Transformational School Principal Leadership Behavior and Its Impact on School Climate

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During the last two decades, researchers and theorists have offered a variety of conceptual designs and empirical findings regarding school leadership conduct, as it relates to organizational climate concerns. As a supplement to the literature, this paper will examine the intentions, decisions, behaviors, and school outcomes associated with one senior high school principal who endeavored to recreate his school organization. The purpose of this paper is to further the understanding of how transformational leadership manifests in the school organization, and to determine how it impacts school climate. The study's findings may be beneficial for school leaders and scholars who wish to better understand the school transformation process.

Keywords: School leadership, organizational climate, ethic of care, emotional intelligence, transformational leadership

Within the educational domain, various researchers have discussed the well- established notion that a relationship exists between leadership, school climate, employee commitment, and effective schools (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Durrah, 2009; Kelley, Thornton, & Daugherty, 2005; McCroskey, 2007). Kelley et al. (2005) emphasized that principals may influence a school's climate a great deal if "they can develop feelings of trust, open communications, collegiality, and promote effective feedback" (p. 23). As Gimbel (2001) discussed, one way of doing so is by sustaining one-to-one relationships with teachers and demonstrating supportive behavior. Within this realm, the principal's interpersonal exchanges are critical, since they hold the capacity to produce a school that is built on a foundation of collegiality, dialogue, and relationships (Sciarappa, 2007).

Due to the power of school principal conduct, it is necessary to explore the intentions, potentialities, activities, and outcomes that are associated with school leadership behavior. In doing so, better understandings may develop, as to the competencies and limitations of actual school leadership practice in today's schools. In turn, rich depictions of the organizational interplay that

transpires within schools can be produced, and the actual effects of school leadership practice can be better understood.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the intentions and behaviors of a particular school principal who sought to transform the school's climate. This study worked to explore the lived experiences of the school leader, subordinates, and stakeholders who were involved with the school organization. The focus was initially placed on gathering a description of the intentions of the school principal and then examining his actual leadership decisions and behaviors, and determining whether such behavior impacted the school's climate.

Specifically, the research question this study addressed was whether the competencies, tendencies, and behaviors of a particular school principal matched his intentions of implementing a form of leadership that was capable of altering the school's climate. The perceptions of administrators, teachers, staff, parents, community members, and recent graduates were utilized to gather an understanding of both the principal's leadership behavior and perceptions of school climate. This process was set in

order to generate an understanding of the capability of leadership behavior in changing the school environment.

Literature on Organizational Climate and School Leadership

In shaping an organization's climate, Fineman (1993) revealed that the construction process "is intensely subjective and personal" (p. 13). As similar subjective constructions take place among an organization's workforce, a clear organizational climate develops. Reichers and Schneider (1990) defined organizational climate as:

> the shared perception of "the way things are around here." More precisely climate is shared perceptions of organizational policies, practices, and procedures, both formal and informal. Climate is a molar concept that is indicative of the organization's goals and appropriate means to goal attainment. (p. 22)

As Stringer (2002) explained, organizational climate is measured indirectly through the perceptions of the members of the organization and consists of six distinct dimensions: 1) structure: reflecting the employees' sense of being well organized or having a clear definition of their roles and responsibilities, 2) standards: measuring the feeling of pressure to improve performance and the degree of pride employees have in doing a good job, 3) responsibility: reflecting employees' feelings of being in control and not having to double-check decisions with others, 4) recognition: indicating employees' feelings of being rewarded for a job well done, 5) support: reflecting the feeling of trust and mutual support that prevails within a work group, and 6) commitment: reflecting the employees' sense of pride in belonging to the organization and their degree of commitment to the organization's goals. The importance of school climate resides in the fact that it has been shown to be a primary determinant of worker motivation and organizational performance (Stringer, 2002).

As Ali and Patnaik (2014) discussed, climate may be influenced by the various conditions of the organization, in terms of systems, structure, and managerial behavior (p. 3). Therefore, a single determinant of organizational climate may not exist. Instead, various sources may combine to create the climate, including: 1) the external environment, 2) leadership practices, 3) organizational structure and arrangements, 4) the background and personal characteristics of the workforce, 5) the physical environment, 6) equipment, technology, and resources, 7) managerial policies, 8) the organization's image, 9) historical underpinnings, and 10) the organization's vision, values, norms, goals, and strategies (Ekvall, 1983; Farokhi & Murty, 2014; Stringer 2002). However, research has consistently shown that by far the most important determinant of climate is leadership (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002; Stringer 2002). In fact,

leadership is responsible for many of the other associated factors, since leaders determine the organization's goals, lay down the organization's structure, control the physical environment, create patterns of communication and decision-making processes, and shape the organization's norms and values (Farokhi & Murty, 2014).

