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A Delphi Study of the Characteristics of School Counselor Leaders Who Have

Overcome Adversity

A Dissertation by

Anita Shirley

University of Massachusetts Global

A Private Nonprofit Affiliate of the University of Massachusetts

Irvine, California

School of Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

May 2024

Committee in charge:

Lisbeth Johnson, Ed.D., Committee Chair

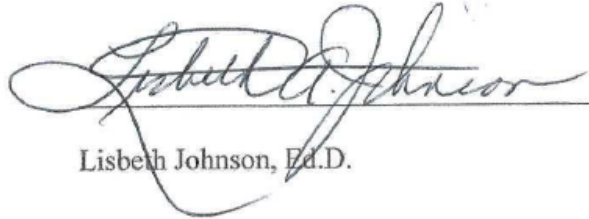
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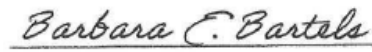
Rebecca Pianta, Ed.D.

University of Massachusetts Global


Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

The dissertation of Anita Shirley is approved.

 _____, Dissertation Chair
Lisbeth Johnson, Ed.D.

 _____, Committee Member
Barbara Bartels, Ed.D.

 _____, Committee Member
Rebecca Pianta, Ed.D.

 _____, Associate Dean
Patrick Ainsworth, Ed.D.

May 2024

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Overcome Adversity

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to Dr. Lisbeth Johnson, my dissertation chair, whose guidance, expertise, and unwavering support were instrumental in shaping this research and steering it towards completion. Your mentorship has been invaluable throughout this journey, and I am truly grateful for your dedication and encouragement.

I am also indebted to the members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Barbara Bartels and Dr. Rebecca Pianta, for their insightful feedback, constructive criticism, and scholarly contributions that enriched the quality of this work. Your collective expertise and commitment to academic excellence have been integral to the development and refinement of this dissertation.

To my cohort mentor, Dr. Johnathan Greenberg and my cohort members, whose camaraderie, encouragement, and shared experiences have provided a supportive network and a sense of community throughout this challenging endeavor, I extend my heartfelt appreciation. Your friendship and solidarity have made this journey more meaningful and enjoyable.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of these individuals, and for that, I am profoundly grateful.

DEDICATION

To my family,

This dissertation is dedicated to you, my pillars of strength and the driving force behind every step of this journey. Your unwavering love, boundless patience, and constant encouragement have been the cornerstone of my success.

Rob, your unwavering belief in my abilities, and your endless support have sustained me through the challenges and triumphs of doctoral study. Your sacrifices and understanding have allowed me the time and space to pursue my academic aspirations, and for that, I am eternally grateful.

Philip and Luke, you two have brought immense joy, laughter, and inspiration into my life. Your curiosity, determination, and unwavering support have motivated me more than you can imagine. As I tackled the challenges of academia, you both reminded me of the significance of balance, perspective, and striving for excellence.

Thank you for being such incredible sources of encouragement and for understanding the commitment required for this journey. Your belief in my dreams means the world to me, and I'm grateful for the lessons in perseverance and dedication that you teach me every day.

Last but certainly not least, I am deeply grateful to my family for their unconditional love, unwavering support, and endless sacrifices. Your belief in me and your encouragement have been the driving force behind my perseverance and determination. To my parents, siblings, and extended family, thank you for always being my pillars of strength and for standing by me every step of the way.

ABSTRACT

A Delphi Study of the Characteristics of School Counselor Leaders Who Have

Overcome Adversity

by Anita Shirley

Purpose: This Delphi study aimed to identify essential qualities school counselor leaders need to navigate role confusion, drawing from Maxwell's (2021) *Leading in Tough Times* strategies. The Delphi panel identified the following strategies: connecting their roles to the organization's vision or big picture, promoting their roles through organizational teamwork, and making good choices or strategic organizational decisions which would assist them in meeting and exceeding their professional school counseling standards.

Methodology: A mixed methods Delphi multivariable research design was utilized to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. This approach aimed to gather consensus from 20 current or former school counselors on a Delphi panel. The study was comprised of three rounds of surveys: the first qualitative, the second quantitative, and the third qualitative.

Findings: Study results highlighted communication as crucial for clarifying roles and aligning with the organization's vision. Advocacy emerged as vital for role clarification and vision alignment. Trustworthiness was identified as essential for promoting the counselor's role through teamwork. Collaboration and teamwork were underscored for connecting roles to the organizational vision and making strategic decisions. Lastly, purpose and clarity were emphasized for aligning the school counseling role with the organizational vision.

Conclusions: Panelist insights underscore the resilience and optimism of school counselors amid challenges, prioritizing communication, teamwork, and role clarity. Despite adversities, counselors persevere in fostering student growth. School counselor leaders are effective when they encourage trust and collaboration. Cultivating this spirit, counselors ensure comprehensive support for their primary role, enriching the educational journey for all students.

Recommendations: School site administrators must actively pursue professional development to grasp the pivotal role of school counselors. Additionally, counselors should maintain involvement in state and national organizations to glean insights for optimal performance. Demonstrating resilience, counselors navigate adversity through collaboration with site, district, and stakeholder networks. This proactive approach ensures continual improvement and effective delivery of essential services within the educational ecosystem.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

While there's life, there's hope.

—Marcus Tullius Cicero

The United States educates students aiming to enable all children to achieve their highest potential as individuals (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2006). This task is mighty because of the sheer volume of students. In the fall of 2021 in the United States, there were an estimated 49.5 million prekindergarten through 12th-grade students in public schools. Additionally, another 4.7 million prekindergarten through 12th-grade students were in private schools across the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). Of the 49.5 million students in the United States, California educates more than 10%, and California educates 5.8 million in kindergarten through 12th-grade attending over 10,000 schools (Data Reporting Office, n.d.-b). Southern California schools account for 3.1 million students in prekindergarten through 12th-grade. Riverside and San Bernardino Counties educate over 800,000 students in classrooms, and 78% come from diverse backgrounds.

Numerous individuals strive to support students in reaching their maximum potential: teachers, school counselors, and school administrators. Each one of these professionals maintains standards throughout their career. In California, teachers must adhere to the California Standards for the Teaching Profession (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2009). School counselors follow the guidelines and standards set by the American School Counselor Association ([ASCA], ASCA, 2019a). California school administrators follow the California Professional Standards for Education Leaders (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2014). The standards these professionals adhere

to guide the educator to do their best job so they can best serve the students entrusted to them. Along with the standards that educators follow, all adhere to their contract language that sets forth standards for working in a specific position and school district.

Although all educators adhere to professional standards, administrators are often considered the school's official leaders; other campus professionals often serve as leaders. As school counselors maintain their professional standards, they have specific roles and responsibilities that frequently move them into leadership roles. The purpose of the school counselor's role is to guide and facilitate lessons on a school campus, ensuring maximum student achievement, as well as fostering equal opportunities for all students (ASCA, 2023e). The school counselor's priority is similar to what UNESCO International Bureau of Education (2006) described as a goal of public education, which is to "ensure equality of access and opportunity for all" (p. 1). However, the aim of this study was to research the school counselor leaders personal qualities who face adversity through role confusion, high caseloads, and high accountability placed on school counselors.

Background

School Counselors' Roles as Leaders

The role of the school counselor has changed dramatically over time. In the early 1900s, school counseling emerged primarily as vocational guidance (Gysbers, 2010a). School counseling began because of the distribution of tasks, advancements in technology, the expansion of vocational education, and the widespread adoption of contemporary democratic systems. During the 1920s, vocational guidance expanded because of the influence of diverse social and educational movements within and beyond

the realm of education. As a result, vocational guidance started to embrace novel areas of study, like mental health, progressive education, child development, and measurement theory.

Some of this language is still used in the context of school counseling. During the 1930s, the practice of guidance counseling in schools began and persisted over time. A theme that arose again in the 1930s was not wasting time in the education system (Gysbers, 2010a). Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, there was debate regarding school guidance's purpose, organization, and operation. There were also continued discussions about terminology, training the school counselor personnel, and the organizational structure of the profession. During this time, there were two significant pieces of federal legislation introduced regarding school counselor training and the evolution of guidance in schools.

ASCA was formed in the 1950s (Gysbers, 2010a). It was also in the 1950s when the beginnings of elementary guidance counseling appeared. During the 1960s and 1970s, there was rapid growth in guidance counseling in schools. According to Gysbers (2010a), this growth could be attributed to "Title V, Guidance, Counseling and Testing of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958" (p. 95). Growth continued because of the Vocational Education Act of 1963, the Vocational Education Amendments of 1968, and the Education Amendments of 1976. In the 1980s and 1990s, social factors such as equal opportunities for all genders, cultural diversity, acceptance of different sexual orientations, and socioeconomic status were influential in molding the field of guidance and counseling (Gysbers, 2010a, 2010b).

School reform was at the forefront with the country's leaders, which resulted in "A Nation at Risk: The Imperatives for Reform," a report released by Bell in 1983 (Gysbers, 2010a; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). In 1991, the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development endorsed a document, which outlined the necessity and reasoning for multicultural perspective in counseling, "Multicultural Counseling Competencies and Standards" (Gysbers, 2010a; Sue et al., 1992). In 1996, a 5-year project was initiated which emphasized the importance of enhancing the training of school counselors in the field of school counseling. Gysbers (2010a) stated, "The goal was to help low-income and minority youth improve academically. The goal was to close the academic achievement gap" (p. 132). As a result, public education started to receive considerable attention in the first decade of the 21st century, and school reform intensified.

This intensification focused on the reduction of dropout rates and increase of graduation rates. With the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, education shifted its focus to prioritize academic achievement (Gysbers, 2010a). The effect on school counseling came with a continued focus on developing, implementing, and evaluating comprehensive guidance and counseling programs (Curry & DeVoss, 2009). In addition, issues from the past, such as terminology, prior experience, educational reform, legislation and advocacy, standards for preparing school counselors, and ratios were apparent. The current concern for school counselors revolved around the aspect of accountability. Their accountability is influenced by their responsibility to work within the comprehensive school counseling program framework and increased pressure to demonstrate their work contributions to student success. Gysbers (2010a) stated, "School

counselors are now being asked to tell what they do and demonstrate the effectiveness of their work” (p. 199).

School Counseling Standards

National

The ASCA national model for school counseling has reached its fourth edition, each iteration updating critical pieces to the school counseling profession. This national model embodies a holistic method for designing, implementing, and assessing a school counseling program aimed at enhancing student achievement (ASCA, 2022). The ASCA national model encompasses five standards that outline the components of an exemplary school counseling program. The ASCA ethical standards serve as a supplementary resource for school counselors, providing guidance in their professional practice (ASCA, 2022a). The primary objective of the ethical standards is to guarantee that school counselors adhere to the essential principles of ethical conduct, thus upholding the utmost standards in their profession. There are six critical areas of focus in the standards: (a) responsibility to students; (b) responsibilities to parents/guardians, school, and self; (c) school counselor directors/administrators/supervisors; (d) school counseling practicum/internship site supervisors; (e) maintenance of standards; and (f) ethical decision-making. In addition, the national model has three domains within which school counselors work—academic, career, and social/emotional (ASCA, 2022).

The ASCA (2021a) student standards have been established to outline the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary for students to attain academic success, college and career readiness, and social emotional development. The student standards are divided into two categories. Category 1 is mindset standards, and Category 2 is behavior

standards. Category 2 is more complex in that it has an additional three areas: learning strategies, self-management strategies, and social skills. The ASCA professional standards and competencies are the guiding principles school counselors review when reflecting on their job (ASCA, 2019a). There is an additional guide for universities preparing new school counselors titled *ASCA Standards for the School Counselor Preparation Programs* (ASCA, 2022c).

State

From the ASCA website, state school counseling standards are present and accessible (ASCA, 2023d). However, the California school counseling website redirects to the California Department of Education website, Mental Health area (California Department of Education, 2023). This redirection is both worrisome and optimistic simultaneously because ASCA standards indicate school counselors should work in three academic, career, and social/emotional domains; however, California appears to add on to these standards by including mental health components.

School counselors in California also reference the California Association of School Counselors (CASC) website and documents as a guide. CASC has recently published a new guide for school counselors, *The California Standards For The School Counseling Profession* (CASC, 2023). This document has updates in policy, legislation, research, and the evolving role of the school counselor. The CASC website has four guiding documents that reference their bylaws and governing policies, ethical standards and policies, mission and purpose, and position statements (CASC, n.d.-a, n.d.-c, n.d.-e, n.d.-g).

Characteristics of Effective School Counselors as Leaders

A leader motivates, innovates, trusts, is visionary, and has a positive influence (Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Moua, 2010). Much of the research about school counseling leadership underscores the idea that school counselors need to be leaders without explaining what goes into being a leader (ASCA, 2022b; Gysbers, 2010b; Sink, 2016). In the 2019 ASCA publication outlining the professional standards and competencies expected of school counselors, this document included a mindset section that addresses leadership and also behaviors identified that address the leadership role (ASCA, 2019a). However, although school counselors may be familiar with these standards and this publication, other leaders may not have knowledge (Whiston, 2002).

Although the majority of the literature emphasizes the importance of school counselors taking on leadership roles, there is also a smaller body of literature that focuses on outlining the specific characteristics and qualities that school counselors need to effectively assume leadership roles. However, through deciphering the research, three main traits were identified that school counselors need to be effective leaders. These include collaboration, advocacy, and systemic change (Young et al., 2015).

The research suggested that school counselors must be collaborative (ASCA, 2021a). This collaboration is accomplished with their administration to effectively develop goals for the school and students (Lambie & Stickl Haugen, 2021; Sink, 2016). Similarly, school counselors must collaborate with the community to be brokers of community resources (Gysbers, 2010b).

A second characteristic the literature suggested was that school counselors must be advocates. The ASCA national model contains strategies for school counselors to deliver direct and indirect services to students to provide leadership through advocacy (ASCA, 2022). School counselors are prompted to use their advocacy to help first-generation students develop college knowledge, meet the needs of all students in crisis, and advocate for their professional identity (Levy & Lemberger-Truelove, 2020).

A third characteristic that frequently emerged in the literature was that school counselors address and create systemic change in schools (ASCA, 2021a). The professional behavior of systemic change is embedded in the school counselor's role (Levy & Lemberger-Truelove, 2020). In the capacity of change agents, school counselors serve as individuals who strive to enhance equity and access, achievement, and opportunities for every student they engage with (ASCA, 2023e).

Adversity in School Counseling

Adversity in school counseling often begins because the role of these professionals is viewed differently by the people they encounter daily (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). Although ASCA has provided a definition for the role of school counselors, it is common for individuals in this profession to encounter challenges when trying to fully define their role (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Havlik et al., 2019). School counselors are still viewed by many as guidance counselors; ASCA changed the job title in 1990 (Zyromski et al., 2019). The change in name for school counselors marked a shift in the nature of their work. However, because of preconceived notions and traditional ideals associated with their previous title, it has been challenging for some to fully understand the evolving responsibilities of school counselors (ASCA, 2023d). If the

educator or community member the school counselor works with is unfamiliar with the ASCA model of school counseling, then the school counselor could have problems with how they do their job. In addition, the administrator they work with can sometimes create adversity by assigning them to tasks that are not school counseling such as bus or cafeteria duty, test administration, and substitute teaching (Barnett, 2010; Bemak, 2000).

School counselor caseloads are another adversity they encounter. The National average for school counselor's ratio in 2021-2022 was 408:1 (ASCA, n.d.-c). ASCA suggests that the ratio should be 250:1; however, only two states follow this recommendation, New Hampshire, and Vermont (ASCA, n.d.-c, n.d.-d). Some states, like Indiana; are as high as 694:1, and others; like Vermont, have a ratio of 186:1 (ASCA, n.d.-c). The student to counselor ratio in grades K-8 varies from as low as 613 students per counselor to as high as 787 students per counselor and in grades 9-12 it ranges from as low as 204 students per counselor to as high as 243 per counselor on a national average (ASCA, 2023b). The concern regarding caseloads is that the school counselors cannot provide the assistance needed to students; however, strides have been made to reduce caseloads (Havlik et al., 2019; Whiston, 2002).

ASCA is clear about the school counselor's role (ASCA, 2023e); however, as stated, that role is sometimes misunderstood, which can lead to the counselor taking on jobs that are not theirs. ASCA documents suggest that the school counselor does short-term counseling, advocacy work, data analysis, and is a systems change agent (ASCA, 2023e; Havlik et al., 2019). These terms take on individual meanings to the individual school counselors and, at times, can be confusing for veteran school counselors, let alone new school counselors who are trying to keep their job.

Leadership

Because school counselors are leaders at their school sites, the types, and styles of leadership they can use are reviewed in the following section of this study. In addition, the researcher explores the obstacles that periodically stand in the way of school counselors exercising their roles in alignment with ASCA standards (Association, 2019a).

Change Leader

A change leader positively influences transformation (Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010). Change leaders hear the call for change and initiate it; as discussed in *True North* (George, 2007), this does not have to come from someone in a leadership role; it can come from anyone who sees that a change needs to be made. In the book *True North*, Georg (2007) discussed being a leader in the seat they are in and that they lead in four directions. Lead yourself first, lead your boss, peers, and subordinates. While leading in these four directions, having various skills and essential characteristics of effective leadership are necessary. School counselors who are effective change leaders take responsibility for their leadership and have clear and focused goals making certain their leadership follows a true north approach (Strear et al., 2018). School counselors can create change through leadership skills gained in their education and their relationship with their district or site boss (Young et al., 2015).

Transformational Leader

A transformational leader, in their interactions with followers, prioritizes the well-being and needs of their team members, while also fostering awareness about the importance of individuals in the overall organization (Hay, 2006). Transformational leaders operate well in close relationships while inspiring and motivating followers

(Aarons, 2006). The theory behind a transformational leader is based on four components: innovation, creativity, idealized influence, and individualized consideration (Eisenbeiss et al., 2008). When choosing to be a transformational leader, school counselors know that they are in this position for a long-term investment (Lowe et al., 2017). Their role as transformational leaders correlates to their role as professional school counselors; they address issues of students that include learning outcomes, college and career opportunities, and social and emotional well-being (ASCA, 2023e; Lowe et al., 2017). Another aspect of the school counselor transformational leadership is that they inspire others into action or make changes (Lowe, 2016).

Conceptual Foundation: Exemplary School Counselors and Adversity

The characteristics of a transformational leader relate to the theoretical foundation that Maxwell (2021) suggested is pertinent for leaders when facing adversity. There are advantages to adversity and good leaders will utilize the adversities to rise up. Several advantages Maxwell (2021) acknowledges include the idea that adversity will guide the leader to self-discovery and can open doors to more opportunities. Finally, Maxwell suggested that people need to look for the benefits that adversity offers and leaders should capitalize on the adversity and use it as a stepping-stone to opportunities for the organization or themselves.

Six Practices of Exemplary Leadership in Adverse Situations

There are six leadership practices that Maxwell (2021) also recommended leaders use in the face of adverse organizational conditions. These practices include the following: (a) define reality, (b) remind stakeholders of the big picture, (c) help

employees develop a plan, (d) help them make good choices, (e) value and promote teamwork, and (f) give them hope.

1. Define Reality

In this practice, effective leaders help the followers understand what is changing in the organization, identify ways to navigate organizational chaos and guide people to overcome adverse situations (Maxwell, 2021). The foundation to being an effective leader is thinking through the situation, defining it, and establishing a clear and visible mission (Hsieh & Drucker, 1988). Defining reality involves facing difficult truths and learning how to utilize vision to inspire new approaches (Senge et al., 2019).

2. Remind Stakeholders of the Big Picture

A leader's role is to keep the big picture in the forefront, which means keeping the vision of the organization in mind for all stakeholders (Maxwell, 2021). They are the communicators of the vision while helping others see the vision too. As a leader sustaining, a shared vision is most important because oftentimes the answers are not clear when challenges arise. Leaders must develop and share their vision with the team.

One of the five effective leadership practices Kouzes and Posner (2006) identified was that peak performance in organizations can come from an inspiring shared vision (Leech & Fulton, 2008). A leader, as Benge (2014) said, is someone who has a vision that is shared with those they are leading and teaching.

3. Help Employees Develop a Plan

Developing strategies to remove the organization from tricky situations takes planning, developing a part of where the organization's next step is and the leader and his or her leadership team leading the way (Maxwell, 2021). Leaders work to create a space

in which their team can come together to speak freely, think deeply, explore options, and search for changes that will create cycles of action and reflection (Senge et al., 2019).

4. Help Them Make Good Choices

Good choices determine people's fate (Maxwell, 2021). Maxwell (2021) stated that oftentimes people do not get to choose things in life, but what matters is what they get from what is chosen. The choices made can position the leader to optimize the fate of the organization in overcoming the obstacles to success. Maxwell (2021) suggested that if leaders have positioned themselves well, they should help others navigate the rough waters. Good choices can mean that a leader is choosing between desirable and less desirable alternatives to do what is right for the organization (White et al., 2016).

5. Value and Promote Teamwork

Through adversity the team needs to work together to emerge from what is troubling the organization's productivity be it finances, lack of productivity, limited time, or leadership challenges (Maxwell, 2021). The leader's responsibility is to promote teamwork and ensure that the team members are working together. In addition, one's leadership courage makes them sustainable with "continuous improvement, adaptation, and collective problem-solving in the face of complex challenges that keep arising" (Fullan, 2005, p. 22).

6. Give Them Hope

Hope is the foundation for change, it can help people to move forward and succeed. Gardner (as cited in Maxwell, 2021) stated, "The first and last task of a leader is to keep hope alive-the hope that we can finally find our way through to a better world- despite the day's action, despite our own inertness and shallowness and wavering

resolve” (p. 11). Leaders infuse hope into their people (Maxwell, 2021). Leaders hope for something better. Batagiannis (2007) suggested that the third component for courageous leaders was hope, “hope, which both comprises vision and permits its existence” (p. 159). Hope is something that a leader has even when feeling despair, and yet they are willing to overcome.

Statement of the Problem

Some leaders face challenges, disappointments, and barriers that deter their ability to achieve organizational goals, and others forge through despite organizational challenges and exceed their organizational and professional standards, goals, or outcomes (Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010; White et al., 2016). School counselors are school leaders who often face adversity of role confusion (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Havlik et al., 2019). Some problems can defeat and upset leaders, which can cause organizations to experience declining revenue, decreased productivity, decreased employee motivation, disruption of employee collaboration and teamwork, and failures that impede organizational goals or achievement of professional standards or outcomes (Rayle, 2006). Unfortunately, limited research has been conducted about the personal qualities that school counselor leaders must possess to achieve professional standards or outcomes despite adversity.

Current school counseling research has discussed the daily barriers that school counselors face to do their job. The ratio of school counselors to students is too high in 48 states, and it exceeds the recommended ratio set by the American School Counseling Association (ASCA, n.d.-b; Whiston, 2002). The administration lacks a comprehensive understanding of the extensive responsibilities and role of school counselors (Lambie &

Williamson, 2004; Whiston, 2002). Additionally, because administration and other school staff employees and community members lack a clear understanding of the duties and responsibilities associated with the role, school counselors are assigned duties that do not belong to them (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). School counselors can be seen as an additional body on a school campus to help with supervision, proctoring tests, and substitute teaching. As a result of the challenges they encounter, school counselors often face adversity in their profession. However, they play a crucial role in implanting the standards required for their profession.

As a result of the adversity that school counselors face, additional research on the essential characteristics school counselors possess that will help them to meet and achieve their professional standards is needed. For example, Hay (2006) discussed whether examining the transformational characteristics of leadership could help a school counselor leader face adversity. Alternatively, in *Leading in Tough Times*, Maxwell (2021) offered six ways to lead through adversity. This research study focused on three of Maxwell's strategies he offered for leaders to lead through and navigate organizational adversity.

This research is needed because school counselors are necessary to teach the 55 million (Data Reporting Office, n.d.-b) students in the United States how to achieve their best academic, college and career, and social-emotional self (ASCA, 2022). Therefore, school counselors should be able to understand their job and the characteristics they need to possess to adhere to and exceed their professional standards. Furthermore, post COVID-19, students have experienced mental health difficulties and school counselors need to be prepared to help through this time (Zhu et al., 2022). School counselors can

help with attaining academics; through teaching skills and course placement in high school to prepare the students for their future. Because COVID-19 has affected academic achievement (Bailey et al., 2021), school counselors can be poised to help students achieve their highest potential if they are allowed to fulfill their roles.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this Delphi multivariable research study was for school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel to identify the personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess in their organizations to lead through the adversity of role confusion by using Maxwell's (2021) *Leading in Tough Times* strategies to include

- connecting their roles to the organization's vision or big picture,
- promoting their roles through organizational teamwork, and
- making good choices or strategic organizational decisions, to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.

The second purpose of this Delphi multivariable research study was for school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel to describe the selected actions school counselors might take to connect their school counseling roles to the organizational vision or big picture to promote their roles through teamwork and to make good choices or strategic decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.

Overarching Questions

1. What would school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel identify as personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess in their organizations to lead through the adversity of role confusion by using Maxwell's (2021) *Leading in Tough Times* to include connecting their roles to the organization's vision or big

picture, promoting their roles through organizational teamwork, and making good choices or strategic organizational decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?

2. What are selected actions described by school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel that school counselor leaders might take to connect their school counseling roles to the organizational vision or big picture to promote their roles through teamwork and to make good choices or strategic decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?

Research Questions

1. What personal qualities do school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel identify school counselor leaders must possess in their organizations to lead through the adversity of role confusion by connecting their roles to the organization's vision or big picture to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
2. What personal qualities do school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel identify school counselor leaders must possess in their organizations to lead through the adversity of role confusion by promoting their roles through organizational teamwork to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
3. What personal qualities do school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel identify school counselor leaders must possess in their organizations to lead through the adversity of role confusion by making good choices or strategic organizational decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
4. What are selected actions described by school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel that school counselor leaders might take to connect their school counseling roles

to the organizational vision or big picture to promote their roles through teamwork and to make good choices or strategic decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?

Significance of the Study

ASCA suggests that school counselors hold a master's degree with a pupil personnel services credential; some states have different qualifications (ASCA, n.d.-d). To obtain this degree, prospective school counselors must attend an accredited university, complete coursework, and complete fieldwork hours. Although the universities are evaluated by their accrediting agencies for their coursework, the fieldwork hours are arranged with school districts. It is suggested that the supervisor should be an exemplar model for the profession; however, there could be varying degrees of supervisors and their understanding of the job (Lambie & Stickl Haugen, 2021). The disjointed approach to educating future school counselors may not adequately prepare them for their future profession.

