents collaboratively define organizational objectives, create communication channels, and offer opportunities for shared responsibility with individuals within the organization.

To ensure organizations use best practice strategies to build shared ownership within an educational institution, public school superintendents must involve stakeholders in decision making, seeking input and feedback from teachers, parents, and community members. Superintendents must establish professional learning communities to facilitate ongoing collaboration. Through the professional learning communities, superintendents empower school leaders at various levels, allowing them to take ownership of specific initiatives or projects. Another way that superintendents empower others is by decentralizing authority and promoting a sense of shared leadership and responsibilities. By implementing these strategies, superintendents and educational leaders can create an environment that nurtures shared leadership. These strategies support building adaptive capacity and organizational success through collective ownership.

Implication 3

Based on the study's findings and conclusions, superintendents actively create well-defined parameters to elevate performance and foster adaptive capacity. It is

strongly recommended that superintendents bolster leadership capacity among their leaders by instituting clear parameters that closely align with organizational goals. To effectively empower leaders, superintendents must articulate predefined goals and objectives.

At the outset of each year, superintendents must allocate dedicated time for collaborative sessions with both district and site-level leaders. During these sessions, the focus will be on defining opportunities for team building, fostering collaboration, and establishing goals that align with the overarching vision of the district. Study participants emphasized the pivotal role of setting clear goals for individuals and groups, effectively communicating expectations related to academic standards also implementing robust systems for monitoring and analyzing both student and staff performance.

Through the establishment of these parameters, superintendents construct a comprehensive framework that empowers leaders, resulting in elevated performance and the cultivation of a positive, collaborative learning environment. The identified strategies serve as a foundation for building adaptive capacity and organizational success because they empower leaders with clear parameters, thereby enhancing team performance.

Implication 4

Based on the study's findings and conclusions, it is recommended that superintendents establish a leadership academy focused on trust and honesty to enhance leadership capacity. This academy should prioritize honesty, integrity, and transparency, serving as a training ground that consistently models trustworthy behaviors and setting a standard for ethical leadership. To build trust, the academy should effectively communicate goals, expectations, and decision-making processes. To ensure best practice

sharing of leadership academy pedagogy, curriculum and structures, the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) should solicit best practice examples and provide a resource repository for the support of superintendents in developing and implementing an academy.

The training provided by the leadership academy must extend to developing leadership teams, fostering honest conversations, and building trust within the professional organization. Superintendents must align their actions with the training to maintain consistency and credibility. Superintendents model and embrace a culture of accountability by acknowledging mistakes and taking responsibility, demonstrating a commitment to learning and improvement.

In addition to creating leadership academies, superintendents must invest in leadership development programs. These programs play a crucial role in cultivating collaborative leadership strategies for new and aspiring superintendents and other district-level leadership cohorts. This investment contributes to the growth and effectiveness of leaders within the educational system.

Another key action for superintendents is the implementation of research strategies that promote professional communities for leadership. This involves allocating time and resources for administrators to join relevant professional organizations that support best leadership practices. Additionally, establishing a collaborative culture in the leadership programs for new leaders is crucial for creating a supportive environment. Through mentorship, experienced leaders share knowledge, provide guidance, and help navigate the complexities of leadership for mentees.

By implementing these comprehensive strategies, superintendents foster a dynamic and supportive environment that nurtures the capacity of leaders within the public school system. This holistic approach underscores the importance of continuous learning and emphasizes the collaborative nature of adaptive leadership in the ever-evolving educational landscape.

Implication 5

Based on the study's findings and conclusions, superintendents develop a learning culture through growth and reflection to develop adaptive capacity. It is recommended that superintendents establish a learning culture by providing growth opportunities and incorporating reflective practices. This approach aligns with the research presented by Heifetz et al. (2009), emphasizing the consistent analysis of actions, note-taking, and the need for iterative adaptation of intentions as more insights into decision outcomes are gained. Furthermore, these strategies shape the behaviors of teams, fostering purposeful reflection that enhances leaders' confidence in decision making (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). This reflective learning contributes to the adaptive capacity of leadership, guiding stages essential for navigation through the change process (Sunderman et al., 2020).

Superintendents must establish mentorship programs within the organization. The program would pair experienced employees with those seeking guidance and support in their professional development. Mentorship provides valuable insights, advice, and networking opportunities that establish various strategies to promote a learning culture. Additional strategies involve mentoring or coaching and fostering a culture of peer observation at school sites. Superintendents will use leadership teams at school sites to observe operations and instruction, providing constructive feedback.