Regarding organizational leadership, various researchers and theorists have explained that the process of climate change requires a socio-emotional aptitude, on the part of the leader, in order to transform an organization (Bass, 2002; Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; George, 2000; Goleman, 1998a; Goleman et al., 2002; Higgs & Dulewicz, 1999; Jordan, Ashton-James, & Ashkanasy, 2006; Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2009). In this realm, Zeidner et al. (2009) revealed that transformational leaders "lead from the heart" and are "in touch with their own and their follower's feelings" (p. 270). Goleman (1998b) argued that in order to be successful, emotional intelligence is a necessary ingredient for leaders to possess. Feldman (1999) reiterated this view, in stating, "emotionally intelligent leadership is about fully developing and applying our emotional and social skills to effectively influence constructive endeavors in others. It's the personal and 'people skills' that are crucial ingredients to effective leadership" (p. 4).

The results of particular research studies provide evidence that certain leadership styles and aptitudes are capable of leading the organizational transformation process. Meyer and Allen (1997) found that when the work experience communicates an organization's support for employees and enhances employees' sense of personal importance, workers become more committed and emotionally tuned into the organization. Kahn (1993) discovered that as organizational leaders demonstrate caring behavior, such as empathy and compassion, employees become replenished and more emotionally engaged. Ozcelik, Langton, and Aldrich (2008) found that leadership practices that facilitate a positive emotional climate in an organization have a significant effect on the organization's performance.

Various researchers have studied *the ethic of care,* and its relation to effective school leadership practice (Bennett, 2008; Johnston, 2002; Kropiewnicki, 2000; Robbins, 1998; Robbins, 2006; Sernak, 1993; Thompson, 2005; Troy, 2009). According to Held (2006), the ethic of care is focused on meeting the needs of others, for whom one takes responsibility (p. 10). Sernak (1998) suggested that a sense of community is established through the ethic of care, which is centered on responsibility and relationships, rather than rights and rules.

In studying school capacity, Bendick (2003) found that a principal who leads out of the ethic of care is central to the development of an organizational relationship structure that successfully increases a sense of school community and institutional potential. Sagnak

(2010) found a link between the dimensions of principal transformational leadership behavior and the development of a caring organization that possesses a specific ethical climate of benevolence. Other research efforts have found leader benevolence to be a key ingredient for trust building in principal-teacher relationships and that the ethical principles of mutual respect, empathy, service, and the development of others are important to the principal's efforts in facilitating school improvement (Lewis, 2008; Schultz, 2005; Wilson, 2008). Indeed, there are other leadership components and styles that may be helpful in creating organizational success. As researchers such as Goleman et al. (2002) and Fullan, Cuttress, and Kilcher (2009) revealed, effective leaders sometimes need to command, coach, set the pace, manage, distribute, and evaluate; however, the activities of care, empathy, and compassion may be the fundamental elements for connecting the leader with the organization, creating a resonant organizational climate, and improving organizational performance (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Goleman et al., 2002). Beck (1994) and Sernak (1998) argued that within the school environment, the ethic of care, when practiced by the school leader, is the necessary component for school renewal and transforming the educational environment.

Methodology

This study focused on the concepts of leadership behavior and school climate in terms of organizational change. Since the study worked to detail the perceptions of school stakeholders, qualitative methods were utilized. The investigation was set to explore not only the tendencies and abilities of the school principal, but also to determine the school's climate, according to the perceptions of school stakeholders. In this way, leadership in the social sphere was fundamental to the study's purpose, as determinations were made regarding the school principal's ability to put forth a style of leadership that was capable of altering the climate of the school.

Sample

This study employed single site case study methodology in order to allow for in-depth analysis of the problem area. The site selection process involved critical assessment procedures that ensured a suitable location in terms of school principal philosophy, school principal tenure, school district characteristics, and stakeholder involvement. Initially, thirty-one school districts were solicited for involvement in the study. A scale down process ensued, as the researcher communicated with and visited sites to determine whether the principal held a distinct philosophy of leadership that contained specific leadership tenets, and had the intention of transforming the school organization. In making this determination, the researcher utilized an on-site one-on-one interview session with potential participants that focused on discovering the principal's leadership intentions, actions, and beliefs. Additionally, during this process, the

researcher sought to determine whether stakeholder involvement was available at the site. The chosen site was a semi-rural school district in the Mid-Atlantic region that met the study's requirements. The senior high school consisted of approximately 2,100 students. At the time of the study, 89% of graduating students pursued post-secondary education, 10% of graduates entered the workforce, and 1% entered a branch of the military. The school faculty and staff consisted of approximately 165 members.

The school district involved in this study worked on a school improvement process over an eight-year period, in which one particular principal was in command. Immediately prior to this span, the school district developed a strategic plan that sought to make vast improvements in the high school's facilities, educational programs, level of faculty involvement, and rates of student achievement. This was due to inadequacies in facilities, standardized testing performance, educational offerings, and staff/student engagement. At the onset of this period, the school principal possessed a five-year administrative tenure, which included stints as an assistant middle school principal and junior high school principal. Prior to his administrative work, the school principal completed five-years of teaching service.