The significance of this study was that it identified the personal qualities that school counselors must possess that help them to achieve their professional standards despite adversity. Maxwell (2021) suggested in times of adversity that effective leaders can lead through adversity by supporting the organization's vision, valuing, and promoting teamwork and by making appropriate decisions. This study aims to elicit from counselors the personal qualities they must possess when leading their organizations through the adversity of counselor role confusion in school organizations by being in the forefront of these three Maxwell strategies while at the same time clarifying for the stakeholders they work with that meeting and exceeding their counselor professional

standards is an important component of utilizing the strategies Maxwell recommends. Current research regarding school counselors has discussed their significant adversities (Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Zyromski et al., 2019). School counselors face a multitude of adversities, such as a lack of understanding of their job, their caseloads being too big, and being assigned duties that do not belong to them (ASCA, n.d.-b; Lambie & Williamson, 2004). While facing these adversities, they are tasked with meeting ASCA academic, college and career, and social-emotional learning domains applicable to every student (ASCA, 2022).

Identifying the characteristics school counselors possess that can shed light on the personal qualities necessary to overcome adversity can help school counselors in the United States related to helping students navigate their education successfully. Fifty-five million students in the United States (Data Reporting Office, n.d.-b) have experienced an education that many have not experienced in recent generations. COVID-19 has created many learning gaps and social-emotional needs that people have not seen before (Zhu et al., 2022), and school counselors who possess expert qualities will be able to persevere through the adversities they face to help their students be successful. Identifying the key qualities will contribute to school counselors being successful and not experiencing burnout in their job (Kim & Lambie, 2018). Kim and Lambie (2018) suggested that school counselors expected to do noncounselor duties have large caseloads, struggle with role conflict, and experience burnout.

A goal of this study was to help human resources in school districts and school counselor programs because there is a projected increase of school counselors between 2021 and 2023 by 9.6% (U.S. News, n.d.). Through identifying qualities expert school

counselor leaders possess, this study could be a recipe for qualifications and characteristics for hiring the best school counselor for a district and enrolling a potential school counselor into a counseling program that develops the characteristics they need to be successful in their career. The study could guide ASCA and state organizations to create resources that could guide university programs or school districts into creating professional development or mentoring programs. Additionally, if someone is already employed as a school counselor and is struggling with meeting their district's expectations, this study may guide them to enhance their skills.

Definitions

Theoretical

Adversity. A state or instance of serious or continued difficulty or misfortune. There are six types of adversity: physical, mental, emotional, social, spiritual, and financial (Fort Behavioral Health, 2023; Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a).

Leadership. Someone competent, committed, and strong of character. They lead by knowing the way, going the way, and showing the way (Maxwell, 2021).

Mental health. Emotional, psychological, and social well-being (World Health Organization, 2023). It affects how a person thinks, feels, and acts.

Motivation. A person's interest or enthusiasm in something (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-c).

School counselor. Certified/licensed educators who improve student success for all students by implementing a data-informed school counseling program (ASCA, n.d.-d).

Teamwork. A combined action of a group of people (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-d).

Operational

American School Counselor Association (ASCA). ASCA supports school counselors' efforts to help students focus on academic, career, and social and emotional development. Hence, the students succeed in school and are prepared to lead fulfilling lives as responsible members of society (ASCA, n.d.-a).

ASCA ethical standards. The ASCA ethical standards specify the obligation to the principles of ethical behavior necessary to maintain the highest standards of integrity, leadership, and professionalism for school counselors (ASCA, 2022a).

ASCA national model. A publication that reflects a comprehensive approach to design, implement, and assess a school counseling program that improves student success. The publication defines the school counselor's role, reflects current education practices, and will assist school counselors in developing an exemplary school counseling program (ASCA, 2022).

ASCA professional standards and competencies. The standards and competencies that outline the mindsets and behaviors school counselors need to meet the rigorous demands of the school counseling profession and the needs of K-12 students (ASCA, 2019a).

ASCA student standards: Mindsets and behaviors for student success. This document describes the knowledge, attitudes, and skills students need to achieve academic success, college and career readiness, and social/emotional development (ASCA, 2021a).

California Association of School Counselors (CASC). The professional state-level organization of school counselors in California (CASC, n.d.-a; n.d.-b; n.d.-c; n.d.-d; n.d.-e; n.d.-g).

California professional standards for education leaders. These are the standards that educational leaders must know and be able to do to move into sustainable, effective practice. They describe the critical areas of leadership for administrators and offer a structure for developing and supporting education leaders throughout their careers (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2014).

California standards for the teaching profession. The California standards for the teaching profession guide teachers in their teaching profession (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2009). There are six domains of the teaching practice: (a) engaging and supporting all students in learning, (b) creating and maintaining effective environments for student learning, (c) understanding and organizing subject matter for student learning, (d) planning instruction and designing learning experiences for all students, (e) assessing students for learning, and (f) developing as a professional educator.

Contract language. An agreement between two or more parties to do or not do something (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-b).

Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP). Schools that successfully implement the ASCA national model framework and show evidence of direct and indirect services to students, program planning and improved student outcomes in the school counseling program earn this designation (ASCA, 2019b).

School counselor role confusion. The struggle to establish and identify clear duties, title, and services provided by the school counselor (ASCA, 2023a).

Delimitations

This study was delimited to school counselors with a master's degree who work in Riverside County in school districts in the state of California in ninth through 12th grade.

Organization of the Study

This research study comprises five chapters, a reference list, and appendices. Chapter I establishes the context by introducing the research study. Chapter I provides an overview of the study, starting with the background information and presenting the research problem. It includes the purpose statement, research questions, and highlights the significance of the problem. Additionally, the chapter defines key terms and delimits the scope of the study. Finally, it outlines the organization of the study as a whole. Chapter II comprises a literature review that delves into the historical aspects of school counseling, emphasizing the role of school counselors. It explores the challenges and adversities that school counselors encounter in their professional role, while also examining the impact of leadership in the field of school counseling. Chapter III provides an overview of the study methodology, focusing on implementation of the Delphi method. It elucidates the selection of the population, sample, the instrumentation utilized, and the process of data collection and analysis. Chapter IV reviews the results from each round of the Delphi study and presents and analyzes the data. Chapter V critically analyzes significant findings derived from the study, as well as any unexpected discoveries. It presents a comprehensive overall conclusion of the findings for school

counselors and their employers. Additionally, the chapter offers recommendations for future research in this area of study.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The past history of our profession cannot be changed, but the visions and dreams of dedicated leaders and members of our profession can redirect school counseling in the future.

Coy et al., 1991, p. 3

School counselors are the heartbeat of a campus; their role suggests that they should be helping students with their academics, postsecondary options, and social/emotional well-being (Blake, 2020). Similarly it is advised that school counselors work in the three tiers of multi-tiered systems of support. Tier 1 is whole class research-based instruction, Tier 2 is targeted at small group interventions for at-risk students, and Tier 3 is individualized intensive interventions (Hatch, n.d.). It is within the three tiers that school counselors provide services at varying levels of support. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends that they work in these three domains and in three tiers to help students attain their goals. School counselors work to improve the lives of students and are especially capable of helping students who face trauma because of adverse childhood experiences while empowering these students to succeed (Henry & Bryan, 2021).

The profession of a school counselor is complex. It is advised that school counselors unite community stakeholders, schools, and families to establish a program that incorporates protective factors and developmental assets, which are essential for students to flourish. They must do this while being an educator, leader, collaborator, and advocate not only for their students but also for themselves and the profession (Henry & Bryan, 2021).

In 2015, school counselors received much-needed attention through the Reach Higher Initiative. This initiative seeks to help every student navigate the college application process (Better Make Room, n.d.). One aspect of the college navigation process involves strengthening student support systems by reinforcing the capabilities of the school counseling profession. This commitment, according to former First Lady Michelle Obama, is accomplished by participating in the national School Counselor of the Year ceremony and celebration along with supporting and uplifting students and educators. In Appendix A, the synthesis matrix identifies themes found in the references used for the literature review.

History of School Counseling

In the 1800s child labor was rampant and there was an outcry for reform. It is in this century that the school counseling profession began (Schmidt, 2008; Wingfield et al., 2010). The factory system employed children who were frequently sold by their parents for physical work or sexual purposes. Protection was needed for children, and this was the motivation to keep them in school (McGowan, 2021). Students needed to stay longer in school to learn more skills to prepare them for a more diverse workforce.

School counseling began with two different perspectives: first to develop students' capacities and second to make the educational world a better place for children (Whiston, 2002). During the initial years of the 20th century, Parsons, who is widely regarded as the father of vocational guidance, emphasized the need for skilled professionals to administer vocational guidance services (Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Schmidt, 2008; Wingfield et al., 2010). In 1908, Parsons established the Boston

Vocational Bureau to help young men choose their careers (Coy et al., 1991; Schmidt, 2008).

The vocational guidance movement began as an enhancement for the postschool placement of students and appropriate client-occupation placement matches (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). The inception of vocational guidance occurred in the early 1900s (Gysbers, 2010a; Lambie & Williamson, 2004; McGowan, 2021; Schmidt, 2008; Wingfield et al., 2010). The establishment of school counseling can be attributed to the division of labor, advancements in technology, the expansion of vocational education, and the increasing prevalence of contemporary democratic systems (Gysbers, 2010a). The purpose of vocational guidance, which school counselors were hired to provide, was to populate the workforce. The growth of this industrial era changed the social fabric of both urban and rural areas (McGowan, 2021). Paisley and McMahon (2001) observed that although the school counseling profession had its roots in youth vocational and moral growth, throughout the decades of the 20th century the profession expanded to include areas influenced by “the social, political, economic, and psychological issues facing schools, communities, families, children, and adolescents” (p. 106).

Parsons authored a book, *Choosing a Vocation*, in which he presented three essential factors for selecting a vocation (Schmidt, 2008). These factors were (a) clear self-understanding of one’s aptitudes, abilities, interests, resources, and limitations; (b) knowledge of the requirements, advantages, disadvantages, and compensation for different types of employment; and (c) an understanding of the relationship between these two groups of facts. Vocational work is still being done today in schools in the domain of college and career. Today school counselors use websites such as California Colleges or

College Board to gain insights into their abilities and the requirements needed to perform their duties (Big Future, n.d.; CaliforniaColleges.edu, n.d.).

Other notable pioneers in the field of school counseling were Davis, Goodwin, Reed, and Weaver (Coy et al., 1991; Schmidt, 2008). Davis from Detroit, Michigan is recognized for his instrumental role in formalizing and incorporating guidance into the accepted curriculum of schools (Coy et al., 1991). Davis conceived and implemented a curriculum that included a specialized course on vocational and moral guidance. This course, taught during English period per week, aimed to provide students with essential skills and values. Reed led the development of systematic vocational guidance in Seattle, Washington (Schmidt, 2008). Weaver gained recognition and became known for his remarkable endeavors at the Boys High School of Brooklyn. In 1911, he successfully established the first-ever guidance services in New York City. Similarly, Goodwin organized a systemwide guidance program in schools in Cincinnati, Ohio.

The early counseling movement gained strength from the founding of the National Vocational Guidance Association in 1913 (Cinotti, 2014; Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Schmidt, 2008). The membership of the National Vocational Guidance Association was composed of professionals from education, psychology, community service, business, and government (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). Their significant work included publishing the *National Vocational Guidance Bulletin*, which spread news and trends regarding vocational guidance (Schmidt, 2008). This publication still exists and is now known as the *Career Development Quarterly* and is published by the National Career Development Association.

During the 1920s, the field of vocational guidance experienced significant expansion because of the influence of several social and educational movements both within and beyond the realm of education (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Gysbers, 2010a; Schmidt, 2008). These included the mental health movement and the emergence of the psychometric movement, which was stimulated by the advancements in intelligence testing pioneered by Binet in France. These developments played a crucial role in driving the growth and increased importance of vocational guidance during this period. As a result, vocational guidance started to take on new responsibilities, such as mental health, progressive education, child development, and the psychometric (measurement theory) movement (Gysbers, 2010a, 2010b; Whiston, 2002; Wingfield et al., 2010). This new take on vocational guidance was introduced by Dewey's cognitive developmental movement (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). These practices are still used in the context of school counseling.

World War I and World War II impacted school counseling because, out of necessity, the U.S. military needed to understand and support the competencies of their soldiers (Schmidt, 2008; Wingfield et al., 2010). The assessments administered to soldiers during that time took the guesswork out of identifying characteristics of the military service men for the millions of soldiers who would serve in the wars (Wingfield et al., 2010). The assessment procedures that the U.S. Army administered were adapted from French psychologist, Binet and then expanded by Otis and Terman (Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Schmidt, 2008). In addition, the intelligence tests that were developed by Otis led to the military's *Army Alpha Examination* and the *Army Beta Examination* (Schmidt, 2008). This testing movement spearheaded by the military further contributed

to the advancement of guidance counseling approaches that emphasized the evaluation of student traits and characteristics essential for making informed career choices and setting appropriate goals. The military-driven testing movement played a significant role in shaping the development of vocational guidance practices, enabling individuals to assess their abilities and aptitudes to determine suitable career paths.

In the 1930s, the concept of guidance counseling emerged, and discussions took place regarding school counseling duties and training, which became structured under pupil personnel services (Gysbers, 2010a). Leading up to World War II, education witnessed changes in the practice of guidance counseling because of influences from Rogers (Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Schmidt, 2008; Whiston, 2002). Rogers' work helped school counselors move away from counselor-centered models toward developmentally oriented helping relationships (Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Schmidt, 2008). According to Coy et al. (1991), "The most profound influence in changing the course and direction of the entire guidance movement in the mid and late 1940s was Carl Rogers" (p. 16). The movement from the counselor-centered model to the developmentally oriented model helped the "profession move from strict information gathering, decision-making, and problem-solving approaches to services intended to meet broader developmental needs of an expanded student population" (Schmidt, 2008, p. 6). Rogers emphasized the importance of guidance counselors empathizing with their clients and understanding their unique experiences in the world. By creating a secure and supportive environment, counselors can help clients progress toward self-actualization. This entails assisting clients in their personal growth journey, enhancing their coping

skills for current issues and future challenges, and ultimately facilitating their development toward reaching their full potential (Lambie & Williamson, 2004).

In the 1940s and 1950s, there was debate about school guidance's purpose, organization, and operation. There was also continued discussion about terminology, training the school counselor personnel, and the organizational structure (Gysbers, 2010a). During this time, there were two significant pieces of federal legislation introduced regarding school counselor training and the evolution of guidance in schools. First in 1946, the U.S. Congress passed the *George-Barden Act*, which allocated financial support for guidance and counseling services (Schmidt, 2008). The second piece of legislation was formed in 1952, The American School Counselor Association (ASCA), and this formalized the school counselors' role, strategies for professional development, resources for research, and advocacy for the profession's identity (Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Zyromski et al., 2019). It was also in the 1950s when the beginnings of elementary school guidance counseling began (Gysbers, 2010a). Before the 1950s there was little attention given to diversity issues (Wingfield et al., 2010). Conversely, mental health workers became the experts at the time and responded to tensions from the civil rights movement, family issues, and the increase in crime. Because of the societal changes and the response into the first decade of the 21st century there was a national priority focused on academic achievement for all students, particularly for low-income students and minority students (Gysbers, 2010b).

With the growth of the school counseling field, school counselors began to focus on ways to reach students with individualized problems and concerns (Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Schmidt, 2008; Wingfield et al., 2010). During the 1950s, there was a

significant emphasis placed on encouraging school counselors to take on leadership roles and provide consultative services for all stakeholders involved in the education system. Additionally, they were also encouraged to offer both small group counseling sessions and individual counseling services for students. This approach aimed to ensure that students received comprehensive support and guidance to thrive academically, emotionally, and socially. As the profession flourished, educational stakeholders began to criticize the finite work of guidance in the school counseling role and requested that counselors at school sites play a bigger role in curriculum development for mental health services.

With the launch of the Russian Sputnik in 1957 and the passing of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958, which promoted achievement in mathematics and science, counseling duties were expanded to be a part of the school team who assisted students in areas of guidance counseling to promote student achievement (Coy et al., 1991; Gysbers, 2010a; Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Whiston, 2002; Wingfield et al., 2010). The passage of the NDEA was an inadvertent advancement in school counseling because the new legislation was “intended to identify, guide, and support students with high aptitudes in the areas of math and science so that they could become future technological innovators” (Lambie & Williamson, 2004, p. 126). A concurrent goal of student counseling assessments was to prepare the students to choose their career or college path after graduating from high school (Schmidt, 2008).

The new terminology for school counseling that began in the 1960s was called Developmental Guidance (Wingfield et al., 2010). The NDEA contributed additional funding to provide school counseling training for elementary and middle school

counselors with these outcomes in mind (Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Schmidt, 2008; Wingfield et al., 2010). The establishment of developmental guidance during this time period provided school counselors with the opportunity to adopt a preventative and proactive approach to school counseling which could reach all students (Wingfield et al., 2010).

The Vocational Education Act of 1963, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the Vocational Education Amendments of 1968, and the Education Amendments of 1976 promoted an expansion of the school counselor's guidance role focusing on the college in the 20th century (Gysbers, 2010a; Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Schmidt, 2008). In the 1980s and 1990s, various social factors such as gender equity, multiculturalism, diversity, sexual orientation, and social class significantly influenced the field of guidance and counseling (Gysbers, 2010a, 2010b). It was also in the 1980s when school counselors were asked to start supporting a comprehensive school counseling program that was more proactive and preventative (Sink, 2016).

It was in 1990 that the American School Counselor Association board unanimously adopted the term "school counseling program" School reform was at the forefront of leader's agendas, which resulted in "A Nation at Risk: The Imperatives for Reform" (Gysbers, 2010a). During this time, the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development published "Multicultural Counseling Competencies and Standards." In 1996 a 5-year initiative was undertaken with the goal of revolutionizing the training of school counselors and transforming the landscape of school counseling. Gysbers, (2010a) stated, "The goal was to help low-income and minority youth improve academically and to close the academic achievement gap" (p. 132). As a result, public

education started to receive considerable attention in the first decade of the 21st century, and school reform intensified.

Gysbers and Henderson deserve much of the credit for the professional direction that school counseling has taken in the 21st century by developing a comprehensive program model for school counselors and researching the program's effectiveness (Schmidt, 2008). Gysbers is a curators' professor in the department of educational, school and counseling psychology at the University of Missouri. Gysbers is the author of 88 articles, 36 chapters in published books, 15 monographs, and 19 books with research and teaching interests in career development, career counseling and school guidance, and counseling program development, management, and evaluation (Gysbers, 2010b). Henderson is a director of guidance in San Antonio, Texas who helps to provide structure for school counseling program development and to set the stage for reform in the profession (Schmidt, 2008).

This intensification focused on the reduction of dropout rates and increasing graduation rates. With the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, academic achievement became the priority in education (Gysbers, 2010a; Wingfield et al., 2010; Zyromski et al., 2021). This effect on school counseling came with a continued focus on developing, implementing, and evaluating comprehensive guidance and counseling programs (Gysbers, 2010a). However, the developmental guidance programs have transformed into comprehensive competency-based school counseling guidance programs (Wingfield et al., 2010).

In addition, issues from the past started to arise again, such as terminology, prior experience, educational reform, legislation and advocacy, standards for preparing school

counselors, roles, and ratios (Gysbers, 2010a; Wingfield et al., 2010). The terminology issue was tied to the role and function of school counselors. Schools continued to struggle with the role definition of a school counselor. Are they guidance experts, both guidance and counseling support teams for students, or are they therapeutic school counselors (Gysbers, 2010a)? The school counselor role was discussed in the educational field, regarding what their major focus should be. Should the school counselor's emphasis be educational (academic), vocational (career), or social/emotional (mental health)? The legislators could not decide which caused confusion for those entering into the profession (Gysbers, 2010a, 2010b).

Apart from clarifying the multiple roles school counselors can play, the National Standards for School Counseling Programs adopted by the American School Counselor Association outline offered a balanced approach to the school counseling role (Paisley & McMahon, 2001). This balanced approach outlines the three domains that schools and counselors need to consider in structuring the school counselor's role at a public-school site. The three domains are academic, college/career, and social/emotional and include counseling strategies necessary to work in these domains. The National Standards for School Counseling that were published by ASCA in 1997 were a response to educational reform (Burnham & Jackson, 2000).

The ASCA national model was initially published in 2003 with the aim of unifying the school counseling profession and enhancing student outcomes (Mason et al., 2023). The ASCA national model provides guidelines for professional identity and the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program, outlining the appropriate and inappropriate roles, purposes, and goals in this context (Gibbons & Williams, 2011;

Mason et al., 2023; Randick et al., 2018; Sink, 2016). The ASCA national model outlines the job duties to include counseling, consultation, curriculum, and coordination duties (ASCA, 2019b; Randick et al., 2018).

The ASCA national model serves as a guiding framework that brings clarity to the multifaceted role of school counselors (ASCA, 2019b; Randick et al., 2018). According to this model, the responsibilities of school counselors encompass a range of crucial tasks. These include offering individual and small group counseling sessions, providing consultation services to various stakeholders, delivering classroom lessons, analyzing disaggregated data to identify areas for improvement, designing targeted interventions, and facilitating comprehensive school-wide responses for crisis. There is another recommendation from ASCA that school counselors spend 80% or more of their time in direct services to students using the strategies from the domains shared previously and no more than 20% of their time in indirect services with others on behalf of students in program planning (ASCA, 2019b; Randick et al., 2018). Indirect services might include consultation, collaboration, and referrals performed on behalf of the student (ASCA, 2023e). m

The school counseling role has transformed dramatically throughout the years. As a result of the emergence of this role from the 1900s to today, and although there are official standards adopted currently for the profession, educators who are not school counselors may still not be clear on what role school counselors should be expected to play at schools. Additionally, because of the school counseling history some school counselors may not be clear on their role.

To see the major shifts in the role of the school counselor over time, Table 1 identifies the major models, period of time, role of the school counselor in each period, and the training required.

ASCA National Model

The ASCA national model has four components: define, manage, deliver, and assess (ASCA, 2019b; Mason et al., 2023). According to Mason et al. (2023), “ASCA has characterized *define* as the understanding and knowledge of professional and student standards; *manage* as program focus and planning; *deliver* as focus on direct and indirect student services; and *assess* as program and school counselor assessment and appraisal” (p. 2). School counselors do this through a data-driven model that is outcome based while using academic achievement, attendance, and disciplinary referrals as their evaluation tools (Zyromski et al., 2021). The ASCA national model is widely recognized as the leading framework for school counselors to implement a comprehensive and data-driven school counseling program that follows a systematic approach (Cinotti, 2014; Mason et al., 2023; Strear et al., 2018). For school counselors who are seeking recognition of an exemplary school counseling program ASCA has created an award, Recognized ASCA Model Program ([RAMP]; ASCA, 2019b). RAMP is an award that showcases successful school counseling services, improved outcomes, and program planning.

Guiding ASCA Elements

The ASCA professional standards and competencies are the guiding principles school counselors review when learning about their work and reflecting on their job (ASCA, 2019a). The professional standards outline the mindsets and behaviors school counselors need to meet the demands of the profession (ASCA, 2019a). The standards

Table 1*Model of School Counseling, Era, Roles, and Training*

Major models of school counseling	Vocational guidance	Mental health movement in school counseling	Developmental guidance	Comprehensive competency-based school counseling programs
Period	1900-1940s	1950s-1960s	1960s-1980s	1990s-2000s
Role	Match a student's personal characteristics with an occupation. Goals include assist students in finding a career	Provide remedial services. Goals include help close achievement gaps, especially culturally diverse, low-income, English language learners, and differing ability children	Primary prevention focus. Integrate guidance and counseling programs within the larger educational program. Goals include increase student achievement, provide more equitable services to students, broader impact on student development and career decision-making, student satisfaction, and safe, orderly, connected school climate	Integral to students' daily educational environment and achievement accountability. Goals include partner and leader in student achievement with school stakeholders, providing vocational, remedial, and developmental interventions based on student data
Training	Training in assessment of occupational selection and placement for all students	Training in prevention and intervention skills to close achievement gaps	Training focuses on identifying the developmental needs of students to meet the diverse needs of students	Multicultural training that encourages school counselors to advocate for the academic achievement of all students

Note. Adapted from “Counselors as Leaders in Schools,” by R. J. Wingfield, R. F. Reese, and C. A. West-Olatunji, 2010, *Florida Journal of Educational Administration & Policy*, 4(1), pp. 114–130 (<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ911435.pdf>). This is a timeline of the school counseling movement. The ASCA national model incorporates these various roles into its framework and culminates these roles into one of leadership.

help to ensure that new and experienced school counselors are prepared to establish, maintain, and enhance their school counseling program by addressing all three ASCA domains.

The ASCA Student Standards: Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success describes the knowledge, attitudes, and skills students need to achieve academic success, college and career readiness, and social/emotional development (ASCA, 2021a). There are 36 ASCA student standards that identify and describe what students should be able to demonstrate as a result of the school counseling program. The mindsets section states what school counselors believe and lists seven mindsets. The behaviors section states that school counselors will demonstrate standards in designing, implementing, and assessing a school counseling program, and there are three categories. The three categories in the behaviors section are the professional foundation, direct and indirect student services, and planning and assessment. The ASCA “Professional Foundation and Planning and Assessment” also has nine standards, and direct and indirect student services have six (ASCA, 2019a).

The “ASCA Standards for School Counselor Preparation Programs” is a guide for universities that are preparing new school counselors (ASCA, 2022c; Lambie & Stickl Haugen, 2021). There are four sections with seven standards attached. They are

- Section 1: Learner and learning
 - Standard 1: Foundational knowledge
- Section 2: Content
 - Standard 2: Core theories and concepts
 - Standard 3: Instructional and school counseling interventions

- Section 3: Instructional practice
 - Standard 4: Student learning outcomes
 - Standard 5: Designing, implementing, and assessing comprehensive school counseling programs
- Section 4: Professional responsibility
 - Standard 6: Professional practice
 - Standard 7: Ethical practice (ASCA, 2022c).