Superintendents must offer reflective practice workshops to provide training on effective reflection techniques, emphasizing the importance of learning from experiences and continually improving professional practices. This can be facilitated through guided discussions and structured reflection exercises. Superintendents can routinely conduct structured reflection sessions for leaders to provide a platform to discuss both successes and challenges in leadership. Through these comprehensive strategies, superintendents' strategies play a pivotal role in cultivating a supportive learning culture within the organization.

Recommendations for Further Research

This exploratory phenomenological research aimed to uncover and articulate the approaches employed by public school superintendents in developing adaptive capacities, aligning with the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership as delineated by Heifetz et al. (2009). Considering the study's outcomes, I suggest the following avenues for future research.

Recommendation 1: Superintendent and Follower Perceptions of the Impact of Adaptive Leadership Strategies on Student Outcomes

It is recommended that a mixed methods study be conducted with superintendents and their cabinets consisting of a follower (cabinet) survey that rates the perceived impact of the strategies that arose from this study on student outcomes followed by qualitative interviews with superintendents using the collective outcome from all followers to delve deeper with superintendents.

Recommendation 2: Collaboration and Networking

It is recommended that qualitative research be conducted to explore the role of collaboration and professional networks in building adaptive capacity for superintendents. It should investigate the perception of how connections with other educational leaders, community stakeholders, and professional organizations contribute to adaptive leadership.

Recommendation 3: Other Superintendents in Northern California

It is recommended that this study be replicated with superintendents from other counties in Northern California. It will be beneficial to see whether the other regions of the state has any impact on the results because this study comprised superintendents in Southern California.

Recommendation 4: Other County Superintendents in California

It is recommended that this study be replicated with superintendents in other counties in California. It will be beneficial to see whether the other counties of the state have an additional impact on the results because this study comprised superintendents in Los Angeles County.

Recommendation 5: Thematic Meta Analysis

It is recommended that the nine dissertations completed in this thematic study be combined into one study to identify the patterns and trends. It will be beneficial to see how the different populations studied by each researcher are similar and different.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

Leaders are confronted with complex changes that pose challenges to their organizations. Addressing the potential disruption caused by these significant changes is

crucial (Morgan, 2020; Netolicky, 2020). The current landscape demands a specific type of change encompassing leadership, decision making, and action (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020). A significant element in managing change involves the leadership approach used. Organizational leaders are entrusted with sustaining and adapting to achieve success. Leaders demonstrate effective adaptability in steering teams through uncertainty and devising inventive solutions that align with the dynamic nature of change. This approach involves a collaborative endeavor to transform attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Simmons, 2022). Furthermore, the response to change must acknowledge its potential impact on the external environment and determine the optimal course of action to support the organization's success (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).

Navigating the helm of a public school district in Southern California presents both challenges and rewards. Public schools rely on superintendents to play a pivotal role in determining the district's overall success. They regularly encounter organizational changes, and superintendents often wrestle with decisions related to declining enrollment, limited funding for aging facilities and equipment, underperforming schools, and the diverse needs of students. Superintendents face scrutiny over the leadership practices used to meet the ever-changing challenges (Carter & May, 2020). Developing leadership styles requires preparation and training to adapt those skills to the ongoing change context frequently occurring at schools (du Plessis & Keyter, 2020; Grissom & Condon, 2021). Superintendents have been urged to embody adaptive leadership in response to these challenges.

This research examined the adaptive leadership strategies employed by public school superintendents in Southern California. The adaptive leadership strategies

highlighted in this study offer valuable insights for both existing superintendents and those aspiring to assume the role in the future. Integrating these findings into forthcoming training programs for superintendents and other district leaders is crucial for maintaining relevance in educational leadership practices. As an associate superintendent in a public school district and someone aspiring to become a superintendent, the knowledge and insights gained from this study have proven invaluable.