Data Collection

Data collection procedures for this study occurred over a five-month period, at the end of the eight-year school improvement process. Data collection began with an in-depth ninety-minute interview with the school principal in order to acquire a detailed description of his leadership philosophy. From there, the leader's behaviors were examined through researcher observation, archived documents, a series of interviews with school stakeholders, and follow-up principal interviews. School stakeholder perceptions of the principal and the school organization were gathered through a semi-structured interview format. For this purpose, a total of thirty administrators, faculty members, parents, community members, and recent high school graduates were selected for participation. Specifically, participation occurred in the form of: four school administrators, seven teachers, one guidance counselor, eight parents, two community members, and eight recent graduates. The researcher utilized semi-structured interview questionnaires as the primary data collection mechanism, and focused on gathering rich descriptions about the school leader's tendencies and behaviors by asking each respondent for details and clarification about past happenings, current events, and perceptions of school climate issues. More specifically, questions were aimed at gathering stakeholder perceptions of the most valued attributes of the school principal; what degree and/or type of impact the principal had on the school; the type of relationships that individual school stakeholders held with the school principal; the communication style(s) of the principal; the

principal's response to stakeholder concerns; the levels of trust and openness that existed within the school; the levels of care, support, commitment, appreciation, and school pride that existed with the school principal and among the school stakeholders; and, examples of personal encounters that school stakeholders had with the principal, which best described his leadership style.

Triangulation of data occurred through on-site researcher observations and document analysis efforts that were centered on gathering an understanding of the school principal's behaviors, organizational outcomes, and perceptions regarding the school's climate. A discovery-oriented approach remained constant throughout the data collection process as participant interviews, on-site observations, and document analyses were conducted. For observational purposes, the researcher attended various events, including: athletic contests, school board meetings, faculty meetings, administrative staff meetings, faculty and staff social gatherings, parent forums, student forums, and school program information nights. Documents were compiled by accessing various print and web-based archives, including: the principal's memorandums to school stakeholders; website communications; extra-curricular program materials; faculty and staff meeting minutes; principal quotes from local newspaper articles; and principal letters to staff, parents, and students.

Data Analysis

Throughout the five-month data collection phase of the study, the initial stage of data analysis occurred as I, the researcher, transcribed interviews, listened to the audio versions of each interview, wrote notes that revealed apparent connections, read and reflected upon my field notes, analyzed my thoughts about what I was hearing, seeing, and reading, engaged in preliminary thematic construction, and compared my data and apparent themes to related research literature. Such activity aligned with Maxwell's (1996) and Patton's (1990) assertions that data analysis for the qualitative researcher should begin immediately after finishing the first interview and/or observation and should continue throughout the field research process.

At the conclusion of the twenty-week on-site investigation, and after verifying the interview data with each participant, I advanced the process by developing categories and themes, which, according to Hatch (2002), is central to the inductive approach of qualitative research. Here, I employed both aspects of the cross-case analysis method, which Patton (1990) discussed: 1) "grouping together answers from different people to common questions", and 2) "analyzing different perspectives on central issues" (p. 376). Beyond this, I progressed with Auerbach and Silverstein's (2003) method, as I: 1) read through the raw text and underlined the relevant passages of each interview, 2) extracted the relevant text according to the study's concerns; 3)

organized preliminary themes and grouped repeating ideas into coherent categories; 4) revamped and finalized the thematic construction process, by making sure each category could be properly filtered into a theme; and 5) created a thematic and theoretical narrative by retelling the participants' stories.

Methods of Verification

I implemented several measures that supported and bolstered the internal validity of the study, which included: the solicitation of feedback, triangulation, collecting rich data, prolonged engagement and persistent observation, member checks, the maintenance of a case study database, a search for discrepant evidence and negative cases, and comparison. Each of these strategies has been mentioned as a specific tactic to allow the qualitative researcher to increase the credibility of conclusions (Creswell, 1998; Maxwell, 1996; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003).

The timeframe reserved for data collection strengthened the verification process, as it allowed me to consider what might be pertinent to the study and offered a variety of activities and events to explore. Furthermore, this period allowed me to review and clarify participant responses with each interviewee and extend my dialogue with the school principal, as I worked to deeply explore organizational expressions, activities, procedures, and events with him.

Results

The findings gleaned from the perceptions of stakeholder participants who had a long-standing relationship with the school suggested that, under the direction of this school principal, the organizational climate changed from a closed, non-trusting environment to one that was open, positive, and trusting. According to these participants, the conduct of prior school principals led to the creation of a non-trusting, closed, and fragmented organizational system. The stakeholder participants suggested that the investigated school principal was able to alter this climate, through his leadership practice. The perceptions of school stakeholders were reinforced through researcher observations and institutional documents that suggested the school operated in a caring, ambitious, stable, positive, and open manner that reflected the intentions and values of the school principal.

