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An Investigation of the Characteristics Successful Executive Directors Perceive to be Most Important in Charter Schools

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An Investigation of the Characteristics Successful Executive Directors Perceive to be
Most Important in Charter Schools

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Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Jeremy Quick under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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To my wife: Without your support and lovable nudging, this process would have been impossible.

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Abstract

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This study was a multiple case study to explore the phenomenon of the charter school executive director and the characteristics needed for success. The executive director characteristics directly affect the success or failure of a charter school (Berman, 2008). A variety of studies have researched the skill sets needed for successful leadership in several types of organizations; these skill sets overlap, and the research has revealed how these skills were interconnected. The evaluation of all these leadership skills helped define the skill set needed for successful charter school leaders and can be used by many stakeholders to improve upon current leadership, prepare new leaders, or help during the hiring process by charter school boards of directors.

Three research questions were used to guide this investigation with data being collected and analyzed using a qualitative approach. The researcher used interviews with four charter school executive directors as the primary source of data collection; other sources of data collection included site visits and document reviews. Data were analyzed and filtered through the conceptual framework of Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins's (2008) four core practices of successful leaders. The executive director practices included building vision and setting directions, understanding and developing people, developing organizations, and managing the teaching and learning program.

The researcher identified findings that helped illuminate characteristics of successful executive directors. The successful executive directors revealed that they developed their organizations by creating structures to help them solve problems for the long term. They also spent time developing people through staff development and removing barriers to improve teacher success. These successful executive directors also created networks with other charter school leaders so they could collaborate with others outside of their particular schools. The participants also noted differences between charter school leadership and traditional school leadership. These successful directors who had all previously been traditional school leaders noted that as charter school leaders, they faced challenges with funding and finding resources they had not faced as traditional school leaders. For details on these results see Chapters 4 and 5.

This project was a qualitative study of four successful charter school executive directors. The findings indicated the importance of using the four core leadership practices identified by Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) for charter school executive directors to be successful. The purpose of this research is to help illuminate what new and existing executive directors can do to improve their practices.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

According to the National Governors Association, the success of a charter school revolved around the executive director and the skills that leader exhibited (Berman, 2008). The National Governors Association found that executive directors required many skills including instructional leadership; finding facilities and maintaining them; developing and monitoring budgets; strategic planning; recruiting board members; hiring and training staff; recruiting and orienting families; public affairs; and working with the governing board, local community, and authorizing board (Berman, 2008). Campbell and Gross (2009) found that as an executive director of a charter school, similar skills were needed, which included finding and managing resources, recruiting students and teachers, balancing the budget, raising school funds, and being the curriculum and instructional leader. Several studies have identified a shortage of executive directors with the skill set needed to lead successful charter schools (Campbell & Grubb, 2008).

Executive Director - Challenges

Campbell and Gross (2008) conducted a study that surveyed 401 charter school executive directors across six states. In one section of the study, they used a Likert scale for participants to rate challenges they faced on a three-point scale: being a very serious challenge, being somewhat of a problem, and not being a problem. They insisted that executive directors of their study were confident in the instructional side of leadership; however, the business aspects of the job were more problematic. The leaders identified finding facilities as the most significant challenge, with 20% stating it was a serious problem they needed to overcome and 19% stating it was somewhat of a problem they faced. Another area with which executive directors were struggling was raising funds

and managing finances. Twelve percent asserted it was a serious problem, while another 25% stated it was somewhat of a problem. Attracting qualified teachers was yet another problem area: 14% stated it was a serious problem, while 22% declared it to be somewhat of a problem. Engaging students' parents was a struggle for many of the participants in this study. Twelve percent stated it was a serious problem, while 14% declared it was somewhat of a problem. Other problem areas for executive directors included negotiating with public schools (9% very serious), attracting students (6% very serious), and complying with state and federal requirements (6% very serious). Additionally, Campbell and Gross (2008) announced that charter executive directors were young and lacked experience.

Cravens, Goldring, and Penaloza (2012) investigated 116 charter schools, and executive directors were asked about the job difficulties they faced. They were surveyed using a five-point Likert scale from not difficult at all to extremely difficult. They explained that all executive directors "reported some difficulty regarding acquiring resources, and recruiting and retaining teachers and students" (Cravens et al., 2012, p. 465).

In addition to Campbell and Gross (2008), Carpenter and Peak (2013) surveyed 78 executive directors and noted they had the lowest confidence in leading literacy and math. Carpenter and Peak also asserted that executive directors had low confidence in the same areas identified for Campbell and Gross (2008), including business aspects of the job. They further explained that engaging parents in a shared vision was challenging. Other factors that made their jobs difficult included lack of community support, lack of autonomy, student discipline, lack of board support, finding financial resources, and having adequate time to complete tasks. They also disclosed that there was a lack of

concern from executive directors in the area of financial resources, although Consoletti (2011) found that most charter schools have closed for reasons associated with financial distress. Carpenter and Peak continued, stating that executive directors spent significantly little time on external development. Finally, their results showed that executive directors placed minimal attention on parental involvement and had low confidence in their abilities to influence parents. This is contrary to what Dressler (2001) stated about the importance of parental involvement after conducting a study on charter school leadership:

> The ultimate determination of the accountability of schools is parental satisfaction. It is the day-to-day functions of schools led by principals who focus on meeting the needs of different stakeholders, primarily parents, that should be the primary intention of accountability. (p. 171)

Dressler (2001) had 17 charter schools take part in his study of charter school executive directors in Colorado. He realized that leaders faced similar challenges there, including building public relations, working positively with the local school districts, maintaining a positive school image, lack of time to complete administrative duties, and finding alternative funding sources (Dressler, 2001).

Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, and Gundlach (2003) surveyed 21 schools in Washington, Ohio, Illinois, and Wisconsin. In their study, charter school executive directors expressed that coursework focused on instructional and managerial leadership, leaving the rest to be learned on the job. Simply stated, their coursework did not adequately prepare them for their leadership roles (Portin et al., 2003).

Levine (2005) did a 4-year study of American colleges and universities where he focused on the schools of education and reported that "the overall quality of educational

administration programs to be poor" (p. 5), with some being appalling. Levine also revealed a vast disconnect between what leaders need to know and the coursework they completed. The universities did not self-evaluate their programs in regard to student needs, and their curricula were lacking connections to student needs. Finally, Levine found that the programs offered very little mentoring by successful leaders.

Charter Closings

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (2015) reported that during the 2014-2015 school year, 200 charter schools closed. Reasons for the closures included low student enrollment, financial problems, and low academic performance (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2015). According to the South Carolina Department of Education (2009), financial difficulties and poor governance were reasons for charter school closings. The Center for Education Reform (CER) found that 15% of charter schools have closed nationwide (Consoletti, 2011). CER confirmed this because of the charters that closed: 41.7% did so for financial reasons, 24% for mismanagement, 18.6% for academic reasons, 4.6% for facilities, 6.3% for public school obstacles, and 4.5% for unknown reasons.

In North Carolina, from 1996 to 2011, 34 charter schools were closed. During that time, the state mandated a 100 charter school cap; in other words, no more than 100 schools were to open during a school year (Stoops, 2010). During that 15-year period, 19 schools closed for financial reasons, and 14 of the 19 closed due to inadequate enrollment. In addition, 11 charter schools closed for mismanagement, two for facilities, one for district reasons, and one for low academic performance (Consoletti, 2011).

Sunderman and Payne (2009) conducted a study that examined the effects of closing charter schools. Their study declared that when charter schools close, it has a

negative effect on students, families, and communities. The result was poor performance on standardized tests and loss of relationships students developed in schools as well as the support they needed to be successful. Changing schools increased a student's likelihood of dropping out of school. Receiving schools that are not prepared to absorb the extra students also experienced a drop in student performance.

Leadership Shortage

Adding to the problem, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (2015) announced a severe shortage of quality executive directors and stated that the shortage will continue to grow. According to the Alliance, 50% of charter school executive directors were expected to retire in the next 5-10 years, leaving a projected void of 6,000 to 21,000 charter school executive directors (Perry, 2008). To make matters worse, Campbell and Gross (2008) revealed that 10% of charter school leaders leave each year. Furthermore, they found that 43% of charter school leaders said they would leave in the next 3 years, and 71% of charter leaders plan to leave in the next 5 years (Campbell & Gross, 2008). Campbell (2010) confirmed this in his 2-year study of 24 charter schools and their executive directors. Campbell and Grubb (2008) exposed that there were not enough charter school leaders to meet the demands of the rapid charter school growth. Campbell and Grubb also shared that not enough leadership training programs were available to support the number of leaders needed for the new charter schools opening. They identified only 13 leadership programs that targeted charter school leaders. Of the 13 programs, only two were degree-awarding programs: Arizona State University and Central Michigan University. Both programs offered Master of Arts degrees but only serve 49 students collectively. They acknowledged that with the loss of existing executive directors and the rise in the need for new ones, there just had not been enough

candidates to fill leadership needs (Campbell & Grubb, 2008). The National Alliance for

Public Charter Schools agreed with Campbell and Grubb. They conceded that the

shortage of charter school leaders is due to the growing numbers of charter schools

(Perry, 2008). These leaders are needed "to establish and achieve a clear school mission,

to recruit, develop, and retain effective educators, and to provide teachers with the

leadership support they need to deliver high-quality instruction" (Berman, 2008, p. 1).

Charter School Growth

Charter schools have grown nationally by 300-400 schools each year since the

first charter law was enacted in 1991 (Lake, 2013). As illustrated in the Figure by Lake

(2013), there were 5,618 charter schools by the 2011-2012 school year, and 547 charter

schools opened in the 2011-2012 school year.
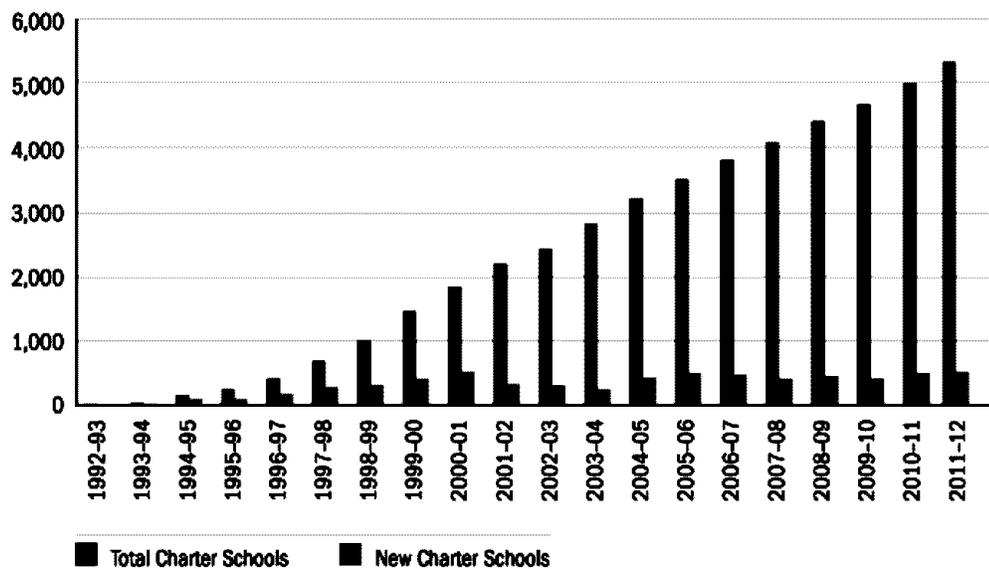
Figure 1. Charter School Growth from 1992 through 2012.

Problem Statement

There is a lack of charter school executive directors equipped with the skills

needed to lead successful charter schools (Campbell & Grubb, 2008). Despite the fact that charter schools have experienced exceptional growth, many established charter schools have closed which has caused a tremendous shortage of successful school leaders. The schools have closed for a variety of reasons that included financial, mismanagement, academic, facilities, and district public school obstacles (Consoletti, 2011). These schools closed because of a lack of quality executive directors. Executive directors lacked the skill set needed to lead successful charter schools (Campbell & Grubb, 2008). To solve these problems, charter school executive directors would need to understand fully what current successful directors perceive to be the instructional and administrative demands of their jobs and to know the personal and professional qualities that have enabled them to be successful.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the current study was to investigate leadership traits successful charter school executive directors perceived to be most important to their success. Further, the current study also investigated what the instructional and administrative demands of a charter school executive director were. Finally, this study examined the instructional and administrative demand differences between leading a charter school and leading a traditional public school.

Significance of the Study

The study of characteristics of successful charter school executive directors will benefit charter school leaders who desire to keep the school in operation and improve their performance. Since the opening of charter schools in 1991, a 15% closure rate has occurred nationwide involving 1,100 charter schools (Consoletti, 2011). Of the charter schools that closed, poor executive director decisions including poor financial decisions,

poor management decisions, low student performance, and lack of facilities contributed

to the schools' failures (Consoletti, 2011). In North Carolina from 1997-2005, 24 charter

schools closed for three reasons: facilities, financial, and mismanagement, all of which

can be connected to poor leadership (Paino, Renzulli, Boylan, & Bradley, 2014). With

the increase of charter schools across North Carolina and in the United States, successful

leadership is paramount to the success of charter organizations (Berman, 2008).

Operational Definitions

The concepts used in this study were defined as follows.

Charter school. A public school that receives public funds on a per-pupil basis

(Hill, 2002). Governed by a board that is held accountable by both parents and the state

board of education (Hill, 2002). Tuition free with performance contracts, failure to meet

the performance agreement results in closure (Berman, 2008). A school of choice "freed

from rules but accountable for results" (Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 2001, p. 14).

Executive director. The highest leadership role within a charter school.

Leadership. Defined by Vroom and Jago (2007) as "a process of motivating

people to work together collaboratively to accomplish great things" (p. 18).

North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey (NCTWCS). A survey

administered to all North Carolina teachers every 2 years to assess teacher perceptions of

their school environment (Hirsch & Emerick, 2007).

Summary

This study investigated the characteristics of successful charter school executive

directors. The success or failure of a charter school revolved around the leader and the

leadership traits he/she exhibited (Berman, 2008). A variety of studies have researched

the skill sets needed for successful leadership in several types of organizations; these skill

sets overlap, and the research revealed how these skills were interconnected. The

evaluation of all of these leadership skills helped define the skill set needed for successful

charter school leaders.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate leadership traits successful charter school executive directors perceived to be most important to their success. This study also investigated what the instructional and administrative demands of a charter school executive director were. Finally, this study examined the instructional and administrative demand differences between leading a charter school and leading a traditional public school.

Introduction

Successfully leading a charter school as an executive director required many characteristics that included instructional leadership, a belief that all children can learn, vision, business skills, and management skills (Perry, 2008). This study was designed to identify those characteristics the successful executive directors of four North Carolina charter schools perceived to be most important to their success.

Cumings and Coryn (2009) conducted a job analysis of charter school executive directors in a national charter school system. The job analysis was designed to gather "information about how a job is done, how it should be done, and how a job will be done; thus, it is simultaneously descriptive, prescriptive, and predictive" (Cumings & Coryn, 2009, p. 158). Cumings and Coryn used a three-phase process: in Phase 1, the job was broken down into essential tasks; in Phase 2, they identified the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to complete the essential tasks of the job; and finally, the results were used in the hiring, training, and performance appraisal processes. Six executive directors took part in all three phases of this study. The participants named a total of 46 essential job tasks that fit into four categories: knowledge, skills, abilities, and other

characteristics. To be considered an essential job task, it had to be a task that could not

be completed by anyone besides the school's executive director. Serious consequences

resulted if the task was completed incorrectly. The researchers also determined the

essentiality of each task and the amount of time each participant spent doing each task.

Executive directors in this study were not spending time on tasks that were rated as

essential to meeting organizational goals. Finally, researchers showed that executive

directors found it challenging to complete the renewal process that every charter school

must complete and provide effective leadership (Cumings & Coryn, 2009).

Horng, Klasik, and Loeb (2010) concurred with Cumings and Coryn (2009) and

reported that executive directors were spending 30% of their day doing administrative

tasks and only 10% of their time on instructional tasks. The research was all conducted

during a 1-week period and utilized 65 researchers who observed and recorded the

activities of 3,607 principals every 5 minutes during the length of a school day (Horng et

al.,2010).

Gurley, Peters, Collins, and Fifolt (2015) conducted a qualitative study of

educational leaders enrolled in graduate educational leadership courses. The researchers

utilized a content analysis using survey questions where 80 educational leaders were

asked to recall important organizational statements of mission, vision, values, and goals,

along with the impact these statements had on their daily professional practices. They

disclosed that on the basis of yes and no responses, 94% of survey participants said their

school had a mission statement, and 62% revealed their school had a vision statement.

Although 94% of participants declared that their school had a mission statement, only

10% of them mentioned high levels of student learning in the mission statement.

Additionally, they stressed that of the 62% of respondents who stated their school had a

vision statement, only 16 of 80 could recall any portion of their vision statement. Of the 80 participants, only six could recall any part of their school's values statements, and 12 participants were able to give goal statements (Gurley et al., 2015).

Clear direction from the literature called for school leaders to develop, articulate, implement, and steward a clear, shared vision among school personnel; yet data from the Gurley et al. (2015) study showed a "disconnect between best practice and reality insofar as a mere 14% of educational leadership students were able to recall any part of a future-oriented vision statement" (p. 236). Furthermore, 90% of leaders in this study had no knowledge of any shared values or statements in their schools. They also noted that school leaders in this study were not able to recall any part of their schools' goal statements on demand (Gurley et al., 2015).