Being given the privilege to sit with 10 outstanding superintendents to listen to their wisdom and experiences was both inspiring and hopeful. Their stories and passion for education, students, and staff were motivational and thought-provoking. These 10 leaders inspired me to examine my leadership areas and encouraged me to pursue new avenues in leadership. I hope this study will inspire others to lead educational organizations with an adaptive mindset fueled by a desire to positively impact the lives of the students they are charged with educating.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Literature Matrix

A1		Literature Matrix																			
Literature Matrix	THEMES	Leadership	Traditional Crisis/Change	Change Leadership/Management	Contemporary/Crisis Leadership	Servant Leadership	Transformation of Leadership	Adaptive Leadership	Experiments in the room named	Responsibility is shared	Independent Judgment is expected	Leadership Capacity is Diminished	Reflection & Continuous Learning are Institutionalized	Gaps in Literature	Public School Systems	Superintendent Leadership	COVID-19	Transactional Leadership	Emergency management	Research	
		REFERENCES																			
1	Bain, A., Hart, P. L., Stern, E., & Sandelius, B. (2017). The politics of crisis management: public leadership under pressure. <i>Agon: Born, Plur? Hart, Eric, Born, Bengt Sandelius, Cambridge University Press.</i>	X	X	X	X					X	X									X	
1	Carne, D. P., & Kley, P. J. (2020). Making sense of the U.S. COVID-19 pandemic response: A policy regime perspective. <i>Administrative Theory & Practice, 42</i> (2), 262-277.	X															X				
1	Covey, R. L. (2002). What hath 9/11 wrought in the aftermath: school leaders use skills in thinking, priorities, and credible empowerment(2). 42. Retrieved from http://library.ohgovern.education/tutorials/ohgovern.education/covey_rh911	X			X							X								X	
1	Fornaciari, J. A., Gagliardi, R. A., & Roberts, B. D. (2017). Racial incidents at the University of Missouri: The Value of Leadership Communication and Stakeholder Relationships. <i>International Journal of Business Communication, 54</i> (2), 189-209.											X								X	
1	Garney, B. B. (2009). Crisis Management's New Role in Educational Settings. <i>The Clearing House, 82</i> (9), 287.	X																			
1	Garney, B. B. (2010). Crisis Leadership for the Real World. <i>Journal of Executive Education, 5</i> (1), 33-43.	X	X		X																
1	Grossen, J.A., & Carlson, L. (2021). Leading Schools and Districts in Time of Crisis. <i>Educational Researcher, 50</i> (5), 315-324.		X												X	X					
1	Hefetz, R.A. (1988). Leadership without easy answers (Vol. 460). Harvard University Press.	X		X				X	X	X	X	X	X								X
1	Hefetz, R.A., Gorenson, A., & Linky, M. (2009). The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world. Harvard Press.	X						X	X	X	X	X	X								
1	Jones, M.D., & McLean, M.K. (2020). Narrative in the time of Trump: Is the narrative policy framework good enough to be relevant? <i>Administrative Theory & Practice, 42</i> (2), 91-111.	X			X																
1	Ryan, K. (2017). Adaptive Transactional Leadership in current higher education: A self-compassion digital school tool. <i>Journal of Leadership Development, 18</i> (1), 1-11.	X		X				X							X	X				X	
1	Kelly, M.L. (2006). Academic solutions in transformational leaders. <i>The Monitor on Academic Admissions Journal</i> . Retrieved from http://www.pau.edu/monitor/articles/0311-01	X					X														
1	Kincaid, B. (2016, July 13). The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World. <i>The Christian Century, 127</i> (14), 40.							X													
1	Lauke, D.L. (2011). Real Work of Leaders. <i>Executive Excellence, 18</i> (3), 18.	X	X												X	X					
1	Leach, D. F. (2009). The assistant school superintendent in New York State: Sense of job satisfaction, job efficacy and career aspirations. Retrieved from http://library.ohgovern.education/tutorials/ohgovern.education/leach_df09											X			X	X					
1	Parks, S.D. (1942-) (2005). Leadership can be taught: a bold approach for a complex world / Sharon Dalez Parks. Harvard Business School Press.	X						X				X									
1	McNulty, R. J. (2022, March 1). Adaptive Leadership for the Post-COVID World: Understanding 'toxicity strategy' is a self-leadership skill when addressing new initiative in a school system. <i>School Administrator, 78</i> (3), 38.							X							X	X					
1	Morgan, M. (2020). Best practices for implementing remote learning during a pandemic. <i>The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues, and Ideas, 93</i> (3), 135-141.	X			X													X			
1	Reisberg, D.M. (2020). School leadership during a pandemic: Navigating tensions. <i>Journal of Professional Capital and Community Advancing online publication</i> . https://doi.org/10.1108/JPCO-05-2020-0017																			X	
1	Northouse, P.G. (2021). Leadership: Theory and Practice. (8th ed.) Sage Education.	X						X													
1	Pearce, Davy D., and Charles Kyrle. "Stable Leadership Styles for the COVID-19 Converged Crisis. <i>Africa Journal of Public Sector Development and Governance, vol. 3, no. 1, Jan. 2021, pp. 81-87. Gale Academic One File.</i>	X		X		X												X			
1	Simmons, D., & K. (2022). Leading Through CHANGE. <i>Educational Leadership, 79</i> (6), 44-47.	X						X				X	X								