Furthermore, the results of this study suggest that particular organizational characteristics developed in time, under the leadership of the school principal. These attributes reflected the principal's core beliefs and values, and were recognized by the stakeholder participants as particular school changes that stemmed from the leader's conduct. Therefore, in the following sections, the school principal's philosophy and actions, and the school's key attributes, will be revealed and then tied to literary findings that relate to transformational leadership behavior.

Findings

According to this study's school principal, particular tenets of his leadership philosophy were instilled from the very beginning of his tenure at the school. The school principal asserted that his philosophy stemmed from the knowledge he gathered through the study of leadership theory along with his personal reflections. Along with this philosophy came a particular leadership style, which he adapted as time moved on. As he explained,

> [Early on] I was much more of a micromanager…the way to make sure it was done the way I wanted it was to work with people, but essentially, also, to do it myself. I know that sounds like a paradox, but it was to be involved with every little thing that went on in the school…And, change and positive growth is really slow in that stage, because you are involved with everything. And now that I think there is some trust and knowledge, and I think people are on the same page, a lot more happens much more quickly and much more positively because I don't need to be there all the time.

Along with his hands-on leadership approach, relationship and trust building were two areas of focus for the principal. He stated that one key is for the faculty and staff to know that he is "behind them, and, in front of them, when need be to lead", and when this is done, "they are more willing to work with you toward a common cause." He went on to say that leadership is:

> mainly about working with people and empowering others. And, it's a lot of hard work up front, when you're building trust, which is the first piece, getting to know each other and building trust. And, once that's done, you can really work with each other well, and much more efficiently, and you can also distribute that leadership much more.

As he revealed, the desire to create a particular school climate was a long-term goal: "It's all about setting. Having a climate for success and safety and trust. That takes a long time to build."

For the school principal, the tenets of: 1) supportive relationships, 2) risk-taking, 3) empowerment, 4) teamwork, 5) a common vision, 6) private and public acknowledgement of good work, 7) high expectations, and 8) communication served as the underpinnings for the school organization. Each area of focus was connected, in some way, to the principal's primary philosophy on leadership, which he succinctly stated: "Leadership ultimately is about working with others, not doing to them." Regarding the particular function of the principal position, the school leader presented his viewpoint in the following way:

> To guide people, to keep people on track toward our vision…to set the vision, to get people to take risks and play around until we get it right. And, my feeling is that we are on the right track, regardless of how we do it, as long as we are moving in the right direction…We've modeled and focused on good relationships and student engagement. We certainly have focused on the art of teaching and building relationships with kids much more than on testing and programming and I'm proud of that.

With a clear vision in mind, the school underwent change during the principal's eight-year tenure at the school. According to stakeholder perceptions, four translucent attributes marked the school organization via the principal's enduring beliefs and actions. In time, the school's stakeholders espoused the school principal's value system, which was vital in developing the school's character. The congruent attitudes that the school stakeholders held in relation to the school's attributes strongly influenced the school's ability to develop standards of operation. In this way, the vision set forth years ago came to fruition through a certain climate that suggested the school functioned through positive, open, and cohesive action. One school administrator described the process that he had seen unfold as the school principal installed his vision:

> What [the principal] does very well in meetings is that he establishes norms of belief. Here's what we believe in the organization, and here's what we do not believe, and how do we act off of that…So, it's modeling and reinforcing, and those types of things…And, you find yourself then not necessarily echoing [his] exact words in meeting with an employee, but you can echo and reinforce organizational norms. And, you can just see the staff members react to that in a very positive way, because they feel safe and they feel they are aligned with the language of what's going on. And, that can be from pacing of change, that can be from employee relations, that can be from how to handle parents or how to handle kids…And, of course, we focus on relationships too. And it's relationships, relationships, relationships, and so it's such a key theme. And, we hire off of that, we staff develop that, and then we see that really play in.

Attribute #1: High Standards

One teacher revealed how the principal's expectations and his standard of performance led to 'unspoken norms' within the school, which were constantly reinforced through the principal's efforts in recognizing the faculty for good work:

> It's a host of unspoken expectations for certain things. It's like, we know we're supposed to give our best every day, and we are. It's a positive thing where, [he's] like, "You guys are awesome

to work with. You are great with this, and look at the achievements you've made. Keep that up." …And, the expectation is to be the best…It's just the way it is…It's stated, it's restated...the overall expectation is "We're here, we're going to be the best we can be. Let's go." We are go-getters. I like to think so, anyway.

An administrator reverberated this thought and provided an analysis of the principal's style and capability of instilling a standard among the school's faculty and staff. He explained that in order to meet the standard, a proactive, rather than a reactive mode was required, and that:

> To be proactive, you got to get out, you got to establish those norms, you got to have the language consistent from faculty meeting to cabinet meeting to staff development session, and then you got to echo that kind of language through formal and informal walk through observations, and otherwise. And then when individuals or teams of teachers are doing it well, then you hit it big with full-scale emails or faculty meeting celebrations of here is what we're doing and you come back to that same language. But, that's proactive, that's knowing your language, it's knowing where you want to go with an organization. And, [he] does that very, very well.