Gurley et al. (2015) also looked at the perceived impact of mission, vision, values, and goals on the daily lives of the educational leaders in their schools. One discovery was that over half of participants "reported that the mission statement in their school had only some to no effect on their daily practice as educators" (Gurley et al., 2015, p. 237). In addition, 56% of leaders disclosed that their school did not have a vision statement or that the vision statement had little to no effect on their work. Sixty percent of leaders in this study reported that their school had no values statements. Finally, 23% of school executive directors revealed that the goal statements had a large to maximum effect on their professional lives. Executive directors "continue to ignore the call from educational change experts to establish, and especially steward, a shared purpose" (Gurley et al., 2015, p. 237).

Successful Leaders

Kouzes and Posner (2007) have researched leaders for over 25 years. They

wanted to find out what leaders did when they were at their personal best while leading others. They identified that successful leaders used the five practices of exemplary leadership: model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. Successful leaders built their credibility and generated trust through consistency with their words and actions and followed through on their promises (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). The researchers declared that credibility was the foundation of leadership. They concluded that regardless of the organization, the practices that successful leaders used were similar (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

The future success of an organization lies on the shoulders of the executive director and his/her ability to set a clear vision with strategic goals and objectives (Bruckman, 2008). From his study of over 300 organizations, Bruckman (2008) compiled variables for success into several areas. The first was working with the group, where the leader must take the time to understand the history of the group, how the group members work together, and what drives them. The next variable was confronting the fear of change. The leader must realize that it is important to understand the level of fear the staff feels when change happens. He/she must consider the group's perspective and know what people have to lose or gain (Bruckman, 2008).

Bruckman (2008) also talked about building trust. In building trust, the leaders began with team building. The leaders were open and honest and gave teachers and staff authentic opportunities to take part in important decisions. Trust began with teams and teamwork. When the leader worked with teams, he/she avoided manipulating the workgroup by making a decision but still giving the group the problem to solve. Leaders listened to employee input and were willing to compromise. They needed to realize that their workforces are the ones in the trenches and can give new plans or ideas a critical

eye and spot possible problems early. It was also essential to know how to give the group

ownership. The group was also allowed to change the leaders' ideas or, better yet, let

them come up with their own initiatives (Bruckman, 2008).

Bruckman (2008) further argued that leaders must also be aware that actions, not

words, built credibility. By rewarding new behaviors early, change occurred faster.

Bruckman insisted that leaders needed to look for positives in the right direction. Some

leaders tried to push their workforce to change by giving financial rewards, but

Bruckman stressed that such rewards had little effect on everyday behavior.

Last, Bruckman (2008) talked about how important it was for leaders to manage

the myths by paying attention to the everyday rumors. Executive directors needed to

have integrity, if they expected to be successful and have followers who believed in them

(Bruckman, 2008).

Covey (2012) reinforced the practices discussed by Kouzes and Posner (2007)

and Bruckman (2008) by insisting that great executive directors inspired trust, aligned

systems, clarified purpose, and unleashed talent. In addition, executive directors earned

the right to lead through their credibility (Covey, 2012). Executive directors clarified the

purpose of their organization by defining the job to be done, creating a clear and

compelling vision, sharing this purpose and vision, and soliciting feedback to increase

engagement (Covey, 2012).

In education, Daresh and Playko (1997) showed that the executive director makes

a school successful, but that job is becoming more difficult.

On the one hand, research that has been directed toward identifying the reasons

why some schools are more effective than others has shown repeatedly that all of

the variables that may have something to do with making some schools more

successful, one stands out. That most critical variable is the leadership behavior

or the school principals. Good schools have good principals. On the other hand,

the role of the school principal is becoming more complex and difficult each day.

Greater pressures are being placed on the principals today. (Daresh & Playko

1997, p. xi)

The Senate's Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity also noted more than

40 years ago the importance of the school principal as it related to the school's success.

They concluded that the school principal was the most crucial variable in a school's

success.

In many ways, the school principal is the most important and influential

individual in any school. He or she is the person responsible for all activities that

occur in and around the school building. It is the principal's leadership that sets

the tone of the school, the climate for teaching, the level of professionalism and

morale of teachers, and the degree of concern for what students may or may not

become. The principal is the main link between the community and the school,

and the way he or she performs in this capacity largely determines the attitudes of

parents and students about the school. If a school is a vibrant, innovative, child-

centered place, if it has a reputation for excellence in teaching, if students are

performing to the best of their ability, one can almost always point to the

principal's leadership as the key to success. (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty,

2005, pp. 5-6)

Portin et al. (2003) identified a set of seven areas that needed to be managed by

successful school executive directors: instructional, cultural, managerial, human

resources, strategic, external development, and micropolitical. The researchers

established the seven areas by researching what principals did in 21 schools across four states over 2 years. The researchers used case studies and inductive ground theory to dig deeply into what executive directors were actually doing. In many states, low performing public schools were closed and reopened as charter schools, dubbing this action school turnaround (Sunderman & Payne, 2009). Researchers who focused on the school turnaround effort and performed a systematic review of the research pinpointed four competencies of successful school turnaround leaders that included driving for results, influencing results, problem-solving, and showing confidence (Steiner, Hassel, Hassel, & Valsing, 2008). More specifically, organizations such as the National Charter School Resource Center have also researched the characteristics required for hiring turnaround executive directors. The characteristics for hiring executive directors who turn around failing charter schools were set high goals and pursue them, achieve quick success with a few early wins, make improvement plans based on data, replace people who are not adapting to change, and self-confidence and stamina. The National Charter School Resource Center (2010) stated that many of the same characteristics for hiring school turnaround executive directors were the same as for hiring business leaders.

Conceptual Framework

Leithwood and Duke (1999) reviewed 10 years of educational journals and spotted six models of leadership practice that occurred most frequently in the research: instructional leadership, transformational leadership, moral leadership, participative leadership, managerial leadership, and contingent leadership. Leithwood and Duke found that there is a seemingly unlimited number of models of leadership practices from which leaders may choose to utilize. Which model leaders chose depended mostly on the situation with which they were dealing (Leithwood & Duke, 1999).

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) summarized executive director traits and came up with "a core set of leadership practices that form the basis of successful leadership and are valuable in almost all educational contexts" (p. 3). Executive directors used the following practices: setting directions, developing people, and developing organizations. Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) identified a fourth core category, managing the teaching and learning program. They also identified subsets to each of the core leadership categories. Table 1 illustrates the four categories of executive director practices and their subsets as identified by Leithwood and Riehl and Leithwood et al.

Table 1

Leadership Practices by Leithwood and Riehl (2003) and Leithwood et al. (2008)

Building Vision and Setting Directions	Understanding and Developing People	Developing Organizations	Managing the Teaching and Learning Program
a. Building a shared vision	a. Offering intellectual stimulation	a. Strengthening school culture	a. Staffing the teaching program
b. Fostering the acceptance of group goals	b. Providing individualized support	b. Modifying organizational structure	b. Providing teaching support
c. Demonstrating high-performance expectations	c. Providing an appropriate model	c. Building collaborative processes	c. Monitoring school activity
		d. Managing the environment	d. Buffering staff against distractions from their work

These practices and subsets used were the conceptual structure for organizing the results of this research.

Building Vision and Setting Directions

Many researchers have defined vision; and all the definitions included some

aspect of future orientation, a mental image, and a direction or goal (Nanus, 1992). "An effective vision presents a credible yet realistic picture of the organization that inspires the participants to reach for a future goal" (Huffman & Hipp, 2000, p. 6). The charter school executive director established the vision and goals and inspired others to meet the vision. Executive directors inspired others to meet the vision by identifying and articulating the vision, creating shared meanings, fostering acceptance of group goals, monitoring the organizations' performance, and communicating with others (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Nanus (1992) identified characteristics similar to those of Leithwood and Riehl (2003) and maintained that visions have the following characteristics: attracts commitment and energizes people, creates meaning in stakeholder lives, establishes a standard of excellence, bridges the present to the future, and transcends the status quo. Buell (1992) agreed with this list by stating that the most important aspect of instructional leadership is the ability of the executive director to lead others toward a vision. Huffman and Hipp (2000) added to this and declared that the primary task of the executive director was to build a vision that included all stakeholders in the school. Gurley et al. (2015) argued that mission, vision, values, and goals were all part of the purpose of the organization. They also specified that it was essential to have a shared commitment to a purpose for an executive director to be successful (Gurley et al., 2015).

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) had conceptions of building a vision and setting directions that were similar to inspiring a shared vision by Kouzes and Posner (2007). Executive directors needed to encourage others in a vision to which everyone can relate. "To enlist support, leaders must have intimate knowledge of people's dreams, hopes, aspirations, visions, and values" (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 17). For teachers and staff to move toward a shared vision, they needed to develop similar values (Buell, 1992).

Staff members came with their own values and filtered everything through those values. When the staff had the same values, they would be able to move toward the same goals, and the impact would be more significant than everyone working to achieve separate goals. Parents and students could be influenced by the vision only if everyone at the school had the same vision, values, and goals (Buell, 1992).

Buell (1992) identified the track that executive directors traveled to achieve a shared vision. According to Buell, the executive director's job was to make sure there was a shared vision. Buell further stated that a shared vision was accomplished through altering and sometimes reworking the values of those who are not on board. He recognized that teachers were the most important advocates of the vision, and that they had to be the promoters. If necessary, the executive director could rework values by knowing and promoting his values and being confident enough to debate with others about their educational values. When necessary, the executive director negotiated with others but was firm about the values that connected with the vision. When the executive director accomplished reworking values, everyone understood what was behind decisions, and values became aligned and became shared values. This took time, and the executive director had to capitalize on every moment to talk about values. Finally, according to Buell, a shared vision resulted when all stakeholders had and could express a comparable vision. Ellis and Joslin (1990) agreed and insisted that a successful school might never meet their long-term vision, but it was a task that involved every stakeholder in the school.

Ellis and Joslin (1990) argued that before an executive director and a school began to develop their vision, they needed to have an understanding of their current position. Once the executive director and stakeholders came to a consensus on where

they were, they could decide on what current practices to keep, because not everything they are doing is wrong. It is only then that a school and the executive director could make an informed decision on where they would like to go, the dream, and the vision. They needed to decide on how to get there, what to keep, what to trash, and what to develop (Ellis & Joslin, 1990).

Kose (2010) examined the effects of a shared vision on student achievement. He reexamined data from previously conducted qualitative multi-case studies he conducted. The author used a purposeful sampling technique and identified 15 peer-nominated principals. The principals were known to have fostered achievement for students generally marginalized due to race and class. The data collection process was through three 90-120 minute interviews with the principal as well as several observations in which the researcher also looked at school vision statements. In four schools, the vision was developed at the same time the school was opening. In an interview, one principal who did not start with a vision in place and took several years developing one stated that a more centralized vision allowed for a faculty and staff who were easier to manage and communicate with. This same principal insisted that the faculty have an increased focus on student learning after the vision was in place.

Kose (2010) was interested in finding what leverage the principal would have from written vision statements. The author noted that for this study, if the principal used a dimension of the vision, it had leverage. Nine principals in the study indicated they used the vision to frame planning, practices, priorities, and policies. Some principals even used the vision statement to focus meetings and conduct interviews. Kose further contended that principals who had four to six concepts in their written vision used their vision more often. Ten principals also maintained that using a vision "provided

substance for future decisions and growth for a few staff members who were not on-board or resisted" (Kose 2010, p. 130).

Huffman (2001) examined schools that were implementing professional learning communities (PLCs) and the role shared vision and values played in the PLC process. They conducted a qualitative 5-year study that included 18 participating schools. The location of most of the schools in this study was the southwest United States, but some of the locations included the southeast, Mid-Atlantic, and Midwest. They interviewed teachers and principals after 1 year of implementation and came up with some conclusions based on the differences between more mature and less mature schools in terms of the development of a vision. More mature schools for this study were schools that used the five dimensions of PLCs developed by Hord (2001). The dimensions were shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice (Huffman, 2001).

Huffman (2001) found that many of the more mature schools designed their vision around the broad range of student growth and made sure to cut through academic area lines. One principal in a more mature school participating in the study revealed that it was essential to consider the needs of all stakeholders when developing the vision. The principal continued by stating that the staff was committed to the whole child and his/her academic success. When looking at a less mature school, one principal acknowledged that the faculty has a hard time internalizing the shared vision (Huffman, 2001).

When looking at who was responsible for developing the vision, more mature schools included all stakeholders in the process. One participant even mentioned that the school reworked their vision every 3 years; and everything was built around the vision including the budget, instruction, and grants. Less mature schools had a hard time even

getting the whole faculty involved (Huffman, 2001).

More mature schools developed their mission using a linear approach, making sure the process contained staff development sessions. Discussions included the whole school organization and a timeline that included time for reflection and conversations about concerns. Less mature schools often hired consultants who directed the process of developing values and visions. Some schools even had their leadership team establish the vision and then present it to the staff. A few schools just adopted their district's vision. These less mature schools would bounce from one initiative to another, which caused a lack of teacher commitment (Huffman, 2001).

As part of the previous 5-year study administered by Huffman and Hipp (2000), researchers analyzed the characteristics of high readiness and low readiness schools. Their focus was on the interaction of shared leadership, shared vision, and supportive conditions. They revealed that if there is a lack of vision, it is impossible to meet future goals or implement programs consistently (Huffman & Hipp, 2000).

Schools showed they were a high readiness school for a shared vision when teachers initiated and held themselves responsible for change, and the staff had a picture of what the future looked like with student learning at the center. In high readiness schools, both teachers and administrators focused on student learning and the application of knowledge. In low readiness schools, the staff saw the vision as someone else's and lacked staff buy-in. Staff members asserted they were not asked for input, and researchers noted this caused staff members to be inconsistent and unreliable (Huffman & Hipp, 2000).

Huffman and Hipp (2000) also insisted that supportive conditions must happen in order to develop a shared vision. They further claimed that teachers would not commit to

a shared vision if trust and respect were lacking. In high readiness schools, "the vision was nurtured and continually revealed in order to push the existing limits" (Huffman & Hipp, 2000, p. 13). Staff members were respected and involved in all aspects of decision-making. One Louisiana teacher stated that teachers were able to make decisions and live with the consequences rather than asking permission for the little things. Another indicator of a high readiness school was that they had an executive director who created pathways to success for teachers. Monitoring progress and giving praise along the way could achieve these pathways for success. Executive directors also took every opportunity to be part of the professional lives of staff and were supportive of their programs and initiatives. In low readiness schools, a few people made decisions, and a majority of teachers were excluded from the decision-making process. In these schools, principals were punitive and reactive and sometimes even uncaring, resulting in teachers who were not committed to improvement (Huffman & Hipp, 2000).

Streshly and Gray (2008) examined six all-star executive directors through formal interviews. There were six all-star executive directors identified for their study based on their schools' sustained performance on student achievement test scores. They wanted to find the critical characteristics and behaviors of these successful executive directors. They found that these executive directors were relentless in pursuing the mission of their school. In their drive for results, they took on blame for failures and gave others credit when the school was successful. One executive director stated, "I see my main responsibility here is to support the people who do the real work in the classrooms" (Streshly & Gray, 2008, p. 119). Executive directors had a vision that was focused on student achievement and promoting a professional staff that would do whatever it took to accomplish the mission. They searched for and hired the right people to fill their

positions and found ways to eliminate those who did not believe in the vision and the mission (Streshly & Gray, 2008).

The subset of demonstrating high-performance expectations also occurred in the public impact project. The public impact project mission was to increase student success for all students, with a focus on poor and minority students (Steiner et al., 2008). The Chicago Public Education Fund funded this study and focused on school turnaround leaders (Steiner et al., 2008). Researchers argued that leaders set high expectations and pushed for results in a meaningful and planned way regardless of barriers. They further explained that school turnaround leaders relentlessly pursued goals they set. In addition, they noted that early goals were picked strategically so success was achieved quickly (Steiner et al., 2008). The school and stakeholders needed to feel success, and then new goals were built on the energy of achieving early wins (National Charter School Resource Center, 2010).

Fostering the acceptance of group goals was very similar to influencing for results in the school turnaround effort. Steiner et al. (2008) also announced that leaders in a turnaround school coached staff members toward appropriate behaviors that were different from what were previously accepted. "Influence is acting with the purpose of affecting the perception, thinking and actions of others" (Steiner et al., 2008, p. 19). Executive directors in turnaround schools influenced staff members by anticipating others' reactions to situations and then changed their actions or used words to create the desired result (Steiner et al., 2008). These leaders demonstrated high-performance expectations even when their decisions were unpopular, and they showed self-confidence and had the stamina to stay the appropriate course. This self-confidence was also very helpful when speaking about the leaders' vision for the school and the expected outcomes

(National Charter School Resource Center, 2010).

Ellis and Joslin (1990) described a process they called commitment. If the staff was not committed to the vision, the vision was not met. They defined commitment as "the investment of willingness and ability to realize a desired state" (Ellis & Joslin, 1990, p. 6). They continued and described the steps to obtain staff commitment to a vision. There were critical issues the staff faced, which is where the process started. Also, assume the vision would take a long time to develop. Know there will be issues to fix along the way. The vision must be built from the bottom up, not from the top down. Finally, if all stakeholders have participated in the building of the vision and put their values and dreams into it, commitment would be the logical product.