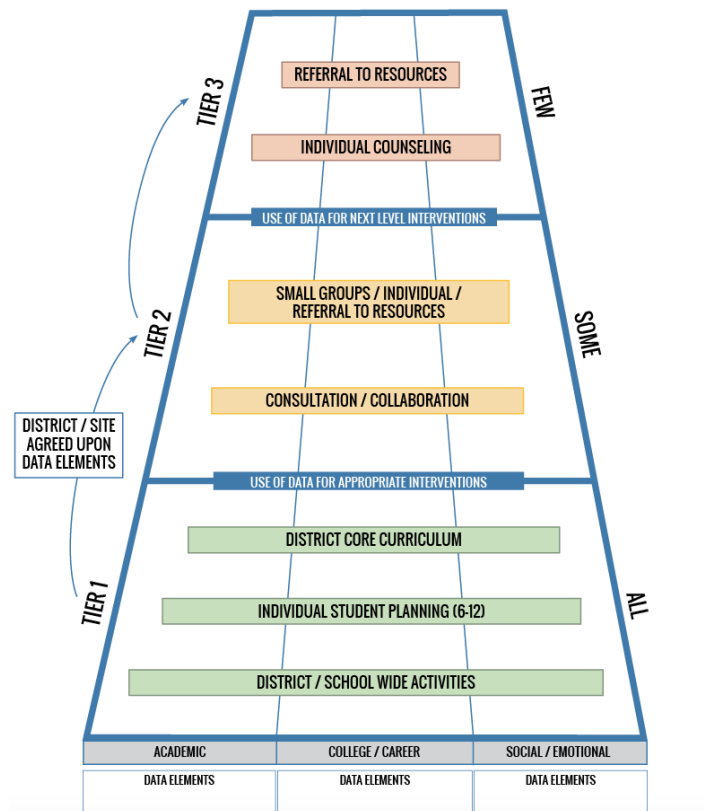
As referenced by the American School Counselor Association, the standards in practice reference four counseling standards that define the profession (ASCA, 2022d). The standards in practice reference four documents, “Eliminating Racism and Bias in Schools: The School Counselor’s Role,” “School Reentry: The School Counselor’s Role,” “Election Conversations: The School Counselor’s Role,” and a fourth one that is under the topic of “Current Issues in Education titled Critical Race Theory” (ASCA, 2022d). The Standards in Practice is a guiding document for school counselors to implement four documents that currently guide their practice.

ASCA has also introduced ASCA ethical standards for school counselors that require counselors to perform specific duties outlined by the ASCA national model that authorizes school counselors to deliver preventative school counseling services (ASCA, 2022a; Mason et al., 2023; Randick et al., 2018). The ethical standards outline how to support students’ academic, career, and social/emotional well-being but they require that school counselors maintain their own wellness (Randick et al., 2018). School counselors are now being asked to function as student advocates and campaign for social justice (McGowan, 2021).

To help school counselors understand the complexities of the profession, Dr. Trish Hatch, who coauthored the ASCA national model and has been a leader in school counseling and advocate for over 30 years created a diagram for school counselors to understand the complexities of the job (Gay, 2021) and to have a road map for the jobs they should be engaged in at schools with students on a daily basis (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Multi-Tiered, Multi-Domain System of Supports



Note. From *Multi-tiered, Multi-domain System of Supports*, by Hatching Results Blog, 2017, p. 3 (<https://www.hatchingresults.com/blog/2017/3/multi-tiered-multi-domain-system-of-supports-by-trish-hatch-phd>).

The diagram shown in Figure 1 helps school counselors create a multi-tiered, multi-domain system of supports framework specifically geared for them to organize a

continuum of core instruction and interventions to meet students' needs (Hatch, 2017). The activities completed in this framework fall within the delivery component of the ASCA national model because it recommends that school counselors spend 80% of their time in direct services and no more than 20% of their time in indirect services with others on behalf of students in program planning (ASCA 2019b; Hatch, 2017). The creation of multi-tiered, multi-domain system of supports was created for school counselors so they could understand their role within the framework of multi-tiered system of supports.

Leadership and School Counselors

A school counselor's role in the 21st century is being called on as a leader throughout the school. They assist in building climate and maintaining home-school collaboration (Wingfield et al., 2010). They are trained to assume leadership roles because they have knowledge regarding awareness and skills that others are not educated about. For example, they have been trained to consider how someone's ethnic identity may impact their development. The ASCA national model emphasizes leadership in school counseling as an integral role because counselors advocate, collaborate, and create systemic change (ASCA, 2019b; Young & Bryan, 2018).

ASCA emphasizes the importance of school counselors taking on a leadership role in their school counseling programs (Lowe et al., 2017; Strear et al., 2018). School counselor leadership is imperative because school counselors implement comprehensive school counselor leadership programs that change student learning outcomes for the positive (Young & Bryan, 2018). Leadership is a significant role for elementary school counselors (Mullen et al., 2019). Leadership may look like facilitating a meeting, sharing effective practices, leading a counseling group, leading staff or parent training, and

leading classroom guidance lessons. The ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies, asks school counselors to demonstrate leadership through the development and implementation of their school counseling program (ASCA, 2019a). School counselors play a crucial role in addressing the diverse issues prevalent in today's schools and should be acknowledged as leaders of their school counseling programs (Lowe et al., 2017).

At the high school level, school counselor leadership takes on a similar role as the elementary school counselors; however, the issues that today's youth are dealing with at the high school level are extremely complex (Lowe et al., 2017). Being a high school counselor leader is a long-term commitment and a long-range view for the needs of the school where they work and for the students they are working with (Lowe et al., 2017). School counselors must have self-leadership skills because they have to teach everyone about their role and advocate for their programs and students (Mullen et al., 2019). For school counselors at the high school, accountability in the profession is extremely important because it validates the counselor's roles and responsibilities (Lowe et al., 2017).

School counselors possess a range of skills, such as counseling, consulting, teaching, advocacy, and research, that enable them to become transformational leaders in their field (Lowe et al., 2017; Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2021). They are trained to facilitate relationships with stakeholders while building rapport and enhancing communication (Lowe et al., 2017). Transformational leadership involves both parties so that they become highly motivated toward working on the same goals (Lowe et al., 2017). School counselors deeply engage with the needs and desires of others in a manner

that leads to transformative growth and development among their followers and team members. Transformational leadership style has the potential for school counselors to promote their school counseling programs to provide maximum support for the diverse clientele of students they currently serve.

However, although professional school counseling standards should guide school counselors in outlining their work and outcomes, the recommended 80% direct service to students is not always followed in schools. School counselors have had a challenging time figuring out their profession and the expectations for their work. Additionally, the problems school counselors face in meeting their professional standards in public schools vary from school to school.

School Counselor Adversity

Maxwell suggested in *Leading in Tough Times* that “Nothing worth having in life comes without effort” (p. 2). School counselors have faced adversity from the onset of their careers. Adversity began because school counselors neglected to take on the leadership role for their job and allowed others to dictate their role and function (Bemak, 2000; Coy et al., 1991). The profession calls for school counselors to be leaders but there is little development for leadership skills in their coursework (Lowe et al., 2017). School counselors have been marginalized in schools (Wingfield et al., 2010). School counselors have been influenced by outside events and external forces (Whiston, 2002).

Adversity takes the form of role ambiguity and what school districts are requiring them to do, including student scheduling, hallway monitoring, and administering tests, that may prevent them from what they should be doing, which is rapport building, consultation, and leadership (Wingfield et al., 2010). School districts require school

counselors to work outside of their roles to do scheduling, maintaining records, and testing (Lowe et al., 2017; Randick et al., 2018). Assigned noncounseling duties include bus or cafeteria duty, test counting and administration, detention monitoring, or substitute teaching in classrooms (Bemak, 2000; Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Rayle, 2006; Strear et al., 2018). There has been role ambiguity since the early days of the guidance movement (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). The school counselors have had a hard time understanding their role which increases the confusion of their role for those that they work with (Gysbers, 2010a).

Adversity also shows up when administrators and other educators are unaware of school counselors training, job duties, or how they can make a difference in the students' lives (Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2021; Randick et al., 2018). Similarly, parents and other interested groups view the school counseling role differently (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). School counselors spend too much time working on clerical and administrative tasks (Coy et al., 1991). Administrators are not aware of the school counseling standards and what the standards suggest for school counselors do (Whiston, 2002). There is confusion about how to best utilize the resources of the school counselor (Cinotti, 2014).

Adversity can be seen in the small details of terminology about the name "guidance" or "counseling" which can be confusing to people who have preconceived ideas and expectations of the terms (Coy et al., 1991). The community has different expectations for the school counselor (Havlik et al., 2019; Paisley & McMahon, 2001). The title matters - school counselor versus guidance counselor or school guidance

counselor (Bemak, 2000; Zyromski et al., 2019). The shift in thinking is a movement toward the future and away from the historical term vocational guidance counselor.

One of the biggest challenges is role definition (McGowan, 2021; Paisley & McMahon, 2001; Whiston, 2002). School counselors have different understandings of their role and what they should be doing with their time (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Lambie & Williamson, 2004). School counselors do not understand or know their own role, which creates ambiguity (McGowan, 2021). They lack supervision from district and site administration, and school counselors need to feel supported (Randick et al., 2018). Role ambiguity leads to burnout, stress, impairment, decreased job satisfaction, and confusion about their contributions to the school (Havlik et al., 2019; Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Randick et al., 2018).

Before a candidate for school counseling even graduates from a college counseling program, there are significant variations in their internship experience depending on their site supervisor. Variations in internship experiences can lead to new school counselors who do not have the skills to implement leadership, collaboration, advocacy, and systematic change within the school counseling program to which they are hired (Gibbons & Williams, 2011; Lambie & Stickl Haugen, 2021). The identity of school counselors varies depending on their graduate training, interactions with other counselors and school personnel, and self-perceptions (Gibbons & Williams, 2011). There is a lack of preparation for specific portions of their job, like the college and career aspects (Novakovic et al., 2021). School counseling programs vary in the approach to how they cover the topic of college and career in the coursework. Some training

programs ignore contemporary needs, trends, and the context of educational change (Bemak, 2000).

Adversity also shows up when school counselor ratios are too high to perform what is being asked (Novakovic et al., 2021; Paisley & McMahon, 2001). Juggling numerous responsibilities, including addressing the academic, social emotional, and career needs of their caseloads, can sometimes overwhelm school counselors who are tasked with managing high caseloads (Randick et al., 2018). Evidence has suggested that higher caseloads produce worse outcomes for students (Kearney et al., 2021). Since 1965, ASCA has recommended a ratio of 250:1. The national average for school counseling ratios in 2021-2022 was 408:1 (ASCA, n.d.-c). The national average for grades K-8 ranges from 613:1 to 787:1 and grades 9-12 ranges from 204:1 to 243:1 (ASCA, 2023b). Committing time to help with college and career readiness is impeded by high ratios (Novakovic et al., 2021). This directly impacts low-income and first-generation students when there is not enough time to devote to them (Havlik et al., 2019; Novakovic et al., 2021).

In today's schools, adversity for school counselors comes when they are called upon to maintain their accountability (Lowe et al., 2017). The school counselor's accountability is influenced by their responsibility to work within the comprehensive school counseling program framework and increased pressure to demonstrate their work contributions to student success (Gysbers, 2010a; Wingfield et al., 2010). Gysbers (2010a) said, "School counselors are now being asked to tell what they do and demonstrate the effectiveness of their work" (p. 199). School counselors are called on to measure their effectiveness and be accountable (Paisley & McMahon, 2001).

Accountability of their work is asked at multiple levels including at school sites, districts, state, and nationally. School counselors face a multitude of challenges, which include coping with unimaginable increases in caseloads, navigating unsupportive systems, experiencing high levels of emotional exhaustion, and often receiving inadequate supervision (Randick et al., 2018).

In this context, there is a need for continued leadership for school counselors to promote the 21st century view of school counseling (Whiston, 2002). There is a need for school counselors to come from diverse populations because the students they are serving are coming from more diverse populations. The concept of diversity should be examined not solely through the lens of race and ethnicity, but also through a broader perspective that encompasses socioeconomic status, students with disabilities, behavioral styles, and various attitudes and value systems. However, the training school counselors receive has psychological and educational theories coming from a Eurocentric background (Paisley & McMahon, 2001). Ongoing professional development is needed to maintain leadership practices, learn about new evidence-based practices like multi-tiered systems of support, and how to support the school and students (Sink, 2016; Strear et al., 2018).

As school counselors face adversity in their practice, there is current research that suggests administrators generally understand the role of the school counselor (ASCA, 2023b). The administrators indicate in the study that they see them fulfilling the main concepts of the ASCA national model. As suggested previously because the role of a school counselor is so complex, school and district administration are less likely to observe school counselors creating action plans that address equity gaps or sharing the results of their program.

The adversities that school counselors still face through this new study “School and District Administrators and the School Counselor Role.” suggest that school counselors still bear the burden of communicating with administration their efforts to set student outcome goals, address achievement gaps, and provide documentation of their work (ASCA, 2023b). The study also highlights that there are significant percentages of school counselors who are working outside of their job duties and being assigned tasks like managing 504 plans or coordinating testing programs. The study does raise awareness for the need for the role and how it differs from other personnel fulfilling school counseling duties and it offers guidance for administration to work together with their school counselor to create an appropriate appraisal instrument.

Administrators and school counselors who approach the school counseling profession by utilizing the national model for school counseling (ASCA, 2019b) will recognize that there is a comprehensive approach to school counseling. However, many school counselors and administrators are working with outdated models that are reactive in their approach (Cinotti, 2014). School counseling is designed as a position, not a program (Bemak, 2000). It is the struggles of school leaders, not the interpretations, that matter the most (Bogotch, 2011). There is a major discrepancy between actual practice and what is advocated as best practice (Wingfield et al., 2010). In addition, new challenges have been debated for years; however, new challenges are unfolding because of society; educational expectations; and issues facing schools, the community, families, and students (Paisley & McMahon, 2001). Table 2 references the adversities of school counselors.

Table 2*Adversities of School Counselors*

Adversities of school counselors	Narrative	Citation
Role ambiguity.	Being required to do work outside of their role.	Lowe et al., 2017; Randick et al., 2018
Administration and other educators are unaware of school counselor training and job duties.	There is confusion about how to best utilize the resources of the school counselor.	Cinotti, 2014
Terminology of the position – “guidance” or “counseling” and the implications of these words.	The title matters.	Bemak, 2000; Zyromski et al., 2019
Role definition.	School counselors have different understandings of their role, which creates ambiguity.	McGowan, 2021
Variation in internship experiences.	The identity of school counselors varies depending on their graduate training, interactions with other counselors and school personnel, and self-perceptions.	Gibbons & Williams, 2011
School counselor ratios	Evidence has suggested that higher caseloads produce worse outcomes for students.	Kearney et al., 2021
The need to maintain accountability	School counselors are called on to measure their effectiveness and be accountable.	Paisley & McMahon, 2001
The need for continued leadership	Ongoing professional development is needed to maintain leadership practices, learn about new evidence-based practices like multi-tiered systems of support, and how to support the school and students.	Sink, 2016; Strear et al., 2018

Expertise of School Counselors Who Are Expert Leaders

Expert school counselors demonstrate strong leadership skills, including the ability to inspire and motivate others through their profession (DeVoss & Andrews, 2006). Their leadership skills are seen through their excellent communication and interpersonal skills, which enable them to foster positive relationships with students, parents, and staff (Wingfield et al., 2010). The ASCA national model identifies leadership as one of the primary traits of the counseling profession (ASCA, 2019b; Strear et al., 2018).

School counselors are well-versed in strategies to promote academic success (ASCA, 2019a). They collaborate with teachers, parents, and students to develop personalized learning plans, provide resources for academic enrichment, and implement interventions when needed (ASCA, 2023a; Sink & Ockerman, 2016). Expert school counselors play a crucial role in helping students explore career options and develop plans for postsecondary education (ASCA, 2019a). They can provide guidance on college applications, scholarship opportunities, and career pathways (J. Bowers & Hatch, 2012). When school counselors implement career and college lessons, they have the potential to increase access to postsecondary opportunities (Parikh-Foxx et al., 2020). Studies also indicate that school counselors have the ability to enhance access to both 4-year and community college programs by offering college readiness counseling (Gilfillan, 2018).

School counselors are the professionals on campus who are trained in both the mental health and educational systems; this makes them uniquely situated to meet the growing mental health needs of school-aged students (Lambie et al., 2019). The role of the school counselor is being someone who helps students develop resilience, coping

skills, and positive relationships (Sink, 2016). School counselors promote social-emotional growth, provide positive examples of behavior that students can incorporate into their lives, and teach students how to make healthier decisions with more positive actions through building proactive strategies that include small group counseling and classroom presentations (ASCA, 2023a; H. Bowers et al., 2018; O'Connor, 2018).

School counselors with leadership skills using their social-emotional insights and behaviors can create an environment that affects the whole school (H. Bowers et al., 2018). The ASCA mindsets and behaviors lead school counselors to a more comprehensive and effective school counseling program, and when school counselors use the mindsets and behaviors to teach social-emotional learning, they are looked at as leaders (ASCA, 2021a; H. Bowers et al., 2018). A school counselor is vital to teaching and supporting social-emotional strategies and they are equally as important to implementing practices on campuses for preventing violence (Ellington, et al., 2023). School counselors do this by addressing the mental health needs of students and creating a safe and connected learning environment. Furthermore, school counselors play a crucial role in supporting students who are vulnerable and have experienced trauma because of adverse childhood experiences such as living in poverty, neglect and abuse, racism, and discrimination (Henry & Bryan, 2021).

The American School Counselor Association defines school counselors as “educators who improve student success for all students by implementing a comprehensive school counseling program” (Mason et al., 2023, p. 1). The ASCA national model provides a framework for school counselors to encourage the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program (ASCA, 2019b; Mason et

al., 2023). To implement the model, school counselors must enact a model of leadership in the process of program implementation (ASCA, 2019a; Hilts et al., 2022). Researchers have reported that school counselors' comprehensive school counseling program implementation is positively related to their leadership (Hilts et al., 2022). When school counselors implement a comprehensive school counseling program it empowers students to produce strengths which enhances school environments by providing supports, opportunities, and resources to students they need to thrive and develop (Henry & Bryan, 2021).

School counselors are equipped with cultural competence. In 2022 ASCA released a position statement regarding school counselors and cultural diversity (ASCA, 2021b). The statement indicated school counselors have a professional and ethical responsibility to expand personal multicultural and social justice advocacy, awareness, knowledge, and skills to be effective, culturally competent school counselors. The multicultural competencies and standards present school counselors with a three-dimensional model to examine their own characteristics (Paisley & McMahon, 2001). School counselors possess specialized training to identify the indicators of racism, which can hinder the progress and potential of marginalized students who face these challenges (ASCA, 2022d). The ASCA mindsets and behaviors for student success and the professional standards and competencies reflect that school counselors have the knowledge and skills to support social justice issues while leading the students and staff (ASCA, 2019a, 2021a, 2022c, & 2022d).

Hatch suggested that advocacy is the most important skill to be a school counselor (Gay, 2021). Hatch is a school counselor leader who has worked on policy and advocacy

for over 30 years at the local, state, and national level (Gay, 2021). School counselors should be using data to advocate to address systemic barriers, district barriers, and curriculum barriers (ASCA, 2023a; Gay, 2021). School counselors use data as a tool to identify equity gaps and advocate for systemic change (Zyromski et al., 2021). The ASCA national model weaves four major themes to create a holistic framework for school counseling: leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change (ASCA, 2019b; Gay, 2021). The school counselor as a collaborator is a vital component of school counselor leadership because they partner with school, family, and community stakeholders to accomplish program goals and provide a comprehensive program and services to support students and meet their complex needs (Henry & Bryan, 2021).

The journey a school counselor makes through the years as they collaborate with the parents, community, students, other school staff takes leadership, advocacy, and tenacity (Bemak, 2000). As a result, if school counselors are to fulfill their role as leaders at public school sites and shepherd students to be successful, then schools need to be able to support their intended roles rather than assign school counselors to noncounselor responsibilities. If the school counseling role is not supported through appropriate work, then the student's future success may be in jeopardy.

Transformational and Change Leadership

As the culture of schools has changed, the leadership to support students has also changed. Diversity and school reform have created a critical situation for school counselors in which it is important for them to define their role and take on transformational and change leadership strategies in their public schools (ASCA, 2010b;

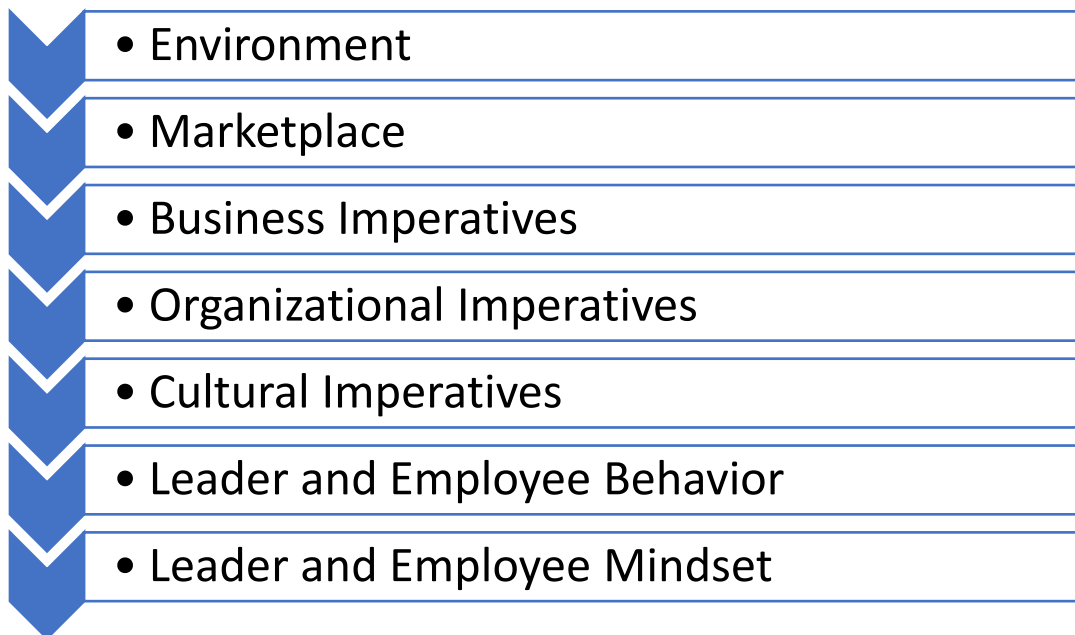
Gysbers 2010a, 2010b). Understanding and taking on these new strategies will amplify the position and will help the school counselors become better leaders.

A change leader is someone who consciously steps into their role of shaping the transformation of their organization and sees change as an opportunity (Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010; Drucker, 2000). Successful transformation and breakthrough results require attention to three areas of focus: (a) content, (b) people, and (c) process (Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010).

Change leaders see that change needs to happen through external forces from the environment and they use the drivers of change model (Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010). This model portrays a sequence of triggers, in which one trigger calls forth another trigger to make a change (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

The Drivers of Change Model



Note. Adapted from *The Change Leader's Roadmap*, by D. Anderson and L. Ackerman-Anderson, 2010, Pfeiffer.

The drivers of change model is useful in many areas for school counselor leaders. The first driver of change helps school counselors understand the scope of the change required and expands their view beyond simply the external dimensions; they can start to recognize all stakeholders contributing to their work. Second, it helps school counselors define the type of change the organization must undergo; this gives examples of the change so they can explain it. Next, the school counselors define the case or reason for the changes required; this will give the change a purpose. Finally, the school counselors provide a framework for communicating the desired outcomes, scope, and case for change to stakeholders; this decreases lack of understanding for their role and the work that they accomplish (Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010).

Transformational change refers to a profound and drastic alteration in strategy, structure, systems, processes, or technology, necessitating a corresponding shift in cultural norms, behaviors, and mindsets for successful implementation (Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010; Stilwell et al., 2016). A conscious change leader is someone who pursues self-awareness (Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010). An effective change leader is someone who actively participates as a learner in helping the organization improve (Fullan, 2011). A change leader has the ability and willingness to change what is already being done (Drucker, 2000). They are understanding of others' internal states, and they are introspective (Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010).

School counselor leaders can use transformational change leadership and help their schools understand the radical shift needed in their roles as public school counselors based on their counseling standards. School counselors apply the skills from transformational leadership when they inspire others to make schoolwide changes

because they have immersed themselves into their schools (Lowe et al., 2017).

Transformational skills are also seen when school counselor leaders gain trust, build relationships, and enhance communication, which directly affects academic achievement and increases the effectiveness of their school counseling program. A change leader is someone who is innovative and seeks opportunities, school counselor leaders must constantly be seeking opportunities because of various changes that are happening (Drucker, 2000).

Conceptual Framework

The book *Leading in Tough Times* suggests that in tough times leaders must take an opportunity to become better leaders through seven challenges: self-leadership, change, teamwork, motivation, strategy, communication, and decision-making (Maxwell, 2021). Working through these challenges as leaders, heads of organizations will come out on the other side as better people and leaders.

Self-Leadership

Self-leadership is about knowing who one is as a leader, and when the leader knows who they are as a leader, they will remain true to themselves when facing adversity (Maxwell, 2021). A leader must begin this journey with self-evaluation because leaders know their own strengths and weaknesses when they are self-aware (Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Maxwell, 2021). Maxwell (2021) suggested that there are specific values that a leader must possess, servanthood, purpose, integrity, and relationships. Being a leader is about knowing one's moral purpose, having a vision, and then sharing those ideals with those one is leading (Benge, 2014). Maxwell also said that courage is necessary because it requires this attribute to take risks and go first when needed. As a leader, courage is

integral for many things; it gives one wisdom, passion, and hope (Batagiannis, 2007). In addition, one's leadership courage makes one sustainable with "continuous improvement, adaptation, and collective problem-solving in the face of complex challenges that keep arising" (Fullan, 2005, p. 22).

Leaders Face Change

Maxwell (2021) said, "Effective leaders make things happen" (p. 29). When leaders face the need to change, they keep moving forward. The desires to find a common ground in the following areas: vision, values, relationships, attitude, and communication; once the leader has established the common ground in these five areas the leader can move forward with the changes. When making the changes, leaders must communicate the plan to stakeholders with simplicity and power, and this will increase the buy-in for change. The best way to achieve change is to look both outward and inward and to combine efforts (Boaz & Ariel-Fox, 2014).

Leaders and the Team

Leaders appreciate their team (Maxwell, 2021). It is important for leaders to create relationships with the people they like and the people they do not like. Teamwork is about creating a culture of unity by getting to know people on the team, expressing appreciation, encouraging, and offering support to them. Leaders must create a multigenerational environment in which generations are mixed together to create an interactive environment where all can learn from each other (Bolser & Gosciej, 2015). When a leader holds people accountable for their actions, this can also create a team (Maxwell, 2021). Everyone must be held accountable to achieve high standards (Lencioni, 2002).