Another administrator watched the principal's vision come to fruition, through the school leader's efforts, along with the efforts of the school's faculty. He explained that the principal holds high expectations for everyone and has a step-by-step plan for meeting the expectations. Furthermore, the principal walks the staff through the plan to make sure they have what they need in order to implement it.

One administrator provided a particular example of how the focus on setting a standard of performance, and then recognizing others for meeting it, allowed the school to prosper in the form of high student achievement:

> A piece where people feel rewarded is AP. If you look at our AP scores, there again, they're going through the roof. We got more kids than ever taking AP level courses and scoring very well on them. I think that's because the culture here is, look, we can't give you a raise, but we commend you as who you are as learners, leaders, and teachers. You try to find those intrinsic motivators and reconnect [people] with why they had a love for education in the first place.

Attribute #2: Relationships Matter

According to one faculty member, the relationship that the faculty and staff had with the school principal allowed all other concerns to fall into place:

> We all want to work with him. We all want to please him. We all want to do well. What you

feel when you walk into a situation, this is a big building with a lot of kids, a lot of teachers, a lot of personalities, there are a lot of strong personalities, he makes it for us, he gets us to a point where we want to do well for him and it's a positive relationship. It's a positive culture. His willingness to not always have the power and to empower us is what makes that relationship a two-way relationship and also a relationship that, again, you want to perform for.

Another teacher revealed how the relationship building process trickled down to the student body, and proposed that this aspect was the most significant tenet in the building. According to this teacher, the number one priority is relationships and the school recognizes that without the relationships with students, and without students feeling really good about their school, nothing can be accomplished. Therefore, the emphasis is on building relationships with teachers, building relationships between students and teachers, and also building relationships between students.

One school administrator discussed what he had seen at the school, as far as the constant effort in getting various types of kids involved and how this created a caring community:

> I think this school is made up of people that try their best to tap all kids and not exclude. And, [the principal] makes it a part of his day to see those kids and he taps us to see those kids. And again, I am not talking about the star athletes or the superstar band and super smart kids, I am talking about the tech kids and I am talking about kids that don't even have a social group. By design, we try to reach out to these kids…You know, bad things happen every day. We get it, but we do try to connect with kids and make a difference. I'll tell you this, this building goes out of its way to make kids feel good as best it can for this kind of situation. So, I feel pretty good about that.

One teacher assessed the relationship piece from a professional community perspective:

> Everything we do is about teamwork…We do a lot of things with professional learning communities, so a lot of things we do come from that teamwork and the consensus of what the team has to say. That's been something that I think has really trickled down and caused some positive feedback because all of a sudden we sort of get this idea that we have a voice and that's important. We've got the character as a high school...We've got a lot of great teachers, a lot of great staff members that come together to really put forth what's best for the kids, and we put ourselves out there a lot of times to talk with them and try to get to a good space with kids.

They [the administration] encourage that…So, from a couple different angles, we've hit that and [the principal] impressed on us how important that is. And he'll do it for us. He'll stop in, "How're you doing? What's up? How's everything going?" Actually all of them do, and they check in and check with the kids, and, so, you just see it. It's everywhere.

Attribute #3: A Stabilized Work Environment

Among the professional staff at the school, there was a consensus that the climate that developed under the principal's leadership resulted in fewer organizational disturbances, in comparison to prior administrations. In this way, the principal's vigorous effort in establishing behavioral norms paid off. One teacher talked about how the school's climate was built upon certain operational and communicative procedures and systems, which, in turn, resulted in a lower degree of turbulence, in comparison to what occurred in other district buildings:

The culture we have, it's very good…we [union representatives] go to these meetings with all the other people across the district…and we walk away from the meetings going "Oh man, our principals are so good." Some of the other buildings, they're dealing with these really silly problems…for whatever reason, the teachers don't feel comfortable going right to their principal and saying, "Hey, I have a question. I have a concern. What should I do about this?" We have that…we have that, big time.

Another teacher provided backing for this sentiment through a description of her first encounter with the principal, and an explanation of how the relationship developed from there:

[The principal] and I started by me walking in and being like "I don't agree with what you just said. I don't agree with the way this went down. You need to fix it." And, that was him looking at me going, "Holy crap. I never met you before, but you're in my face." And, I walked in and I took a huge risk that day. But, I said what I needed to say and he was like "Okay, let's start over. What did I do? Tell me." And, I just laid it out there and he was like "Alright." And, the thing he said to me was "I hope you can always speak to me this way." And, I never forgot that, and I've never changed that. So, with him, it's always brutal honesty whether I agree with him or not. So, it's hard not to trust and buy into it when that's your starting point and you've seen good things.

One long-term faculty member echoed the analyses and experiences of the others, with his own description of what he has experienced at the school:

This has been the most cohesive and fair leadership I have ever experienced in education.