Strategic leaders developed plans to promote the school vision, mission, and goals, a process which is similar to building vision and setting directions. Each leader needs to develop vision, mission, and goals collaboratively and know how to create a plan to reach the expected outcomes (Portin et al., 2003).

Understanding and Developing People

The charter school executive director must devote time to developing people. "Most work in schools, of course, is accomplished through the efforts of people" (Leithwood & Reihl, 2003, p. 4). Leithwood and Reihl (2003) continued, "effective educational leaders influence the development of human resources in their schools" (p. 4). In conclusion, executive directors influenced stakeholders by offering intellectual stimulation, individualized support, and an appropriate model.

Providing an appropriate model was important in the work of Kouzes and Posner (2007) under their first exemplary leadership practice, model the way. The actions of successful executive directors reflected the expectations they had of others. To

accomplish this goal, executive directors clarified values by standing up for what they believed in. The exemplary executive directors went one step further; because they knew they were representing an entire organization, they worked toward consensus around shared values. Another example of providing an appropriate model was what Kouzes and Posner have called enabling others to act, their fourth exemplary practice. According to Kouzes and Posner, ideal executive directors built teams and teamwork through trust and collaboration. Similarly, both Bruckman (2008) and Covey (2012) identified building and inspiring trust as an essential skill for any leader. Leaders also provided teachers and staff members with individual support by making others feel capable, committed, and strong. Kouzes and Posner had a fifth exemplary leadership practice, called encouraging the heart, which was also a way of understanding and developing people. Executive directors built a culture that celebrated victories, and they also performed acts that showed they cared.

Developing people also occurred in the public impact project. According to this project, "Developing others is influence with the specific intent to increase the short and long-term effectiveness of another person" (Steiner et al., 2008, p. 19). Developing others included giving instruction, providing expectations, giving feedback, and letting others have the power to make important decisions so they can learn from failure as well as success (Steiner et al., 2008).

Developing Organizations

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) reported that executive directors must use PLCs to make changes that are sustainable. Sustainable changes were accomplished by strengthening the school culture, modifying organizational structure, building collaborative processes, and managing the environment.

Walker and Slear (2011) conducted a study at six school districts in a Mid-Atlantic state that included 336 middle school teachers. The study investigated the executive director behaviors that affected teacher self-efficacy at different points in their career. The researchers used the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale, which was a nine-point Likert-type scale. The teachers then rated their principal's behaviors on the following characteristics: communication, consideration, discipline, empowering staff, flexibility, influence with supervisors, inspiring group purpose, modeling instructional expectations, monitoring and evaluating instruction, providing contingent rewards, and situational awareness. Modeling instructional expectations by the executive director was a statistically significant predictor of teacher self-efficacy with a Durbin Watson of 1.921. Teachers who had 0-3 years of experience valued executive directors who were willing to provide instructional support and direction for classroom instruction. Teachers with 4-7 years of experience wanted an executive director who modeled instructional expectations as well and also wanted an executive director who communicated with them about what is happening around the school. They wanted an executive director who would help them understand the big picture outside their classroom and gain a deeper understanding of school operations and daily activities. Teachers with 8-14 years of experience identified three areas that were statistically significant in raising teacher self-efficacy in the following order: communication, consideration, and modeling instructional expectations. Clear communication built teacher efficacy within this group. The group added consideration as an executive director characteristic that increased teacher self-efficacy. This characteristic was especially important to teachers who had reported low self-efficacy. Finally, teachers with 15 years or more experience expressed that the most significant executive director behavior was inspiring group purpose. This group of

teachers required an executive director who helped them find meaning in what they were doing as well as setting goals and achieving them for the betterment of students (Walker & Slear, 2011).

Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy (2000) investigated the effects of collective teacher efficacy on student performance. Goddard et al. concluded that collective teacher efficacy strengthened school culture. According to the researchers, "Collective teacher efficacy is the perception of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty as a whole will have a positive effect on students" (Goddard et al., 2000, p. 503). Their study included 47 elementary schools and 452 teachers in a large urban school district located in the Midwest. Goddard et al. found, "collective teacher efficacy is a significant predictor of student achievement in both mathematics and reading achievement" (p. 500). Collective teacher efficacy explained more than one half to two thirds of the between-school variance in mathematics and reading. There was a one-unit increase in collective teacher efficacy, which was an 8.62-point average gain in mathematics and an 8.49-point average gain in reading. Teachers in a school with high teacher efficacy were more likely to act purposefully to increase student achievement.

Kouzes and Posner (2007) included another example of developing organizations, which they referred to as challenging the process. Executive directors searched for ways to improve, innovate, and grow. They listened to those closest to the front lines, and in education that was the teachers. Innovation began with listening and creating an environment where experimentation was accepted and recognized.

The National Charter School Resource Center (2010) studied the characteristics of executive directors in turnaround schools. Researchers identified that for organizations to develop their leaders, executive directors needed to make decisions based on data.

Successful school turnaround leaders built school improvement plans based on data. They gathered relevant information and then identified areas that needed improvement and attacked those areas with specific goals in an improvement plan. These same leaders strengthened their school culture by removing staff members who were not adapting to the needs of the school.

Borman, Carlson, and Robinson (2011) studied the effectiveness of using data on improving student achievement in both reading and math. They included over 500 urban, suburban, and rural schools in seven states including Ohio, Pennsylvania, Mississippi, Tennessee, Indiana, Arizona, and Alabama. They utilized interventions developed by consultants from Johns Hopkins and the Center for Data-Driven Reform in Education (CDDRE). The participants in the study received training on implementing and using the data derived from benchmark assessments developed by CDDRE to guide reform. The results of using the CDDRE initiatives were compared to those of a control group on a delayed treatment condition. Assignment to the treatment group had a significant effect on students for math at .06 standard deviations. The reading treatment group was not significant but was positive with an effect size of .033. The authors concluded that the results of their study showed that data-driven reform efforts had a meaningful impact on student achievement.

Portin et al. (2003) formulated that leaders strengthen school culture by staying true to a school's traditions. The leader must understand the history of the school. Only through that lens can the leader understand the climate of the school and build from that tradition to meet the school's goals and mission.

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) established that managing the environment is one of the core sets of leadership skills needed for an executive director to be successful. They

defined this skill as working with staff and community to pursue goals. This was very similar to what Portin et al. (2003) referred to as managerial leadership. Actions taken by leaders when performing managerial leadership included managing budgets and facilities, building schedules, keeping a safe and secure environment, and dealing with transportation. Due to changing budgets, all leaders, especially charter executive directors, were attentive to their budgets and creative with raising funds (Portin et al., 2003).

A part of developing organizations was marketing the school to the community. Building connections was a significant responsibility for the success of executive directors. These connections helped supplement programs or even increased funding (Portin et al., 2003). Streshly and Gray (2008) referred to this practice as building relationships. Streshly and Gray argued that the most crucial aspect of a successful executive director was the ability to build relationships. All six of their superstar executive directors had this trait (Streshly & Gray, 2008); and one principal summed up his job this way: building relationships, helping others form relationships with each other in the school building, and then reaching beyond the school building to the community. Such a practice was critical for the success of executive directors.

Minckler (2013) tied together many of the previous concepts mentioned in this section of this dissertation in his study on building social capital. In his quantitative study of 465 teachers in 13 schools within two school districts in Southern Louisiana, he explored the relationship between the executive director and teacher social capital. According to him, the definition of teacher social capital was the teacher having resources as a result of being a member of the social network(s) and using these resources to produce outcomes to benefit the school, students, and other teachers. According to

Minckler, teachers had two networks through which they worked: teacher bonding social capital (TBOSC), which was used in the school or internally; and teacher bridging social capital (TBRSC), which was used outside the school or externally. The researcher used surveys that were completed by the teachers to measure perceptions about teacher social capital and its influence on the executive director in their schools. Minkler used Leithwood, Aitken, and Jantzi conceptions of leadership that included the following executive director characteristics: provides vision and inspiration, models behavior, provides individualized support, provides intellectual stimulation, fosters a commitment to group goals, encourages high performances, provides a contingent reward, and encourages individual improvement.

In Minckler's (2013) study, teacher perceptions of the school's executive director were assessed using the School Core Tasks Survey that included 31 items, and TBOSC/TBRSC were measured using a 56-item teacher social capital scale. Twenty-six items measured teacher perceptions of the presence of the following preconditions of teacher social capital: opportunity, motivation, and ability. Twenty-five items measured four variables of TBOSC: collaboration, teaching beliefs and practices, community identity, and culture of the community. The remaining five items referred to TBRSC and teacher degree of working with outside organizations.

Minckler (2013) used Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software to analyze his data and found correlations for the relationships between variables. He found a positive and statistically significant relationship between the executive director and the preconditions of opportunity, motivation, and ability of teacher social capital. Correlations among the eight executive director subscales and the three preconditions subscales ranged from low moderate from provides individualized support/ability at

0.371 to high moderate from providing intellectual stimulation/opportunity at 0.636. As reported by Minckler, executive directors had control over opportunity and created the physical space and cultural expectations that created opportunities for teachers to collaborate. The executive director subscales and opportunity had moderate correlations that ranged from 0.497 for models behavior/opportunity to high moderate with a correlation of .636 for provides intellectual stimulation/opportunity. "The relationships between opportunity and the leadership subscales indicated that the teachers in the study perceive opportunities for professional growth as an avenue for leaders to provide intellectual stimulation and to encourage individual improvement and high performance" (Minckler, 2013, p. 666). Minckler also found a moderate relationship between the executive director and motivation. The top three correlations were encouraging high performance 0.515, providing vision and inspiration 0.499, and providing intellectual stimulation 0.495. Minckler suggested that having high-performance expectations was critical for the executive director, and it also had the highest correlation with ability of 0.460. There was also a moderate correlation between leadership and motivation that ranged from moderate at 0.406 for provides individualized support/motivation to 0.515 for encourages high performance/motivation.

Minckler (2013) reported both a positive and statistically significant association between the executive director and TBOSC. In his study, subscales for the executive director and TBOSC went from a low, moderate correlation for provided individual support/collaboration of 0.351 to a moderate correlation for models behavior/culture of community of 0.497. Furthermore, all items in the relationships between the executive director, which contained 31 items, and TBOSC, which contained 25 items, were moderately significant and positive with a correlation of 0.570. Minckler also expressed

that in schools where executive directors modeled desired behavior, provided vision, inspired others, expected high performance, and fostered collaboration on increasing teacher capacity and improved student achievement, TBOSC was positively affected. "Leaders shape the organizational culture through consistency and alignment of words, attitude, and actions" (Minckler, 2013, p. 668). The findings added support to the interpretation that executive directors affected teaching capacity through the establishment of high expectations. The moderate connection between the executive director subscale of encourages high performance and the TBOSC subscale of collaboration indicated that the teachers in the study associated executive director expectations for high performance with their collaborative efforts to improve teaching and learning. Minckler went on to state that there was a statistically positive correlation between the executive director and TBRSC; the overall correlation between them was small but significant at 0.265. That small association led the researcher to conclude that participation in outside development was more of a self-directed activity than an executive director led activity.

Just as Goddard et al. (2000) expressed that teacher collective efficacy (TCE) improved school culture, Minckler (2013) found a positive relationship between the executive director and TCE with an overall correlation of 0.686. He noted a correlation of 0.534 between the executive director subscale of encourages individual improvement and TCE, and a 0.592 correlation between fosters group goals and TCE. Minckler further reported a correlation of 0.616 between encourages high performance and TCE and a 0.638 correlation between provides vision and inspiration. There was also a moderate positive relationship of 0.666 between models behavior and TCE. An executive director who modeled high standards for performance created a strong sense of community and

inspired teachers and improved teacher abilities to get the job done. Last, with regard to teacher self-efficacy, the findings of Walker and Slear (2011) that stated that modeling instructional expectations was a predictor of teacher self-efficacy; such a correlation was also found by Minckler between TSE and the executive director subscale of models behavior with a correlation of 0.314.

Managing the Teaching and Learning Program

Executive directors in charter schools must hire the best staff to fit the needs of the school, provide support to the staff, monitor school activity, and buffer staff against distractions from their work (Leithwood et al., 2008). Portin et al. (2003) explained that instructional leadership was also an essential part of being an executive director and expressed that leaders were responsible for assuring the quality of instruction, demonstrating teaching practices, supervising curriculum, and locating quality instructional materials and resources. Leithwood and Duke (1999) also shared that instructional leadership, which "focuses on the behaviors of teachers as they engage in activities directly affecting the growth of students" (p. 47), was a priority.

O'Donnell and White (2005) performed a quantitative study in Pennsylvania that included 75 middle schools, 75 principals, and 250 English and math teachers that correlated teacher perceptions of executive director behaviors and student achievement. The researchers used the Principals Instructional Rating Scale developed by Hallinger that included 50 behaviors, and they also analyzed student achievement data from the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment. The instructional leadership characteristic used by executive directors with the most substantial relationship with math and reading scores were promoting the school learning climate at $p < .01$ Pearson coefficient. Defining the school mission and managing the instructional program also had positive

relationships with math and reading scores. These findings showed that increased teacher perceptions of executive leader instructional behaviors increased student achievement. "By applying a univariate forward selection regression process, the researchers identified teacher ratings of one leadership dimension – promoting the school learning climate – as a significant predictor of both PSSA mathematics and reading scores (p<.05)" (O'Donnell & White, 2005, p. 61). The standardized beta coefficients identified the relationship as positive. Therefore, "teacher perceptions of principals' efforts to promote the school-learning climate had the largest explanatory power for predicting mathematics and reading scores" (O'Donnell & White, 2005, p. 61).

Managing the teaching and learning program was similar to what Portin et al. (2003) referred to as human resource management. Leaders had the responsibility of hiring staff, firing staff, and mentoring staff. Leaders also developed new leadership within their schools. Hiring the best staff by the leader was critical to the success of the school (Portin et al., 2003).

A fundamental part of the executive director's job continues to be supporting teachers; therefore, executive directors must be able to provide in-service professional development to teachers. In order to provide professional development, leaders must gain access to hard-to-find resources and match professional development to school goals (Portin et al., 2003). Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, and Birman, (2002) studied the effects of professional development on teacher classroom practices in a 3-year longitudinal study. They also declared that when teachers took part in content focused collective professional development, there was an increase in its use after 1 year compared to those who took part independently. Finally, data indicated that building on previous knowledge was another way in which professional development could change

classroom-teaching practice. Without executive director guidance, these changes in classroom practices would not happen. As Minckler (2013) stated, the executive director provides opportunities for teachers to collaborate, receive training through professional development, practice skills, perform peer observations, and gain access to mentoring, which all strengthened TCE and in turn strengthened school performance.

Horng et al. (2010) examined a large school district in Florida to learn what principals did, how they spent their time, and how their time spent on specific tasks affected student achievement. Schools in Florida received grades based on student achievement. Researchers exposed that executive directors of low-performing schools spent more time on administrative tasks than principals at higher performing schools. They further reported that executive directors at high-performing schools spent more time on organizational management and day-to-day instructional activities. Also, this study showed that executive directors' "time spent on organizational management tasks is positively associated with both student performance and gains in student performance" (Horng et al., 2010, p. 512). Examples of the activities in organizational management included hiring personnel, dealing with concerns from teachers, and developing and monitoring a safe school (Horng et al., 2010). Streshly and Gray (2008) communicated that executive directors in their study acted as buffers against distractions to teaching and learning.

Research Questions

The researcher answered three research questions.

1. What do executive directors of charter schools perceive to be the instructional and administrative demands of their jobs?

2. What personal and professional qualities do executive directors of charter

schools believe have enabled them to be successful in their positions?

3. What do executive directors of charter schools perceive to be the instructional and administrative demand differences between leading a charter school and leading a traditional public school?

The researcher developed Question 3 to meet the objectives of this project. The first two questions are from Bloomfield's (2013) study entitled Investigating Leadership in Charter Schools: An Examination of the Leadership Traits of Executive Directors in Successful Charter Schools. Bloomfield conducted a qualitative study of four successful charter school executive directors. He expressed a gap between current comprehensions of educational leadership and charter school leadership. Bloomfield also identified that the demands on executive directors were more significant than expected. He continued that successful executive directors perceived they were directly responsible for the successes and/or failures of their schools. Last, executive directors relied heavily on the traits, skills, and tactics outlined by Leithwood et al. (2008). Executive directors in their studies searched for ways to improve, innovate, and grow. They listened to those closest to the front lines, and in education that was the teachers. This was done to challenge the existing process and develop new structures.

Summary

Successfully leading a charter school requires many characteristics (Perry, 2008). This study intended to identify the characteristics that were most important to a successful charter school executive director in four charter schools in North Carolina. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) and Leithwood et al. (2008) developed the conceptual structure for organizing the results of this project's research.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate leadership traits successful charter school executive directors perceived to be most important. The study identified the leadership styles and skills that are most important to successful charter school executive directors in four North Carolina charter schools. These schools were chosen based on the following factors: percentages from the leadership sections of NCTWCS, the leaders' experience included a minimum of 1 year as a leader in both a public school and charter school, and finally end of grade (EOG) achievement test scores. With the completion of the current study, the styles and skills identified can be used in other charter schools to help emergent leaders and existing leaders improve their leadership performance. The methodology used by the researcher was a replication of a qualitative study by Bloomfield (2013) with the addition of one research question that was approved by Bloomfield before the researcher conducted the research.