Leaders Create Motivation

Leaders can create energy and inspire others to achieve (Maxwell, 2021). During tough times it is the leader's job to motivate the team and keep them moving forward despite the obstacles in the path. An effective motivator is one who can create purpose and meaning for the work and understand what motivates people (Derosa & Lepsinger, 2010). Team members engaged in high performance teams exhibit a strong sense of initiative and willingly dedicate additional effort toward attaining team objectives.

Leaders and Strategy

Challenges in leadership happen; it is how the leader approaches them that is the key to overcoming them (Maxwell, 2021). Strategic planning helps the organization look at the long term, clarify the future direction, and develop a coherent and defensible basis for decision making (Harvey & Drolet, 2005). Maxwell (2021) stated that to face challenges, the leader must prepare and develop strategy by (a) facing the challenge, (b) understanding the challenge, (c) evaluating the challenge, and (d) appreciating the challenge.

Leaders Communicate

Communication is about more than vision casting and giving directions, it is about engaging, connecting, questioning, and listening to people (Maxwell, 2021). Successful leaders clearly communicate their goals and direction to ensure that everyone has a shared target (Derosa & Lepsinger, 2010). Clearly communicated goals are of utmost importance for teams because they provide team members with a profound sense of purpose and significance. When communicating a leader asks the right questions to gain valuable feedback; examples of questions to ask are "What do you think?" and

“What do you need?” (Maxwell, 2021, pp. 101–102). Maxwell (2021) said, “During tough times, communication may be the leader’s most important skill” (p. 111).

Leaders Make Decisions

The greatest challenge a leader will encounter is decisions that affect other people (Maxwell, 2021). When faced with challenge, leaders face decisions that are courageous: (a) what must be done, priority; (b) what must be done first, change; (c) what must be done differently, creative; (d) what might be possible; and (e) people who should and should not be involved; if leaders get into the habit of making decisions, they develop experience and become better leaders. At the end of the day the leader is the decision maker; however, high performing teams do better when there is an established decision-making process (Derosa & Lepsinger, 2010).

When applying these tenets to their lives in their organizational world, leaders will be grounded in learning how to make difficult decisions and can inspire the team to move forward in a crisis (Maxwell, 2021). Members of high-performance teams exhibit a remarkable level of initiative and are willing to put in extra effort to accomplish team objectives (Derosa & Lepsinger, 2010). Table 3 illustrates a conceptual framework adapted from Maxwell’s book: *Leading in Tough Times*.

From this conceptual framework, Maxwell (2021) identified six variables that can help leaders succeed in times of crisis and adversity in organizations. These six variables are

- Define reality, identify ways to navigate chaos and guide.
- Remind stakeholders of the big picture, keep vision of the organization in mind for all stakeholders.

- Help employees develop a plan, develop strategies to remove the organization from tricky situations.
- Help them make good choices, good choices determine fate.
- Value and promote teamwork, the team needs to work together to emerge.
- Give them hope, hope is the foundation to move people forward to succeed.

Table 3

Conceptual Framework for Leading Through Adverse Times

Example challenge	Characteristic	Organizational outcome
Self-leadership	Self-awareness	Fosters improvement in the organization.
Change	New perspective	Creates possibilities for changing the way things are completed.
Teamwork	Engagement	Builds capacity in the organization.
Motivation	Achievement	Encourages stakeholders to succeed.
Strategy	Informs choice	Gives stakeholders options with parameters.
Communication	Clarity	Generates calm and cohesiveness.
Decision making	Action	Requires stakeholders to review results and make modifications.

Note. Adapted from *Leading in Tough Times*, by J. C. Maxwell, 2021, Center Street.

For this study, the researcher has elicited three of the six variables from the Maxwell study to identify how expert school counselor leaders can lead through the adversity of counselor role confusion. By using three of the strategies Maxwell recommends, school counselors can connect their roles to their school’s organizational vision, promote their counseling roles through organizational teamwork, and make good

choices or strategic decisions to meet and exceed their school professional counselor standards.

Summary

If you have been trusted to lead, you have an opportunity to raise people up through tough times.

John C. Maxwell, 2021, p. 132

School counselors have faced their fair share of adversities; however, many persevered through the challenges. The implementation of the ASCA national model provides the framework for school counselors to better understand their role, purpose, and goals as they relate to professional identity and implement a comprehensive school counseling program (Mason et al., 2023). The literature review highlighted the history of school counselors from the early beginning in 1800, because of an outcry for reform (Schmidt, 2008; Wingfield et al., 2010), through the reforms in the 21st century.

The Chapter II literature review also highlighted the contributions ASCA has made since publishing the first ASCA national model in 2003. The national model emphasizes leadership among school counselors, as such. There is an overview of leadership and school counselors and skills needed to be a leader. Change and transformational leadership were discussed as guides for school counselor leaders.

School counselor adversities were reviewed in the literature review. The adversity of role ambiguity was discussed (Bemak, 2000; Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Rayle, 2006; Strear et al., 2018). Chapter II concluded with the expertise that school counselors have and how school counselors can use data to collaborate and advocate for their students, themselves, and the profession (ASCA, n.d.-b; 2019a; 2021b; DeVoss &

Andrews, 2006; Gay, 2021; Lambie et al., 2019; Mason et al., 2023). Finally, the conclusion of Chapter II is the conceptual framework of Maxwell's *Leading in Tough Times*. Adversity as an opportunity to become a better leader is reviewed through the seven challenges of self-leadership, change, teamwork, motivation, strategy, communication, and decision making.

Chapter III explains the Delphi method used for the research. In Chapter III, an explanation of how 9-12 high school counselor leaders from Riverside County were identified, selected, and surveyed. Chapter III describes the study's population and process for selecting the sample of Delphi participants. The researcher discusses how the survey instruments were developed and measures taken to increase validity and reliability. Chapter III concludes with a description of the data collection, analysis process, and study limitations. Chapter IV analyzes the data from the Delphi panel responses aligned to each research question and for each round. Chapter V identifies findings, implications, conclusions, researcher recommendations, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This Delphi research study was conducted as a thematic study using three of six variables outlined by Maxwell (2021) in his book: *Leading in Tough Times*. This study intended to identify the personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess when leading through the adversity of role confusion that will assist them in fulfilling their roles to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards. Three of the six variables Maxwell indicated can support leaders in times of adversity include:

- remind stakeholders of the big picture,
- help them make good choices, and
- value and promote teamwork.

In this chapter, the core components of the Delphi methodology are explored and an explanation of the thematic study is provided. A comprehensive description of the parameters of the Delphi design and study processes are summarized. Then the population description, sample, and criteria for recruiting school counselors who served on the Delphi panel are reviewed. The researcher then described in this chapter the instruments used in data collection, the way reliability and validity processes were developed, and the specific steps used for collecting and analyzing the data. Chapter III concludes by providing a discussion about the study's limitations.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this Delphi multivariable research study was for school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel to identify the personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess in their organizations to lead through the adversity of role confusion by using Maxwell's (2021) *Leading in Tough Times* strategies to include

- connecting their roles to the organization’s vision or big picture,
- promoting their roles through organizational teamwork, and
- making good choices or strategic organizational decisions, to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.

The second purpose of this Delphi multivariable research study was for school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel to describe the selected actions school counselors might take to connect their school counseling roles to the organizational vision or big picture to promote their roles through teamwork and to make good choices or strategic decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.

Overarching Questions

1. What would school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel identify as personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess in their organizations to lead through the adversity of role confusion by using Maxwell’s (2021) *Leading in Tough Times* to include connecting their roles to the organization’s vision or big picture, promoting their roles through organizational teamwork, and making good choices or strategic organizational decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
2. What are selected actions described by school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel that school counselor leaders might take to connect their school counseling roles to the organizational vision or big picture to promote their roles through teamwork and to make good choices or strategic decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?

Research Questions

1. What personal qualities do school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel identify school counselor leaders must possess in their organizations to lead through the adversity of role confusion by connecting their roles to the organization's vision or big picture to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
2. What personal qualities do school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel identify school counselor leaders must possess in their organizations to lead through the adversity of role confusion by promoting their roles through organizational teamwork to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
3. What personal qualities do school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel identify school counselor leaders must possess in their organizations to lead through the adversity of role confusion by making good choices or strategic organizational decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
4. What are selected actions described by school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel that school counselor leaders might take to connect their school counseling roles to the organizational vision or big picture to promote their roles through teamwork and to make good choices or strategic decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?

Research Design

Delphi Multivariable Thematic Study

A mixed methods Delphi multivariable research design was chosen by the researcher for this study. A mixed methods study collects both qualitative and quantitative data. Multivariable research studies are studies in which three or more variables are being

studied simultaneously in the research as compared with one or two variables being researched at a time (Feinstein, 1996). This researcher was also part of a two-person thematic team that researched the personal qualities that leaders must possess to lead through the adversity of role confusion by utilizing selected strategies from Maxwell's (2021) *Leading in Tough Times*. The selected strategies and three variables chosen from Maxwell for this research about school counselors leading through the adversity of role confusion included

- connecting their roles to the organization's vision or big picture,
- promoting their role through organizational teamwork, and
- making what Maxwell calls good choices or strategic organizational decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.

The Delphi multivariable mixed methods design for this study was appropriate because the researcher sought to reach a consensus about the study's research topics from school counselors on the Delphi panel who were currently in the role of school counselor at a school site. Finally, each of the two participants in this thematic study collaborated in using Maxwell's (2021) study to construct purpose statements and research questions but researched two different populations.

A Delphi mixed methods design methodology was used for this research study. The Delphi study was named after the Greek town of Delphi (Fish & Busby, 2005; Linstone & Turoff, 2002). A temple in Delphi contained a famous oracle that Apollo used to speak through to predict the future (Fish & Busby, 2005). The Delphi method used today has more rational and scientific methods in attempting to predict the future and to gain consensus from a body of experts in a specific field regarding ideas or predict the

future of the ideas (Fish & Busby, 2005). For example, the Delphi study was used by the Air Force in the 1950s to gain consensus

“regarding the estimation of the number of A-bombs required to reduce the munitions output by a prescribed amount” (Linstone & Turoff, 2002, p. 10).

The primary reason for selecting the Delphi method in this study was to establish a consensus among school counseling leaders. The school counselors chosen for this study met the selected research study to be qualified as school counselor leaders.

Delphi studies incorporate three features: anonymous response, iteration and controlled feedback, and statistical group response (Dalkey, 1969). The anonymity of using the Delphi method is of great benefit in Delphi research because the respondents can feel free to answer honestly (Dalkey, 1969; Linstone & Turoff, 2002). The multiple rounds in a Delphi study also allow for real time feedback (Monroe, 2023).

Multivariable Delphi Study

Maxwell’s (2021) research investigated six variables that were recommended as important strategies for leaders to utilize in times of adversity. Counselors often experience adversity at their school sites, as reviewed in Chapter II, because they are assigned duties that do not align with their roles. Counselors are also often leaders at school sites; however, their roles are not always understood and with multiple responsibilities, adverse conditions are created for counselors. It becomes difficult for them to manage the outcomes that are defined for them by professional school counseling standards.

As a result, this study sought to investigate three of the six variables typically aligned with the counselor’s role and work responsibilities at school sites. Because three

variables were researched, this Delphi study was a mixed methods multivariable study that investigated three areas the researcher included in the three survey rounds of the Delphi research. The three rounds in this Delphi research that considered multivariables in the survey questions were administered as follows.

Round 1

Round 1 consisted of three open ended questions provided to the school counselor leaders on the Delphi panel that revolved around the three variables in the study. Upon return of the responses for each of the three questions in Round 1, the researcher provided the responses back to the panel by identifying the frequency of responses for each of the three questions and coding the responses into themes by question. In the mixed methods research approach to this study, qualitative data were collected from this round. The open-ended survey research questions school counselors on the Delphi panel were asked were:

1. In your experience, what are the personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess to lead through the adversity of confusion about their roles at school sites by connecting their roles to the school's vision or big picture to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
2. In your experience, what are the personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess to lead through the adversity of confusion about their roles at school sites by promoting their roles through organizational teamwork to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
3. In your experience, what are the personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess to lead through the adversity of confusion about their roles at school sites

by making good choices or strategic organizational decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?

See Appendix B for complete survey for all rounds.

Round 2

The researcher calculated the frequency of responses for each of the three questions from Round 1. Based on this frequency analysis, Round 2 school counselor leaders on the Delphi panel were provided with the response themes for each of the three questions in Round 1 and then asked to rate the importance of those themes on a 6-point Likert scale by survey question. The ranges on the Likert scale were 1 = *unimportant*, 2 = *moderately unimportant*, 3 = *slightly unimportant*, 4 = *slightly important*, 5 = *moderately important*, and 6 = *extremely important*. Once the researcher received the rated responses back from the panelists, the researcher identified the top-most important rated responses for each of the three questions through the use of mean score analysis. Data collected from this round was quantitative. The specific survey question asked of panelists in Round 2 was:

Please rate the themes identifying personal qualities counselor leaders must possess on each list elicited from the three questions taken from the Round 1 survey questions on the six-point scale provided from extremely important to unimportant as regards the personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess to lead through the adversity of role confusion at their school sites:

- List 1: to connect their roles to the school's vision or big picture to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.

- List 2: to promote their roles through organizational teamwork to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.
- List 3: to make strategic organizational decisions or good choices to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.

See Appendix B for the complete survey for all rounds.

Round 3

The researcher calculated the mean responses from Round 2 ratings to calculate what panelists indicated in their Likert scale rating were the most important personal qualities. In Round 3, the school counselor leaders on the Delphi panel were sent back the personal qualities rated as most important personal qualities identified for each of the three questions. The school counselor leaders on the panel were then asked to choose one to two most important personal qualities from each of the three lists and describe how school counselor leaders who possess these important personal qualities might demonstrate how they connect their roles to the vision or big picture, how they promote their roles through teamwork, and how they make good choices or strategic organizational decisions that allows them to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.

For these responses, a minimum of three and a maximum of six responses were expected from each panelist. In the mixed methods research approach to this study, qualitative data were collected from this round. The specific survey questions for Round 3 were as follows:

Please select one to two qualities identified as most important from Round 2 for each of the questions below and respond:

1. In your experience, describe the selected actions school counselor leaders who possess the personal qualities identified in Rounds 1 and 2 might take to lead through the adversity of role confusion in their organizations to connect their roles to the school's vision or big picture to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
2. In your experience, describe the selected actions school counselor leaders who possess the personal qualities identified in Rounds 1 and 2 might take to lead through the adversity of role confusion in their organizations to promote their roles through organizational teamwork to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
3. In your experience, describe the selected actions school counselor leaders who possess the personal qualities identified in Rounds 1 and 2 might take to lead through the adversity of role confusion in their organizations to make good choices or strategic organizational decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?

See Appendix B for complete survey for all rounds.

Because this Delphi approach elicited both qualitative and quantitative data, this research design was a mixed methods approach. Round 1 and Round 3 in this multiple variable Delphi study elicited qualitative data, and Round 2 produced quantitative data. The researcher combined qualitative and quantitative research throughout the process to establish a mixed methods approach (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Using a mixed methods approach for a Delphi study is expected to reduce bias in the synthesis requirement for utilizing this method (Grime & Wright, 2016). A Delphi mixed methods

study was also chosen for this research because the researcher was interested in providing comprehensive data from a Delphi panel of school counselor leaders, which increased the credibility of the data gathered (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Population

The population of this study was a group the researcher was interested in (Patten & Newhart, 2018). There are approximately 120,793 school counselors in schools in the United States (ASCA, n.d.-c). The population of school counselors in California is estimated in K-12 schools to be 11,581. School counselors serve a population of approximately 5,892,073 students. Figure 3 shows the ratio of school counselors to students by school district across the state of California.

Target Population

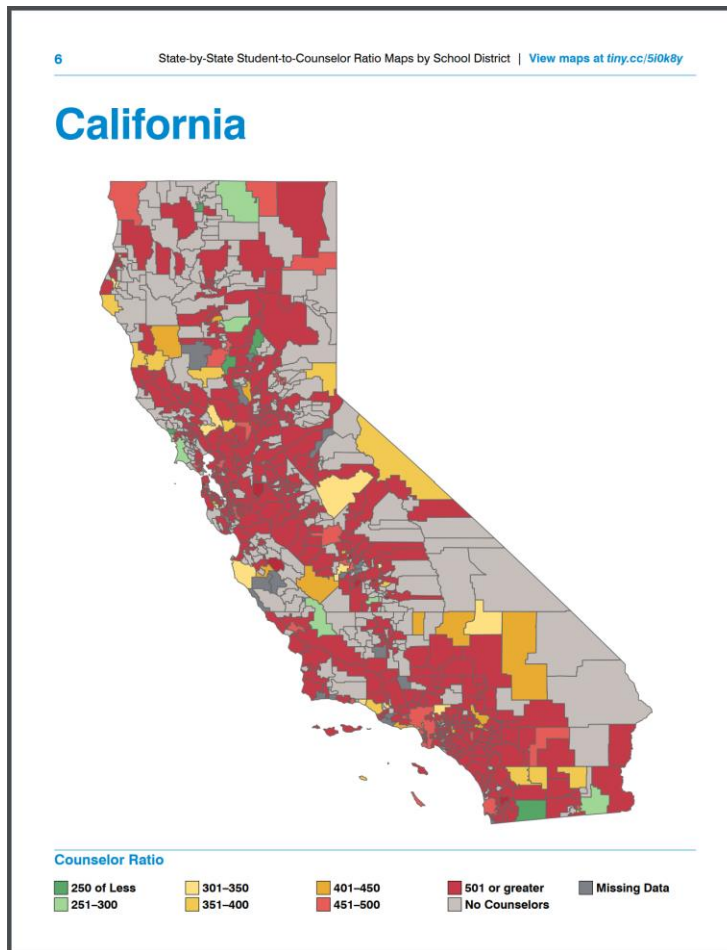
A target population refers to a group of individuals from which a sample is selected, and the findings can be applied or generalized to the entire population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). To narrow the population, the researcher established the field of school counselors to grades 9-12 school counselors who work in Riverside County, California. To decrease bias, the school counselors could not work in the Corona-Norco Unified School District in Riverside County, because this was the researcher's employer at the time of the study. Additionally, Corona-Norco Unified School District school counselors were not used for this study because the researcher was a former school counselor and coordinator of school counseling for the district.

The target population was 343 school counselors in Riverside County in high schools in grade 9-12 (American Civil Liberties Union, n.d.; Data Reporting Office, n.d.-a). The school counselors working in grades 9-12 work in 19 districts in Riverside

County. Riverside County has 71 traditional and alternative schools-of-choice high schools (Data Reporting Office, n.d.-d).

Figure 3

California Student-to-Counselor Ratio Map by School District



Note. From *State-by-State Student-to-Counselor Ratio Maps*, by P. Patel and M., 2021, National Association for College Admission Counseling, p. 6 (<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED615227.pdf>).

Sample

The researcher considered the sample size when conducting and evaluating research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The study sample is a subgroup of the target population that the researcher studied for generalizing about the target population

(Creswell, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The sample chosen was 20 randomly selected, 9-12 school counselors in 18 districts (eliminating the researchers school district) in Riverside County. Both male and female school counselors were chosen randomly by listing the school counselors by gender in two lists and selected randomly from each list, as detailed in the sampling procedures in this study with 10 male and 10 female school counselors being identified.

School Counselor Leader Eligibility

To establish what a school counselor leader is, the researcher narrowed the population to school counselors who met both of the criteria in the first subset and met at least one criteria in the second subset:

Subset 1

- Actively serving grades 9-12 as high school counselors in a public school or currently working in public education in Riverside County and was a former school counselor within the last 3 years serving grades 9-12 as a high school counselor.
- Have a minimum of 3 years of school counselor experience.

Subset 2

- Are currently a member of ASCA or CASC.
- Were affected by adversity as a school counselor.
- Presented on a school counseling topic at a state or national conference.
- Won their district or state school counselor of the year award.
- Authored an article for a peer-reviewed journal or published a school counseling book.

- Are currently a school counselor at a RAMP school.
- Are adjunct professors in an accredited school counseling program.

Selection Process

Purposeful Sampling

When considering the research topic purposeful sampling was chosen. Purposeful sampling was selected because the researcher intentionally selected the individuals for the Delphi panel and sites to learn or understand the phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). The individuals selected through purposeful sampling were chosen based on their possession of relevant information and their ability to provide a wealth of information (Patten & Newhart, 2018). For example, in this study, the researcher selected for the Delphi panel, school counselors or Riverside County employees who have been a school counselor within the last 3 years who work in one of the 18 high school districts in Riverside County, California in grades 9-12 who met three of the nine characteristics; and all two characteristics met in Subset 1 and a minimum of one characteristic in Subset 2 under the eligibility sampling criteria.

Homogeneous Sampling

Homogeneous sampling is a form of purposeful sampling in which the researcher seeks individuals who are similar to one another from larger and more diverse populations (Patten & Newhart, 2018; Patton, 2015). The purpose of choosing a homogeneous group to study was to describe the personal qualities of school counselors who work in similar environments and in this case for purposes of research in 9-12 high schools in California in Riverside County, which generalizes the findings (Patton, 2015).

Convenience Sampling

Convenience sampling is when the researcher selects participants because of the ease of availability (Patten & Newhart, 2018; Patton, 2015). The researcher chose Riverside County because of its proximity. Riverside County was additionally chosen by the researcher because of familiarity with the demographics. Selection bias was left out of the selection of participants through a random selection of participants.

Random Sampling

Random sampling is a fair and unbiased selection process in which every member of the population has an equal opportunity to be included in the research (Patten & Newhart, 2018). Random sampling for this study was conducted by choosing every other school counselor on the database list from Riverside County (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Prior to choosing every other counselor the researcher placed the school counselors into two lists, male and female that were alphabetical by district. Twenty school counselors and five alternates were sought.

Sample Selection Process

The researcher used a process for selecting the school counselors for the Delphi panel that included random selection. The researcher used the California School Counseling Association database and made a list of all 9-12 public high school counselors in the Riverside County region (CASC, n.d.-f), placing males in one list and females in a second list. Randomly, the researcher identified every other school counselor on each list and created two random lists, one of males and one of females. Once the researcher created the random lists, she sent out the letter (see Appendix C) to 20

members, 10 from the male list and 10 from the female list with a description of the study and criteria to be involved in the study.

The researcher attached information and criteria for participating in the study requesting that potential participants complete a demographic criteria form (see Appendix D) and returned it to the researcher. Those who responded first were entered into the study being mindful of gender and attempting to identify equal numbers of male and female counselors for a total of 20 counselors who responded. When the researcher had 20 eligible volunteers for the study, she sent out correspondence (see Appendix E). The researcher added male or female names to the list from the original random list(s) until enough eligible participants for a total of 20—10 male and 10 female—volunteered for the study. Potential participants who met the criteria were contacted via email and were introduced to the study (see Appendix E).

Of those individuals who responded and met the criteria, 23 were invited to participate in the study (see Appendix C). In addition, individuals who responded and met the demographic criteria were also provided with the necessary informed consent materials (see Appendices F and G). After the respondents completed and sent the informed consent information and voluntarily agreed to participate in all three Delphi panel rounds, the first survey for Round 1 was distributed to the panel members (see Appendix B).

Instrumentation

Survey Monkey was used as the online survey tool; the surveys were emailed to communicate with the identified participants. This study used three rounds of surveys to have 9-12 school counselors and former school counselors within Riverside County

identify the personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess when leading through the adversity of role confusion.

Instrument Development

To begin the development of the questionnaire, there are two stages (Cox & Cox, 2008). The first stage guides the development of the questionnaire, which aligns the research questions with what the researcher is trying to determine. In the second stage, the guiding questions are operationalized and made more specific. The researcher first used the research questions to design the survey questions to collect data aligned with the data intended to be collected to respond to the research questions.

In addition, the researcher adapted the survey questions to align with the conceptual framework developed from the three variables that the researcher identified applied to school counselors about how leaders can successfully navigate diversity using Maxwell's (2021) *Leading in Tough Times*. Finally, because this Delphi study was a mixed methods study and included multivariables and three Delphi rounds, the researcher crafted the three survey instruments for Rounds 1, 2 & 3 to collect data in three rounds and included both qualitative and quantitative survey questions in the development of the three instruments.

To reiterate, Round 1 included development of three open-ended qualitative multivariable survey questions aligned with the research questions, a quantitative survey was developed for Round 2 using a 6-point Likert scale in which the panelists were asked to rate the top three or four responses provided to them from Round 1 themes for each of the three survey questions, and finally, the researcher requested qualitative responses from panelists in Round 3 by asking them to in Round 3 in their experience to describe

actions counselors might take when leading through the adversity of role confusion in their school organizations.

Researcher as an Instrument for the Study

As researchers conduct a qualitative inquiry, they are considered the instrument (Patton, 2015). The researcher, as an instrument, has a great deal of credibility that relies on the skills, competence, and rigor of the person doing the work. Data are not objective because they are a creation of human design through the creation, collection, and analysis phases. This is where the bias of the researcher is found through the study, however, through the field test the researcher can review the survey items and look for any problems (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). When conducting research, the researcher in this study acknowledged their own biases and remained conscious of them, ensuring that they took the necessary steps to minimize their influence on the study's outcomes.

Validity

Validity is the measurement of something; if something is valid, the tool measures what it was designed to measure (Patten & Newhart, 2018). In this study, how well the survey questions align with the information the researcher seeks will determine the validity. Validity addresses the following questions: "Do researchers observe what they think they see? Do inquiries hear the meanings that they think they hear?" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 330). Do the researcher and the participants agree on describing the events?

To increase study validity, the researcher field tested the surveys before administering them to the Delphi panelists. The researcher field tested the instrument by inviting two expert school counselors who were not part of the study to complete the

survey questions. Based on feedback from the field test participants, minor modifications were made to the instruments used for the Delphi panelists.

Reliability

Reliability is considered established when a test yields consistent results (Patten & Newhart, 2018). The Delphi method used a panel of school counselors to gather consensus and provided each member of that panel with the same questions in the same format, which yielded consistent results. The researcher also invited a former school counselor who possessed a doctorate degree to review the processes and questions for Rounds 1, 2, and 3. This person was asked to provide feedback regarding the validity of the survey questions asked and the processes used for each Delphi round. The Delphi process and content of questions were revised, as feedback was provided by this colleague with a doctorate degree.

Field Test

To ensure the validity of the study's instrument, a field test was conducted prior to administering the survey to participants. This field test was conducted to identify any weaknesses in the question format, processes, or content. Additionally, the field test aimed to assess whether the questions allowed the researcher to collect the intended research data, enabling them to effectively respond to the research questions.