Like, I would love to retire and go out with this team…I have been through some pretty darn dysfunctional administrations [at this school] and it's not fun. You don't want to be in the situation where people are basically just closing their doors and keeping their heads down and doing their own thing. And, you want to be able to have your door open. He [the principal] came in on the heels of some dysfunction. And, I think what he wanted to do was just provide or establish stability and consistency and fairness. All three of which were pretty absent at the end of the administration prior to him. So, just by being those three things, it helped a lot. It helped an awful lot.

Attribute #4: A Cultivated School Environment

According to various school stakeholders, the type of school environment that developed under the direction of the school principal grew due to the leader's aptitude and willingness to do the things necessary for the school to flourish. One administrator explained that the principal had an aptitude for seeing the organization as a whole and effectively delegate. The administrator reported that this allowed the principal to relinquish control, share the vision, and get others to buy into his ideas. As the process progressed, the principal simply "supported from all angles."

One teacher described the school's power structure, in terms of teacher/administrator relationships, and explained how it reflected the principal's disposition along with that of the wider school community:

I think the school tries very hard to have the power come from the bottom up. I don't think it always happens, but I think of all the principals that have been here in the twenty plus years that I've been here, [he] tries very hard to get everybody talking and communicating with others about what's going on and I think that builds trust. I've never felt that I've said something to him that he has used against me, and I sometimes think there are principals who you're reluctant to say anything to for fear that the next time they'll hold it against you. I don't think he does that. I feel pretty free saying what I think he needs to hear. I don't do it often, but he wants to know what people are thinking, and is very attuned to the climate and how people are feeling about things.

It is testimonials like these that suggest the "drawing in" process is a key element of the principal's leadership work. In turn, a "cultivated organization" of some sort was produced at the school, in the sense that the school's stakeholders were given, and accepted, the invitation to be an active part of a caring, progressive organization. One assistant principal explained that teachers now come to him with creative ideas on how to

move a program or activity forward, and are willing to do so in a way that goes beyond their contract or a paid supplemental position. According to him, it translates into them really believing in the organization and the students. In this sense, "they just see a need for it and they make it happen."

Another administrator explained that, in its transformation, the school learned how to make intentional decisions, based on the organization's goals:

> You always have to have the global perspective. You have to know the goals and we've adopted the learning criteria and some goals within the building for those learning criteria. That's kind of like our window panes and our filter for things. So, it's constantly going back to "does that fit into the filter?" "Does that fit through those panes?" If not, then let's put it on the side burner. [It's] very similar to the Southwest Airlines model of, "are we going to be the cheapest airfare around", and if not, then it's off the table, we're not discussing it and that's kind of the way he [the principal] does it. You take it back to that, to that goal statement, and if it fits great, if it doesn't, we've got to re-evaluate or we got to trash it altogether.

One of the school's former students described the development of the school's climate in the following terms:

> [The principal] kind of set the tone and then the teachers would carry that on and then [came] the atmosphere. It was like caring, trustworthiness, that kind of thing, so they really strived to, I think, carry those on throughout the day. Like, create a community to make students feel at home. I thought they were always committed to seeing us succeed…I think there were a lot of deep connections. I actually invited them, when I graduated, to my graduation party. I made a great connection with them. I always thought it was a caring place. They really were looking out for their students. It wasn't just like an operation. They kept us in mind all the time.

Along with the students, who fondly talked about: being recognized for their work, the focus on relationships, and the school being a place where "teachers always presented themselves as somebody more than just a teacher", the parents presented their own descriptions of the school. One parent, who was involved with the school for an extended period of time due to having three children move through the building, provided details of the differences she observed over the years, as the school administration changed:

> There's been a lot more evening activities for parents. Getting your kids off to college, and psychology [topics]. They brought in some people who can talk to what your kids are going through, like bullying and things like that. I think they've done a lot of that. That's what I think shows that they care about the parents, too. They've tried to find things that will help us better equip our students. I think that's the concern I see. I've seen that in the change; more forums, more community forums have been happening here then did before. I feel like I can come in here at any time and feel like I could walk around here and ask questions. I feel a sense of belonging. Even Back-to-School Night. Just coming here for that and seeing the parents and teachers, it feels like, "This is good. They care."

Another parent commented on the experiences she has had with teachers, who demonstrated a penchant for positive communications:

> I have had notes for my daughter and the teachers have called. Again, it's the environment, its more, "let's reinforce positives." And, so, I think for us, that's been really good. We can see if our kids are doing something that we need to address differently, but it is really great when a teacher calls and says, "Hey, you know, [daughter's name] did a great job on this and we just wanted you to know." So, that's very different from, "your child didn't turn in a paper or something," So, it's more along the lines, let's show positive reinforcement.

Such accounts mirror the school principal's desire for his school to offer a particular story. As he revealed:

> It's the script tape or the stories that people tell and the symbols that are so important. And, I think that's who we are… We joke around and people know that relationships and helping all kids matters most and helping each other… We do have a culture of recognition. informal and formal, catch someone doing good, like, I have colleagues telling me what their colleagues are doing. That's awesome. I constantly am copied on emails. Not to protect people, its never defensive, its celebratory… it's that recognition and thank you, and making sure the boss knows so he can say it too, that's part of it. Because they see that that's the culture. They feel that we are more like a family around here.