Methodology

The researcher used the same methodology as Bloomfield (2013) to replicate his study. The areas written by Bloomfield, then paraphrased by the researcher, and used in the current study were the following sections: the overview of research methods, case study approach, data collection, and data analysis. Replication is an essential tool so results can be generalized and the study results can be confirmed or negated (Schmidt, 2009).

Overview of Research Methods

This study utilized a qualitative research approach with a multiple case study design. According to Creswell (2009), qualitative research is appropriate when the goal

is to explain, describe, or explore a phenomenon. Qualitative methods are used to comprehend human experience in specific settings; by contrast, quantitative research is used to examine relationships between variables (Creswell, 2009). In a qualitative study, the researcher seeks answers to open-ended questions to further understand how social experience is created and given meaning (Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) further described qualitative research as based on the "view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds" (p. 6). Qualitative methods are suitable for the study of a social phenomenon (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1998).

Merriam (1998) further defined the characteristics of qualitative research:

1. administered by a researcher as an instrument for analysis and data collection,

2. includes fieldwork,

3. utilizes an inductive research design, and

4. generates an abundant amount of detailed findings.

The current study of successful charter school executive directors investigated qualitative methods as it incorporated several characteristics. First, leadership as a charter school executive director, as discussed in Chapter 2, is a social interaction based on the relationship between leader and follower. Qualitative methods are best for the examining of the interactions between individuals where the researcher is an integral part of data collection. Second, qualitative research methods take place in the real world rather than in a laboratory. The use of interview fieldwork was determined to be appropriate for the real-world dynamics between charter school executive directors. Expressing leadership experiences from the aspect of executive directors of successful charter schools based on inductive interpretations of the data causes this study to be interpretive. Finally, this study expressed leadership experiences from the aspect of executive directors of

successful charter schools based on inductive interpretations of data. This study of

charter school executive directors lent itself to qualitative research methods because of its

naturally subjective nature of understanding social relationships through introspection to

achieve a "depth of understanding" (Patton, 1990, p. 1) of successful charter school

leadership.

According to Creswell (2009), qualitative research methods are within a social

constructivist theory of knowledge in which knowledge arises as a result of individual

perspectives and experiences. Knowledge itself is "forged in discussions and interactions

with other persons" (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). Therefore, both social constructivist theory

and qualitative research theory place worth on the significance of lived experience

(Rudestam & Newton, 2007). In the present study, the researcher first explored and then

explained the phenomenon of leadership through interviews and first-person accounts of

executive director perceptions of their successful leadership in successful charter schools.

This study examined the question of successful leadership practice through the

experiences and perceptions of charter school executive directors, data that are best

explained and analyzed through qualitative research methods.

Case Study Approach

This study utilized a multiple case study design. Patton (1990) wrote that the art

of evaluation includes creating a research design that is appropriately suited to a unique

situation and decision-making context. A qualitative researcher commonly applies one of

five design approaches referred to by Creswell (2009). The five design approaches

included an ethnographic design for studies examining the cultural behavior of

individuals over an extended period; a phenomenological or narrative design for studies

of groups or individuals; and a case study or grounded theory approach for studies of

activities, events, or processes.

When a researcher's goal is to understand "concepts, models, and theories" (Merriam, 1998, p. 19) in a bounded or single unit system, a case study approach is appropriate. Merriam (1998) depicted case study research as existing within a bounded system. The researcher must determine clearly which elements exist inside and which elements exist outside the study's scope. The researcher must explain what is contained within and is apart from the study's parameters (Merriam, 1998). The action of bounding the study calls for the researcher to define the study's unit of examination. Case study design was suitable for the current study given its goals and parameters in which the researcher investigated the leadership practices (models) and behaviors of four charter school executive directors (bounded system).

The researcher used a multiple case study design to organize this project, with each executive director to serve as a single case. A multiple case study is a study that uses several cases that share common characteristics (Merriam, 1998). The rationale for this is that the use of multiple case studies is comparable to that of multiple case experiments. Multiple case study design increases literal replication because each case is selected intentionally so that it either contributes or predicts similar results. The study may produce conflicting results; but for predictable reasons, termed theoretical replication, with both, the goal is replication (Yin, 1994), or the ability to infer future conclusions from the findings of the case. Multiple case studies are frequently considered to be more vigorous than a single case study design because the information gathered is more significant and therefore compelling (Yin, 1994). For this reason, the current study utilized a multiple case study design, entailing data collection from four executive directors of successful charter schools. The data collected using a multiple

case study design yielded more reliable findings than a single case study design.

For this study, the four charter school executive directors were considered successful on the basis of clear, measurable criteria. The criteria included percentages from the leadership sections of the NCTWCS, EOG achievement test scores, and the leaders having had at least 1 year of experience within both traditional and charter schools as either a leader or as a teacher. Their schools were demonstrably more successful by these various criteria when compared with other charter schools in their state. As research has shown, a school's success is determined in large part by the efficacy of a school's leadership (Deal & Peterson, 2009; Portin et al., 2003). By obtaining self-reported data on their specific leadership traits from the respective charter school leaders, the researcher identified the qualities and practices that helped to contribute to each respective school executive director's success.

Research Questions

This multiple case study has three research questions.

1. What do executive directors of charter schools perceive to be the instructional and administrative demands of their jobs?

2. What personal and professional qualities do executive directors of charter schools believe have enabled them to be successful in their positions?

3. What do executive directors of charter schools perceive to be the instructional and administrative demand differences between leading a charter school and leading a traditional public school?

To answer the first two research questions, the researcher utilized the interview protocol in Appendix A. Research Question 1, "what do executive directors of charter schools perceive to be the instructional and administrative demands of their jobs," was answered

through Interview Questions 3, 4, 6, and 7 found in Appendix A. Research Question 2, "what personal and professional qualities do executive directors of charter schools believe have enabled them to be successful in their positions," was answered through Interview Questions 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13, which can be found in Appendix A. Question 3, "what do executive directors of charter schools perceive to be the instructional and administrative demand differences between leading a charter school and leading a traditional public school," was answered through Interview Question 14, which can also be found in Appendix A.

Selection Process

The selection process in the original study by Bloomfield (2013) was modified because of changes and differences in state policies between the two states. One difference was that the Midwestern state where the study took place used multiple authorizers, which does not exist in North Carolina. The other change included the use of schools meeting annual yearly progress (AYP); this measure is no longer used.

The current study utilized the following criteria to select executive directors to take part in the study. The selection process used the 2016 NCTWCS to pinpoint successful charter school executive directors. The researcher identified executive directors of charter schools that had an 80% completion rate on the 2016 NCTWCS. Next, the researcher used questions from the leadership section of the 2016 NCTWCS to further pinpoint executive directors of charter schools as participants in the study. The responses to the 19 leadership constructs were averaged so the researcher readily identified the charter executive directors to be included. Only executive directors of schools with 80% of staff agreeing with the mathematical mean of the leadership constructs were included.

The first construct or question that was addressed in the NCTWCS on leadership was question 7.1: Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement about leadership in your school, (a) there is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in this school, (b) teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them, (c) the school leadership consistently supports teachers, (d) teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction, (e) the school leadership facilitates using data to improve student learning, (f) teacher performance is assessed objectively, (g) teachers receive feedback that can help them improve teaching, (h) the procedures for teacher evaluation are consistent, (i) the school improvement team provides effective leadership at this school, (j) the faculty are recognized for accomplishments.

The second construct or question on leadership in the NCTWCS was 7.3: The school leadership makes a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about (a) leadership issues, (b) facilities and resources, (c) the use of time in my school, (d) professional development, (e) teacher leadership, (f) community support and involvement, (g) managing student conduct, (h) instructional practices and support, (i) new teacher support.

The NCTWCS was designed by the New Teacher Center (NTC) and was part of the NTC Teaching Empowering, Leading and Learning (TELL) survey instrument. TELL is a multi-state survey that has been validated both internally and externally. The external validity analysis used the Rasch model and prompted the survey to undergo changes to the survey which included going from a six-point rating scale to a four-point and the addition of an eighth construct. The Rasch model assessed the structure of the response scale and the alignment between the constructs of the survey and the broader

survey questions. The external reliability analysis used both the Rasch model and Cronbach's alpha as a measure of consistency and reported that the TELL survey could produce consistent results. The external analyses discovered the TELL survey to be statistically sound in both reliability and validity (NTC, 2014). The internal analysis for validity conducted by NTC included a scree plot or a line segment plot that showed a seven- to nine-factor solution. It also included the use of eigenvalues to show the amount of variance and affirmed that eight factors together explained 62% of the variance. Minimum variance thresholds were met because the eight factors had at least a value of one. Reliability was acceptable and had Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .86 to .96. Specifically, the school leadership constructs had a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .948 (NTC, 2014).

EOG achievement test scores from 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 were also used during the selection process, because the performance on these tests distinguishes schools that are experiencing success with EOG achievement type tests. Finally, participants in this study had experience in both traditional and charter schools in leadership.

Participants

Four executive directors were selected based on the selection factors. The first factor from the NCTWCS was the percentage of executive directors' staff members who completed the survey in 2016. That percentage had to be higher than 80% to take part in this study. Of the 161 possible executive directors, 64 were eligible to take part. The second factor from the NCTWCS were the responses to the mathematical mean on the leadership constructs section of the survey, which was higher than 80% in agreement with the constructs. Of the remaining executive directors, 54 had an average of greater than 80% agreeing with statements on the leadership constructs of the NCTWCS survey.

The third factor was the results of the math and reading EOG scores. Each executive

director's school had test scores above 50% in both math and reading composites in the

following school years: 2014-2015 and 2015-2016. A field of 32 executive directors was

in the data set fulfilling these constraints. The fourth factor was that each executive

director had experience in both charter and traditional public schools. A Google survey

to which nine executive directors responded determined if they had both charter and

traditional public school experience. Of the responses, there were seven executive

directors eligible to take part in this study. Table 2 shows the selection criteria.

Table 2

Study Sample through Selection Criteria

	80% completion rate on NCTWCS	80% agreement on leadership constructs of NCTWCS	50% EOG Scores 2013-2014 and 2014-2015	Experience: charter & traditional public schools	Total
Executive Directors	64	54	32	7	7

After IRB approval, the researcher contacted each of the seven executive director

subjects and extended a formal invitation to participate in the study (Appendix B). Four

executive directors completed all required documents and agreed to take part in the study.

All participants received written consent, which was signed and returned to the researcher

(Appendix C).

Data Collection

A case study utilizes a precise way of collecting, organizing, and analyzing data

(Merriam, 1998). Usually, through fieldwork, the researcher complies qualitative data,

which involves enlisting study participants in a dialogue about their experiences and

perceptions. The insights, suggestions, and findings that arose were the development of

systematic analysis of the data obtained by fieldwork.

In case study design, data collection involves four types of evidence: observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials (Creswell, 2009). The primary duty of the case study researcher during the data collection phase is to accumulate numerous sources of evidence, generate a case study database, and retain a logical series of evidence to enhance the reliability of the conclusions (Merriam, 1998).

Open-ended, systematic interviews were the primary source of data collection for this research study. The researcher conducted interviews at each of the four charter school sites with each of the four executive directors (see Appendix A for the interview protocol). The researcher administered a pilot interview to clarify the interview questions before meeting with the selected participants. The interviews intended to obtain detailed accounts from each executive director regarding the leadership of his or her charter school. As a result of the interviews, the researcher next obtained evidence about challenges in the school and the actions and traits each executive director had demonstrated to overcome those challenges. The interviews lasted from 45 to 60 minutes and were audiotaped and later transcribed for analysis by the researcher. Each participant received a copy of the interview questions before the interview to produce more thought-provoking responses. A transcript of each interview was given to each participant for verification and to allow an opportunity for error correction. After initial analysis of the interview and data were analyzed, shorter follow-up interviews with each executive director were administered and transcribed.

To increase the reliability of the findings of this study, the researcher used a case study protocol to lead the investigation (see Appendix A). This protocol included meeting procedures, interview questions and format, data recording, data analysis, and

the creation of the case study report (Yin, 1994). According to Patton (1990), the objective of the case study is to document and communicate a rich account of the experiences and nuances of the case circumstances. In this instance, the case was the study of the leadership traits of each of the four executive directors. This protocol helped to ensure the integrity of the data and consequently support the goal of the study.

Data Analysis

The involvement of the researcher directly with the study participants is a challenge of qualitative research (Creswell, 2009). As the vehicle of data collection, the qualitative study researcher was aware of the difficulty in talking with participants clearly and without bias during the interview process. The topic of researcher bias and the problems associated are addressed later in this chapter under limitations of the study. To raise the validity of the data analysis, the researcher employed a process that records participant perspectives and recognizes when specific ideas are repeated based on a theme. This process was used to make clear the accuracy of the data collected by the researcher (Creswell, 2009).

The researcher gathered data from the study participants through many data types (observations, documents, written communication, and interviews) rather than relying only on interviews with the four charter school executive directors. After analysis by the researcher, preliminary themes and traits were identified. An outside scholar was used for accuracy to vet the preliminary findings. The vetting process included the scholar and researcher reviewing the transcriptions and themes noted by the researcher for accuracy. The scholar noted suggestions in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

The goal of this study was to identify common traits of executive directors of successful charter schools through analysis of collected data filtered through the

identified conceptual framework of successful executive director practices. The executive director practices included building vision and setting directions, understanding and developing people, developing organizations, and managing the teaching and learning program (Leithwood et al., 2008). Merriam (1998) described the data analysis process that included category aggregation, pattern identification, generalization, and case description. According to her, category aggregation is where the researcher codes data into categories. Pattern identification is where the researcher finds similarities and differences among categories and cases. Generalization is where the researcher develops explanations and reflections about the cases and categories. Finally, case description is where the researcher assembles a detailed view of the elements of each case. The case descriptions can be found in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. The researcher collected, analyzed, and coded data and then sorted it into the four executive director practices categories.

For this study, interviews served as the primary source of data. Each participant interview was transcribed and analyzed for comments related to specific leadership practices. Each specific comment was highlighted according to category and coded by school and participant source for reference purposes via Microsoft Excel. Data analysis focused on examining thematic similarities in leadership practice among the study's four subjects within the theoretical context described by Leithwood and Riehl (2003) and Leithwood et al. (2008). The four categories of successful executive director leadership were building vision and setting directions, understanding and developing people, developing organizations, and managing the teaching and learning program (Leithwood et al., 2008). The researcher used yellow, blue, green, and red respectively for the dimensions of leadership (categories), highlighted sentences/comments for each

executive director, and looked for themes to arise. Numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4 were used to code to the executive directors and schools. As stated earlier, each executive director's interview was categorized first, and then the researcher looked for similarities between executive directors, a process known as a cross-case analysis. If the mention of an executive director's dimension appeared in the qualitative data one or two times, it was considered a low or unused area of leadership. If the mention of an executive director's dimension appeared in the qualitative data three times, it was considered a moderately used area of leadership. Last, if it came up four or more times, it was considered an important area of focus for the executive director. In the cross-case analysis, if the area of leadership was a low or an unused area of leadership by three or four executive directors, it was considered to have low importance to their success. If the area of leadership was moderate or high by two leaders, it was considered to be moderately important to the success of executive directors. Finally, if the area of leadership was moderate or high by three or four executive directors, it was considered to be highly important to the success of executive directors.

The case descriptions focused on the four charter school executive directors. Each case description contained a short biographical sketch of the leader, along with brief descriptions of the leader's leadership style and perceptions regarding challenges at the school and the strategies used to overcome these challenges. In a multiple case study, a typical analytical approach as described by Creswell (2009) was first to provide a detailed description of each case (termed a within-case analysis) followed by a thematic analysis between the cases (termed a cross-case analysis). For the present study, the goal was to identify leadership traits, which have permitted a select group of charter school executive directors to achieve success in their schools. The within-case analysis

combined with the cross-case analysis allowed for the identification of such themes, along with a rich description of each trait.

Limitations of the Study

Creswell (2009) stated that limitations are potential problems with the study the researcher has identified. The researcher modified from Bloomfield (2013) the following limitations:

1. The accuracy of this study and the validity of its conclusions, based upon analysis of the data, depended on the clarity and honesty of the study participants.

2. The findings of this study were limited to the charter schools located in North Carolina.

3. The findings of this study were limited to the conditions of the studied charter schools.

4. The findings of this study were limited to the experiences of the charter school executive directors who participated in the study.

5. The findings of this study were limited by the definition of success developed by the researcher and imposed in the criterion-selection process.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate leadership traits successful charter school executive directors perceived to be most important. This study identified leadership styles and skills that were most important to successful charter school executive directors in four North Carolina charter schools. These schools were chosen based on percentages from NCTWC and achievement test scores, and the executive director had to have leadership experience in both traditional and charter schools. From the current study, the styles and skills identified can be used by other charter schools to help emergent leaders and existing leaders improve performance.