The field test is reliable if the results are consistent (Patten & Newhart, 2018). To confirm the reliability of the survey instrument, the researcher used the questions in a field test. Two expert 9-12 school counselors in Riverside County who met the selection criteria but did not participate in the actual study were selected and they field tested the survey instrument for all three rounds in the order provided for the study within a 2-week

period. The field test involved participants responding to all three rounds of the survey and offering feedback on the clarity of the questions, the provided directions, and the overall structure of the instrument. Considering the feedback, adjustments were made to the instrument's structure, wording of the questions, and directions to ensure validity.

The participant also invited a former student or counselor who possessed a doctorate degree to review the processes and questions for Rounds, 1, 2, & 3 during the field test. This person was requested as well to review the field test results and to provide feedback on the validity of the questions asked and the processes used. The researcher revised the Delphi processes and content of questions, as feedback was provided by this colleague with a doctorate degree.

Data Collection

Data were not collected for this survey until permission to conduct the survey was obtained from the University of Massachusetts Global Institutional Review Board (see Appendix H) and certification of completion issued by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (see Appendix I). Survey data were collected in three rounds as follows.

Round 1 Data Collection

Data collection for this Delphi study included open-ended question results, ranked Likert scale results, and free response answers (see Appendices B, H, and I). Round 1 consisted of three open ended questions that revolved around the three variables in the study. The survey questions were emailed to the panel participants separately utilizing Survey Monkey (see Appendices B, H, and I). The Delphi school counselor panelists were given 2 weeks to return responses to the Round 1 survey. Upon return of the

responses for each of the three questions in Round 1, the researcher provided the responses back to the panel by identifying the frequency of responses for each of the three questions and coding the responses in themes. The top themes became the basis for the Round 2 survey.

The survey questions (see Appendix B) asked for Round 1 were as follows:

1. In your experience, what are the personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess to lead through the adversity of confusion about their roles at school sites by connecting their roles to the school's vision or big picture to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
2. In your experience, what are the personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess to lead through the adversity of confusion about their roles at school sites by promoting their roles through organizational teamwork to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
3. In your experience, what are the personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess to lead through the adversity of confusion about their roles at school sites by making good choices or strategic organizational decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?

To increase clarity with the panelists, examples of personal qualities and a definition of adversity were provided with the survey questions along with parameters around what professional standards are for school counselors (see Appendix J). Some examples of personal qualities may include empathy, active listening, patience, flexibility, trustworthiness, problem solving skills, and cultural competence (ASCA 2022a, 2022d, 2023a).

Round 2 Data Collection

The Round 2 survey contained the top compiled list of themes from Round 1 responses for each of the three questions. Participants were requested to rate the responses from Round 1 regarding personal qualities school counselors must possess in their organizations to lead through the adversity of role confusion (see Appendix B) by using three different Maxwell (2021) strategies, to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards. The survey instrument asked the participants to rate the importance of those themes identified in Round 1 for each of the three questions on a six-point Likert scale by question. The ratings on the Likert scale were 1 = *unimportant*, 2 = *moderately unimportant*, 3 = *slightly unimportant*, 4 = *slightly important*, 5 = *moderately important*, and 6 = *extremely important*. The researcher identified the top *most important* rated responses for each of the three variables through the use of mean score analysis.

The participants had 1 week to return the Round 2 survey and it was emailed to participants using Survey Monkey. If a participant wanted to add a theme they identified as not being sent to them in Round 1 list of themes, they could add this to the list themes for any of the three response lists and rate that theme using the Likert 6-point scale.

The specific survey question for this Round 2 was:

Please rate the themes on each list elicited from the three Round 1 Survey questions on the six-point scale provided for each theme from extremely important to unimportant as regards the personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess to lead through the adversity of confusion about their roles at school sites:

- List 1: to connect their roles to the school's vision or big picture to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.

- List 2: to promote their roles through organizational teamwork to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.
- List 3: to make strategic organizational decisions or good choices to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.

Round 3 Data Collection

The survey instrument used in Round 2 returned back the responses rated as *most important* to the Delphi school counselor panelists for Round 3 and in Round 3, panelists were asked to choose one to two most important responses from each of the three lists generated in Round 2 and to describe actions school counselor leaders who possess the personal qualities identified as most important in Round 1 and 2 might take to demonstrate action in the three strategic areas summarized in the previous survey questions (see Appendix B). The Round 3 survey was emailed to participants using Survey Monkey.

The specific survey questions for this Round 3 were

1. In your experience, describe the selected actions school counselor leaders who possess the personal qualities identified in Rounds 1 and 2 might take to lead through the adversity of role confusion in their organizations to connect their roles to the school's vision or big picture to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
2. In your experience, describe the selected actions school counselor leaders who possess the personal qualities identified in Rounds 1 and 2 might take to lead through the adversity of role confusion in their organizations to promote their

roles through organizational teamwork to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?

3. In your experience, describe the selected actions school counselor leaders who possess the personal qualities identified in Rounds 1 and 2 might take to lead through the adversity of role confusion in their organizations to make good choices or strategic organizational decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?

All results from the three rounds of data collection were stored on the researcher's personal computer, which was password secured and protected for additional confidentiality and security. The researcher securely stored the results from the open-ended questions, rankings, and Likert scale for 3 years prior to destroying the data. In addition, all individualized panelists responses in all rounds were identified by a letter to maintain anonymity.

Data Analysis

This Delphi study comprised three rounds of surveys that were administered using Survey Monkey. The panel of 9-12 high school counselor leaders responded to the surveys and the data were analyzed after each round.

Round 1

In Round 1, the researcher collected qualitative data using three open-ended questions in the Round 1 survey. Upon return of the responses for each of the three questions within a 2-week period from Round 1, the researcher analyzed the responses by coding the frequency of responses to the open ended questions and then identifying the themes from Round 1 using Delve.

Round 2

Based on the top themes identified from Round 1, the survey for Round 2 collected quantitative data by using a 6-point Likert scale to determine the personal qualities school counselor leaders identified were most important when leading their organizations through adversity of confusion about their roles. The panelists were given 1 week to return their ratings to the researcher. Panelists were also told they could add a theme or response to rate in Round 2 if they felt there was a theme missing from the Round 1 data they received. The Likert scale for this Round 2 included the following ratings: 1 = *unimportant*, 2 = *moderately unimportant*, 3 = *slightly unimportant*, 4 = *slightly important*, 5 = *moderately important*, and 6 = *extremely important*.

Once the rating responses for the themes from Round 1 were received from each panelist for each of the three questions, the researcher calculated the mean for each of the questions to identify the most important responses for each of the three questions in the survey. The researcher created three lists with the most important personal qualities identified in Round 2 for each question.

Round 3

During Round 3, after the researcher collected the quantitative data from Round 2, by using the mean calculation of the “most important ratings” for each of the three lists in Round 2 the ratings were sent to the panelists for each of the questions. The panelists were then asked to choose no more than one to two items from each of the three lists rated as most important personal qualities and describe from their experiences what selected actions counselors who possess these personal qualities might take to:

- List 1: connect their roles to the school's vision or big picture to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.
- List 2: promote their roles through organizational teamwork.
- List 3: make good choices or strategic organizational decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.

The researcher again analyzed the qualitative responses in Round 3 by identifying the frequencies of responses for Lists 1, 2, and 3 through coding processes using Delve identified the themes in the responses for Round 3.

Interrater Reliability

Interrater reliability establishes the validity of the research through two or more coders measuring the data by applying the same measurement tool. The coders do this by classifying the content units in the same categories (Lovejoy et al., 2016; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). It is recommended that the minimum acceptable level of consensus be at 80% to establish interrater reliability (Lovejoy et al., 2016).

For this study, interrater reliability was used to identify common themes and establish agreement among the panel members for Round 1 and Round 3. The researcher had a second person code 10% of the open-ended responses from Round 1 and Round 3, which helped to ensure the qualitative data were interpreted correctly and helped the researcher uncover new insights. The external person who independently coded the data had a doctorate degree and extensive experience conducting research and analyzing qualitative data. The person who held a doctorate degree also demonstrated knowledge of how to manipulate statistical data by cross checking the mean calculations of the researcher for the quantitative data in Round 2.

Human Participant and Ethical Precautions

The researcher must comply with (a) policies about study implementation processes utilizing human participants and (b) ethical precautions. This includes a full explanation of the study process, confidentiality measures, participant bill of rights form, and informed consent form (see Appendices E, C, F, and G). Part of the precautions undertaken for this study included obtaining University of Massachusetts Global IRB approval on all instruments and procedures and gaining informed consent from each human participant (see Appendix F and G). This contributed to an ethically mindful research process (Galka-Gonyeau, 2020).

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Before collecting any data, the researcher submitted the study to the University of Massachusetts Global IRB. The University of Massachusetts Global IRB examined the study's content to evaluate whether the study had any questionable activities and then provided final approval for using human participants (see Appendix H).

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI)

When an institution is engaged in nonexempt human subject's research that is conducted or supported by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), it must satisfy HHS regulatory requirements related to holding an assurance of compliance and certifying institutional review board (IRB) review and approval. The guidance document describes (a) scenarios that, in general, would result in an institution being considered engaged in a human subject's research project; (b) scenarios that would result in an institution being considered not engaged in a human subject's research project; and (c) IRB review considerations for cooperative research in which multiple institutions are

engaged in the same nonexempt human subject's research project (U.S. HHS, 2008). For this study, the researcher completed training and certification from the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative showing awareness of precautions when working with human subjects (see Appendix I).

Informed Consent

Informed consent is a procedure where researchers working with human participants provide a detailed description of their research project and obtain the participants' consent to participate based on their understanding and the project's methods and goals (American Psychological Association [APA], 2014). To ensure participants have a clear understanding of informed consent, researchers should provide them with information regarding the following aspects:

1. The purpose of the research and expected duration and procedures.
2. Their right to decline to participate and to withdraw from the research once participation has begun.
3. The foreseeable consequences of declining and withdrawing.
4. Reasonably foreseeable factors that may be expected to influence their willingness to participate, such as potential risks, discomfort, or adverse effects.
5. Any protective research benefits.
6. Limits of confidentiality.
7. Incentives for participation.
8. Whom to contact for questions about the research and research participants' rights.

Each participant received an informed consent form with American Psychological Association recommendations for this study (see Appendix F) and a Bill of Rights (see Appendix G). The use of data and confidentiality was fully explained. The informed consent form was attached to initial email communications with the panelists and was required to be reviewed and signed electronically before starting the Round 1 survey. The panelists could retain a copy of the consent form for their records and drop out of the study at any time. All records were stored in a password-protected online folder. This site was password-protected, and the researcher's computer was password-protected.

Limitations

Limitations may affect interpretations of the results based on the experience of the researcher with the methodology (Patten & Newhart, 2018). Limitations may also be a sign of weakness or problems with the study identified by the researcher (Creswell, 2012). The limitations to this study were that it was conducted in Riverside County, California for grades 9-12 public school counselors. The size of the sample in this research study was limited to 20 grades 9-12 school counselors and the response of the panelists were limited to the small sample size. This means that the responses received in this research by this Delphi panel were limited to this panel of participants in this study and cannot necessarily be generalized to the public high school counselors in other schools.

Summary

Chapter III explained the Delphi mixed methods multivariable methodology used for this research including how the survey questionnaire for each round were developed. In Chapter III, there was an explanation of how the 20 9-12 high school counselor leaders

from Riverside County were identified, selected, and surveyed. Chapter III also identified the criteria used to define school counselors as being experts. Chapter III provided an overview of the study population and explained the process for selecting the sample of Delphi participants. It also detailed the development of survey instruments, including measures to enhance their validity and reliability. Chapter III concluded by describing the data collection and analysis procedures, as well as acknowledging the limitations of the study. Chapter IV analyzes the data from the Delphi panel responses aligned to each research question and for each Round. Chapter V identifies findings, implications, conclusions, researcher recommendations, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA, COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

Chapter IV focuses on the research, data collection, and findings. This chapter commences with an overview of the study's purpose statement and three research questions. Subsequently, it delves into the research methodology and the procedures for data collection. The population and target population are explained, followed by a breakdown of the sample criteria. The sample for this study was delimited to expert school counselors who serve 9-12 grade students and two former school counselors in Riverside County, California. The distinct sample criteria used to qualify as an expert for the purposes of this study are delineated in this chapter. Additionally, a presentation and analysis of the data collected are presented. Chapter IV concludes with a summary in preparation for further discussions of conclusions and unexpected findings in Chapter V.

This Delphi study sought to determine the personal qualities school counselor leaders possess to overcome adversity and become expert school counselors. Additionally, after identifying the personal qualities, the focus included delineating the actions school counselors would undertake to navigate the challenges inherent in their role. Eighteen school counselors who serve 9-12 grade students and two former school counselors who have been school counselors within the last 3 years from Riverside County, California participated in three rounds of surveys designed to build consensus on the research topic. Chapter IV of this study provides a thorough summary of the data collected and the findings.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this Delphi multivariable research study was for school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel to identify the personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess in their organizations to lead through the adversity of role confusion by using Maxwell's (2021) *Leading in Tough Times* strategies to include

- connecting their roles to the organization's vision or big picture,
- promoting their roles through organizational teamwork, and
- making good choices or strategic organizational decisions, to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.

The second purpose of this Delphi multivariable research study was for school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel to describe the selected actions school counselors might take to connect their school counseling roles to the organizational vision or big picture to promote their roles through teamwork and to make good choices or strategic decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.

Overarching Questions

1. What would school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel identify as personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess in their organizations to lead through the adversity of role confusion by using Maxwell's (2021) *Leading in Tough Times* to include connecting their roles to the organization's vision or big picture, promoting their roles through organizational teamwork, and making good choices or strategic organizational decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?

2. What are selected actions described by school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel that school counselor leaders might take to connect their school counseling roles to the organizational vision or big picture to promote their roles through teamwork and to make good choices or strategic decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?

Research Questions

1. What personal qualities do school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel identify school counselor leaders must possess in their organizations to lead through the adversity of role confusion by connecting their roles to the organization's vision or big picture to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
2. What personal qualities do school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel identify school counselor leaders must possess in their organizations to lead through the adversity of role confusion by promoting their roles through organizational teamwork to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
3. What personal qualities do school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel identify school counselor leaders must possess in their organizations to lead through the adversity of role confusion by making good choices or strategic organizational decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
4. What are selected actions described by school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel that school counselor leaders might take to connect their school counseling roles to the organizational vision or big picture to promote their roles through teamwork and to make good choices or strategic decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?

Research Design

Delphi Multivariable Thematic Study

A mixed methods Delphi multivariable research design was chosen by the researcher for this study. A mixed methods study collects both qualitative and quantitative data. Multivariable research studies are studies in which three or more variables are being studied simultaneously as compared with one or two variables being researched at a time (Feinstein, 1996). This researcher was also part of a two-person thematic team who researched the personal qualities that leaders must possess to lead through the adversity of role confusion by using selected strategies from Maxwell's (2021) *Leading in Tough Times*. The selected strategies and three variables chosen from Maxwell for this research about school counselors leading through the adversity of role confusion included

- connecting their roles to the organization's vision or big picture,
- promoting their role through organizational teamwork, and
- making what Maxwell calls good choices or strategic organizational decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.

The Delphi multivariable mixed methods design for this study was appropriate because the researcher sought to reach a consensus about the study's research topics from school counselors on the Delphi panel who were currently in the role of school counselor at a school site. Finally, each of the two participants in this thematic study collaborated in using Maxwell's (2021) study to construct purpose statements and research questions but researched two different populations.

A Delphi mixed methods design methodology was used for this research study. The Delphi study was named after the Greek town of Delphi (Fish & Busby, 2005;

Linstone & Turoff, 2002). A temple in Delphi contained a famous oracle that Apollo used to speak through to predict the future (Fish & Busby, 2005). The Delphi method used today has more rational and scientific methods in attempting to predict the future and to gain consensus from a body of experts in a specific field regarding ideas or to predict the future of the ideas. For example, the Delphi study was used by the Air Force in the 1950s to gain consensus “regarding the estimation of the number of A-bombs required to reduce the munitions output by a prescribed amount” (Linstone & Turoff, 2002, p. 10). The primary reason for selecting the Delphi method in this study was to establish a consensus among school counseling leaders. The school counselors chosen for this study met the selected research study to be qualified as school counselor leaders.

Delphi studies incorporate three features: anonymous response, iteration and controlled feedback, and statistical group response (Dalkey, 1969). The anonymity of using the Delphi method is of great benefit in research because the respondents can feel free to answer honestly (Dalkey, 1969; Linstone & Turoff, 2002). The multiple rounds in a Delphi study also allow for real time feedback (Monroe, 2023).

Multivariable Delphi Study

Maxwell’s (2021) research investigated six variables that were recommended as important strategies for leaders to use in times of adversity. School counselors often experience adversity at their school sites, as reviewed in Chapter II, because they are assigned duties that do not align with their roles. School counselors are also often leaders at school sites. However, their roles are not always comprehended, resulting in the creation of unfavorable circumstances because of their numerous responsibilities. It

becomes difficult for them to manage the outcomes that are defined for them by professional school counseling standards.

This study sought to investigate three of the six variables typically aligned with the counselor's role and work responsibilities at school sites. Because three variables were researched, this Delphi study was a mixed methods multivariable study that investigated three areas the researcher included in the three survey rounds of the Delphi research. The three rounds in this Delphi research that considered multivariables in the survey questions that were administered are described in the following sections.

Data Collection

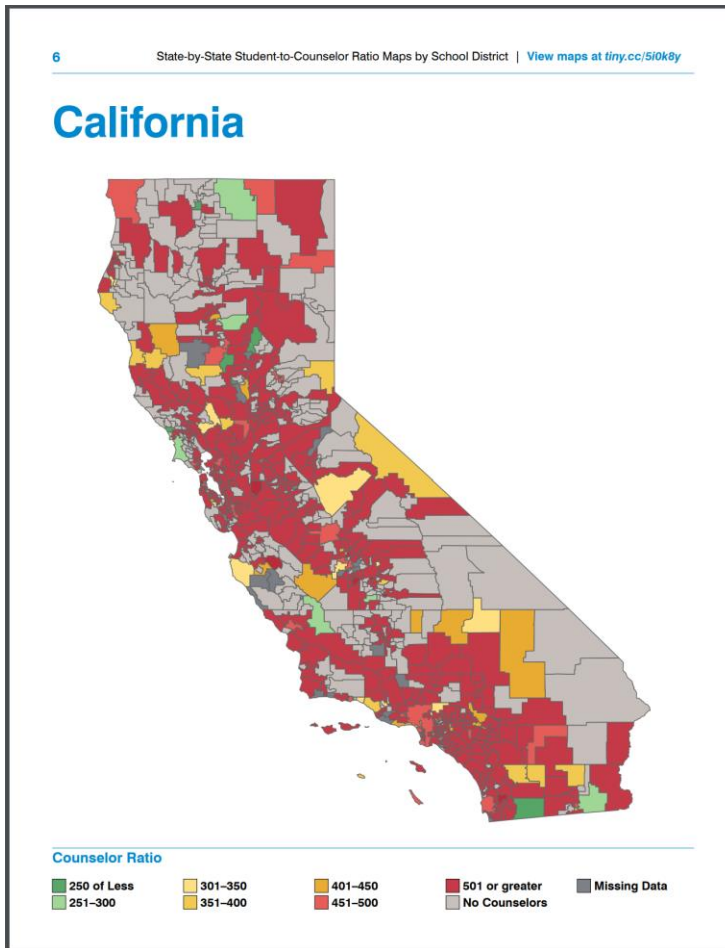
Data were not collected for this survey until permission to conduct the survey was obtained from the University of Massachusetts Global Institutional Review Board (see Appendix H) and certification of completion issued by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (see Appendix I). Survey data were collected in three rounds by emailing panelists web-based surveys through Survey Monkey.

Population

A population is “a group of individuals having one characteristic that distinguishes them from other groups” (Creswell, 2012, p. 142). The population of this study was a group in whom the researcher was interested (Patten & Newhart, 2018). There are approximately 120,793 school counselors in schools in the United States (ASCA, n.d.-c). The population of school counselors in California is estimated to be 11,581 in the K-12 schools. School counselors serve a population of approximately 5,892,073 students. Figure 3 (repeated here for ease of reference) shows the ratio of school counselors to students by school district across the state of California.

Figure 3

California Student-to-Counselor Ratio Map by School District



Note. From *State-by-State Student-to-Counselor Ratio Maps*, by P. Patel and M., 2021, National Association for College Admission Counseling, p. 6 (<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED615227.pdf>).

Target Population

A target population refers to a group of individuals from which a sample is selected, and the findings can be applied or generalized to the entire population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). To narrow the population, the researcher established the field of school counselors to grades 9-12 school counselors who work in Riverside County, California. To decrease bias, the school counselors could not work in the

Corona-Norco Unified School District in Riverside County because this was the researcher's employer at the time of the study. Additionally, Corona-Norco Unified School District school counselors were not used for this study because the researcher was a former school counselor and coordinator of school counseling for the district.

The target population was 343 school counselors in Riverside County in high schools in grade 9-12 (American Civil Liberties Union, n.d.; Data Reporting Office, n.d.-a). The school counselors working in grades 9-12 work in 19 districts in Riverside County. Riverside County has 71 traditional and alternative schools (Data Reporting Office, n.d.-d).

Sample

The researcher considered the sample size when conducting and evaluating research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The study sample is a subgroup of the target population whom the researcher studied for generalizing about the target population (Creswell, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The sample chosen was 20 randomly selected 9-12 school counselors in 18 districts (eliminating the researcher's school district) in Riverside County. From the 18 districts, 250 school counselors were emailed to request participation. Of the 250 school counselors, 32 responded to the survey; however, only 23 met the criteria. Of the 23 who met the criteria, only 20 panelists decided to participate once the study began.

School Counselor Leader Eligibility

To establish what a school counselor leader is, the researcher narrowed the population to school counselors who met both of the criteria in the first subset and met at least one criterion in the second subset.

Subset 1

- Actively serving grades 9-12 as high school counselors in a public school or currently working in public education in Riverside County and was a former school counselor within the last 3 years serving grades 9-12 as a high school counselor.
- Have a minimum of 3 years of school counselor experience.

Subset 2

- Are currently a member of ASCA or CASC.
- Were affected by adversity as a school counselor.
- Presented on a school counseling topic at a state or national conference.
- Won their district or state school counselor of the year award.
- Authored an article for a peer-reviewed journal or published a school counseling book.
- Are currently a school counselor at a RAMP school.
- Are adjunct professors in an accredited school counseling program.

Analysis of Participant Data

Of the 250 school counselors originally identified, 32 responded to the email sent and 23 met the criteria for the study. School counselors on the Delphi panel included 21 current school counselors and two former school counselors. The sample was reduced further to 20 when eligible panelists were sent the Bill of Rights and voluntary participation forms. The final participant total by Round 3 was 16 who qualified and completed all required rounds of the study.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Delphi Round 1: Qualitative Analysis

The first open-ended survey questions were emailed to the panel through the use of an online survey company called Survey Monkey. In the Delphi Round 1, the participants were emailed three open ended questions that aligned with the multivariable research study. Responses to the three open-ended survey questions each produced a list of responses for a total of three lists. These response lists were compiled and maintained in a secure Survey Monkey cloud-based computing server for each of the three lists. The panelists were sent two additional documents: definitions (see Appendix J) and ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies (ASCA, 2019a).

The researcher sent three open-ended questions to the Delphi panelists. The responses from the panelists generated three lists, and each list responded to each question. The three survey questions were as follows:

1. In your experience, what are the personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess to lead through the adversity of confusion about their roles at school sites by connecting their roles to the school's vision or big picture to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
2. In your experience, what are the personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess to lead through the adversity of confusion about their roles at school sites by promoting their roles through organizational teamwork to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
3. In your experience, what are the personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess to lead through the adversity of confusion about their roles at school sites

by making good choices or strategic organizational decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?

For Round 1, of the 20 panelists who qualified for the study, only 19 responded. In the first round the researcher identified themes from the data collected using the three open-ended survey questions.

Round 1 Survey Question 1 (Regarding Vision)

The panelist responses resulted in identifying nine qualities synthesized from the 92 submissions for Survey Question 1. From the 92 responses, the researcher identified the frequencies of responses and used Microsoft Excel to categorize the highest frequencies into nine themes from the pool of responses. As part of the data analysis, the researcher used the cross-analysis approach whereby the highest frequencies of responses became key findings grouped into themes (Patten & Newhart, 2018). The final nine themes are identified in Table 4 for Round 1 Survey Question 1.

Table 4

Round 1 Survey Question 1 (Vision): Themes and Frequencies

Theme	Frequency per theme	% of responses
Communication	19	20.7%
Flexibility	16	17.4%
Visionary	15	16.3%
Advocacy	10	10.9%
Collaboration	9	9.8%
Adaptability	8	8.7%
Listener	8	8.7%
Trustworthy	6	6.5%
Strategic	1	1.0%
Total	92	100.0%

Note. Total respondents = 19.

Emerging Themes From Round 1 Survey Question 1

Of the nine synthesized themes, four highest identified themes emerged. The researcher separated the themes into clusters by the percentages of responses. The first cluster contained the top four identified themes, representing 65.3% of the data. These were qualities that included communication, flexibility, having a vision, and being an advocate. The middle cluster of themes contained four qualities, representing 33.7% of the data. These qualities included collaboration, adaptability, listening, and trustworthiness. The last cluster included one theme, which represented 1.0% of the data. This last theme was to be strategic.

Round 1 Survey Question 2 (Regarding Teamwork)

The panelist responses resulted in 72 submissions for Survey Question 2. From the 72 responses, the researcher identified the frequencies of responses and used Microsoft Excel to categorize the highest frequencies of responses that became the nine themes. As part of the data analysis, the researcher used the cross-analysis approach whereby key findings were grouped into themes (Patten & Newhart, 2018). The final nine themes are identified in Table 5.

Emerging Themes From Round 1 Survey Question 2

From these nine synthesized themes, three clusters of themes emerged. The first cluster contained the top four identified themes, representing 65.1% of the data. These were qualities that included communication, being trustworthy, a good listener, and collaboration. The middle cluster of themes contained three qualities, representing 28.1% of the data. These qualities included advocacy, visionary, and flexibility. The last cluster

included two themes, which represent 6.8% of the data. The last themes were adaptability and to be strategic.