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W
Literature Matrix	THEMES	Crisis Mergers	Leadership	Traditional Crisis Change	Change Leadership Management	Contemporary Crisis Leadership	Servant Leadership	Transformation of Leadership	Adaptive Leadership	Emergence in the room	Responsibility is shared	Independent Judgment is required	Leadership Capacity is Developed	Reflection & Continuous Learning are Institutionalized	Claps in Literature	Public School Systems	Superintendent Leadership	COVID-19	Transactional Leadership	Emergency management	Research	
REFERENCES																						
	Sudler, H. M., Headrick, J., & McCauley, C. (2020). Addressing Complex Issues and Crisis in Higher Education With an Adaptive Leadership Framework. <i>Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning</i> , 32(1), 22-33.			X						X												
	Yukl, G., & Mahood, R. (2015). Why Resilient and Adaptive Leadership is Essential. <i>Consulting Psychology: Journal: Practice and Research</i> , 67(1), 81-91.									X	X											
	Baguelin, J. (2020). "Leading Through a Pandemic: Adaptive Leadership and Purpose Action." <i>Journal of School Administration, Research and Development</i> , 5(1), pp. 10-34.		X							X			X						X			
	Bundy, J. M.D., Pinner, C.E., Short, and B.T. Coombs. (2017). "Crisis and Crisis Management: Integration, Interpretation, and Research Development." <i>Journal of Management</i> , 43(6), pp. 1061-1092.	X	X			X															X	
	Rubin, L. G., Browne-Ferrigno, T., & Rowland, T. J. (2018). Superintendent Roles as CEO and Team Leader. <i>Research in Educational Administration & Leadership</i> , 3(2), 179-205.		X															X				
	W. Davis, C.A., Rubin, J.D., W. Hedges, J., & Capri, R. (2023, Spring). Covid-19 schools and their adaptive leadership: Integrates the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. <i>Journal of Multidisciplinary Research</i> , 15(10), 103-113.		X							X									X			
	Stammann, S. A. (2005). Unprecedented Crisis Strikethrough Superintendents Role. 77(1), 47.		X																			
	Femer, T., and T. Calk, (2015). "Leadership in Crisis Management: Separation of Leadership and Ethical Considerations." <i>Philosophy, Economics and Finance</i> 26, 695-701.		X		X												X	X				
	Hemmer, L., & Barr, D. S. (2020). Leadership in action: The experiences of seven Texas superintendents before, during, and after Hurricane Harvey. <i>Educational Management Administration & Leadership</i> , 48(5), 964-985. doi:10.1177/1741443219872077																	X			X	
	Holt, K., Rowe, J., & Tins, M. (2018). Crisis Management: Theory and Practice. <i>ResearchGate</i> .	X		X	X																X	

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W
Literature Matrix	THEMES	Crisis Mergers	Leadership	Traditional Crisis Change	Change Leadership Management	Contemporary Crisis Leadership	Servant Leadership	Transformation of Leadership	Adaptive Leadership	Emergence in the room	Responsibility is shared	Independent Judgment is required	Leadership Capacity is Developed	Reflection & Continuous Learning are Institutionalized	Claps in Literature	Public School Systems	Superintendent Leadership	COVID-19	Transactional Leadership	Emergency management	Research	
REFERENCES																						
	Femer, T., and T. Calk, (2015). "Leadership in Crisis Management: Separation of Leadership and Ethical Considerations." <i>Philosophy, Economics and Finance</i> 26, 695-701.		X		X											X	X					
	Hemmer, L., & Barr, D. S. (2020). Leadership in action: The experiences of seven Texas superintendents before, during, and after Hurricane Harvey. <i>Educational Management Administration & Leadership</i> , 48(5), 964-985. doi:10.1177/1741443219872077																X				X	
	Holt, K., Rowe, J., & Tins, M. (2018). Crisis Management: Theory and Practice. <i>ResearchGate</i> .	X		X	X																X	
	Graham, J.A., & Corbin, L. (2021). Leading Schools and Districts in Times of Crisis. <i>Educational Researcher</i> , 50(5), 313-324.	X														X	X				X	
	Russell, T. J., & Shorner, C. C. (2011). The School Superintendent Role: Challenges and Issues. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312144321															X	X			X		
	McMillen, J. H., Schwemmer, S., & Pearson, (2010). Research in Education Evidence-Based Inquiry, 7th Edition. MyEducationLab Series. Pearson.													X	X						X	
	Femer, M. G. (2015). Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice.																				X	
	Roberts, C., & Hyatt, L. (2019). The planning journey: A practical and comprehensive guide to planning, writing, and defining your organization. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.														X						X	
	Townsend, K. S. (2007). Effective superintendent/school board practices: Strategies for developing and maintaining good relationships with your board. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.														X	X						