Case Descriptions

Case 1: Executive Director 1 and Charter School A. Executive Director 1 is a 39-year-old White female who operates Charter School A. She has 6 years of experience in leadership: 4 years in traditional public school leadership and 2 as an executive director of Charter School A. She also has 11 years of experience as a teacher in a traditional public school. Her educational background included a bachelor's degree from East Carolina University in elementary education, and a master's degree from the same university in reading, with certification in both reading specialist and reading instruction. She attended Western Carolina to obtain a post-master's certificate in leadership.

Executive Director 1 started her career in education as a third grade and fourth grade elementary teacher. She pursued leadership because of a conversation she had with her superintendent of schools. She was sharing ideas about changes she would like to make. He said, "well, since you want to make changes, you need to be in leadership, to have your voice heard. What are you going to do about that?" Executive Director 1 went

home and told her husband, "I am going back to school, I am going be a principal, and I am going to do it my way." That is just what she did! She became an assistant principal for 3 years at a traditional public elementary school. She spent 1 year as a principal in a traditional public school before moving to Charter School A as an assistant principal. After 1 year as an assistant principal at Charter School A, she became the principal.

Executive Director 1 was drawn to Charter School A because she felt like she could make a difference. It was also time for her own children to start high school, and she expressed problems in traditional public schools. She was a principal in the public school where her son was projected to attend and was concerned about the persistent gang activity and drugs in the school. "As a principal of a traditional public school, my hands were tied on lots of issues that I felt I should be able to fix." The summer before her son was to enter high school, she applied for and was named the assistant principal of a local charter school. The reason she took the position was, as she stated it, "I wanted to be part of something I believed in, and something I felt that I could mold, and change and make work for kids." She was concerned about the politics of traditional public schools: "So often I feel like our traditional public schools work for politics' sake but not necessarily for the kids."

Charter School A opened in 2013. Executive Director 1 described Charter School A as "a project-based school, where we teach through giving children real-life issues and asking them to come up with ways to solve those real-life issues." Project-based learning begins in kindergarten and continues through high school; it teaches children to collaborate and solve problems, which is real world applicable. Executive Director 1 shared the mission statement of Charter School A:

Charter School A seeks to create a challenging learning environment while

striving to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of our 21st century learners to prepare them for citizenship, leadership, and success in a rapidly changing world. Our school promotes a safe, orderly, caring and supportive community. Each student's self-esteem is fostered by positive relationships with students and staff. We strive to have our parents, teachers, and community members actively involved in our student's learning.

Charter School A had 92.5% of their staff take part in the NCTWCS; 37 of 40 staff members took the survey. Of the respondents, there was a mathematical mean of 84.24% of staff agreeing with the leadership constructs of the NCTWCS, or put specifically, the mean of Question 7.1 and Question 7.2. Question 7.1 was, "please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about school leadership in your school." It included 11 constructs (a-k) about school leadership. Question 7.1a is missing in Table 3 because at the state level in the 2016 survey, this question was not included. Table 3 includes the results for Question 7.1, including the results to constructs a-k of the survey.

Table 3

NCTWCS Results of the Leadership Constructs for Question 7.1 for Charter School A

7.1 Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about school leadership in your school.	2014	2016
a. The faculty and staff have a shared vision.	94.4	
b. There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in this school.	83.3	83.8
c. Teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them.	72.2	83.8
d. The school leadership consistently supports teachers.	88.9	94.3
e. Teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction.	88.9	94.6
f. The school leadership facilitates using data to improve student learning.	82.4	78.8
g. Teacher performance is assessed objectively.	100	91.2
h. Teachers receive feedback that can help them improve teaching.	93.7	83.3
i. The procedures for teacher evaluation are consistent.	92.9	84.8
j. The school improvement team provides effective leadership at this school.	80	69.2
k. The faculty are recognized for accomplishments.	92.9	76.5

Table 4 includes the results for Question 7.2, including the results to constructs a-i of the survey.

Table 4

NCTWCS Results of the Leadership Constructs for Question 7.2 for Charter School A

7.2 The school leadership makes a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about:	2014	2016
a. Leadership issues	72.2	84.8
b. Facilities and resources	94.4	65.7
c. The use of time in my school	76.5	87.9
d. Professional development	72.2	69.7
e. Teacher leadership	61.1	88.2
f. Community support and involvement	100	93.7
g. Managing student conduct	88.2	91.2
h. Instructional practices and support	94.4	91.2
i. New teacher support	55.6	87.9
Mean of 7.1 and 7.2	84.21	84.24

Charter School A serves 960 students in Grades K-11 and is expecting to grow by one grade level each year. Table 5 shows the demographic makeup of School A, local area, and the state of North Carolina.

Table 5

Demographic Makeup of School A (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015), Local Community (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016), and North Carolina (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016)

	School A	Local Community	North Carolina
White	79.8%	57%	68.2%
Black	10.5%	35%	21.5%
Hispanic	4.5%	6.8%	8.9%
Two or More	3.6%	9.3%	2.4%
Asian	1%	<1%	2.6%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	<1%	<1%	<1%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	<1%	2%	1.2%

Case 2: Executive Director 2 and Charter School B. Executive Director 2 is a 59-year-old White male who operates Charter School B. He has 27 years of experience in education. Executive Director 2 has 21 total years of leadership experience. He has 9

years of experience as a leader in traditional public schools and 12 years of experience in charter school leadership. Executive Director 2 has a bachelor's degree in science education, a master's degree in school leadership, and a doctor of education degree in curriculum and instruction.

Executive Director 2 spent the beginning of his career working for the University of Wyoming and did a lot of in-service training in science education. He then moved to a traditional public school located in Cheyenne, Wyoming, where he did in-service training as well. He started working in charter schools in 2004 as an executive director of a school in Hawaii. He was drawn to that school because of its environmental education focus and worked there for 8 years. He finally ended up in North Carolina as the executive director of Charter School B.

Executive Director 2 joined Charter School B because of the school's focus on environmental education and its student enrollment size. He preferred to work in smaller school settings as his leadership experiences focused on charter schools with less than 220 students. "I do like the small environment, but it does make the finances harder."

Charter School B is a K-8 school with 185 students. The school opened in 2005. Executive Director 2 described the school as being environmentally focused with an experiential approach to expeditionary learning. He defined expeditionary learning as a type of learning which takes place outside of the school within the community and encourages self-reliance. The mission statement of Charter School B was shared by Executive Director 2: "We support each student's continuing discovery and development of self and community by providing a learning environment that is relevant, active, and project oriented. All aspects of the student experience enhance his or her natural learning power."

Charter School B had 94.74% of their staff take part in the NCTWCS; 18 of 19 staff members took the survey. Of the respondents, there was a mathematical mean of 87.16% of staff agreeing with the leadership constructs of the NCTWCS. Table 6 notes that 7.1a is missing from the 2016 survey; the state did not include this question in the survey. Table 6 includes the results for School B to Question 7.1, including the results to constructs a-k of the survey.

Table 6

NCTWCS Results on the Leadership Constructs for Question 7.1 for Charter School B

7.1 Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about school leadership in your school.	2014	2016
a. The faculty and staff have a shared vision.	69.2	
b. There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in this school.	84.6	94.4
c. Teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them.	61.5	83.3
d. The school leadership consistently supports teachers.	92.3	100
e. Teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction.	91.7	83.3
f. The school leadership facilitates using data to improve student learning.	84.6	82.4
g. Teacher performance is assessed objectively.	76.9	100
h. Teachers receive feedback that can help them improve teaching.	83.3	76.5
i. The procedures for teacher evaluation are consistent.	83.3	87.5
j. The school improvement team provides effective leadership at this school.	88.9	66.7
k. The faculty are recognized for accomplishments.	83.3	88.2

Table 7 includes the results for School B for Question 7.2, including the results to constructs a-i of the survey.

Table 7

NCTWCS Results on the Leadership Constructs for Question 7.2 for Charter School B

7.2 The school leadership makes a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about:	2014	2016
a. Leadership issues	75	93.7
b. Facilities and resources	90	94.1
c. The use of time in my school	80	88.2
d. Professional development	90	83.3
e. Teacher leadership	88.9	94.1
f. Community support and involvement	100	100
g. Managing student conduct	66.7	100
h. Instructional practices and support	100	77.8
i. New teacher support	75	62.5
Mean of 7.1 and 7.2	83.3	87.2

Charter School B serves 185 students in Grades K-8. The demographic makeup of School B, local community, and North Carolina are shown in Table 8.

Table 8

Demographic Makeup of School B (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015), Local Community (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016), and North Carolina (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016)

	School B	Local Community	North Carolina
White	97%	92.9%	68.2%
Black	<1%	2.3%	21.5%
Hispanic	1%	2.6%	8.9%
Two or More	1.6%	2.3%	2.4%
Asian	<1%	1.5%	2.6%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	<1%	<1%	<1%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	<1%	<1%	1.2%

Case 3: Executive Director 3 and Charter School C. Executive Director 3 is a 47-year-old African-American female who operates Charter School C. She has 9 years of experience in school leadership. Four of those years were in traditional public schools, and 5 were in charter schools. Executive Director 3 was also a language arts teacher for 12 years in both traditional public schools and charter schools. Seven of those years were

in a traditional public school setting, and 5 were in the charter school setting. Executive Director 3 earned a law degree from UNC-Chapel Hill, and a master's degree, followed by a doctoral degree in school administration from North Carolina State University.

Executive Director 3 started her career as a language arts teacher in the county where she was raised. The charter she now leads is in the same county. After receiving her education degree, she moved to another county where she taught for a year before entering law school. After she completed her law degree, she clerked with the U.S. attorney's office and from there she went to the attorney general's office where she focused on criminal law. She practiced law for 2 years, but the work made her feel depressed about the state of her community. This led her to return to the classroom as both a teacher and student. While in the classroom, she pursued her master's degree in school administration and then her Ph.D. in educational research and policy analysis. In 2006, she discovered charter schools and became fascinated and fixated on them. "She was fascinated with the successes that charter schools were seeing, particularly in poor and minority-majority communities." She decided to join the charter movement. She was accepted and completed the building excellent schools program in Boston, Massachusetts. From there, she worked at KIPP-NYC, which is the largest charter school network in the nation.

Executive Director 3 opened Charter School C and was drawn to do so for two reasons. First, she grew up in the community and knew the struggles of the poor and minority students. Second, she wanted the autonomy that comes with being a charter school leader. As a traditional public school leader, "I was very painfully aware of the strings attached; I felt more like a puppet than a school leader." She needed the freedom to build a curriculum that met the needs of her students like College Prep 101 or

organization and time management. She also wanted the freedom to have her students take two blocks of math and two blocks of language arts, where one block was grade-level appropriate and the other personalized for each student's learning needs.

Charter School C opened in 2014 as a K-3 charter school with state approval for K-8. Since opening, Charter School C has added a grade level every year. Executive Director 3 described her school's mission as being a blended learning, college preparatory school with a heavy focus on character and ethics. The mission statement at Charter School C was shared by Executive Director 3: "Charter School C is committed to the cultivation of powerful, versatile, and motivated learners empowered to become college-educated leaders whose contributions to the world inspire greatness in themselves and others through virtue, wisdom, courage and intellectual rigor." Every student at Charter School C has been provided with technology through a computerized tablet to be used as a textbook and provided Internet access by removing socioeconomic barriers to learning.

Charter School C had 80.76% of its staff complete the NCTWCS; 21 of 26 staff members completed the survey. Of the respondents, there was a mathematical mean of 80.26% of staff agreeing with the leadership constructs of the NCTWCS. In Table 9, Question 7.1a is missing from the 2016 survey. The results for School C to Question 7.1, including the results to constructs a-k of the survey are shown in Table 9.

Table 9

NCTWCS Results on the Leadership Constructs for Question 7.1 for Charter School C

7.1 Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about school leadership in your school.	2014	2016
a. The faculty and staff have a shared vision.	95.7	
b. There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in this school.	90.9	60
c. Teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them.	79.2	60
d. The school leadership consistently supports teachers.	91.7	73.7
e. Teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction.	100	95
f. The school leadership facilitates using data to improve student learning.	100	100
g. Teacher performance is assessed objectively.	91.3	95
h. Teachers receive feedback that can help them improve teaching.	95.7	85
i. The procedures for teacher evaluation are consistent.	95.5	84.2
j. The school improvement team provides effective leadership at this school.	90	73.7
k. The faculty are recognized for accomplishments.	83.3	95

The results for School C for Question 7.2, including the results to constructs a-i of the survey are shown in Table 10.

Table 10

NCTWCS Results on the Leadership Constructs for Question 7.2 for Charter School C

7.2 The school leadership makes a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about:	2014	2016
a. Leadership issues	85.7	66.7
b. Facilities and resources	95.5	77.8
c. The use of time in my school	59.1	77.8
d. Professional development	91.3	73.7
e. Teacher leadership	82.6	89.5
f. Community support and involvement	81.8	72.2
g. Managing student conduct	95.7	78.9
h. Instructional practices and support	95.7	94.7
i. New teacher support	91.3	72.2
Mean of 7.1 and 7.2	89.6	80.3

Charter School C serves 197 students in Grades K-4. Table 11 depicts the demographic makeup of School C, local community, and North Carolina.

Table 11

Demographic Makeup of School C (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015), Local Community (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016), and North Carolina (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016)

	School B	Local Community	North Carolina
White	16.8%	33.1%	68.2%
Black	82.2%	62.8%	21.5%
Hispanic	1%	2%	8.9%
Two or More	<1%	<1%	2.4%
Asian	<1%	2.3%	2.6%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	<1%	<1%	<1%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	<1%	1.1%	1.2%

Case 4: Executive Director 4 and Charter School D. Executive Director 4 is a 47-year-old White male who operates Charter School D. He has 25 years of leadership experience, 20 of those years in traditional public schools and 5 in charter schools. Executive Director 4 also has 9 years of teaching experience in traditional public schools. His educational background includes a bachelor's degree in elementary education from

the University of Pittsburgh; a master's degree, an educational specialist degree, and a

doctorate in education all from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Executive Director 4 started his career as a third-grade teacher in a traditional

elementary school. He then transferred to another school where he taught third, fourth,

and fifth grade in a looping setting, which he described as students remaining with the

same teacher over the period of 2 or more years. Soon, he became an assistant principal

at this same elementary school because his principal and the school's superintendent

identified him to participate in a county-level program for potential leaders. The program

was created to identify, train, and produce effective school leaders. He then became the

principal of a high school, where he received the award of regional principal of the year.

He stayed in that role for 5 years. He then became the instructional improvement officer

for secondary schools at the district level. The instructional improvement officer role

prepared him to become the regional superintendent of the enrichment region, which

included the nine lowest performing schools in the district.

Executive Director 4 moved to Charter School D after a conversation with the

principal who had originally hired him to become the assistant principal at the elementary

school. His previous principal had met with him to ask him if he had ever given thought

to building his own high school. Executive Director 4 responded that he would love to

start his own high school. His previous supervisor then said, "well that is precisely what

we are going to do." Executive Director 4 interviewed for the position. He liked the idea

of being able to open his own high school and everything that went with it, including

building the building, defining the curriculum, and hiring the teachers.

Executive Director 4 described his charter school as a school that created self-

directed learners through the use of a middle college concept. According to him, the

mission statement of the charter school was,

> To create students that are ready for the high-level workforce, military, two-year
>
> schools, or four-year schools, and to develop those skill sets needed in the
>
> elementary and middle school to prepare high school students to be ready for
>
> those jobs.

In the middle college concept, students complete the high school curriculum in their

ninth- and tenth-grade years and take nothing but college-level classes in their eleventh-

and twelfth-grade years. He said that as a leader of a K-12 charter school, "we have no

place to look but inward. We cannot blame the other grade levels for our students being

underprepared." According to him, they cannot have the middle school teachers blame

the elementary teachers and then the high school teachers blame the middle school

teachers when students are not prepared; they can only look at themselves as they are part

of the K-12 team. He said that they could only ask, "Have we prepared our students to

meet our mission?"

Charter School D is a K-12 school with 497 students. The school opened in 2001.

Charter School D had 100% of their staff take part in the NCTWCS; 37 staff members

took the survey. Of the respondents, there was a mathematical mean of 96.6% of staff

agreeing with the leadership constructs of the NCTWCS. Table 12 notes that 7.1a is

missing from the 2016 survey; the state omitted this question. The results for School D

to Question 7.1, including the results to constructs a-k of the survey are shown in Table

12.

Table 12

NCTWCS Results on the Leadership Constructs for Question 7.1 for Charter School D

7.1 Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about school leadership in your school.	2014	2016
a. The faculty and staff have a shared vision.	100	
b. There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in this school.	100	100
c. Teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them.	87.5	91.7
d. The school leadership consistently supports teachers.	95.8	100
e. Teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction.	100	97.1
f. The school leadership facilitates using data to improve student learning.	100	97.1
g. Teacher performance is assessed objectively.	100	100
h. Teachers receive feedback that can help them improve teaching.	100	97.1
i. The procedures for teacher evaluation are consistent.	100	88.2
j. The school improvement team provides effective leadership at this school.	95.5	93.9
k. The faculty are recognized for accomplishments.	95.2	88.6

The results for School D for Question 7.2, including the results to constructs a-i of the survey are shown in Table 13.