Discussion of Findings

From this study's perspective, the perceptions disclosed by the school's stakeholders suggest that an open, positive climate existed in the organization, which transmitted the distinct cultural tenets of "high standards" and "positive relationships." The findings suggest these served as the values of the organization, which were transmitted through the principal's diligence in installing a particular school vision.

From a leadership perspective, Kouzes and Posner

(2007) asserted that research has shown that excellent leaders "model the way" (p. 15). The process is brought to life as the leader: communicates clear and strong personal beliefs, affirms shared values, sets an example, teaches others to model the organization's values, confronts critical incidents, frames critical incidents as teachable moments, and reinforces the behavior that he or she wants repeated.

The school principal regularly applied the tenets associated with Kouze and Posner's (2007) *model the way* principle. As the study's leadership themes revealed, the principal worked to: exert his presence throughout the building, set high standards, recognize stakeholders' efforts, demonstrate encouragement, show appreciation for his staff's accomplishments, and build a united professional team. Through consistent behavior, the principal extended his vision by embedding it within the everyday workings of the school. In turn, each of the school's stakeholders became well aware of the school's mission and his expectations, and worked cohesively and positively toward the aims of the organization.

According to this study's school stakeholder participants, institutional activity reflected involvement in and appreciation for the organization's vision, which suggested the existence of a resonant emotional climate. The study's field observations supported this conclusion, since observed school activity indicated high levels of stakeholder commitment, involvement, and positive professional relations. Written documents, in the form of memorandums, personal notes, and website communications, also served as a significant data piece to this conclusion, since they signified a clear communication of the school's values and revealed consistent execution of those values. For instance, the school principal routinely sent celebratory letters to faculty and parents, while highlighting the good work being done by professionals and students alike. Handwritten notes of encouragement were given by the principal to those who were experiencing difficult times. Website communications included the district mission statement, which mentioned the school's "partnership with family and community", the "safe and nurturing environment", and the "commitment to excellence and innovation." The high school webpage showcased the "Best High Schools" ranking that was recently attained from the U.S. News and World Report and the College Boards AP District Honor Roll status, which included recent consecutive years of distinction. Such forms of communication produced a channeled network of care, concern, and celebration that was enacted in times of personal need, achievement, and success.

As Glaser (2005) mentioned, *true leadership* speaks of the leader who is able to: set the context for change, create an atmosphere of collaboration and trust, unite the organization, collaborate through the sharing of best practices, learn what world-class organizations do,

and find better solutions to problems (pp. 39-40). When necessary, true leadership works to change a toxic environment that is characterized by its closed communications, competition for resources and recognition, and malnourished spirit (pp. 40-41), to an open, healthy system that feeds off: the organization's vision, strategic dialogue, common goals, sensitivity among stakeholders, the proper deployment of resources, and ideas for the future (p. 42). In turn, rather than a *dissonant* state that involves organizational conflict, unrest, frustration, and antagonism (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005), and a "downward cycle that affects students' academic interest and achievement, teachers' sense of efficacy and commitment to excellence, and the emotional well-being of both groups" (Beck, 1994, p. 42), a *resonant* state is created that leads to a positive institutional spirit along with personal and group renewal (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Goleman et al., 2002).

The results of this study indicate that the school principal's leadership behavior was instrumental in creating a resonant environment, which was flavored heavily with acts of care, concern, strategy, and competence. The result was a positive, vibrant school climate that played its part in producing results at a higher level than ever before. The results of this study suggest that the school principal's approach to leadership aptly produced climate change in the school. Figure 1 exhibits the process that transpired in the school organization.

The school principal's leadership behavior, which involved fifteen key practices, is closely aligned with the transformational leadership practices that have been cited in the literature. This form of leadership is concerned with defining and articulating a vision for the organization and having the followers accept the credibility of the leader (Bass, 1997; Burns, 1978; Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003). In this context, the leader seeks potential motives and hidden capacities of subordinates and then attempts to enhance those motives and capacities through transformational influence (Burns, 1978). Transformational leadership is said to transform followers into leaders and leaders into change agents as the followers' senses of self-worth and confidence along with the need for opportunities are addressed in order to gain true commitment and greater involvement in the organization's efforts (Avolio et al., 1991; Bass, 1997; Bass & Riggio, 2005; Burns, 1978). Carey (1992) argued that in order for a leader to become transformational, there must be a shift to universal, transcendent values that results in the "leader's choice to be in relationship with others rather than to control them" (p. 232).