Table 5

Round 1 Survey Question 2 (Teamwork): Themes and Frequencies

Theme	Frequency per theme	% of responses
Communication	17	23.6%
Trustworthy	11	15.0%
Listener	10	14.0%
Collaboration	9	12.5%
Advocacy	8	11.1%
Visionary	7	10.0%
Flexibility	5	7.0%
Adaptability	3	4.0%
Strategic	2	2.8%
Total	71	100.0%

Note. Total respondents = 19.

Round 1 Survey Question 3 (Regarding Good Choices)

The panelist responses resulted in identifying nine qualities synthesized from the 70 submissions from Round 1 Survey Question 3. From the 70 responses, the researcher identified the frequencies of responses and used Microsoft Excel to categorize the nine themes from the pool of responses. As part of the data analysis the researcher used the cross-analysis approach whereby key findings were grouped into themes (Patten & Newhart, 2018). The final nine themes are identified in Table 6.

Emerging Themes From Round 1 Survey Question 3

From these nine synthesized themes, three clusters of themes emerged. The first cluster contained the top three identified themes, representing 50.1% of the data. These were qualities that include being strategic, communication, and adaptability. The middle

cluster of themes contained four qualities, representing 38.5% of the data. These qualities included listening, being a good listener, having a vision, trustworthiness, and collaboration. The last cluster included two themes, representing 11.4% of the data. The last two themes were advocacy and flexibility.

Table 6

Round 1 Survey Question 3 (Good Choices): Themes and Frequencies

Theme	Frequency per theme	% of responses
Strategic	13	18.6%
Communication	12	17.2%
Adaptability	10	14.3%
Listener	8	11.4%
Visionary	8	11.4%
Trustworthy	6	8.6%
Collaboration	5	7.1%
Advocacy	4	5.7%
Flexibility	4	5.7%
Total	70	100%

Note. Total respondents = 19.

Qualitative Summary Analysis of Round 1 Data

In summarizing the data from Round 1, Table 7 shows the response themes from all three survey questions with corresponding frequencies indicated by percentages of responses. Table 7 is the list of themes generated from Round 1. The researcher identified the themes from Round 1 with 50% or more responses. These top themes were then used in Round 2 and sent to the panelists to rate each of the themes in Round 2.

Table 7*Summary of Round 1 Themes*

Survey Question 1: Vision		Survey Question 2: Teamwork		Survey Question 3: Good choices	
Theme	% of responses	Theme	% of responses	Theme	% of responses
Communication	20.7%	Communication	23.6%	Strategic	18.6%
Flexibility	17.4%	Trustworthy	15.0%	Communication	17.2%
Visionary	16.3%	Listener	14.0%	Adaptability	14.3%
Advocacy	10.9%	Collaboration	12.5%	Listener	11.4%
Collaboration	9.8%	Advocacy	11.1%	Visionary	11.4%
Adaptability	8.7%	Visionary	10.0%	Trustworthy	8.6%
Listener	8.7%	Flexibility	7.0%	Collaboration	7.1%
Trustworthy	6.5%	Adaptability	4.0%	Advocacy	5.7%
Strategic	1.0%	Strategic	2.8%	Flexibility	5.7%

Delphi Round 2: Quantitative Analysis

The researcher in Round 2 sent the top themes from Round 1 for each of the three lists that represented over 50% of the response themes to the panelists. The researcher asked the participants on the Delphi panel to rate the themes in each of the three lists by using a 6-point Likert scale to determine the personal qualities school counselor leaders identified were most important when leading their organizations through adversity of confusion about their roles. The 6-point Likert scale had the following rating scale: 1 = *unimportant*, 2 = *moderately unimportant*, 3 = *slightly unimportant*, 4 = *slightly important*, 5 = *moderately important*, and 6 = *extremely important*.

Delphi Round 2 Survey Questions 1–4 (Regarding Vision)

Round 2 of the Delphi study Survey Questions 1 through 4 aligned with Research Question 1. Fifty percent or more of the highest coded themes found as a key finding

from this survey for Question 1 in Round 1 were communication, being flexible, having a vision, and being an advocate.

The survey questions for the themes identified in Round 1 regarding vision were as follows:

1. Please rate the importance of being a communicator to connect the school counselor's role to the school's vision or big picture to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.
2. Please rate the importance of being flexible to connect the school counselor's role to the school's vision or big picture to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.
3. Please rate the importance of being visionary to connect the school counselor's role to the school's vision or big picture to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.
4. Please rate the importance of being an advocate to connect the school counselor's role to the school's vision or big picture to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.

The Round 2 questionnaire was emailed to panelists through the Survey Monkey platform. Twenty participants completed this survey and ranked the four themes according to the Likert scale previously listed. The researcher used a quantitative data analysis process and calculated the means using Survey Monkey for each of the qualities. Table 8 shares the mean scores calculated for each of the four themes identified in order from highest mean to lowest mean score.

Table 8*Identified Quality and Mean Scores (Vision)*

Identified quality	Mean score
Advocate	5.9
Communication	5.7
Flexibility	5.6
Visionary	4.9

Note. Total respondents = 20.

The mean score for the four qualities (themes) identified in Round 1 ranged from 4.9 to 5.9. There was one theme with a mean score of 5.9, one with a mean score of 5.7, and one with a mean score of 5.6. and one with a mean score of 4.9. None of the participants marked any of the themes as slightly unimportant, unimportant, or very unimportant.

The top-rated theme was advocacy with a mean score of 5.9. Seventeen of the 20 participants rated this quality as extremely important, and three rated it moderately important. The second highest rated theme was communication with a mean score of 5.7, and 14 participants rated it extremely important and six rated it moderately important. The third highest rated theme was flexibility with a mean score of 5.6, and 14 participants rated it as extremely important, four rated it as moderately important, and two rated it slightly important. The following sections discuss the ratings for advocacy, communication, flexibility, and visionary.

The most important quality a school counselor must possess to connect to the school's vision or big picture is to be an advocate. See Table 9 for the ratings for advocacy.

Table 9

Advocacy (Vision)

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Very important	17	85%
Moderately important	3	15%
Slightly important	0	0%
Slightly unimportant	0	0%
Unimportant	0	0%
Very unimportant	0	0%
Total	20	100%

Note. Total respondents = 20; mean score = 5.9.

Advocacy was defined by the panel as

- articulating the value of school counseling services
- asking for the necessary resources to support their programs
- doing what it takes
- embracing innovation, staying abreast of latest research and best practices
- having a voice
- helping underrepresented groups, by respecting diverse perspectives and cultural differences
- knowing the school's needs
- putting students first

The second most important quality a school counselor must possess to connect to the school's vision or big picture is communication. See Table 10 for the ratings for communication.

Table 10

Communication (Vision)

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Very important	14	70%
Moderately important	6	30%
Slightly important	0	0%
Slightly unimportant	0	0%
Unimportant	0	0%
Very unimportant	0	0%
Total	20	100%

Note. Total respondents = 20; mean score = 5.7.

Communication was defined by the panel as

- able to communicate their vision, goals, and expectations to both the counseling team and the broader school community
- articulate
- clear and transparent
- communicate the role
- good communication skills
- solution focused communicator

The third most important quality a school counselor must possess to connect to the school's vision or big picture is flexibility. See Table 11 for the ratings for flexibility.

Flexibility was defined by the panel as

- able to collaborate with others
- have patience
- look at all sides
- someone who thinks outside of the box

Table 11*Flexibility (Vision)*

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Very important	14	70%
Moderately important	4	20%
Slightly important	2	10%
Slightly unimportant	0	0%
Unimportant	0	0%
Very unimportant	0	0%
Total	20	100%

Note. Total respondents = 20; mean score = 5.6.

The fourth most important quality a school counselor must possess to connect to the school's vision or big picture is visionary. See Table 12 for the ratings for visionary.

Table 12*Visionary (Vision)*

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Very important	3	15%
Moderately important	11	55%
Slightly important	6	30%
Slightly unimportant	0	0%
Unimportant	0	0%
Very unimportant	0	0%
Total	20	100%

Note. Total respondents = 20; mean score = 4.9.

Visionary was defined by the panel as

- ability to envision and articulate a clear vision of the role of school counseling within the broader context of the school's goals and mission
- someone who can analyze and apply potential goals and pathways to the vision

- someone who has a school counselor vision
- understand the school's vision and be able to discuss how their role contributes to it.

Delphi Round 2 Survey Questions 5–8 (Regarding Teamwork)

For Round 2 the Delphi study Questions 5 through 8 aligned with Research Question 2, and the researcher used a survey questionnaire with the 6-point Likert scale for participants to rank the themes identified in Round 1. The highest coded themes found as a key finding from this survey Question 2 in Round 1 were communication, being trustworthy, a listener, and collaborative.

The survey questions for the themes identified in Round 1 regarding teamwork were as follows:

5. Please rate the importance of being trustworthy in order to promote the school counselor's role through organizational teamwork to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.
6. Please rate the importance of being collaborative in order to promote the school counselor's role through organizational teamwork to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.
7. Please rate the importance of being a good listener in order to promote the school counselor's role through organizational teamwork to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.
8. Please rate the importance of being a good communicator in order to promote the school counselor's role through organizational teamwork to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.

The Round 2 questionnaire was emailed to panelists through the Survey Monkey platform. Twenty participants completed this survey and ranked the four themes according to the Likert scale previously listed. The researcher used quantitative data analysis and calculated the means using Survey Monkey for each of the qualities. Table 13 shares the mean scores calculated for each of the four themes in order from highest mean to lowest mean score.

Table 13

Identified Quality and Mean Scores (Teamwork)

Identified quality	Mean score
Trustworthy	5.9
Listener	5.9
Communicator	5.9
Collaborative	5.6

Note. Total respondents = 20.

The mean score for the four qualities (themes) identified in Round 1 ranged from 5.6 to 5.9. There were three themes with a mean score of 5.9 and one with a mean score of 5.6. None of the participants marked any of the themes as slightly unimportant, unimportant, or very unimportant.

The top-rated theme was trustworthy with a mean score of 5.9. Eighteen of the 20 participants rated this quality as extremely important, and two rated it moderately important. The second top-rated themes were listener and communicator with a mean score of 5.9. Seventeen of the 20 participants rated this quality as extremely important, and three rated it moderately important. The fourth highest rated theme was collaborative with a mean score of 5.6, and 14 participants rated it extremely important, four rated it

moderately important, and two rated it slightly important. The following sections discuss the ratings for trustworthy, listener, communication, and collaborative.

The top-rated quality that a school counselor must possess to connect to promote organization teamwork was trustworthy. See Table 14 for the ratings for trustworthy.

Table 14

Trustworthy (Teamwork)

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Very important	18	90%
Moderately important	2	10%
Slightly important	0	0%
Slightly unimportant	0	0%
Unimportant	0	0%
Very unimportant	0	0%
Total	20	100%

Note. Total respondents = 20; mean score = 5.9.

Trustworthy was defined by the panel as

- aware of their role
- building trust
- having problem solving skills
- having emotional intelligence
- honesty
- kindness
- mutual respect
- transparent

The next quality that a school counselor must possess to connect to promote organization teamwork was good listener. See Table 15 for the ratings for good listener.

Table 15

Listener (Teamwork)

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Very important	17	85%
Moderately important	3	15%
Slightly important	0	0%
Slightly unimportant	0	0%
Unimportant	0	0%
Very unimportant	0	0%
Total	20	100%

Note. Total respondents = 20; mean score = 5.9.

A good listener was defined by the panel as

- active listening
- assertiveness
- charismatic
- open to hearing input without critiquing
- promote role
- tolerant
- willing to join a discussion
- willing to lead

The next quality that a school counselor must possess to connect to promote organization teamwork was good communicator. See Table 16 for the ratings for good communicator.

Table 16

Communication (Teamwork)

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Very important	17	85%
Moderately important	3	15%
Slightly important	0	0%
Slightly unimportant	0	0%
Unimportant	0	0%
Very unimportant	0	0%
Total	20	100%

Note. Total respondents = 20; mean score = 5.9.

Communication was defined by the panel as

- able to work with all cultures and personalities
- approachable
- articulate and having facts to back up what you are saying
- being a professional
- being consistent and clear
- being clear and explaining
- communicating the roles of different staff and stakeholders
- ensuring information is accessible and understandable
- having strong relationships
- persuasive communication
- remaining calm in situations
- understanding and empathizing with the concerns and perspectives of others

The fourth most important quality a school counselor must possess to connect to promote organizational teamwork is collaboration. See Table 17 for the ratings for collaborative.

Table 17

Collaborative (Teamwork)

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Very important	14	70%
Moderately important	4	20%
Slightly important	2	10%
Slightly unimportant	0	0%
Unimportant	0	0%
Very unimportant	0	0%
Total	20	100%

Note. Total respondents = 20; mean score = 5.6.

A collaborative school counselor leader was described by the panel as

- one who can foster a collaborative approach by working closely with administrators, teachers, and other stakeholders to build a unified vision of the school counseling program and its contribution to the school’s success
- someone who can articulate the why
- one who is willing to collaborate with staff

Delphi Round 2 Survey Questions 9–11 (Regarding Good choices)

Round 2 of the Delphi study Survey Questions 9 through 11 aligned with Research Question 3, and the researcher used a survey questionnaire with the 6-point Likert scale for participants to rank the themes identified in Round 1. The highest coded

themes found as a key finding from this survey Question 3 in Round 1 were being strategic, a good communicator, and adaptable.

The survey questions for the themes identified in Round 1 regarding good choices were as follows:

9. Please rate the importance of being adaptable in order to make strategic organizational decisions or good choices to meet and exceed the professional school counseling standards.
10. Please rate the importance of being strategic in order to make strategic organizational decisions or good choices to meet and exceed the professional school counseling standards.
11. Please rate the importance of being a good communicator in order to make strategic organizational decisions or good choices to meet and exceed the professional school counseling standards.

The Round 2 questionnaire was emailed to panelists through the Survey Monkey platform. Twenty participants completed this survey and ranked the three themes according to the Likert scale previously listed. The researcher used quantitative data analysis and calculated the means using Survey Monkey for each of the qualities. Table 18 shares the mean scores calculated for each of the four themes in order from highest mean to lowest mean score.

The mean score for the three qualities (themes) identified in Round 1 ranged from 5.2 to 5.8. There was one theme with a mean score of 5.8, one with a mean score of 5.5, and one with a mean score of 5.2. None of the participants marked any of the themes as slightly unimportant, unimportant, or very unimportant.

Table 18

Identified Qualities and Mean Scores (Good Choices)

Identified quality	Mean score
Communicator	5.8
Adaptable	5.5
Strategic	5.2

Note. Total respondents = 20.

The top-rated theme was communicator with a mean score of 5.8. Sixteen of the 20 participants rated this quality as extremely important, and four rated it moderately important. The second top-rated theme was adaptable with a mean score of 5.5. Twelve of the 20 participants rated this quality as extremely important, six rated this theme as moderately important, and two rated it slightly important. The third highest rated theme was strategic with a mean score of 5.2, and eight participants rated it extremely important, eight rated it moderately important, and four rated it slightly important. The following sections discuss the ratings for communicator, adaptable, and strategic.

The most important quality a school counselor must possess to make strategic organizational decisions or good choices to meet and exceed the professional school counseling standards is communication. See Table 19 for ratings for communicator.

Communicator was defined by the panel as

- approachable
- caring
- communicate their needs
- empathetic
- positive mindset

- promote a collaborative environment
- utilize relationships

Table 19

Communicator (Good Choices)

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Very important	16	80%
Moderately important	4	20%
Slightly important	0	0%
Slightly unimportant	0	0%
Unimportant	0	0%
Very unimportant	0	0%
Total	20	100%

Note. Total respondents = 20; mean score = 5.8.

The second important quality a school counselor must possess to make strategic organizational decisions or good choices to meet and exceed the professional school counseling standards is adaptable. See Table 20 for the ratings for adaptable.

Table 20

Adaptable (Good Choices)

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Very important	12	60%
Moderately important	6	30%
Slightly important	2	10%
Slightly unimportant	0	0%
Unimportant	0	0%
Very unimportant	0	0%
Total	20	100%

Note. Total respondents = 20; mean score = 5.5.

Adaptable was defined by the panel as

- flexible to change
- open to new or changing counseling practices to meet the ever-evolving needs in order to align with professional standards
- someone who can make required decisions

The third important quality a school counselor must possess to make strategic organizational decisions or good choices to meet and exceed the professional school counseling standards is strategic. See Table 21 for the ratings for strategic.

Table 21

Strategic (Good Choices)

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Very important	8	40%
Moderately important	8	40%
Slightly important	4	20%
Slightly unimportant	0	0%
Unimportant	0	0%
Very unimportant	0	0%
Total	20	100%

Note. Total respondents = 20; mean score = 5.2.

Strategic was defined by the panel as

- someone who can align the school counseling program with the school's overall mission and goals and plan accordingly
- someone who can combine levels of experience and clarify roles
- strategic thinker—detail oriented, scaffolding smaller site goals to tackle larger organizational goals

Analysis of Round 2 Data

Table 22 summarizes the key findings from Round 2 from the three sets of survey questions including the highest themes identified (using mean scores) and their ratings for each of the survey questions. Table 22 shows the ratings of the list of themes generated from Round 1 and the Likert score ratings calculated in Round 2. Ratings with a mean score higher than 5.7 were sent to panelists to answer Round 3 survey questions. The 5.7 mean score represents 100% of the panelists choosing 5 = *moderately important* and 6 = *extremely important* on the Likert scale.

Table 22

Key Findings Round 2: Theme Mean Score Ratings

Survey Questions 1–4: Vision		Survey Questions 5–8: Teamwork		Survey Questions 9–11: Making good choices	
Theme	Mean score	Theme	Mean score	Theme	Mean score
Advocate	5.9	Trustworthy	5.9	Communicator	5.8
Communicator	5.7	Listener	5.9	Adaptable	5.5
Flexibility	5.6	Communicator	5.9	Strategic	5.2
Visionary	4.9	Collaborative	5.6		

Delphi Round 3: Qualitative Analysis

There were six variables identified through the ratings that came from Round 2 that represented a mean score of 5.7 or above of the responses identified from the three lists. These highest rated variables with mean scores of 5.7 and or above were sent to the panelists for Round 3. The rated variables identified with a mean score of 5.7 and above for the question regarding vision were advocacy and communication. Trustworthy, listener, and communication were identified and rated above a 5.7 for the question regarding teamwork. Communication was identified and rated above a 5.7 for the

question regarding good choices. For Round 3, the panelists were sent six survey questions asking them to describe what their actions would look like regarding the rated variables identified in Round 2. The Survey Questions for Round 3 were as follows.

1. In your experience, describe what being an advocate looks like for school counselor leaders who lead through the adversity of role confusion in their organizations to connect their roles to the school's vision or big picture to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
2. In your experience, describe what good communication looks like for school counselor leaders who lead through the adversity of role confusion in their organizations to connect their roles to the school's vision or big picture to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
3. In your experience, describe what being trustworthy looks like for school counselor leaders who lead through the adversity of role confusion in their organizations to promote their roles through organizational teamwork to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
4. In your experience, describe what being a good listener looks like for school counselor leaders who lead through the adversity of role confusion in their organizations to promote their roles through organizational teamwork to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
5. In your experience, describe what good communication looks like for school counselor leaders who lead through the adversity of role confusion in their organizations to promote their roles through organizational teamwork to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?

6. In your experience, describe what good communication looks like for school counselor leaders who lead through the adversity of role confusion in their organizations to make good choices or strategic organizational decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?

Of the 20 of the panelists who qualified for the study, 16 responded. Two panelists reached out to the researcher during the researcher's scheduled window of data collection to inform the researcher that Survey Monkey was having a problem, and their responses were not captured. The researcher requested the two panelists to complete the survey again once Survey Monkey was fixed; however, they declined.

Delphi Round 3 Survey Question 1 (Regarding Vision)

The panelist responses resulted in identifying eight actions synthesized from the 46 submissions for Survey Question 1. From the 46 responses, the researcher identified the frequencies of responses and used Microsoft Excel to categorize the highest frequencies into eight themes from the pool of responses. The final eight themes are identified in Table 23 for Round 3 Survey Question 1.

Emerging Themes From Round 3 Survey Question 1

From these eight synthesized themes, three clusters of themes emerged. The first cluster contained the top two identified themes, representing 56.6% of the data. These were actions that included collaboration and teamwork and purpose and clarity. The middle cluster of themes contained three actions, representing 32.7% of the data. These actions included communication and engagement, leadership and interpersonal skills, and reflective practices. The last cluster included three themes, which represent 10.7% of the

data. This cluster included professional and ethical conduct, adaptability and flexibility, and inclusivity and cultural competence.

Table 23

Round 3 Survey Question 1 (Vision): Themes and Frequencies

Theme	Total submission per theme	% of responses
Collaboration and teamwork	17	37.0%
Purpose and clarity	9	19.6%
Communication and engagement methods	6	13.1%
Leadership and interpersonal skills	5	10.9%
Reflective practices	4	8.7%
Professional and ethical conduct	2	4.3%
Adaptability and flexibility	2	4.3%
Inclusivity and cultural competence	1	2.1%
Total	46	100%

Note. Total respondents = 16.

The most important action to describe what an advocate looks like for school counselor leaders who lead through the adversity of role confusion in their organizations to connect their roles to the school’s vision or big picture to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards is collaboration and teamwork.

Collaboration and teamwork to provide advocacy are described as

- aligning with common areas of interest and actively work or eliminate confusion
- being courageous and knowledgeable
- empathize
- giving suggestions and opinions to support students and school

- having knowledge about various programs that the site or district offers that are available to students
- promoting the value of the school counselor
- someone who researches solutions and creates like-minded people who have similar goals
- willing to ensure stakeholders understand the role of the school counselor

Round 3 Survey Question 2 (Regarding Vision)

The panelist responses resulted in identifying eight actions synthesized from the 72 submissions. From the 72 responses, the researcher identified the frequencies of responses and used Microsoft Excel to categorize the highest frequencies into eight themes from the pool of responses. The final eight themes are identified in Table 24 for Round 3 Survey Question 2.

Table 24

Round 3 Survey Question 2 (Vision): Themes and Frequencies

Theme	Total submission per theme	% of responses
Communication and engagement methods	25	35.0%
Purpose and clarity	15	21.0%
Profession and ethical conduct	14	19.4%
Collaboration and teamwork	11	15.2%
Adaptability and flexibility	3	4.2%
Reflective practices	3	4.2%
Leadership and interpersonal skills	1	1.0%
Inclusivity and cultural competence	0	0.0%
Total	72	100.0%

Note. Total respondents = 16.

Emerging Themes From Round 3 Survey Question 2

From these eight synthesized themes, three clusters of themes emerged. The first cluster contained the top three identified themes, representing 75.4% of the data. These were actions that include communication and engagement methods, purpose and clarity, and professional and ethical conduct. The middle cluster of themes contained one action, representing 15.2% of the data. This action includes collaboration and teamwork. The last cluster included three themes, representing 9.4% of the data. This cluster includes the themes of adaptability and flexibility, reflective practices, and leadership and interpersonal skills.

The most important action to describe what good communication looks like for school counselor leaders who lead through the adversity of role confusion in their organizations to connect their roles to the school's vision or big picture to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards is communication and engagement. Communication and engagement to provide good communication are described as

- being present
- promoting the work through school websites and social media
- staying current with information
- utilizing varying ways to communicate; text, phone, direct messaging, email, messaging platforms, and in person

Delphi Round 3 Survey Question 3 (Regarding Teamwork)

The panelist responses resulted in identifying eight actions synthesized from 62 submissions for Survey Question 3. From the 62 responses, the researcher identified the frequencies of responses and used Microsoft Excel to categorize the highest frequencies

into eight themes from the pool of responses. The final eight themes are identified in Table 25 for Round 3. Survey Question 3.

Table 25

Round 3 Survey Question 3 (Teamwork): Themes and Frequencies

Theme	Total submission per theme	% of responses
Professional and ethical conduct	44	71.0%
Collaboration and teamwork	7	11.0%
Inclusivity and cultural competence	4	6.5%
Leadership and interpersonal skills	4	6.5%
Communication and engagement methods	3	4.8%
Reflective practices	0	0.0%
Adaptability and flexibility	0	0.0%
Purpose and clarity	0	0.0%
Total	62	100%

Note. Total respondents = 16.

Emerging Themes From Round 3 Survey Question 3

From these eight synthesized themes, three clusters of themes emerged. The first cluster contained the top identified themes, representing 71% of the data. These were actions that include professional and ethical conduct. The middle cluster of themes contained three actions, each representing 29% of the data. These actions include collaboration and teamwork, inclusivity and cultural competence, leadership and interpersonal skills, and communication and engagement.

The most important action to describe what being trustworthy looks like for school counselor leaders who lead through the adversity of role confusion in their

organizations to promote their roles through organizational teamwork to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards is professional and ethical conduct.

Professional and ethical conduct to be trustworthy are described as

- accountable for actions
- be confidential with students and staff
- be dependable to do your work, follow through, meet deadlines, be organized
- be honest
- be someone who is respected
- demonstrate transparency through communication regarding actions, decisions, and intentions
- don't gossip
- have integrity
- maintain your word
- remain authentic regardless of adversity
- show that you care
- stay true to your word, while keeping the schools interest at heart

Delphi Round 3 Survey Question 4 (Regarding Teamwork)

The panelist responses resulted in identifying eight actions synthesized from 63 submissions for Survey Question 4. From the 63 responses, the researcher identified the frequencies of responses and used Microsoft Excel to categorize the highest frequencies into eight themes from the pool of responses. The final eight themes are identified in Table 26 for Round 3 Survey Question 4.

Table 26*Round 3 Survey Question 4 (Teamwork): Themes and Frequencies*

Theme	Total submission per theme	% of responses
Collaboration and teamwork	21	33.3%
Leadership and interpersonal skills	16	25.0%
Reflective practices	11	17.5%
Inclusivity and cultural competence	4	6.3%
Professional and ethical conduct	4	6.3%
Communication and engagement methods	4	6.3%
Adaptability and flexibility	3	5.0%
Purpose and clarity	0	0.0%
Total	63	100.0%

Note. Total respondents = 16.

Emerging Themes From Round 3 Survey Question 4

From these eight synthesized themes, three clusters of themes emerged. The first cluster contained the top two identified themes, representing 58.3% of the data. These actions included collaboration and teamwork and leadership and interpersonal skills. The middle cluster of themes contained one action, representing 17.5% of the data. This action included reflective practices. The next cluster included 4 themes, representing 23.9% of the data. These actions include inclusivity and cultural competence, professional and ethical conduct, communication and engagement methods, and adaptability and flexibility.