APPENDIX B

Participant Invitation

Dear Superintendent,

My name is Darrin De Knikker. I am a doctoral candidate in the University of Massachusetts's Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program in the School of Education. I am a part of a thematic team researching 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 public school superintendents in Los Angeles County. Your participation is greatly appreciated and will provide valuable insights and ideas for future leaders facing crises in their fields and bring value to the research.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe strategies used by superintendents of California public school districts in Los Angeles County to build an adaptive capacity based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership by Heifetz et al. (2009).

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be invited to participate in a 60-minute, one-on-one interview conducted on Zoom. I will ask questions to allow you to share your experience as a public school district superintendent. The interview questions will assess specific leadership strategies during times of great change and opportunity. The interview will be recorded for transcription purposes.

There are no significant risks to your participation in this research study. The interview will be at a time which is convenient for you. There are no significant benefits to participating; nonetheless, a potential benefit may be that you will have an opportunity to add to the research regarding exemplary leaders' practices, policies, and experiences during times of change. The information in the study is intended to inform researchers and leaders about what exemplary superintendents like you do to cultivate knowledge, experiences, and strategies to lead during times of great change and opportunity.

If you agree to participate in the interview, you can be assured that it will be completely confidential. No names will be attached to any notes or records from the interview. All information will remain in locked files, accessible only to the researchers. No employer will have access to the interview information. You will be free to stop the interview and withdraw from the study at any time. You are also encouraged to ask any questions that will help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. Feel free to contact the principal investigator, Darrin DeKnikker, at ddeknicc@mail.umassglobal.edu or by phone at (909) 815-3586 to answer any questions you may have. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or your rights as a participant, you may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, University of Massachusetts, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine CA 92618, 949-341-7641.

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Form

INFORMATION ABOUT: Phenomenological Study on Adaptive Leadership During Times of Great Change and Opportunity as Perceived by California Public School Superintendents in Los Angeles County School Districts.

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Darrin DeKnikker.

PURPOSE OF STUDY: You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Darrin DeKnikker, a doctoral student from the School of Education at the University of Massachusetts Global. The purpose of this exploratory phenomenological study is to identify and describe the strategies used by superintendents to build an adaptive capacity based on the five key characteristics of adaptive leadership identified by Heifetz et al. (2009).

The interview(s) will last approximately 45–60 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 the lived experiences of special education directors and the strategies used to build adaptive capacity. The findings will be available to me at the conclusion of the study and will provide new insights into this 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 Amber Gallagher at xxxxx@xxxxx.xxx or Dr. Cindy Petersen (Advisor) at xxxxx@xxxxx.xxx.

- e. My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide to not participate in the study and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer particular questions during the interview if I so choose. I understand that I may refuse to participate or may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the Investigator may stop the study at any time.

- f. No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be 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

Research Participant's Bill of Rights



UMASS GLOBAL UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Research Participant's Bill of Rights

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

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

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

APPENDIX E

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?

APPENDIX F

Interview Protocol

My name is Darrin DeKnicker and I am a doctoral candidate at 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 on-site property managers in Southern 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. I provided the interview questions and five key characteristic definitions for adaptive leadership prior to the interview to help you understand the aims of the study and the concepts related to the interview questions I will be asking. 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 *public school district superintendents* will be conducted in the same manner.