Bass and Avolio (1993) provided a framework for examining organizations, while incorporating a transformational leadership model that consisted of four specific leadership behavioral components: 1) charisma or idealized influence, 2) inspiration, 3) intellectual
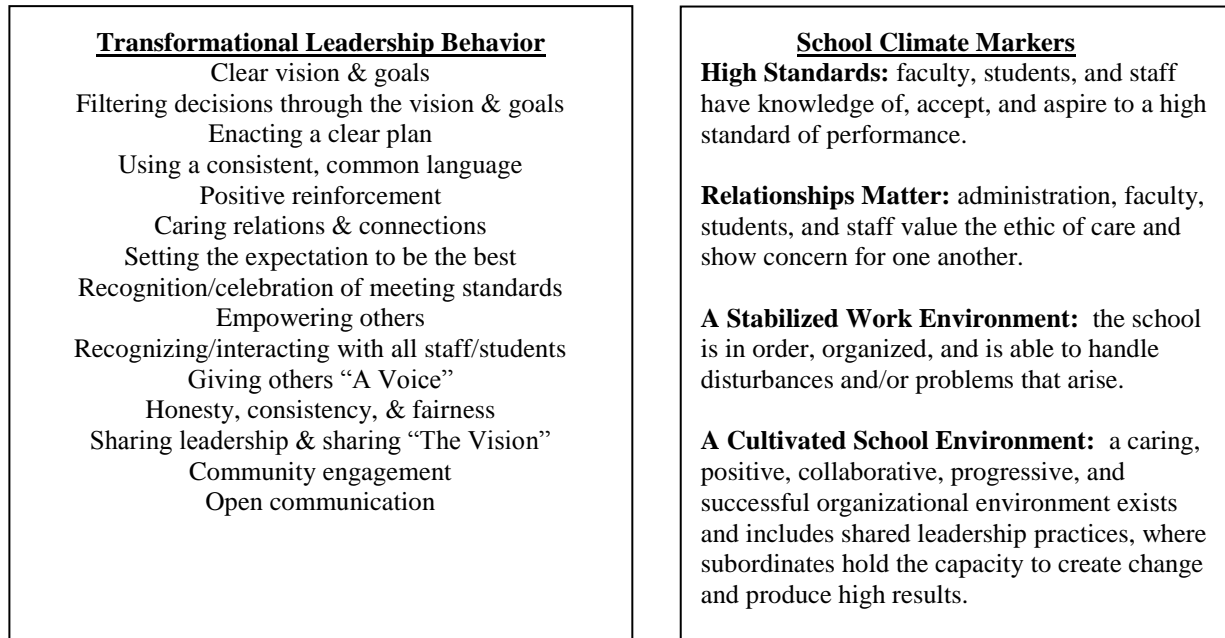

Transformational Leadership Behavior

Clear vision & goals
Filtering decisions through the vision & goals
Enacting a clear plan
Using a consistent, common language
Positive reinforcement
Caring relations & connections
Setting the expectation to be the best
Recognition/celebration of meeting standards
Empowering others
Recognizing/interacting with all staff/students
Giving others "A Voice"
Honesty, consistency, & fairness
Sharing leadership & sharing "The Vision"
Community engagement
Open communication

School Climate Markers

High Standards: faculty, students, and staff have knowledge of, accept, and aspire to a high standard of performance.

Relationships Matter: administration, faculty, students, and staff value the ethic of care and show concern for one another.

A Stabilized Work Environment: the school is in order, organized, and is able to handle disturbances and/or problems that arise.

A Cultivated School Environment: a caring, positive, collaborative, progressive, and successful organizational environment exists and includes shared leadership practices, where subordinates hold the capacity to create change and produce high results.

Figure 1. Transformational Leadership Behavior & Specific School Climate Markers.

stimulation, and 4) individualized consideration. This work asserted that transformational organizational cultures, rather than transactional or non-leadership environments, would "provide the context for more effective organizational and individual performance" (p. 121). According to Avolio et al. (1991), idealized influence is the element of this model that allows the leader to develop extensive personal rapport and influence with followers by treating them with respect, and, in turn, "building their confidence and trust in the overall mission" (p. 15). The results of this study suggest that the school principal's transformational leadership behavior was capable of altering the climate of his school in distinct ways.

Conclusion

This study considered the climate-related effects of transformational school leadership conduct. The results indicate a highly resonant climate existed in the organization, which was due to the transmission of clearly established values and actions throughout the school. This led to feelings of empowerment, excitement for school initiatives, advanced understandings of organizational norms, appreciation for being a part of the organization, acts of care and concern among stakeholders, productive work-related activity, and a stabilized environment. The conclusion to be drawn is that transformational leadership behavior holds the power to alter the feelings and conduct that transpire within a school organization and create synergy, as the school stakeholders accept, aspire to, and

match the school leader's values, beliefs, and actions. While the results of this study illuminate the power of transformational leadership practice, and demonstrate its impact on school climate, further qualitative inquiry is necessary in order to study, critique, and explain the leadership processes that are being instilled in K-12 schools. Through such inquiry, scholars and practitioners may come to better understand how the leadership process plays out in the school organization, how it affects school climate, and what needs to be accomplished in terms of leadership training and remediation.

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