The most important action to describe what being a good listener looks like for school counselor leaders who lead through the adversity of role confusion in their organizations to promote their roles through organizational teamwork to meet and exceed

their professional school counseling standards is collaboration and teamwork.

Collaboration and teamwork to be a good listener are described as

- empathetic understanding
- fostering a culture of teamwork
- hearing all perspectives and willing to consider alternative viewpoints
- listening to understand not to respond
- open to all stakeholders input and values the opportunity communicate with others
- someone who can reflect, restate, and ask insightful questions
- someone who can talk and listen and help people come to consensus
- value both veteran and new counselors' perspectives and ideas
- work toward collaboration

Delphi Round 3 Survey Question 5 (Regarding Teamwork)

The panelist responses resulted in identifying eight actions synthesized from the 65 submissions. From the 65 responses, the researcher identified the frequencies of responses and used Microsoft Excel to categorize the highest frequencies into eight themes from the pool of responses. The final eight themes are identified in Table 27 for Round 3 Survey Question 5.

Emerging Themes From Round 3 Survey Question 5

From these eight synthesized themes, three clusters of themes emerged. The first cluster contained the top two identified themes, representing 52.4% of the data. The actions included communication and engagement methods and purpose and clarity. The middle cluster of themes contained three actions, representing 27.4% of the data. These

actions include collaboration and teamwork and professional and ethical conduct. The last cluster included four themes, representing 20.2% of the data. This cluster includes leadership and interpersonal skills, reflective practices, adaptability and flexibility and inclusivity and cultural competence.

Table 27

Round 3 Survey Question 5 (Teamwork): Themes and Frequencies

Theme	Total submission per theme	% of responses
Communication and engagement methods	23	35.4%
Purpose and clarity	11	17.0%
Collaboration and teamwork	10	15.4%
Professional and ethical conduct	8	12.0%
Leadership and interpersonal skills	4	6.1%
Reflective practices	4	6.1%
Adaptability and flexibility	3	5.0%
Inclusivity and cultural competence	2	3.0%
Total	65	100.0%

Note. Total respondents = 16.

The most important action to describe what good communication looks like for school counselor leaders who lead through the adversity of role confusion in their organizations to promote their roles through organizational teamwork to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards is communication and engagement methods.

Communication and engagement methods are described as

- articulate how school counseling services support students and the school counselor role
- being a liaison between stakeholders
- establish rapport
- people who care about the issues being discussed, and willing to express their opinions
- sharing information with all stakeholders and willing to come back to talk about after people have had time to process
- utilizing various ways to communicate; online, phone, email, newsletters, social media, google classroom, in person, messaging platforms

Delphi Round 3 Question 6 (Regarding Good Choices)

The panelist responses resulted in identifying eight actions synthesized from the 64 submissions for Survey Question 6. From the 64 responses, the researcher identified the frequencies of responses and used Microsoft Excel to categorize the highest frequencies into eight themes from the pool of responses. The final eight themes are identified in Table 28 for Round 3 Survey Question 6.

Emerging Themes From Round 3 Question 6

From these eight synthesized themes, three clusters of themes emerged. The first cluster contained the two top identified themes, representing 50% of the data. The actions included communication and engagement methods and collaboration and teamwork. The middle cluster of themes contained two actions, each representing 34% of the data. These actions included professional and ethical conduct and purpose and clarity. The third cluster of themes included three actions, representing 16% of the data. This cluster

includes leadership and interpersonal skills, reflective practices, inclusivity, and cultural competence.

Table 28

Round 3 Survey Question 6 (Good Choices): Themes and Frequencies

Theme	Total submission per theme	% of responses
Communication and engagement methods	17	27.0%
Collaboration and teamwork	15	23.0%
Professional and ethical conduct	11	17.0%
Purpose and clarity	11	17.0%
Leadership and interpersonal skills	5	8.0%
Reflective practices	4	6.0%
Inclusivity and cultural competence	1	2.0%
Adaptability and flexibility	0	0.0%
Total	64	100.0%

Note. Total respondents = 16.

The most important action to describe what good communication looks like for school counselor leaders who lead through the adversity of role confusion in their organizations to make good choices or strategic organizational decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards is communication and engagement methods.

Communication and engagement methods are described as

- articulate issues and explain influencing decisions
- asking questions
- being able to explain the factors that influence decisions

- establishing rapport
- having accurate facts when communicating or making decisions
- networking
- reading and attending professional developments
- seeking input from others
- utilizing varying ways to communicate; online, direct messaging, phone, email, newsletters, in person

Analysis of Round 3 Data

In summarizing the data from Round 3, Table 29 shows the themes in order of highest response.

Key Findings

In this chapter, a description of the research methodology and data collection procedures was provided as well as an analysis of the data for all three rounds.

Round 1 Key Findings

For the question regarding vision survey questions with a 50% and above panel response score, the theme responses included

- communication
- flexibility
- visionary
- advocacy

For the question regarding teamwork survey questions with a 50% or above panel response score, the theme responses included

- communication

- trustworthy
- listener
- collaboration

Table 29

Key Findings Round 3

Question 1: Advocacy (vision)	Question 2: Communication (vision)	Question 3: Trustworthy (teamwork)	Question 4: Listener (teamwork)	Question 5: Communication (teamwork)	Question 6: Communication (good choices)
Collaboration and teamwork	Communication and engagement methods	Professional and ethical conduct	Collaboration and teamwork	Communication and engagement methods	Communication and engagement methods
Purpose and clarity	Purpose and clarity	Collaboration and teamwork	Leadership and interpersonal skills	Purpose and clarity	Collaboration and teamwork
Communication and engagement methods	Professional and ethical conduct	Inclusivity and cultural competence	Reflective practices	Collaboration and teamwork	Professional and ethical conduct
Leadership and interpersonal skills	Collaboration and teamwork	Leadership and interpersonal skills	Inclusivity and cultural competence	Professional and ethical conduct	Purpose and clarity
Reflective practices	Adaptability and flexibility	Communication and engagement methods	Professional and ethical conduct	Leadership and interpersonal skills	Leadership and interpersonal skills
Professional and ethical conduct	Reflective practices	Reflective practices	Communication and engagement methods	Reflective practices	Reflective practices
Adaptability and flexibility	Leadership and interpersonal skills	Adaptability and flexibility	Adaptability and flexibility	Adaptability and flexibility	Inclusivity and cultural competence
Inclusivity and cultural competence	Inclusivity and cultural competence	Purpose and clarity	Purpose and clarity	Inclusivity and cultural competence	Adaptability and flexibility

For the question regarding good choices survey questions with a 50% or above panel response score, the theme responses included

- strategic

- communication
- adaptability

Round 2 Key Findings

To determine the key findings for Round 2, the researcher rated the themes from Round 1, and this rating elicited the following ratings at mean scores of 5.7 and above.

For vision, with a mean score of 5.7 or higher, which represents 100% of the panel scoring, the qualities rated as either *extremely important* or *moderately important* were

- advocate
- communication

For teamwork, with a score of 5.7 or higher the ratings were

- trustworthy
- listener
- communicator

For good choices, the panel response with a score 5.7 or higher, the highest was at 5.8 for

- communicator

Round 3 Key Findings

For Survey Question 1 regarding advocacy (vision) with above 50% response rate, the themes included

- collaboration and teamwork
- purpose and clarity

For Survey Question 2 regarding communication (vision) with above 50% response rate, the themes included

- communication and engagement methods
- purpose and clarity
- professional and ethical conduct

For Survey Question 3 regarding trustworthy (teamwork) with above 50% response rate, the themes included

- professional and ethical conduct

For Survey Question 4 regarding listener (teamwork) with above 50% response rate, the themes included

- collaboration and teamwork
- leadership and interpersonal skills

For Survey Question 5 regarding communication (teamwork) with above 50% response rate, the themes included

- communication and engagement methods
- purpose and clarity

For Survey Question 6 regarding communication (good choices) with above 50% response rate, the themes included

- communication and engagement methods
- collaboration and teamwork

Summary

Chapter IV explained the research, data collection, and key findings of the Delphi mixed method multivariable study over three rounds of survey questions. The researcher

analyzed qualitative data and identified the themes from Round 1 from panelists' responses regarding Maxwell's (2021) strategies to navigate adversity, which included the variables of vision, teamwork and making good choices. In Round 2, the themes that were identified in Round 1 by 50% or more of the responses in Round 1 were analyzed using a quantitative approach and sent to the panelists to rate in Round 2. Once rated, the researcher calculated the mean score for each of the variable responses, and any responses with a mean score of 5.7 and above were sent to panelists in Round 3. The panelists were asked in this final Round 3 to identify specific actions counselors would take to implement those variables identified and rated in Round 2. Major findings of all three rounds were summarized at the end of Chapter IV. Chapter V identifies the major findings, unexpected findings, conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

School counselors have faced adversity from the onset of their careers. Adversity began because school counselors neglected to take on the leadership role for their job and allowed others to dictate their role and function (Bemak, 2000; Coy et al., 1991). Although these statements are true, the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies asks school counselors to demonstrate leadership through the development and implementation of their school counseling program (ASCA, 2019a). The ASCA national model weaves four major themes to create a holistic framework for school counseling: leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change (ASCA, 2019b; Gay, 2021).

The book *Leading in Tough Times* suggested that in tough times leaders must take an opportunity to become better leaders through the following seven challenges: self-leadership, change, teamwork, motivation, strategy, communication, and decision-making (Maxwell, 2021). There are six leadership practices that Maxwell (2021) also recommended leaders use in the face of adverse organizational conditions. These practices include the following: (a) define reality, (b) remind stakeholders of the big picture, (c) help employees develop a plan, (d) help them make good choices, (e) value and promote teamwork, and (f) give them hope. This study focused on three things—remind stakeholders of the big picture, help them make good choices, and value and promote teamwork. The adversities that school counselors still face suggest that school counselors still bear the burden of communicating with administration their efforts to set student outcome goals, address achievement gaps, and provide documentation of their work (ASCA, 2023b). This study aimed to elicit from counselors the personal qualities

they must possess when leading their organizations through the adversity of counselor role confusion in school organizations by being in the forefront of these three Maxwell strategies while clarifying for the stakeholders they work with that meeting and exceeding their counselor professional standards is an important component of using the strategies Maxwell recommends.

Chapter I was an introduction to the Delphi research study. Chapter I provided an overview of the study, starting with the background information and presenting the research problem. It included the purpose statement and research questions and highlighted the significance of the problem. Additionally, Chapter I defined key terms and delimited the scope of the study. Finally, it outlined the organization of the study as a whole.

Chapter II comprised a literature review that delved into the historical aspects of school counseling, emphasizing the role of school counselors. It explored the challenges and adversities that school counselors encounter in their professional role while also examining the impact of leadership in the field of school counseling.

Chapter III provided an overview of the study methodology, focusing on implementation of the Delphi method. It elucidated the selection of the population, sample, the instrumentation used, and the process of data collection and analysis.

Chapter IV reviewed the results from each round of the Delphi study and presented and analyzed the data. The sample for this study was delimited to school counselor leaders or former school counselors within the last 3 years who work in grade 9-12 schools in Riverside County, California. The criteria used to qualify as a panel member for this study was also described in Chapter IV. There were three rounds of

surveys used in the data collection process. The first round involved the collection of qualitative data, the second round collected quantitative data, and the third round collected qualitative data.

Chapter V concludes this Delphi research study. The purpose statement, research questions, and methodology are reviewed. In addition, the major findings, unexpected findings, conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for further research are presented in this chapter. Chapter V ends with concluding remarks and overall reflections.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this Delphi multivariable research study was for school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel to identify the personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess in their organizations to lead through the adversity of role confusion by using Maxwell's (2021) *Leading in Tough Times* strategies to include

- connecting their roles to the organization's vision or big picture,
- promoting their roles through organizational teamwork, and
- making good choices or strategic organizational decisions, to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.

The second purpose of this Delphi multivariable research study was for school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel to describe the selected actions school counselors might take to connect their school counseling roles to the organizational vision or big picture to promote their roles through teamwork and to make good choices or strategic decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.

Overarching Questions

1. What would school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel identify as personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess in their organizations to lead through the adversity of role confusion by using Maxwell's (2021) *Leading in Tough Times* to include connecting their roles to the organization's vision or big picture, promoting their roles through organizational teamwork, and making good choices or strategic organizational decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
2. What are selected actions described by school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel that school counselor leaders might take to connect their school counseling roles to the organizational vision or big picture to promote their roles through teamwork and to make good choices or strategic decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?

Research Questions

1. What personal qualities do school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel identify school counselor leaders must possess in their organizations to lead through the adversity of role confusion by connecting their roles to the organization's vision or big picture to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
2. What personal qualities do school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel identify school counselor leaders must possess in their organizations to lead through the adversity of role confusion by promoting their roles through organizational teamwork to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?

3. What personal qualities do school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel identify school counselor leaders must possess in their organizations to lead through the adversity of role confusion by making good choices or strategic organizational decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
4. What are selected actions described by school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel that school counselor leaders might take to connect their school counseling roles to the organizational vision or big picture to promote their roles through teamwork and to make good choices or strategic decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?

Research Design

Delphi Multivariable Thematic Study

A mixed methods Delphi multivariable research design was chosen by the researcher for this study. A mixed methods study collects both qualitative and quantitative data. Multivariable research studies are studies in which three or more variables are being studied simultaneously as compared with one or two variables being researched at a time (Feinstein, 1996). This researcher was also part of a two-person thematic team who researched the personal qualities that leaders must possess to lead through the adversity of role confusion by using selected strategies from Maxwell's (2021) *Leading in Tough Times*. The selected strategies and three variables chosen from Maxwell for this research about school counselors leading through the adversity of role confusion included

- connecting their roles to the organization's vision or big picture,
- promoting their role through organizational teamwork, and

- making what Maxwell calls good choices or strategic organizational decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.

The Delphi multivariable mixed methods design for this study was appropriate because the researcher sought to reach a consensus about the study's research topics from school counselors on the Delphi panel who were currently in the role of school counselor at a school site. Finally, each of the two participants in this thematic study collaborated in using Maxwell's (2021) study to construct purpose statements and research questions but researched two different populations.

A Delphi mixed methods design methodology was used for this research study. The Delphi study was named after the Greek town of Delphi (Fish & Busby, 2005; Linstone & Turoff, 2002). A temple in Delphi contained a famous oracle that Apollo used to speak through to predict the future (Fish & Busby, 2005). The Delphi method used today has more rational and scientific methods in attempting to predict the future and to gain consensus from a body of experts in a specific field regarding ideas or predict the future of the ideas (Fish & Busby, 2005). For example, the Delphi study was used by the Air Force in the 1950s to gain consensus "regarding the estimation of the number of A-bombs required to reduce the munitions output by a prescribed amount" (Linstone & Turoff, 2002, p. 10). The primary reason for selecting the Delphi method in this study was to establish a consensus among school counseling leaders. The school counselors chosen for this study met the selected criteria of this study to be qualified as school counselor leaders.

Delphi studies incorporate three features: anonymous response, iteration and controlled feedback, and statistical group response (Dalkey, 1969). The anonymity of

using the Delphi method is of great benefit in research because the respondents can feel free to answer honestly (Dalkey, 1969; Linstone & Turoff, 2002). The multiple rounds in a Delphi study also allow for real time feedback (Monroe, 2023).

Population

A population is “a group of individuals having one characteristic that distinguishes them from other groups” (Creswell, 2012, p. 142). The population of this study was a group the researcher was interested in (Patten & Newhart, 2018). There are approximately 120,793 school counselors in schools in the United States (ASCA, n.d.-c). The population of school counselors in California is estimated in K-12 schools to be 11,581. School counselors serve a population of approximately 5,892,073 students.

Target Population

A target population refers to a group of individuals from whom a sample is selected, and the findings can be applied or generalized to the entire population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). To narrow the population, the researcher established the field of school counselors to grades 9-12 school counselors who work in Riverside County, California. To decrease bias, the school counselors could not work in the Corona-Norco Unified School District in Riverside County because this was the researcher’s employer at the time of the study. Additionally, Corona-Norco Unified School District school counselors were not used for this study because the researcher was a former school counselor and coordinator of school counseling for the district.

The target population was 343 school counselors in Riverside County in high schools in grade 9-12 (American Civil Liberties Union, n.d.; Data Reporting Office, n.d.-a). The school counselors working in grades 9-12 work in 19 districts in Riverside

County. Riverside County has 71 traditional and alternative schools-of-choice high schools (Data Reporting Office, n.d.-d).

Sample

The researcher considered the sample size when conducting and evaluating research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The study sample is a subgroup of the target population whom the researcher studied for generalizing about the target population (Creswell, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The sample chosen was 20 randomly selected, 9-12 school counselors in 18 districts (eliminating the researchers school district) in Riverside County. Both male and female school counselors were chosen randomly by listing the school counselors by gender in two lists and selected randomly from each list, as detailed in the sampling procedures in this study, and 10 male and 10 female school counselors were identified.

Major Findings

Research Question 1

What personal qualities do school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel identify school counselor leaders must possess in their organizations to lead through the adversity of role confusion by connecting their roles to the organization's vision or big picture to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?

Major Finding 1

Communication was a variable identified by the Delphi panel as the major attribute all school counselor leaders should use to clarify their roles and how their roles support the organization's vision. Communication was a theme addressed 50% or more of the time by panelists in Round 1 and was rated at the top of the strategies in Round 2

with an average mean score of 5.7. In addition, school counselors identified strategies in Round 3 as to how communication should be used to navigate adversity and clarify their roles. The panelists shared that school counselors must exemplify effective communication by embodying presence and engagement with diverse student populations, fostering motivation, and transparently educating stakeholders about their role and responsibilities in alignment with state and national standards and the school's vision. When school counselors are honest and have clear articulation of their goals, they can advocate for the vital role of school counseling. Communication should be carried out through various platforms, including social media, school websites, in person meetings, and direct messaging. Communication is key to helping stakeholders understand their role (Havlik et al., 2019). This finding agreed with the theoretical framework of Maxwell in this study. Maxwell (2021) indicated that good leaders “communicate the vision of the organization once, then continually remind the team of it” (p. 110).

Major Finding 2

Advocacy was a variable identified by the Delphi panel as the major attribute all school counselor leaders should use to clarify their roles and how their roles support the organization's vision. Advocacy was a theme addressed 50% or more of the time by panelists in Round 1 and was rated above all the rest of the qualities in Round 2 with an average mean score of 5.9. In addition, school counselors identified strategies in Round 3 as to how advocacy should be used to navigate adversity and clarify their roles.

In Round 3, the panelists indicated that one way they demonstrate advocacy is by using their voices to speak up and professionally articulate the importance and impact of

their positions. Moreover, effectively advocating their initiatives and ensuring that all stakeholders are aware of their plans greatly enhances their advocacy efforts. Hatch suggested that advocacy is the most important skill needed to be a school counselor in today's schools (Gay, 2021). Leaders bear the responsibility for seeing the big picture and helping people to see it through advocacy (Maxwell, 2021).

Research Question 2

What personal qualities do school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel identify school counselor leaders must possess in their organizations to lead through the adversity of role confusion by promoting their roles through organizational teamwork to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?

Major Finding 3

Trustworthiness was a variable identified by the Delphi panel as the major attribute all school counselor leaders should use to promote their roles through organizational teamwork. Trustworthy was a theme addressed 50% or more of the time by panelists in Round 1 and was rated above all the rest of the strategies in Round 2 with an average mean score of 5.9. In addition, school counselors identified strategies in Round 3 as to how being trustworthy could help school counselors clarify their roles through teamwork.

Panelists demonstrated vulnerability by openly sharing their experiences and challenges in Round 3. The panelists indicated that to be trustworthy, school counselors need to communicate facts accurately and ensure that information is treated with respect and confidentiality. They should always prioritize the best interests of the school community, remaining dependable and authentic in their approach. School counselor

leaders should genuinely care about the issues and people they work with, consistently demonstrating integrity and following through on their commitments. The panelists also suggested that honesty and respect are core values for school counselor leaders as they strive to be transparent and open in their interactions. A leader motivates, innovates, trusts, is visionary, and has a positive influence (Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Moua, 2010). Maxwell (2021) suggested, “Trust is required for people to feel safe enough to create, share, question, attempt, and risk. Without it, leadership is weak and teamwork is impossible” (p. 67).

Research Question 3

What personal qualities do school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel identify school counselor leaders must possess in their organizations to lead through the adversity of role confusion by making good choices or strategic organizational decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?

Major Finding 4

Communication was a variable identified again by the Delphi panelists as the major attribute all school counselor leaders should use to clarify their roles and how their roles support making good choices. Communication was a theme addressed 50% or more of the time by panelists in Round 1 and was rated at the top of the strategies in Round 2 with an average mean score of 5.8. In addition, school counselors identified strategies in Round 3 as to how communication should be used to navigate adversity, clarify their roles, and make good decisions or choices in their roles.

Panelists explained that it is important to ask thoughtful questions that encourage reflection and critical thinking. Additionally, the panelists indicated that they need to stay

informed and current on relevant topics by actively reading and attending professional development opportunities. By networking with experts in the field, the panelists responded in Round 3 that this strategy could help them to access valuable resources and gain insights.

In Round 3, the panelists suggested that school counselor leaders should regularly provide updates to stakeholders, effectively communicating the why behind their decisions; this helps to build understanding and support. They also suggested that school counselors should also use data to back up their information, making their communication more evidence-based and persuasive. By letting stakeholders know about plans, they ensure transparency and collaboration in the decision-making process.

Maxwell (2021) stated,

Your choices are the only thing you can truly control. You cannot control your circumstances, nor can you control other people. By focusing on your choices, and then making them with integrity, you confirm and strengthen your commitment. And that is what often separates success from failure. (pp. 39-40)

Research Question 4

What are selected actions described by school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel that school counselor leaders might take to connect their school counseling roles to the organizational vision or big picture to promote their roles through teamwork and to make good choices or strategic decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?

Major Finding 5

Collaboration and teamwork were variables identified by the Delphi panelists as selected actions all school counselor leaders should use to connect their school counseling role to the organizational vision or big picture to promote their roles through teamwork and to make good choices or strategic decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards. Collaboration and teamwork were a theme addressed 50% or more of the time by panelists in Round 3.

In addition, the Delphi panelists identified strategies in Round 3 as to how collaboration and teamwork should be used to navigate adversity and clarify their roles. Panelists explained that school counselor leaders should be adept at leveraging various resources and building relationships within their school community. They shared that school counselor leaders should get to know people and understand their perspectives, fostering an environment of trust and open communication. They should find ways and be willing to compromise and be supportive, recognizing that everyone's input is valuable in achieving common goals.

The panelists also shared in their responses that school counselor leaders should actively listen to all perspectives and seek advice from others to solve issues effectively. It was stated in Round 3 that school counselors as effective leaders should consider all points of view, even if they differ from their own, and demonstrate knowledge and empathy in their decision-making processes.

School counselors who demonstrate in their role that they are collaborators are true leaders, the panelists stated in Round 3. Collaboration is a vital component of school counselor leadership because by collaborating they are partnering with school, with the

family, and community stakeholders to accomplish program goals and provide comprehensive program and services to support students and meet their complex needs (Henry & Bryan, 2021). Collaboration is the key to overcoming tough times. When people come together, combining their strengths and working toward a common goal, they have the power to achieve greatness (Maxwell, 2021).

Major Finding 6

Purpose and clarity were variables identified by the Delphi panel as selected strategies all school counselor leaders should focus on to connect their school counseling role to the organizational vision or big picture to promote their roles through teamwork and to make good choices or strategic decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards. Purpose and clarity were themes addressed 50% or more of the time by panelists in Round 3.

In addition, school counselors identified strategies in Round 3 as to how purpose and clarity should be used to navigate adversity and clarify their roles. Panelists explained that it is important to be optimistic and proactive in advocating for their students. The panelists shared in Round 2 that school counselor leaders can use data to demonstrate how noncounseling duties can impede their ability to effectively support students, explaining that it is always best to bring it back to what is best for the students. They can speak up and ensure that all voices are heard in committee work. These school counselor leaders can help clarify their role and prioritize the needs of students.

The panelists emphasized that conveying information with optimism underscores purpose and clarity. Moreover, they stressed the significance of being deliberate in selecting data for dissemination among students, staff, and stakeholders. Panelists stated

that it is crucial for them to transparently share outcomes, perceptions, and participation data regarding the school counseling department—both the positive and negative aspects—so that everyone comprehends the students' and school's needs. Maxwell (2021) stated, “You can’t grow to your potential if you don’t know your purpose” (p. 17).

Unexpected Findings

Unexpected Finding: Role Ambiguity

The first unexpected finding the researcher discovered was that during this study, the Delphi panel did not indicate that there was any role ambiguity with being asked to do noncounseling duties such as bus duty, substitute teaching, or test coordination.

Unexpected Finding: Training

The second unexpected finding the researcher discovered was that the Delphi panel did not suggest a perceived necessity for additional training for site or district administrators concerning the role of the school counselor. The training is needed for administration because school counselors have caseloads that have ratios that are too high and are assigned duties that do not align with the ASCA standards (ASCA, 2023a).

Unexpected Finding: New Counselor Training

The third unexpected finding the researcher discovered was that there was no mention of any deficits in training new school counselors on essential knowledge they would require to fulfill their responsibilities more effectively and to become school counselor leaders because of lack of training during their internship experience. New school counselors begin their career right out of the university with a Pupil Personnel Services Credential, and some school districts expect a master’s degree, but not all districts require this. In their preparation for this career, school counselors must

demonstrate that they learned and mastered seven standards (ASCA, 2022c). This is an exceptional number of learning outcomes without any type of induction or mentoring program provided to new school counselors to monitor that they learned these standards.

Unexpected Finding: Ratios

The fourth unexpected finding the researcher discovered was that although the Delphi panel acknowledged adversities, they did not mention specific adversities associated with the position such as ratios being too high based on the ASCA recommendation of 250:1 (ASCA, n.d.-b).

Conclusions

Conclusion 1

In conclusion, it was strongly emphasized by the Delphi panelists in all three Rounds of the study that communication plays a vital role in vision, teamwork, and making effective decisions or good choices when navigating adversity and role confusion. The panel members provided very clear recommendations about what needs to be done to overcome the adversity of role confusion. The panelists emphasized that school counselors who are effective leaders should be communicating their role and contributions of school counselors to all stakeholders. To fully understand the role of the school counselor as a leader, those they work with need to know their hopes and fears (Kouzes & Posner, 2006).