Informed Consent

I would like to remind you that any information that is obtained in connection to this study will remain confidential. All 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. Per the informed consent, your participation in this study will remain confidential and comments made or demographic information will only be presented in summary format 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 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 indicated 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

Interview Questions & Prompts

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

Characteristic: Developing leadership capacity.

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?

Characteristic: Institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning.

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?

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

General Probes For researcher’s eyes only ☺

The General probes may be used during the interviewee when you want to get more information or expand the conversation with them. These are not questions you share with the interviewee. It is best to familiarize yourself with these probes and use them in a conversational way when appropriate to extend their responses.

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

APPENDIX G

Alignment Table of Research Questions to Interview Questions

Purpose: The purpose of this exploratory phenomenological 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. (2009).

Research Question	Variable	Definition	Interview Question and Prompt	Literature Support
<p>#1. How do <i>leaders*</i> build an organization's adaptive capacity through making naming elephants in the room the norm?</p>	<p>Making naming elephants in the room the norm.</p>	<p>The act of openly addressing sensitive underlying issues, or undiscussables, to resolve potential barriers that interfere with an organization realizing its full potential (Heifetz et al, 2009; Toegel & Barsoux, 2019; Baker, 2004).</p>	<p>IQ#1 What practices do you use as a leader in your organization to make addressing sensitive underlying issues an organizational norm?</p> <p>Prompt How do these practices facilitate adaptive leadership development? Can you give an example?</p> <p>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?</p> <p>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?</p>	<p>Baker, A. C. (2004). Seizing the moment: Talking about the "undiscussables." <i>Journal of Management Education</i>, 28(6), 693-706. https://doi.org/10.1177/1052562903252661</p> <p>Klonsky, M. F. (2010). <i>Discussing undiscussables: Exercising adaptive leadership</i> (Publication No. 3426112) [Doctoral Dissertation, Fielding Graduate University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.</p> <p>Schlaerth, A., Ensari, N., & Christian, J. (2013). A meta-analytical review of the relationship between emotional intelligence and leaders' constructive conflict management. <i>Group Processes & Intergroup Relations</i>, 16(1), 126-136. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430212439907</p> <p>Toegel, G., & Barsoux, J.-L. (2019). It's time to tackle your team's undiscussables. <i>MIT Sloan management review</i>, 61(1), 37-46.</p>

<p>#2. How do <i>leaders</i> build an organization's adaptive capacity through nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization?</p>	<p>Nurturing a shared responsibility for the organization.</p>	<p>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).</p>	<p>IQ#3 Can you describe a time (in your current role) when you facilitated shared ownership of organizational goals amongst team members?</p> <p>Prompt: How would you describe the outcome and its relation to the organization's future?</p> <p>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?</p> <p>Prompt: How do you encourage participation across teams and roles throughout the organization?</p>	<p>Harris, A., & Spillane, J. (2008). Distributed leadership through the looking Glass. <i>Management in Education</i>, 22(1), 31–34. https://doi.org/10.1177/0892020607085623</p> <p>Heifetz, R. & Linsky, R. (2002). <i>Leadership on the line</i>. Harvard Business School Press.</p> <p>Heifetz, R., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). <i>The practice of adaptive leadership</i>. Harvard Business Review Press.</p> <p>Northouse, P. (2016). <i>Leadership theory and practice</i> (7th edition). SAGE Publications.</p> <p>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. <i>Journal of Oncology Practice</i>, 12(11), 1012-1019. https://doi.org/10.1200/jop.2016.013771</p>
<p>#3. How do <i>leaders</i> build an organization's adaptive capacity through encouraging independent judgment?</p>	<p>Encouraging independent judgment.</p>	<p>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).</p>	<p>IQ#5 Describe a situation where you encouraged employees to make choices based on personal and professional experience?</p> <p>IQ#6 What are some systems and structures that you have in place for team members to exercise independent judgment and choice?</p> <p>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</p>	<p>Heifetz, R., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). <i>The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world</i>. Harvard Business Press.</p> <p>Shanbhag, N. (2002). Responsible direction and the supervisory status of registered nurses. <i>Yale Law Journal</i>, 112(3), 665. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A96306891/AONE?u=irv3447&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=23a3cd01_</p> <p>Casavant, R., Elrod, P. F., Jr., & Mayo, C. M.</p>