Table 13

NCTWCS Results on the Leadership Constructs for Question 7.2 for Charter School D

7.2 The school leadership makes a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about:	2014	2016
a. Leadership issues	100	97
b. Facilities and resources	95.8	97.3
c. The use of time in my school	100	100
d. Professional development	100	97.1
e. Teacher leadership	95.8	100
f. Community support and involvement	100	97.1
g. Managing student conduct	95.8	97.2
h. Instructional practices and support	100	100
i. New teacher support	100	96.8
Mean of 7.1 and 7.2	98.0	96.6

Charter School D serves 497 students in Grades K-12. Table 14 shows the demographic makeup of School D, local community, and North Carolina.

Table 14

Demographic Makeup of School D (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015), Local Community (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016), and North Carolina (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016)

	School B	Local Community	North Carolina
White	78.5%	54.3%	68.2%
Black	13.1%	26.1%	21.5%
Hispanic	3.8%	42.7%	8.9%
Two or More	4.6%	3.5%	2.4%
Asian	<1%	1.7%	2.6%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	<1%	<1%	<1%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	<1%	<1%	1.2%

Research Questions and Study Results

In this study, the researcher analyzed data against the framework by Leithwood and Riehl (2003) and Leithwood et al. (2008) to answer the following research questions.

Research questions. The researcher intended to answer three research questions.

1. What do executive directors of charter schools perceive to be the instructional

and administrative demands of their jobs?

2. What personal and professional qualities do executive directors of charter schools believe have enabled them to be successful in their positions?

3. What do executive directors of charter schools perceive to be the instructional and administrative demand differences between leading a charter school and leading a traditional public school?

The first two questions are from Bloomfield (2013). The researcher developed Research Question 3 to meet the objectives of this study.

Interviews with the four charter school executive directors were audio recorded and later transcribed. Follow-up interviews were also conducted and transcribed. These transcriptions were shared with each participant so they could be verified and edited for necessary changes. Following participant input, the researcher then analyzed the transcriptions. These transcriptions were the primary source of data used in this study. Other data sources included field notes done by the researcher, documents shared with the researcher by participants, and the observation of the participants in a staff meeting or community event.

A color-coding system was then used to analyze the transcripts and other data sources according to the framework developed by Leithwood and Riehl (2003) and Leithwood et al. (2008). In Table 15, the color-coding system, which is used to analyze qualitative data transcripts, is shown.

Table 15

Theoretical Context Coding System

Theoretical Framework developed by Leithwood and Riehl (2003) and Leithwood et al. (2008)	Highlight Color
Building Vision & Setting Directions	Yellow
Understanding and Developing People	Blue
Developing Organizations	Green
Managing the Teaching and Learning Program	Red

Executive Director Qualities of Success: Theoretical Context Findings

The executive directors of this study spent most of their time engaged in three areas that were found to be core leadership practices by Leithwood and Reihl (2003) and Leithwood et al. (2008). The three areas that executive directors spent time cultivating and were found to be of high or moderate importance to the success of the executive director were developing organizations, developing people, and managing the teaching and learning program.

Data analysis focused on examining thematic similarities in leadership practice of the study's four subjects within the theoretical context and the four categories of successful executive director leadership. Each interview was categorized, then the researcher looked for similarities between executive directors also known as a cross-case analysis. If an executive director's dimension was mentioned by the participants one or two times, it was considered a low or unused area of leadership; if an area was mentioned three times, it was considered a moderately used area of leadership; and finally, if the area was discussed four or more times, it was considered highly important for the executive director. In the cross-case analysis, if the area of leadership was a low or an unused area of leadership by three or four executive directors, it was considered to have low importance to their success. If the area of leadership was moderate or high by two

leaders, it was considered to be moderately important to the success of executive

directors. Last, if the area of leadership was moderate or high by three or four executive

directors, it was considered to be highly important to the success of executive directors.

The number of comments/sentences and the level of importance that came through during

the interviews with each executive director are noted in Table 16.

Table 16

Executive Director Qualities of Success: Number of Comments/Sentences and Level of Importance

Executive Director	Building Vision and Setting Directions	Understanding and Developing People	Developing Organizations	Managing the Teaching and Learning Program
ED 1	2 – Low	5 – High	6 – High	3 – Moderate
ED 2	0 – Unused	3 – Moderate	5 – High	3 – Moderate
ED 3	2 – Low	8 – High	8 – High	0 – Unused
ED 4	5 – High	4 – High	5 – High	1 – Low

The within-case analysis focused on the number of times each executive director

mentioned a core leadership practice. The core leadership practice of building vision and

setting directions was an area of leadership that was of low or unused importance to three

of the leaders in this study. Executive Director 4 of this study talked about building

vision and setting directions during the interview five different times, so it was a highly

important area of leadership practice for him. The core leadership practice of

understanding and developing people was a highly important area of leadership for three

of the interview participants. Executive Director 1 brought up understanding and

developing people five times; Executive Director 3 talked about understanding and

developing people eight times; and finally, Executive Director 4 mentioned the need for

understanding and developing people four times. The core leadership practice of

understanding and developing people was moderately important to Executive Director 2 who talked about it three times. The core leadership practice of developing organizations was reported to be a highly important area of leadership by all four executive directors of this study. Executive Director 1 talked about developing organizations six times; Executive Director 3 brought up developing organizations eight times; and Executive Directors 4 and 2 talked about this area of leadership five times. Finally, the core leadership practice of managing the teaching and learning environment was found to be an area of moderate importance for Executive Directors 1 and 2, coming up in the interview three times for each director. The core leadership practice of managing the teaching and learning environment was a low area of leadership for Executive Director 4 and was an unused area of leadership for Executive Director 3.

The cross-case analysis focused on finding similarities between each executive director's interviews. Two areas of leadership were found to be of high importance to the executive directors of this study: understanding and developing people and developing organizations. One area was found to be moderately important, managing the teaching and learning program. Table 17 shows the cross-case analysis with details following.

Table 17

Executive Director Qualities of Success: Cross-Case Analysis

Theoretical Framework developed by Leithwood and Riehl (2003) and Leithwood et al. (2008)	Analysis Findings – Importance of Success
Building Vision and Setting Directions	Low Importance
Understanding and Developing People	Highly Important
Developing Organizations	Highly Important
Managing the Teaching and Learning Program	Moderately Important

As stated earlier, two areas of leadership were found to be highly important to the executive directors of this study: understanding and developing people and developing

organizations. Managing the teaching and learning program was found to be moderately important. Understanding and developing people was a highly important area of leadership for three of the four executive directors in this study. Developing organizations was found to be a highly important area of leadership for all four executive directors of this study. Managing the teaching and learning program was found to be moderately important, because it was moderately important for two executive directors in this study. Building vision and setting directions was found to be of low importance to the executive directors of this study because it was a low or unused area of leadership for three of the four executive directors.

The initial findings led the researcher to conduct further analyses that were laid out in Chapter 3; another color-coding system was used to analyze the data according to the research questions. The coding system that was used to analyze the data is shown in Table 18.

Table 18

Research Questions Coding System

Research Questions	Color
1. What do executive directors of charter schools perceive to be the instructional and administrative demands of their jobs?	Purple
2. What personal and professional qualities do executive directors of charter schools believe have enabled them to be successful in their positions?	Orange
3. What do executive directors of charter schools perceive to be the instructional and administrative demand differences between leading a charter school and leading a traditional public school?	Pink

These two analyses led to the development of themes that were referenced by the participants in response to the research protocol, theoretical context, and research

questions. An outside scholar looked at the themes found by the researcher for accuracy.

After looking over the transcriptions she agreed with what the researcher had noted as

themes. The themes are referenced in Table 19, and details follow.

Table 19

Themes

Research Questions	Themes
1. What do executive directors of charter schools perceive to be the instructional and administrative demands of their jobs?	1.1 Number of demands 1.2 Money/Facilities
2. What personal and professional qualities do executive directors of charter schools believe have enabled them to be successful in their positions?	2.1 Developing Organizations by developing structures 2.2 Buffering/Removing barriers for teachers 2.3 Understanding and Developing People 2.4 Collaboration/Networking
3. What do executive directors of charter schools perceive to be the instructional and administrative demand differences between leading a charter school and leading a traditional public school?	3.1 Resources - People 3.2 Resources – Money 3.3 Autonomy

Demands on the executive director: 1.1 number of demands. The main issue

that kept coming up in this study was the sheer number of demands placed on executive

directors of charter schools. Executive Director 1 stated, "I am my own central office,

and I cannot call the maintenance department when the air conditioning does not work or

anything like that. I am it. The buck stops with me, period." She continued, "there is no

one else to call, and that has been a little challenging." She was clear about the number

of things for which she is responsible. She concluded, "even down to DPI reports and things like that. I am the HR office, the maintenance department, the finance department, everything."

Executive Director 2 responded similarly: "This charter school is a little bit unique because it has a little less administrative staff." He then continued by listing all of his leadership responsibilities: "I have to be the curriculum leader, and I have to be the finance director, director of facilities, and pretty much anything I can think of, because there is just me."

Executive Director 4 listed similar demands placed on him. He was the director of curriculum, the director of outreach, and the one who answered to the board. He went on to clarify that because of the funding that is available, his staff hiring is limited: "In meeting academic goals, fiscal goals, things like that, I must be highly critical on the people I hire. The money is limited so the hires must be precise and skilled." Due to financial limitations and academic needs, all of the administrative tasks were his tasks; he could not have a staff of 40 people to help him. His administrative team consisted of a secondary principal, an elementary principal, and himself. He revealed that when he was in the public school system, he had a much larger administrative team: "When I was in traditional county, I had 12 people on my administrative team, who had people under them, and they had people under them as well." He declared that charter schools have less money in their budgets and therefore need to have smaller administrative teams: "Charter schools cut out the fat that exist in many large district public school systems."

Executive Director 3 also noted all of the tasks she had to do: "As an executive director right now, I am working as a teacher, essentially in some aspects as a principal, and as a superintendent, and as the one reporting to the board." She concluded this idea

and stated, "I am the one who is ultimately accountable for everything to the State Department of Public Instruction." She noted her duties when working with the community and the high needs of her community. She explained that her charter school pulls students from six surrounding counties, and she feels the need to engage with each one of those communities. She expressed that students attending many charter schools in the state can come from various communities and neighboring counties, which helps increase her enrollment but adds stress to her leadership. When explaining her duties within the different communities, she said, "these communities are very different, one from the other. So, one of the difficulties I face is differentiating my way of engaging with each community, to make sure that I am meeting the needs of every community."

Executive Director 1 explained a similar response connected to students and their school of origin. The students attending Charter School A were from seven different school districts, many from home schools, and some from private schools. Some of her students enter with academic/social gaps in their education, while others do not. Charter Schools A's staff has found that there is a lot of extra work that it is challenging due to the diversity of students. "The first couple of years there is a lot of need for remediation to get everybody on a similar educational level." She continued, "many of the surrounding school districts pass students on even when the students are not proficient." She stated that "when the students enter Charter School A and they have never failed a grade, and suddenly we are labeling the child as non-proficient, that is scary for parents."

All four executive directors noted a lack of time to complete leadership tasks. Executive Director 1 found: "I enjoy going into classrooms, it is just that in this position I do not have a whole lot of time to do that." Executive Director 3 noted all of the things that she wants to accomplish and also noted the lack of support to get them done. "There

are 10,000 things that I have to do because I do not have all those extra people that traditional school leaders have, so I have to do all that stuff myself." Executive Director 4 described the balancing act that he has to go through. He described his difficulties:

> The difficulty then becomes how do I stay at a high level in a superintendent type role or as an executive director of a charter school. When I am worried about raising funds, building business partnerships, keeping parents involved getting into every classroom to do four observations seems impossible. Balancing that and being strategic on where I am going to give and take has been a challenge.

> All of the executive directors of this study dealt with a large number of demands. They each had many responsibilities, but they also felt as though there was just not enough time to complete all of the leadership tasks that were expected of them. Some of these administrative tasks included being the school's director, the principal, and the facilities and maintenance department as well as the outreach director. All of these demands made them feel overwhelmed, preventing time and the ability to focus on student outcomes; however, these successful executive directors needed to be strategic on where they spent their time.

Demands on the executive director: 1.2 money/facilities. All four of the executive directors in this study further noted that facilities and money was a demand and challenge faced by the executive director. Funding for building a new high school was an issue that Executive Director 1 described: "Charter schools face financing issues because we do not receive capital funding that traditional public schools do." She continued, "We have a facilities' mortgage; we have to pay a mortgage on our school every month. That is something public schools do not face." She also described her challenge with the building process. She felt underprepared from her university coursework because she

had never taken a course about capital financing, a course on how to obtain a construction loan, or a course on how to complete an environmental or traffic study. She felt as though she was not prepared to deal with the steps needed to build an on-site school. "These are things that I have just had to learn on the job, so that is a big challenge, and it is very time-consuming." There were other issues she faced that included having to talk to lawyers and bankers: "As an administrator you do not really anticipate having to complete these processes, unless you are growing in size." As her school grows, she explained, "there are growing pains, but we are figuring it out"; however, the process is overwhelming and time consuming. As she noted, "I thought that since I built my house in a year, I could build a school in a year, but that is not the case." She concluded, "we are in year two, and still haven't broken ground yet, so it is a little frustrating."

Executive Director 2 also mentioned that his biggest challenge is money. He described that when his enrollment went down, or parents did not choose to send their children back to his school, or just a few parents pulled their children out before the allotted time, it would drastically impact the school's yearly income. This affected their finances because as he noted, "We are small enough that if we lose 10 or 12 kids, it throws our whole budget out of whack."

Executive Director 3 described her problems with facilities: "My biggest problem, which is facilities, is because we have grown a lot faster than people expected us to, so there are no capital funds put back to begin the much needed facilities." She continued and described her school: "We are doing modular buildings, and we are remodeling an old industrial factory, which has many code issues." She also talked about funding: "The renovation of this building to convert it into a school is something that's very difficult to get funding for."

Executive Director 4 described his funding and building challenges. He described how charter schools in North Carolina do not get capital funding to build buildings and how the money does get distributed to charter schools. He reported that in North Carolina, "money does not follow the students in charter schools." The charter school the child plans to attend will only receive the money from the state and local allotment when moneys are sent from the child's designated public school or county. Charter School D receives their local allotment from the county in which the child's designated school resides, yet each county has different percentages of per student allotment. For example, Charter School D received $4,800 from the state and $2,800 from the local county, County A. He then described that when he gets a student from the next county over, County B, he gets the local money but not state money, only $1,200, which is a difference of $1,600 per student. He has 90 students from County B; if they were from County A, which pays more, he would receive a lot more money. The students, however, are not from County A, so he is down a significant amount of money. He then revealed that the local school district in County B is given an increase to their state allotment due to the lower local allotment. "They are trying to make up the difference so that for public schools across the board there's an equal allotment for funding." According to him, charter schools do not get the increased bump in allotment from the state funding that the traditional public schools receive because that money does not follow the students. He continued by describing the flow of money: "It goes first to the county commissioners, and then to the traditional public school district who then pay the charter schools, on a monthly basis, based on how many students we have from their particular county." Then he divulged that there are certain funds that charter schools do not have access to including transportation, capital outlay, and cafeteria funds. "So, there is money that gets

funded into areas where we as charters cannot touch, and then we get what they feel is the fair amount of what is left in the pot." He explained that it is challenging; and due to these circumstances, it forces him to be conservative, such as not have a curriculum department or other necessary programs to balance needs and support. That is why he feels like it is imperative for him to watch his teacher salaries and to stay competitive with the traditional public school system. Executive Director 4 made it clear that he wanted to have chorus, band, and a new gym but that he was not able to do all of these items at once because the school did not receive capital outlay for buildings, so he had to make sacrifices.

Executive Director 4 pointed out that charter school funds are not fairly dispersed and the situation could be better. "Often times the rhetoric states that charter schools are taking funding from public schools." He continued, "however, with an objective look, charter schools are not getting their fair part to meet the expectations that every other school is expected to meet as well." He disclosed that charter schools have to be conservative with their money, and sometimes they even need to save money from year to year to fix structures. "If we want to do a roof, we do not get capital money from the county to fix our roof. We have to 'squirrel' it away, to be ready to fix the roof." He reported that charter schools have to "be very strategic on how we use our funding because there's no more coming." He wishes for the state of North Carolina to have the money follow the students at every school: "let the money follow the kids and just give the charter and public schools equal access to funding; we would have one less thing to gripe about."

When describing the impact of taking out a loan, Executive Director 1 stated it clearly: "We have to be very aware of the decisions that we make and the long-term

effects on the school." She explained that when she enters into a loan, the note lasts for 40 years: "So long after I have retired, the school is still going to be paying for the decisions that I make now." She then declared how important it is to be aware of the school's future: "It is not just about what I am doing today in my position, but how my decisions are going to affect the success and the longevity of the school."

Finding facilities and acquiring money are challenges that all four of the executive directors in this study described. All four of the executive directors discussed the difficulties they faced with funding facilities and building projects. They also discussed how these projects are very time consuming, challenging to complete, and frustrating. Furthermore, they described the difficulties created by the lack of capital outlay funding they receive from the state and how they need to save money to fund building maintenance and new building projects.