When the role of the school counselor is clearly communicated, it can significantly reduce adversity for school counselors who need to meet and exceed their professional standards within the school community. By ensuring that everyone understands the value and importance of the school counselor position, there is a greater

likelihood of support and promotion for their role. This increased awareness will lead to a more cohesive and collaborative environment where the needs of students are prioritized, resulting in a more positive and effective educational experience for all.

Conclusion 2

In conclusion, school counselors must serve as their own advocates and clarify their roles and responsibilities within the educational system. They can actively promote the importance of the position and the positive impact they can have on students' academic, social emotional, and career choices. By being vocal and proactive in highlighting their role, to ensure that their contributions are recognized, valued, and integrated into the school community, school counselors can also be effective leaders in the school community. Through their advocacy efforts, school counselor leaders can foster an environment in which their expertise and support are widely acknowledged and used, ultimately benefiting the overall success of the students they serve. There are three main traits that school counselors need to be to be effective leaders; they should be collaborators, advocates, and systemic change agents (Young et al., 2015). In August of 2022, California announced a plan to increase the number of school counselors in the State (California ALL, 2022). The goal is for an additional 10,000 school counselors to be hired to ensure that the mental health needs are being met for California students in public schools. As these new school counselors are hired across the state it becomes increasingly more important for school counselors to fully understand their role and be their own advocates within the educational system. As leaders, it is their job to paint the picture of the future, to inspire people to work harder, and to tell them who they can become (Maxwell, 2021).

Conclusion 3

In conclusion, school counselors must follow the ASCA guidelines that identify that school counselors must demonstrate collaborative skills in the workplace (ASCA, 2021a). Collaboration aligns with the findings for research questions regarding school counselor leaders leading teams and communicating effectively to all stakeholders. School counselors as leaders should actively seek opportunities to work alongside teachers, administrators, parents, and other stakeholders to create a supportive and inclusive environment for students. When collaborating with all, the school counseling team is able to see things from all angles and create a cyclical decision-making process. By collaborating with others, school counselors can effectively address the diverse needs of students and develop comprehensive strategies to enhance their academic and personal growth through teamwork, and they can leverage the collective expertise and resources for the school community leading to more effective interventions, programs, and initiatives. School counselors can foster collaboration and teamwork that will contribute to the overall success and well-being of students, creating a positive and thriving educational environment. School counselors can also demonstrate to others in the school community how their primary role of supporting students impacts others in a positive way. Maxwell (2021) stated, “If you want to succeed in tough times, you need a better team. You need the right people in the right places doing the right things together. As the leader, you are responsible for facilitating these things” (p. 45).

Conclusion 4

In conclusion, school counselors need leadership classes to be a requirement as part of their program and professional development should be offered by ASCA and

CASC. School counselors are called on to be leaders during their education as a school counselor. Standard 6, Professional Practice says candidates must understand their role as a leader (ASCA, 2022c). Furthermore, other documents that ASCA distributes to educate school counselors call for them to be leaders in the school, district, state, and nation (ASCA, 2019a & 2022a). The concern is that not all school counselors know how to be a leader. Being a leader requires special skills, and without specialized training they may not be prepared to take on this task. These leadership skills should include but not be limited to communication, follow through, trustworthiness, and ethical behavior.

Implications for Action

Implication 1

For school counselor leaders to navigate the adversity of role confusion in the school workplace, site administrators must engage in professional development opportunities that enhance their understanding of the role of school counselors. By becoming aware of the primary role of a school counselor, a site administrator should be able to maximize the use of school counselors' expertise and prioritize how they assign duties to the school counselor that aligns with their training and their roles. Site administrators observe the role of school counselors fulfilling their job responsibilities, which indicates they generally understand the role (ASCA, 2023b). Training for administrators should be offered by ASCA and CASC. But even more importantly it should be offered at ACSA, an organization that school administrators are more likely to attend.

Implication 2

It is imperative that school counselors continue to communicate and be a part of state and national organizations so they can elicit knowledge from the organization to continue doing their job effectively. School counselors who do not collaborate or communicate with other school counselors regarding their adversities and expectations will not see substantive changes in their positions. School counselors who are a part of these organizations stay updated on the latest research, best practices, and policy changes in the field. Additionally, when school counselors are a part of state and national organizations, they can network with peers, advocate for necessary resources and support, and ensure that the needs of students are effectively addressed at a broader level. The ASCA national model weaves four major themes to create a holistic framework for school counseling: leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change (ASCA, 2019b; Gay, 2021).

Implication 3

School counselors should demonstrate resilience in overcoming adversity by leveraging collaboration and teamwork with their site, district, and other stakeholders. By working together with others at the school site, they can create a strong support network that helps them navigate through challenging circumstances. Through partnerships with teachers, administrators, parents and community members, school counselors can gather diverse perspectives and resources to develop effective strategies in making decisions that support the best programs for student success. The ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies explicitly states that school counselors must collaborate for student success achievement and success (ASCA, 2019a).

School counselor leaders must collaborate with stakeholders to identify and implement interventions, provide counseling services, and create a safe and inclusive environment for students. By using teamwork, school counselors can tap into the collective knowledge and expertise of the educational community, allowing them to adapt and respond to adversity with creativity and innovation. Their collaborative efforts can empower students to build resilience and achieve academic success.

Implication 4

School counselors must be leaders. School counselors are often the only people on their site doing their job and they must use leadership skills to be able to complete their job. When school counselors are alone on a site, the leadership skills that they have will help them to be selective in sorting out their own duties and work responsibilities and lead their administration and the teaching staff. School counselors have standards that they are supposed to be teaching at each student grade level, and these leadership skills will help them to accomplish their job (ASCA, 2021a). Additionally, school counselor leadership must be showcased in the way they navigate having tough conversations regarding learning difficulties or behavior issues and addressing bullying or harassment issues, including social emotional issues such as depression or suicide. School counselors who embody the skills of a transformational leader should be very successful leaders on campus. The four factors that make up a transformational leader are idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Hay, 2006).

Recommendations for Further Research

The following research methodologies are recommended:

- Replicate the study in Riverside County, California using a Delphi methodology with K-6 or K-8 school counselor leaders. This study was limited to 9-12 grade school counselor leaders. School counselor leaders in other grade levels may identify different qualities and actions to overcome the adversity of role confusion.
- Replicate this study by conducting a comparative Delphi study with panelists of 10 principals and 10 school counselors. This study was limited to 9-12 grade school counselor leaders. Principals may identify different qualities and actions to overcome the adversity of role confusion, and a comparison of the two perspectives would provide additional information on both the adversities school counselors face and how to overcome the issues of role confusion.
- Replicate this Delphi study using site or district administrators as panelists without school counseling experience. This study was limited to current or previous school counselors within the last 3 years. Site or district administrators may recommend different qualities and actions to overcome the adversity of role confusion.
- A phenomenological study could be conducted to understand the lived experiences of school counselors and what they believe is needed to clarify role confusion and meet and exceed their goals.

Concluding Remarks and Reflection

The profession of school counseling has been present since the 1900s and has undergone significant changes over time. Initially focused on vocational guidance, it has now expanded to provide comprehensive support in various areas such as social

emotional development, academic achievement, and college and career planning. The ASCA national model provides guidelines for professional identity and the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program, outlining the appropriate and inappropriate roles, purposes, and goals in this context (Gibbons & Williams, 2011; Mason et al., 2023; Randick et al., 2018; Sink, 2016). School counselors are school leaders who often face adversity of role confusion (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Havlik et al., 2019). Some problems can defeat and upset leaders, which can cause organizations to experience declining revenue, decreased productivity, decreased employee motivation, disruption of employee collaboration and teamwork, and failures that impede organizational goals or achievement of professional standards or outcomes (Rayle, 2006). Unfortunately, limited research has been conducted about the personal qualities that school counselor leaders must possess to achieve professional standards or outcomes despite adversity.

School counselors often encounter various adversities in their profession. One adversity is role ambiguity when the expectations and responsibilities other their role may be unclear. Additionally, administrators and other educators may be unaware of specific training and job duties of school counselors, leading to lack of support and understanding. There may also be confusion regarding terminology used to describe their role, whether it is referred to as guidance or counseling. Furthermore, school counselors may have received different training and experiences during their college or counseling program, which can impact their ability to effectively meet the needs of their students. Last, high student-to-counselor ratios can make it difficult for counselors to maintain accountability and provide necessary support to students while also promoting a 21st

century view of school counseling that focuses on comprehensive support and preparation for future success.

As school counselors face these adversities, there is hope for them to work through them. ASCA (2023b) conducted a national survey in 2022 in which they asked school and district administrators about their understanding of the school counseling ASCA national model, and generally this group of people understand the role. School counselors need to take the skills of leadership from the national model of leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change (ASCA 2019b) and put them into practice. This study gave concrete actions for what school counselors need to do to ensure that stakeholders understand their role so they can overcome the adversities they face.

The panelists through this study taught me that although they face numerous challenges and obstacles in their work, they remain hopeful for the future of students. They firmly believe that by fostering robust communication, promoting teamwork, and establishing clarity and purpose in their role, they can accomplish great things to assist students in navigating through school and life and becoming better equipped individuals. Despite the adversities, school counselors consistently strive to create a positive impact and provide the necessary support for students' growth and development.

My sincere hope for school counselors is that they place their trust in their fellow colleagues and cultivate a collaborative spirit among themselves. By developing a sense of unity and teamwork, school counselors can create an environment in which they can learn from one another and grow together. This shared knowledge and experience will ultimately benefit the students they serve because they will receive well-rounded support from a collective of dedicated individuals.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Synthesis Matrix

Work Cited	Adversity	Consent	Delphi Method	Educator Standards	Expert School Counselor Leader Qualities	Problem Statement	School Counseling History	School Counseling Standards	Study	Types of Leaders
<p>Aarons, G. A. (2006). Transformational and transactional leadership: Association with attitudes toward evidence-based practice. <i>Psychiatric Services</i>, 57(8), 1162-1169. https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.57.8.1162</p>										<p>x</p>

<p>American Civil Liberties Union. (n.d.). <i>Cops and no counselors.</i> https://www.aclu.org/issues/juvenile-justice/school-prison-pipeline/cops-and-no-counselors</p>									x	
<p>American Psychological Association. (2014, June). <i>APA: Psychologists should obtain informed consent from research participants.</i> https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2014/06/informed-consent.</p>		x								
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<p>American School Counselor Association. (n.d.-b). School counselor roles & ratios. https://www.schoolcounselor.org/About-School-Counseling/School-Counselor-Roles-Ratios</p>					x	x			x	
<p>American School Counselor Association. (n.d.-c). Student-to-school-counselor ratio 2021-2022. https://www.schoolcounselor.org/getmedia/b9d453e7-7c45-4ef7-bf90-16f1f3cbab94/Ratios-21-22-Alpha.pdf</p>	x								x	
<p>American School Counselor Association. (n.d.-d). Who are school counselors? https://www.schoolcounselor.org/getmedia/a0e5b299-5798-4a1c-b4f9-</p>	x								x	

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<p>American School Counselor Association. (2021b). The school counselor and cultural diversity. https://www.schoolcounselor.org/Standards-Positions/Position-Statements/ASCA-Position-Statements/The-School-Counselor-and-Cultural-Diversity</p>					x					
<p>American School Counselor Association. (2022a). ASCA ethical standards for school counselors. https://www.schoolcounselor.org/getmedia/44f30280-ffe8-4b41-9ad8-f15909c3d164/EthicalStandards.pdf</p>								x		

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<p>American School Counselor Association. (2022c). ASCA standards for school counselor preparation programs. https://www.schoolcounselor.org/getmedia/573d7c2c-1622-4d25-a5ac-ac74d2e614ca/ASCA-Standards-for-School-Counselor-Preparation-Programs.pdf</p>								x		

<p>American School Counselor Association. (2022d). Standards in practice. https://www.schoolcounselor.org/Standards-Positions/Standards/Standards-in-Practice</p>					x			x		
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<p>American School Counselor Association. (2023e). The role of the school counselor. https://www.schoolcounselor.org/getmedia/ee8b2e1b-d021-4575-982c-c84402cb2cd2/Role-Statement.pdf</p>	x				x		x			x
<p>Anderson, D., & Ackerman Anderson, L. (2010). <i>Beyond change management</i>. Pfeiffer</p>					x					x
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Whiston, S. C. (2002). Response to the past, present, and future of school counseling: Raising some issues. <i>Professional School Counseling</i> , 5(3), 148-155.	x					x		x			
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Wingfield, R. J., Reese, R. F., & West-Olatunji, C. A. (2010). Counselors as leaders in schools. <i>Florida Journal of Educational Administration & Policy</i> , 4(1).	x					x		x			
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<p>Young, A., Dollarhide, C. T., & Baughman, A. (2015). The voices of school counselors: Essential characteristics of school counselor leaders. <i>Professional School Counseling</i>, 19(1), 36-45. https://www.jstor.org/stable/90014787</p>					x			x		
<p>Zhu, Q., Cheong, Y., Wang, C., & Sun, C. (2022). The roles of resilience, peer relationship, teacher–student relationship on student mental health difficulties during COVID-19. <i>School Psychology</i>, 37(1), 62-74. https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000492</p>	x									

<p>Zyromski, B., Griffith, C., & Choi, J. (2021). Embracing school counselors' situatedness: Data-based decision making as fulfillment of a complex identity. <i>Professional School Counseling</i>, 24(1_part_3), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X211011922</p>	x				x		x	x		
<p>Zyromski, B., Hudson, T. D., Baker, E., & Darcy Haag, G. (2019). Guidance counselors or school counselors: How the name of the profession influences perceptions of competence. <i>Professional School Counseling</i>, 22(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X19855654</p>	x						x			

APPENDIX B

Survey Instrument – Round 1

After you review the definitions of words (Appendix J provided in Survey Monkey as an introduction) in the questions below, please respond by creating a list of personal qualities for each of the three questions included in this survey:

1. In your experience, what are the personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess to lead through the adversity of confusion about their roles at school sites by connecting their roles to the school's **vision** or **big picture** to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
2. In your experience, what are the personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess to lead through the adversity of confusion about their roles at school sites by promoting their roles through **organizational teamwork** to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
3. In your experience, what are the personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess to lead through the adversity of confusion about their roles at school sites by **making good choices** or **strategic organizational decisions** to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?

Survey Instrument –Round 2

Please rate the themes identifying personal qualities counselor leaders must possess on each list elicited from the three questions taken from the Round 1 survey questions on the six-point scale provided from extremely important to unimportant as regards

the personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess to lead through the adversity of role confusion at their school sites:

- List 1: to connect their roles to the school's vision or big picture to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.
- List 2: to promote their roles through organizational teamwork to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.
- List 3: to make strategic organizational decisions or good choices to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.

Survey Instrument---Round 3

Round 3: Please select one to two qualities identified as most important from Round 2 for each of the questions below and respond:

- In your experience, describe the selected **actions** school counselor leaders who possess the personal qualities identified in Rounds 1 and 2 might take to lead through the adversity of role confusion in their organizations to connect their roles to the school's **vision** or **big picture** to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?
- In your experience, describe the selected **actions** school counselor leaders who possess the personal qualities identified in Rounds 1 and 2 might take to lead through the adversity of role confusion in their organizations to promote their roles through **organizational teamwork** to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?

- In your experience, describe the selected **actions** school counselor leaders who possess the personal qualities identified in Rounds 1 and 2 might take to lead through the adversity of role confusion in their organizations to **make good choices** or **strategic organizational decisions** to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards?

APPENDIX C

Invitation to Participate

STUDY: A Delphi Study intended to identify the personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess to identify opportunities in the face of adversity that will assist them in fulfilling their roles by meeting and exceeding their professional school counseling standards.

November 2023

Dear Prospective Study Participant,

You are invited to participate in a research study to identify the personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess when faced with adversity. Furthermore, once qualities are identified you will rate them. Then you will be requested to describe strategies school counselors might use when faced with adversity. This study could influence future school counselor leaders and Human Resource departments when hiring prospective school counselors.

The main investigator for this study is Anita Shirley, Doctoral Candidate at the University of Massachusetts, Global (UMass Global) Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program. You were selected to participate in this study because of your expertise in high school counseling.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this Delphi multivariable research study was for expert school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel to identify the personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess in their organizations to lead through the adversity of role confusion by using Maxwell's *Leading in Tough Times* (2021) strategies to include:

- connecting their roles to the organization's vision or big picture,
- promoting their roles through organizational teamwork, and
- making good choices or strategic organizational decisions, to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.

The second purpose of this Delphi multivariable research study was for expert school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel to describe the selected actions school counselors might take to connect their school counseling roles to the organizational vision or big picture, to promote their roles through teamwork and to make good choices or strategic decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.

PROCEDURES: If you decide to participate in this study, you will receive three rounds of electronic surveys via Survey Monkey, with each survey taking approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. The first-round survey will contain three open-ended questions asking what personal qualities school counselor leaders possess that enable them to overcome adversities they face. The second-round survey will utilize a Likert scale and ask participants to rate the importance of each quality. The third-round survey will ask participants to identify strategies to overcome adversity.

RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS: This study involves no more than minimal risk. There are no known harms or discomforts associated with this study beyond those encountered in everyday life. There is no cost to you for participating, and you will not be compensated in any way for your participation. The survey will be completed anonymously, and the researchers will not know your identity.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: Your participation in this study does not yield any direct benefits to you. However, analysis of the data generated from your participation in this study is intended to provide current information on the most important characteristics high school counselors leaders possess to overcome adversities. Ultimately the goals are to help high school counselors positively affect student outcomes due to providing the needed organizational support.

ANONYMITY: All surveys and research data collected will be stored securely and confidentially on a password-protected server. Records of information that you provide for the research study, and any personal information you provide, will not be linked in any way. It will not be possible to identify you as the person who provided any specific information for the study. Because you will complete the survey anonymously, your name or other identifying information will not be used in reports or publications. Your responses as a Delphi panelist will not be shared with any other member on the Delphi Panel. Only the research team may have access to study records to protect participants' safety and welfare.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns regarding this study, you may contact me at [redacted]@mail.umassglobal.edu or by email at [redacted]. You can also contact the study's Dissertation Chairperson, Dr. Lisbeth Johnson, by email at [redacted]@umassglobal.edu. If you have any further questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, please contact UMass Global's Office of Institutional Research, UMass Global, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618. BUIRB@umassglobal.edu.

Respectfully,

Anita Shirley
Doctoral Candidate, UMass Global

APPENDIX D

Demographic Survey

Experience/Demographic Information

1. Please indicate your gender
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Non-Binary

2. Are you currently a high school counselor serving grades 9-12 in a public school?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

3. Do you currently work in public education outside of the field of school counseling in grades 9-12 in Riverside County, but were a school counselor within the last 3 years?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

4. Please indicate your years of experience as a school counselor at any grade level.
 - a. Less than two years
 - b. Between 3-10 years
 - c. Ten years or more

5. Please indicate if you are a member of ASCA or CASC.

- a. Yes
 - b. No
6. Are you a school counselor who has faced adversity? If yes, please indicate the type below.
- a. Role ambiguity – ASCA’s definition of school counselor vs. what being asked to do
 - b. Administration unaware of school counselor training or job duties
 - c. School counselor ratio above recommended 250:1
7. Please indicate if you’ve presented at an ASCA National Conference or CASC Conference on a Topic related to High School Counseling.
- a. Yes
 - b. No
8. Please indicate if you’ve received any district, county, or state recognition for excellent service as a high school counselor.
- a. Yes
 - b. No
9. Please indicate if you’ve authored an article for a peer-reviewed journal or published a school counseling book.
- a. Yes
 - b. No

10. Please indicate if you are currently a school counselor at a RAMP school.

a. Yes

b. No

11. Please indicate if you are an adjunct professor in an accredited School Counseling Program.

a. Yes

b. No

APPENDIX E

Explanation of Study

RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: A Delphi Study of the Characteristics of School Counselor Leaders Who Have Overcome Adversity

Lead Researcher:
Anita Shirley, Doctoral Candidate
UMass Global
Department of Education
Faculty Sponsor:
Dr. Lisbeth Johnson
UMass Global
Department of Education

- You are invited to participate in a research study to identify the personal qualities school counselor leaders possess to help them overcome adversity. Furthermore, you will be asked to rate the qualities and describe selected strategies that can be used. The main investigator for this study is Anita Shirley, Doctoral Candidate at the University of Massachusetts, Global (UMass Global) Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program. You were selected to participate in this study because of your expertise and experience in high school counseling.
- High school counselors in Riverside County in California were selected for this study. Participation should require 30 to 45 minutes in total, which will be broken up into three 10-to-15-minute intervals spread over four weeks. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may discontinue your involvement in this study at any time without any consequences.
- The purpose of this Delphi study is to identify, from the perspective of expert school counselors, the qualities school counselors must possess to help them overcome adversity and still meet and exceed professional standards.
- If you decide to participate in this study, you will receive three rounds of electronic surveys via Survey Monkey, with each survey taking approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. The first-round survey will contain three open-ended questions asking what personal qualities school counselor leaders possess that enable them to overcome adversities they face. The second-round survey will utilize a Likert scale and ask participants to rate the importance of each quality. The third-round survey will ask participants to identify strategies to overcome adversity.

- This study involves no more than minimal risk. There are no known harms or discomforts associated with this study beyond those encountered in normal daily life. There is no cost to you for participating, and you will not be compensated in any way for your participation. The survey will be completed anonymously, and the researchers will not know your identity.
- Your participation in this study does not yield any direct benefits to you. However, analysis of the data generated from your participation in this study is intended to provide current information on the characteristics school counselor leaders possess that enable them to overcome adversities they face.
- All surveys and research data collected will be stored securely and confidentially on a password-protected server. Records of information that you provide for the research study, and any personal information you provide, will not be linked in any way. It will not be possible to identify you as the person who provided any specific information for the study. Because you will complete the survey anonymously, your name or other identifying information will not be used in reports or publications. Only the research team may have access to study records to protect participants' safety and welfare.
- If you have any questions, comments, or concerns regarding this study, you may contact me at [redacted]@mail.umassglobal.edu or by email at [redacted]. You can also contact the study's Dissertation Chairperson, Dr. Lisbeth Johnson, by email at [redacted]@umassglobal.edu. If you have any further questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, please contact UMass Global's Office of Institutional Research, UMass Global, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618. BUIRB@umassglobal.edu.

Do you agree to participate in this study? () Yes () No

APPENDIX F

Informed Consent and Confidentiality

Information About: A Delphi Study intended to identify the personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess to identify opportunities in the face of adversity that will assist them in fulfilling their roles by meeting and exceeding their professional school counseling standards.

Responsible Investigator: Anita Shirley

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this Delphi multivariable research study was for expert school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel to identify the personal qualities school counselor leaders must possess in their organizations to lead through the adversity of role confusion by using Maxwell's *Leading in Tough Times* (2021) strategies to include:

- connecting their roles to the organization's vision or big picture,
- promoting their roles through organizational teamwork, and
- making good choices or strategic organizational decisions, to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.

The second purpose of this Delphi multivariable research study was for expert school counselor leaders on a Delphi panel to describe the selected actions school counselors might take to connect their school counseling roles to the organizational vision or big picture, to promote their roles through teamwork and to make good choices or strategic decisions to meet and exceed their professional school counseling standards.

Your expected time commitment for this study is: An estimated 8-10 minutes per round based on your response time and will consist of three rounds of survey questions to obtain your expert opinion on personal qualities expert school counselors possess.

I understand that:

- a. 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 process 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 Researcher may stop the study at any time.
- b. You have the option to have your name be anonymous but must request this from the researcher prior to the conclusion of the research process.
- c. There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research.
- d. The surveys should take approximately 8-10 minutes of time to fill out.
- e. All responses will be combined to develop the next round of surveying.
- f. The responses are anonymous. The Researcher will protect my confidentiality by keeping the research materials in a password-protected computer that is available only to the researcher and retained for five years. Additionally, no personally identifiable

information (PII), (such as, names, Social Security Numbers [SSNs], e-mail addresses, Internet Protocols [IP] addresses, street addresses, telephone numbers) will be attached to the answers once they have been received from the respondent.

g. The possible benefit of this study to me is that my input may help add to the research regarding school counselor adversity and personal qualities school counselors possess to overcome the adversity. It will also produce data and general information that may be useful to school districts and universities, which have school counseling programs.

h. Any questions I have concerning my participation in this study will be answered at any time by Anita Shirley. She can be reached by email at:

[redacted]@mail.umassglobal.com or Dr. Lisbeth Johnson (Dissertation Chair), [redacted]@umassglobal.edu.

No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be 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 Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMass Global University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: 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.

Email Address: _____ Printed Name of Participant: _____
Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

(This was electronically signed via Survey Monkey)

APPENDIX G

UMass Global Participant Bill of Rights

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:

- To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
- 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.
- To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
- To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
- To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
- To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
- To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
- To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
- To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
- 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 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:

Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs UMass Global, 6355 Laguna Canyon Road Irvine, CA, 92618

(This was electronically signed via Survey Monkey)

APPENDIX H

UMass Global Institutional Review Board Approval

Dear Anita Shirley,

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 I

Certificate of Completion of Training by Collaborative Institutional Training

Initiative (CITI)

Plsc

Completion Date	14-May-2022
Expiration Date	N/A
Record ID	48926327

This is to certify that:

Anita Shirley


Has completed the following CITI Program course:

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

Under requirements set by:

University of Massachusetts Global

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.


Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w77d350d0-8985-4ad2-9e0a-fc6551109e4b-48926327

APPENDIX J

Definitions for Participants

1. **Active listening.** To listen attentively.
2. **Adversity.** A state or instance of serious or continued difficulty or misfortune.

There are six types of adversity: physical, mental, emotional, social, spiritual, and financial (Fort Behavioral Health, 2023; Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a).
3. **Charismatic.** To compel charm which inspires others.
4. **Cultural competence.** Understanding and respecting different cultures, beliefs, and values in order to support all people with different backgrounds.
5. **Empathy.** To be able to understand and relate to experiences and emotions of others.
6. **Flexibility.** To be able to adapt to different needs or circumstances.
7. **Patience.** To have a calm demeanor in order to provide ongoing support or to navigate complex situations.
8. **Personal power.** The ability to influence people or events.
9. **Problem solving skills.** To be able to analyze situations, identify issues, and develop effective strategies to help come to a solution.
10. **School counselor role confusion.** The struggle to establish and identify clear duties, title, and services provided by the school counselor (ASCA, 2023a).
11. **Trustworthiness.** To be able to maintain confidentiality when appropriate.