			teams exercised choice using the structures?	(1995, April). Communicate: make your expertise known. <i>Appraisal Journal</i> , 63(2), 155. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A17015338/AONE?u=irv3447&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=c2916bea
#4. How do <i>leaders</i> 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).	<p>IQ#7 What are the important leadership competencies that your organization focuses on in developing leaders?</p> <p>Prompt Can you give some examples of activities that are encouraged to develop these leadership competencies?</p> <p>IQ#8 As a leader, how do you motivate individuals and groups to increase their leadership potential?</p> <p>Prompt Can you provide some examples of when your strategies to motivate leaders to develop have been effective?</p>	Hull, R., Robertson, D., & Mortimer, M. (2018). Wicked leadership competencies for sustainability professionals: Definition, pedagogy, and assessment. <i>Sustainability</i> 11(4), 171-177. http://doi.org/10.1089/sus.2018.0008

<p>#5. How do <i>leaders</i> build an organization's adaptive capacity through institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning?</p>	<p>Institutionalizing reflection and continuous learning.</p>	<p>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., 2015; Vera & Crossan, 2004; Veldsman & Johnson, 2016).</p>	<p>IQ#9 How do you institutionalize or make reflection a permanent part of your organizational culture?</p> <p>Prompt How is reflection used to facilitate adaptive capacity? Can you give an example?</p> <p>IQ#10 How do you institutionalize or make continuous learning a permanent part of your organizational culture?</p> <p>Prompt How is continuous learning used to facilitate adaptive capacity? Can you give an example?</p>	<p>Cojocar, 2008; Pearson & Smith, 1986; Ramalingam et al., 2020; Senge et al., 2015; Vera & Crossan, 2004; Veldsman & Johnson, 2016</p>
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APPENDIX H

Observer Feedback Form—Field Test

Conducting interviews is a learned skill set/experience. Gaining valuable insight about your interview skills and effect with the interview will support your data gathering when interviewing the actual participants. As the interview observer you should reflect on the questions below after completing the interview. You should provide independent feedback at the conclusion of 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 I

Participant Feedback Form—Field Test

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

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

APPENDIX J

Researcher Feedback Form—Field Test

Conducting interviews is a learned skill set/experience. Gaining valuable insight about your interview skills and affect with the interview will support your data gathering when interviewing the actual participants. As the researcher you should reflect on the questions below after completing the interview. You should also discuss the following reflection questions with your ‘observer’ after completing the interview field test. The questions are written from your perspective as the interviewer. Provide your observer with a copy of these reflective questions prior to the field test interview. Then you can verbalize your thoughts with the observer and they can add valuable insight from their observation. After completing this process you may have edits or changes to recommend for the interview protocol before finalizing.

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 K

CITI Program Completion Certificate



Completion Date 12-May-2022
Expiration Date N/A
Record ID 48770947

This is to certify that:

Darrin DeKnikker

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Human Subjects Research

(Curriculum Group)

Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers

(Course Learner Group)

1 - Basic

(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

University of Massachusetts Global



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w1e18e955-31ca-4460-8570-ee48c40c3e42-48770947

APPENDIX L

Approval From the Institutional Review Board



Darrin Deknikker <ddekni@umassglobal.edu>

IRB Application Approved As Submitted: Darrin De Knikker

8 messages

Institutional Review Board <my@umassglobal.edu>
Reply-To: webmaster@umassglobal.edu
To: ddekni@umassglobal.edu
Cc: cpeterse@umassglobal.edu, irb@umassglobal.edu

Thu, Sep 7, 2023 at 1:51 PM

Dear Darrin De Knikker,

Congratulations, your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the UMass Global Institutional Review Board. This approval grants permission for you to proceed with data collection for your research. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If any issues should arise that are pertinent to your IRB approval, please contact the IRB immediately at IRB@umassglobal.edu. If you need to modify your IRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at the following link: <https://irb.umassglobal.edu/Applications/Modification.pdf>.

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

Thank you,
David Long, Ed.D.
Professor
Organizational Leadership
IRB Chair
dlong@umassglobal.edu
www.umassglobal.edu

APPENDIX M

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.

APPENDIX N

Definitions

The following terms are both theoretical and operational terms that are relevant to the study. Theoretical definitions are cited from 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).

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 (Heifetz et al., 2009; Toegel & Barsoux, 2019; Baker, 2004).

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).

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).

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; Heifetz et al., 2009; Harris, 2011; Sharratt & Fullan, 2009).

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., 2015; Vera & Crossan, 2004; Veldsman & Johnson, 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).