Executive director qualities of success: 2.1 developing organizations by developing structures. The executive directors in this study developed their organizations by using the core leadership area of developing structures. Leithwood and Reihl (2003) also noted this as a core leadership practice that successful executive directors used in their study. Executive Director 1 described a structure that her school has created this year that helps track student EOG scores and growth. They built their data sheets through Google Docs to track every child. They used the spreadsheet to track every EOG score each child had ever received, and it is updated every year as students move into each new grade. Her school then used the data collected to develop remediation and enrichment groups. All students attended a remediation or enrichment block every day. The executive director explained why the data collection is so important: "Anyone can pull the data from that particular spreadsheet. For example I can

go in and, see how Susie is doing in math and what her grades were last quarter." The executive director can also tell when the student has been pulled for more remediation, on which days, and for what specific skills.

Executive Director 2 also noted that structures were missing to track student success and started doing similar work with regard to tracking EOG scores: "Last year we started amassing EOG scores to track how student progress." He also talked about starting to use benchmarks: "This year we put together our benchmark assessments." His school operated on trimesters, and they gave their benchmarks on the trimester, so they could track where students were performing. After EOG testing and scores are released, Executive Director 2 stated, "we will then be comparing the benchmark scores to student performance on EOGs to see if we have predicted correctly." His hope with this process is that his "teachers will have a better gauge of where they need to be teaching." He pointed out that because they are small enough, they could even look at each student individually on their spreadsheet. He also mentioned that they were missing a structure for referring students to special education screening. He talked about how this data tracking process was being implemented in their new structure for student referrals into special education screening: "We are on the verge of doing much better with referrals into student support team process (SSTP)." He indicated that every school where he had ever worked had needed to improve their student referral process for special education. According to him, many times teachers were giving students who should have been referred and tracked for the SSTP the help they needed without ever talking to anyone or documenting the support provided. Last, he added that in years past, teachers did not refer students to the SSTP until April, when it was too late for documented processes to facilitate student testing needs. "If the process had been tied together with the benchmark

tracking, and every month or two teachers generated a report, less students would fall through the cracks." He felt as though his student referral team had done much better with this new system, as it would aid in keeping track and expediting the referral process.

Executive Director 3 described a structure that her school was working on to help teachers use data to drive instruction. It started with an outside consultant who provided training. The training was on unpacking the curriculum standards and reading benchmark reports from Case 21 Assessments, basically using backwards planning or teaching by design. She described the PLC process as well, which happens each week at her charter school. The teachers have a weekly grade level PLC meeting/training session about data. She created an expectation that "teachers would be creating tests that are reliable predictors for performance on the state tests." The teachers would bring that data to their PLC meetings every week. At the data meetings, the teachers along with the principals would look at the data with each grade level so that as a team they could make sure teachers were using the data to tell them what concepts or what standards need to be reviewed, retaught, or addressed individually with specific children.

Executive Director 4 has also used the core leadership skill of developing organizations by developing structures when his school developed and aligned its curriculum within his charter school. He described how when he became the executive director at Charter School D, Common Core had already been implemented state wide; but at Charter School D, teachers were still using the 1998 North Carolina Standard Course of Study. When he first came to Charter School D, there were no curriculum documents for Common Core implementation. Teachers at the school would download materials from websites that claimed this might be a good activity or worksheet. Then they passed the downloaded materials into a planning guide and said, "Here is our

Common Core curriculum." However, they never read the core objectives to discern if what they downloaded was in alignment with the state objectives. As an administrative team, we had had to change teacher mindsets about how to teach students the new curriculum. To help him do a better job with leading the implementation of Common Core, he "contacted a school district that he worked with in Nevada, who had been working with the federal government for five years to fine tune their use of Common Core." The documents the Nevada school system had were created jointly with the developers of the Common Core curriculum, so Executive Director 4 contacted them: "I called them and said, how much would you charge me for your Common Core documents? She sent me everything in Microsoft Word for free." Charter School D received the documents and distributed them to their teachers; and over a 2-year period, the teachers molded them into their own curriculum. He said to his teachers, "I want you to cut, paste, erase, move, reorder, add to, or do whatever you need to make these documents our curriculum documents." The administrative team "provided time for team meetings and things like that so we got to a point where we had a working K-12 systematic pacing guide for reading, math, science, and social studies."

After completing the process for developing their pacing guides, Executive Director 4 and Charter School D moved on to creating a new structure for benchmark testing and working with students to create a system for learning which targeted each student individually. "So we sent our pacing guides to Mastery Connect, who used to be the people that made the tests in NC, to help us create our own quarterly benchmarks." He wanted a better system to track progress "so that we could diagnose on the go, instead of doing an autopsy at the end of the year." He continued, "because once the students have taken the EOG tests, it is done; there is no redo and it's too late for analysis of the

issues." Charter School D completed four benchmarks in Grades 1-10 "to monitor the students' progress, to find out how they are performing along the way, to inform parents of gaps or needs, and even prescribe remediation and enrichment." Charter School D implemented the use of Study Island as their go-to home tool. Charter School D sent home reports giving detailed information on how students were doing. Then they said to the parents, "we have already keyed in the work for your child, for when they get home tonight, all your child needs to do is log in, and he can be working on the areas of struggle at home." His team wanted to make it "systematic from the classroom to the home and back to school again, so it was not just busy work; it was prescribed work for specialized growth." He reported that the kids are more engaged in doing "Study Island than they were with just, you know, worksheets and busywork." He revealed that this is a process, and they will know very soon how their new system has worked. "So we have done a full year now of math and reading benchmarks to see what kind of return we get for our money, if anything."

Another structure developed by Executive Director 4 relates to the purchasing of curriculum materials. "I have tried to create a structure where my lead teachers go through curriculum materials." The newly developed team examines new material and makes a list of items that may be useful. Then the executive director meets this team to start purchasing the materials.

The successful executive directors in this study used the core leadership practice developed by Leithwood and Reihl (2003) of developing organizations by developing structures. All four of the successful executive directors of this study built structures to help them solve specific problems like tracking student progress data and creating effective curricula. They each did this with the goal of increasing student success. They

built their data sheets to track every child and then used this data to create and align curriculum, drive instruction, and develop student groups for remediation and enrichment.

Executive director qualities of success: 2.2 buffering/removing barriers.

Three of the successful executive directors in this study removed barriers from teachers so teachers could be successful and spend time on other tasks related to student learning and success. This concept was also found under the core leadership practice of managing the teaching and learning program developed by Leithwood et al. (2008). They referred to this as buffering staff against distractions from their work. Executive Director 1 used this strategy to remove barriers from her staff members. She started off every school year in a staff meeting explaining to all personnel that her job, her role "is to remove barriers." Some of the barriers she removed included reducing redundant paperwork, dealing with parental concerns and questions, and dealing with stakeholder concerns. She does this so "the teachers can be more effective in their job because they are the ones who are interacting with the students on a daily basis."

Executive Director 2 also talked about removing barriers by taking the weight off of teachers. When he first came to Charter School B, teachers did not have the resources to help them teach, so they focused on getting textbooks and curriculum support, which helped remove some of the barriers to effectively teaching students. Executive Director 4 put it as giving his staff the support needed to get things done. He said it this way, "I gave them the support that they needed, and by implementing the fiscal support, the curricular support, and the administrative support they need to get things done."

Executive Director 3 used the core leadership practice of managing the teaching and learning program developed by Leithwood et al. (2008) by providing staff members

with informal feedback and training. When talking about how she has met her curriculum goals, she mentioned the importance of training: "The biggest component that we have done is focus on training because we know that many teachers, and leaders, struggle with the whole idea of data-driven instruction." Executive Director 3 used reflection journals and reflective activities to help her staff develop. This process took place at every staff meeting: "Every staff meeting starts with the staff doing some kind of journal or reflection activity." The journaling activities were started this year to help teachers, especially beginning teachers, be reflective and improve their teaching practices. Every staff meeting has a journaling activity built into it so teachers can become reflective practitioners. The journaling activities may be "personal responses to a video clip, or a training session, or a guest speaker, or sometimes the teachers are asked to reflect on a specific lesson they taught in their journal."

Three of the successful executive directors in this study used the core leadership practice of managing the teaching and learning program developed by Leithwood et al. (2008) by removing barriers from teachers. They removed redundant paperwork, provided funding for curriculum materials, and dealt with concerns from parents and other stakeholders. The three successful executive directors of this study used removing barriers so they could give teachers time to spend on tasks related to student learning and success.

Executive director qualities of success: 2.3 understanding and developing people. The executive directors of this study took the time to understand and develop people, which was also a core leadership practice noted by Leithwood et al. (2008). Taking the time to understand and develop people was a highly critical area for successful leadership to the executive directors in this study. Developing people was

accomplished through building trust, training staff, and supporting staff. Two of the executive directors of this study, Executive Director 1 and Executive Director 2, described this as a process where they developed buy-in and trust from each of their staff members.

Executive Director 1 used the core leadership practice of developing people by coaching her staff members. She wanted them to see that there was a better way to teach students. She described it this way: "So my job is to help teachers realize a different way to approach teaching, to help them reflect on their practice, so that they can make the necessary changes to be successful in the classroom." She then described a process of building trust by letting teachers take risks and supporting them: "They can just go and take that risk and then I will help them if it does not work." She finished this idea of developing trust by describing her day-to-day interactions with staff: "There are many conversations that I have on a daily basis that are time consuming, but they are important. They are important to that particular teacher or to that particular person who is sitting in my office."

Giving feedback to her teachers was something Executive Director 1 felt was very important to build buy-in and trust. She described a process she calls 30-second feedback. She used this whenever she was working with a teacher to help them become better. It starts by "going into the classroom, and saying, 'I noticed that you are doing "X" but it seems that is not working. Tell me you logic behind doing this?'" She wanted her staff members to reflect and discover for themselves problematic approaches to instruction so they could realize, "maybe what I am doing is not the best for all of my students." She then described going about the process from a different angle: "I noticed today you were lecturing about 'X'; your students did not seem engaged. Is there logic

behind your lecture or perhaps another approach to the lesson you could take next time?"
Her goal with this is for the teachers to really start to see the solutions for themselves, by
"really digging deeper into why they are teaching a specific way." After the teachers
began to see their teaching patterns and the problems created, the next step in her process
was to guide them in a better direction or, put in her words, "steering them into the
direction of...ok well, here at Charter School A teachers have the opportunity to try
different approaches to instruction, so what other ways might you teach students concept
'X.'" According to her, when teachers begin to experience success, they start to buy-in
and gain trust in her. Executive Director 1 then talked about why staff buy-in is so
important: "If I do not get buy in, and I am making the teachers do it my way, it is not
going to last. Even if teachers did it my way just for a walk through observation." She
admitted, "when I walk out that teacher is just going to go back to whatever she believes
to be more comfortable to her." According to Executive Director 1, "it is critical to me
that teachers buy into the school's philosophical pedagogy, and they come to that
conclusion themselves." She was not afraid of helping staff to reach the desired buy-in
and to align their goals with the goals of Charter School A: "If they do not buy in even
after multiple conversations, we the administrative team and teacher do a coaching plan,
and we meet more often to create lesson plans and assessments for specific teacher
support."

Executive Director 1 revealed her steps to developing a coaching plan and how
this might lead to removing a staff member who still does not buy in to Charter A's
philosophy. When Executive Director 1 starts a coaching plan, she lays out the
expectations and desired outcomes from the beginning: "This is the outcome that I am
looking for, these are the steps we are going to take, and then we meet once a week to see

how you are doing with those steps." She talked about how she wanted teachers to come up with the plan themselves, but sometimes she personally needed to tell them what exactly to do: "When I originally meet with struggling teachers, I want them to be able to come up with their plans themselves, but sometimes, I have to lay it out for them." She is direct, if needed: "I have noticed that every time I have come into your classroom, we have had these same conversations about this particular issue. I do not see a difference, and this is what I want you to try." She talked about how it is important to give the teacher support along the way: "I am going to help you, I am going to come and follow up on these days, and these are the things I would like to see." What happens at times is that some teachers are still not on board; and when this happens, she explains,

I have specifically stated what I need you to do, and after multiple opportunities,

you are not doing it, which is fine for some but not for Charter School A. This

might not be a good fit for you here.

Executive Director 2 also used the core leadership practice of understanding and developing people by building trust and developing staff members. He described how when he was a new administrator he thought he needed to have all the answers instead of trusting in and building trust with his staff members: "Feeling as a new administrator, like you are supposed to have all the answers, you are supposed to jump in and direct people all the time. It just doesn't work that way." He declared, "having all the right answers could work for a little while, but after some time, people get sick of you, and then they close their door and do whatever they want anyway." Armed with this knowledge and stepping back to look at what individual talents his staff has, "made me realize, maybe I better use those talents, instead of jumping in where I do not know what I am talking about." Executive Director 2 has been developing this skill, and now he

likes to "let his staff take care of what he delegates to them or hires them to do. Let them problem solve for themselves. My answers are not necessarily the only ones that work best."

Executive Director 2 also used buy-in. He described building buy-in by throwing out a few suggestions and letting his staff members process them in the hopes that the idea becomes their own and not something he has forced upon his staff. He said, "I like to throw out ideas in the form of a question so my staff can process it on their own." When his staff is given time to process the idea in the form of a question, "They have time to think and eventually realize that it is a good idea. It then becomes part of what they do, and they are married to it." His idea was that people needed to own the ideas, feel part of it. In his words, "they do not just try an idea for six weeks or until I get off their back because if they are not vested they just close their door and do what they want." He believes that if he can get his staff to buy in to the ideas, he will not need to make them do it.

Trusting in his staff was also something that Executive Director 4 identified as important to his success: "I have to put plenty of trust in the professional faculty that I have, to know their curriculum, to know what they need for meeting the demands of the students, and to know the curriculum that is to be taught in their classroom." He used support and leadership opportunities to build trust with his staff: "I want to put the leadership in the hands of the people that are willing to step up and lead." He continued, "I want to give them the support that they need, the fiscal support, the curricular support, and the administrative support they need to get the job done." He would place teachers in roles where they participate in the important decision-making about teaching and learning, including purchasing curriculum materials, developing the school calendar,

grade level PLCs, and student grade level transition requirements.

The executive directors of this study used the core leadership practice developed by Leithwood and Reihl (2003) of understanding and developing people. They each took the time to understand and develop their staff. Developing teachers was accomplished through building trust, training staff, and supporting staff. The successful executive directors of this study used a process to develop buy-in and trust from each of their staff members.

Executive director qualities of success: 2.4 collaboration/networking. The number one most mentioned quality that was brought up by every successful executive director in this study was the idea of collaboration. The collaboration these executive directors were talking about happened beyond the doors of their particular charter schools. They each reached out in their own way conscientiously and consistently to find resources to help them create solutions to problems each of their charter schools faced.

Executive Director 1 described how she reached out to collaborate and talk with others who were also running charter schools: "The other charter schools are great. You can pick up the telephone and call another charter director ask them for their input on a problem." She revealed that all of the other charter schools in her area work well together, even the ones in the same counties. She had a collaborative meeting with another charter director where they met once a month to collaborate; but as she stated, "I had to make those connections myself." She explained that these relationships already existed in traditional public schools, due to the existing structures within the school systems. As she described, there might be district principal meetings or leadership meetings. In the charter world, "If I do not attempt to network myself as a charter school leader, I do not have anyone to bounce those ideas off of or with whom to problem

solve."

Executive Director 2 declared that he found it difficult to find the network he needed within his small school; so Executive Director 2 reached out to another charter school leader in Colorado, and they would, as he stated it, "Call each other and visit. It is not like I told her, that I have this problem or that problem, we just visited." He needed someone that he could talk to and who would listen. Someone that "I could just throw out some ideas and talk about an interaction with this person or that person. We could just chat about it." In his opinion, this leader from Colorado was someone with experience but would not tell him exactly what to do. She did not try to pressure him into stating what was wrong, and she "helped me feel supported. However, lack of collaborative leadership teams is one of the difficulties of small school systems."

Executive Director 3 also talked about the importance and the power of keeping a network with others. She described keeping in touch with the co-founder of KIPP and sitting on two boards, one at a community college, and one with the county commissioners. She also kept in touch with others through a group called Mastermind, and the NC Charter Accelerator Program. Her goal was to keep up to date, and she used networking to do just that. As she explained, "when you are harnessing the power of networking it keeps you from becoming stale-mated as a school leader, it keeps you from becoming isolated." According to her, "this work is hard work, and it weighs on your spirit and your mind and in your heart and your soul." She needed her networks so she could stay positive. She felt that "when you do not have others who can truly understand what it is that you are going through that you can draw from in the tough moments that you can celebrate with during the high moments, it is just not quite the same." The networks helped her deal with the tough parts of being an executive director. One group

Executive Director 3 was part of was a group called Mastermind Group. "Mastermind

Group started in the business sector for CEOs and top business executives. Then some

innovative school leaders from around the country began to recognize that this model

might work for them." She felt like Mastermind was a great way to network without the

need to go back to school; because when a person is in graduate school, they have a

network already available. She divulged, "I still need intellectual collaboration and

connection"; and Mastermind is a way for her to do that. When taking part in the

activities of the group, according to her, they had to set a weekly goal, share it with the

group, and then be accountable for that and come back the next week to report on their

progress and findings. She then talked about how this group can help solve issues that

may be going on at school: "I might have a parent issue, or there may be something with

my district, school board." For her, this group gave an opportunity for her to talk about

problems at her school without being judged and with people from all over the United

States who may have already dealt with a similar issue with their school. The people in

the Mastermind Group were from "all over the country, some in charter schools, and

some in traditional public school, some superintendents, some principals, and some

directors." She declared that "they are all leaders out here trying to make a difference in

the lives of children, and that takes hard work."

Executive Director 4 talked about why it is so important to have a strong network

of colleagues. He said, "It is a lonely job sometimes at the top, and it is scary to admit to

people that I do not know how to handle something." Coming to a solution can be gained

through networks: "I pick the phone up, I send the email and do whatever I need to do to

get the answers I need to solve the problem." Executive Director 4 named some

networks, graduate school, and a forum he called PEP (Principal Executives Program) but

confessed, "There's not as much out there as it used to be." He did mention that there are ways to understand the charter movement better, but one needs to make the connections by "attending staff developments, going to charter school leader meetings, national charter school movements, or state charter school movements, to learn more." Just like Executive Director 3, Executive Director 4 feels the need to continually find ways to keep up with the changes that happen in education. Executive Director 4 explained that it is important to be adaptable, to not get rooted or to become an island. To overcome the challenges Executive Director 4 explained, "the best way to overcome many of the challenges is to be adaptable and to be in touch with people." He continued, "if you get rooted in your ways, you do not realize processes have changed, and you become an island; the job becomes tough." He also noted that leaders are not supposed to know everything. According to him as a leader, "you are just supposed to get the resources to the people needing to get the job done and have some connections out there that you can bring in people that know stuff." He declared, "I am an expert in some areas, but I am not an expert in everything."

Collaboration was mentioned by all four of the successful executive directors of this study. The collaboration that all four of these executive directors used happened beyond the doors of their particular charter schools. Each of them reached out to other charter school leaders and built connections in their communities to help them solve problems faced in their charter schools.

Charter vs. public differences: Resources money, people, increased autonomy. Executive directors of charter schools overwhelmingly listed resources such as people and money as a significant difference between charter schools and traditional public schools; however, these executive directors also noted that in charter

administration, there were less restrictions placed on them than in the traditional school settings. Despite the lack of resources, they enjoyed the autonomy that came with being a charter school executive director.

When reacting to the question, "thinking about your previous experience as a traditional school leader, how do the demands of the job of executive director/principal compare or contrast," Executive Director 1 stated that she had more support in traditional public schools: "I would say that being a charter school leader is totally different, than being a public school principal. When I had an issue as a principal in a traditional public school, I picked up the phone, and I called the county office." Executive Director 1 also noted that being an executive director of a charter school is completely different from being a principal of a traditional public school. One of the differences she noticed was concerning administrative demands: "You are your own central office, and you cannot call the maintenance department when the air conditioning does not work or anything like that. You are it." She has found this to be challenging. She then listed everything that she needed to be: "I am the HR office, the maintenance department, the finance officer, I am everything." She discovered that "the job as an executive director of a charter school is much more involved than it is in the traditional public setting." She continued and described how she was both the leader of her school and the supervisor of the building project. She was the one ultimately responsible for everything to do with building a new high school at Charter School A. When describing the differences between traditional public schools and charter schools, Executive Director 1 stated, "of course charter schools face financing issues because we do not receive capital funding like the traditional public schools do." She continued, "we have a mortgage; we have to pay the mortgage every month. That is something you do not do in public schools."

Executive Director 2 also noted the differences in resources between charter schools and traditional public schools. "In traditional school districts, it is a lot easier. Your scope is much smaller, on what you have to know and do. There are a lot more resources." He continued, "however, on the other hand, I originally left a big school district because I felt like it was sucking out my soul."

Executive Director 3 compared the lack of support through the resource of people in a charter school to the support she felt in a traditional public school. She said, "As an assistant principal in the public school, I felt so supported, I had my principal, I had those people in central office." When she was in the traditional school setting, she felt like if she were to make a mistake, someone would be there to help her. Maybe they would catch that mistake before it became catastrophic. They would be her advocates. She described that, as the executive director, "If I make an error, it may be months before it is even caught. Moreover, when it is caught, I am the only one who can take the blame. This creates extra stress." As an executive director of a charter school, she was aware that the "buck stopped" with her: "I am the one that is ultimately representing the board of directors, who are obligated to the state treasurer's office as well as the department of public instruction, and the board of directors." She went on describing more people she was representing: "The school, the community, the vendors, the teachers, the students, the parents, and everyone." She asserted that being a traditional school leader was much different from being an executive director of a charter school. She continued that, as a principal in a traditional school, the focus is on the school. Someone else sets the budget: "I may have helped set the discretionary budget through fundraisers, but the pressure of making sure that I meet payroll is not mine to worry about as a traditional school principal." She also expressed that the "finance officer at the central office sets the

spending budget." Last, as an executive director, she wore many different hats: "I am

working as a teacher, essentially in some aspects as a principal, and as a superintendent,

the one reporting to the board, and the one who is ultimately accountable for everything

to the state Department of Public Instruction."

Executive Director 4 also had a feeling of being supported by having more

resources in the form of people. He described his experience as a regional superintendent

of the enrichment region: "My job was to radically change the lives of students in 99%

free and reduced lunch and 99% minority schools, to be competitive with the schools

where those things were not influences." He described himself as having a laser-like

focus on what he needed to accomplish, due to the job description: "I had the support of

the superintendent, the support of the school board, and 12 staff members. So I had other

people who could share the workload." Then he described some of the jobs other people

filled so he could maintain his focus: "I had a person that was over math, a person in

charge of reading, a person who directed special programs, and a person who led

community support and outreach." As an executive director of a charter school, he

acknowledged that he did not have all those people in the supporting roles like he did in

the traditional school setting:

> So, in one minute I am in the frame of mind budgeting for the next year, and then
>
> I get a call from a kindergarten parent who is upset that her student did not get to
>
> go out to play time.

He did not want to make that parent feel as though what she had to say was less important

than working on the budget and saving jobs. "I have got to stop what I am doing, and be

there for my parents, either by directing her to the right person or spending the next thirty

minutes listening to her." He feels as though he has limited resources and people, due to

the funding method used for charter schools. He stated that the hardest part of the job for him was "taking a look at school goals and community needs to see how they can mesh together in a way that do not swamp the boat." Executive Director 4 elaborated:

> I did not expect it to be this challenging, to be a leading a charter school with a total population of not even a fraction of the students that the freshman class at the previous traditional high school I once led had.

He confessed that his traditional high school "was larger than my entire charter school, and at times the high school principal job seemed easier than the charter job." When asked in a follow-up interview to expand on this, Executive Director 4 reported, "That it is the people that I had around me that made the job easier." He listed the people who he had to help when he was the principal of a traditional public school: "I had four assistant principals, five guidance counselors, a director of career and technical education, two nurses, two social workers, and three curriculum coaches." As a charter director, he declared, "Here I am! Let me take off my curriculum coach hat, I was the K-2 principal for a minute, and I have to be constantly switching my hats and changing my roles." He described when he gets home at the end of the day: "I get home at night, and I am like, what did I do today? Because I did so much, I just hope I got something done." He finished by disclosing, "That is the biggest difference I saw between the two is the amount of stuff that is there for traditional school principals."

The executive directors also noted that they enjoyed the autonomy that came with being charter school executive directors. Executive Director 1 explained that she enjoyed being an executive director of a charter school because she could do it her way. She felt like she could make a difference because "as a principal of a traditional public school, my hinds were really tied on lots of issues that I felt like I should have been able to fix." As

an executive director of a charter school, she could mold and change issues as she needed in order to improve education and the instructional environment for the students. In traditional public schools, she noted that her decisions could always be revoked or changed if they did not fit in with the district's ideologies or budget. For example, in a traditional public school, she had certain steps she had to follow before she could suspend a student from school. She wants her students in the classroom for instructional time; but when the student is disrupting the learning of everyone else around him, there was really no other option in her mind other than to remove him from the school. In traditional public schools, she had to keep disruptive and violent students at school and in their classes until all of the documented district mandated student intervention steps were followed before in-school suspension or out-of-school suspension could even be considered. Then a team of people would be expected to meet to decide the course of action. At Charter School A, she enjoys the autonomy of making the decision to suspend a student out of school without all of the mandated steps that were involved in a traditional public school setting. Autonomy was something that drew Executive Director 3 as well. She enjoyed the freedom to extend her school day so students could have two blocks of reading and two blocks of math. She also enjoyed the autonomy to design her own curriculum so students focused more on college preparation and global awareness. Finally, she was able to extend the number of teacher workdays and pay her teachers to do professional development during the summer. Executive Director 3 described working as a traditional public school principal as having to follow protocols instead of doing what she felt was right for students. Executive Director 4 also described autonomy as a reason for working in Charter School D. He has been able to build his own high school, define the curriculum, hire the teachers, and attract students. He felt at times that

in the traditional setting when he had innovative ideas, he was not able to try them due to bureaucracy, often hearing, "that's not the way we do it here." As an executive director of a charter school, he now has the flexibility to be more innovative and try new ideas. Executive Director 4 described some of the flexibility he has now which includes starting the school year earlier (they start on August 9, so they can end the first semester before winter break). Executive Director 4 continued by stating that he did not have to follow the state teacher salary scale and that he could hire noncertified teachers and not be forced to follow strict budget line-item codes. Executive Director 2 disliked the restrictions that come with working in traditional public schools so much that he said, "I originally left a big traditional school district because I kind of felt like it was sucking out my soul."

Executive directors of charter schools listed the resources of people and money as a significant difference between charter schools and traditional public schools. The successful executive directors of this study noted that they had less financial support as a charter school leader. In traditional schools, they would receive capital outlay for building repairs or new building projects; but in charter schools, they did not. They also felt as though they had more administrative demands placed on them as charter school executive directors than they did as traditional school principals. As a traditional school principal, they mentioned support came from central office; as an executive director of a charter school, there is no central office to help solve problems.

Summary

The job of the executive director of a charter school can be challenging and demanding as stated by Executive Director 3 but, at the same time, very rewarding. The successful executive directors in this study found two areas identified by Leithwood and

Reihl (2003) and Leithwood et al. (2008) to be highly important to their success:

developing organizations through developing structures and developing the teaching and

learning programs through buffering staff against distractions from their work. The other

area that these executive directors noted helped them to be successful was networking/

collaboration. Chapter 5 includes discussion and summary of the findings of the research

questions.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate leadership traits successful charter school executive directors perceived to be most important. This study identified leadership styles and skills that were most important to successful charter school executive directors in four North Carolina charter schools. These schools were chosen based on percentages from the NCTWC and achievement test scores. Upon completion of the current study, the styles and skills identified can be used in other charter schools to help emergent leaders and existing leaders improve performance.

Summary of Findings

This study used three research questions to guide this study.

1. What do executive directors of charter schools perceive to be the instructional and administrative demands of their jobs?

2. What personal and professional qualities do executive directors of charter schools believe have enabled them to be successful in their positions?

3. What do executive directors of charter schools perceive to be the instructional and administrative demand differences between leading a charter school and leading a traditional public school?

There are demands placed on executive directors of successful charter schools. The first question aimed to find out what these demands were. The second question was posed to find the qualities that executive directors used to be successful. There are perceived instructional and administrative demand differences between leading a traditional public school and leading a charter school. The third question aimed to find these perceived demands.

The researcher identified eight findings that were in response to the research questions, the findings are referenced in Table 20, and details follow.

Table 20

Findings

Research Questions	Findings
1. What do executive directors of charter schools perceive to be the instructional and administrative demands of their jobs?	1.1 There were a high number of demands placed on executive directors' time, and they had a feeling of being overwhelmed. 1.2 Executive directors face difficulties in finding funding and finding the right staff members.
2. What personal and professional qualities do executive directors of charter schools believe have enabled them to be successful in their positions?	2.1 Executive directors developed their organizations by developing structures to help them solve problems. 2.2 Executive directors removed barriers for staff members so that they could do their jobs more effectively. 2.3 Executive directors developed people 2.4 Executive directors used collaboration or networking, especially connections outside of their schools. 2.5 Building vision and setting directions were of low importance to the executive directors in this study.
3. What do executive directors of charter schools perceive to be the instructional and administrative demand differences between leading a charter school and leading a traditional public school?	3.1 Executive directors of charter schools face monetary issues that traditional public schools do not face. 3.2 Executive directors of charter schools do not have the same human resource capital as traditional public schools forcing them to fulfill more roles. 3.3 Executive directors of charter schools enjoy the autonomy and freedoms that comes with working in charter schools.

Findings: Research Question 1. Research Question 1 was posed to find the

perceived instructional and administrative demands placed on executive directors. Two findings surfaced concerning this question. The first finding was that there were a high number of demands placed on the executive director. The second finding was that executive directors face difficulties in finding funding and the right staff members.

There were numerous demands placed on executive directors, and executive directors had a feeling of being overwhelmed by the demands; Bloomfield (2013) also found this in his research. In his study of charter schools, Bloomfield found that "the quantity of demands on the executive director from all areas of school leadership is much greater than expected in charter schools" (p. 109). Campbell and Gross (2009) found similar results in their study that confirmed both the researcher's and Bloomfield's results. Campbell and Gross (2009) found that executive directors of charter schools were responsible for finding and managing resources, recruiting students and teachers, balancing the budget, raising school funds, and being the curriculum and instructional leaders. The demands placed on executive directors of charter schools are numerous.

Executive directors of charter schools in this study had difficulty finding funding and people to fulfill the various roles required to run a charter school. Cravens et al. (2012) also noted that all executive directors in their study, "report some difficulty acquiring resources, and recruiting and retaining teachers and students" (p. 465). The lack of funding was evident in this study of successful executive directors. Executive Director 2 stated it best: "Our biggest challenge is money." He noted that money was the reason for his facilities problem, and funding was the reason for his lack of office support, which is all traced back to attaining his students. As he stated, "with a small school, losing just a few students, can throw the whole budget out of whack."

Finding funding and facing high demands is something all organizational leaders

face, but this is especially true for executive directors of charter schools. As stated by Executive Director 4, "charter schools do not get capital funding." If executive directors of charter schools are to be successful, funding must become a priority. Without proper funding, executive directors of charter schools are forced to focus on performing duties that are not related to student achievement, i.e., administrative tasks. Completing these tasks takes precious time away from focusing on instructional tasks. When executive directors spend time on tasks that are not related to student achievement, the impact will then limit the education of students. Ultimately, if students are not achieving, parents will choose not to send their children to the charter school the next year. Removing students will remove funds from that school, creating further funding issues and possibly closure of the school. The proper funding of a charter school is imperative to the executive director's success.

Findings: Research Question 2. Research Question 2 intended to find out what executive directors of charter schools believed to be the professional and personal qualities that have enabled them to be successful in their positions. As a result of the research protocol, four conclusions were noted. First, executive directors of charter schools used the core leadership practice of developing their organizations by developing structures to help them solve problems. Second, executive directors of charter schools used the core leadership practice of developing people, specifically their teachers and staff members. Next, executive directors used the core leadership practice of managing the teaching and learning program by removing barriers that limit teaching and promote student success. This was done so the teachers could do their jobs more effectively. Finally, executive directors used collaboration and networking to make connections outside of their schools.

These successful executive directors all used the core leadership practice of developing organizations by developing structures to help them solve problems they faced. The development of structures to solve problems was also very clear in the research and noted as a core leadership practice of successful charter school executive directors by Leithwood and Reihl (2003) and Leithwood et al. (2008). The executive charter school directors of this study developed data-collecting systems to help them track student testing and student growth data. This idea of utilizing systems or structures to track data to improve student performance was also noted in a study by Borman et al. (2011). The authors concluded that data-driven structures had a meaningful impact on student achievement in both reading and math. In the current study, Executive Directors 1, 2, and 4 developed structures for tracking student progress; the results of their work have yet to be seen because they have just started this process. Just as the successful executive directors of this study developed systems, so did leaders of turnaround schools. School turnaround leaders make decisions based on data. Successful school turnaround leaders gathered valuable information and then identified areas that needed improvement and attacked those areas with specific goals in a structured improvement plan.

The idea of developing the organization by developing structures seems to the researcher as being very important so the actions or changes become long lasting. The idea of lasting change is not new to education, and charter school Executive Director 4 noted this when he was talking about putting his trust into others. He stated, "It is less about me, and my leadership and more about the school and its vision." He went on to disclose the fact that if he were to leave his position without trusting in his staff and the legacy of the school's vision, it would all end with him or any other leader who did not establish trust or create buy-in of the school's vision from their staff. That was another

way of stating that he wanted to build structures that will be in place after he leaves.

Successful executive directors in this study used the core leadership practice of managing the teaching and learning program by removing barriers so employees could do their jobs more effectively. The executive directors in this study removed barriers by having proper curriculum materials, access to technology for all students, and not interrupting staff with parental issues that did not connect to learning. Leithwood et al. (2008) identified this skill as being a core leadership practice of successful executive directors. Executive Director 4 stated the need for removing barriers as an essential skill so people can get things done: "I give them the support that they need, the fiscal support, the curricular support, and the administrative support to allow them to get things done." Also, noted in a study conducted by Streshly and Gray (2008), this was a vital skill. In the study, they examined six all-star executive directors through formal interviews. The six all-star executive directors of charter schools were identified for their study based on their schools' sustained performance on student achievement test scores. They wanted to find the critical characteristics and behaviors of these successful executive directors. They identified that executive directors of their study acted as buffers against distractions to teaching and learning (Streshly & Gray, 2008). Executive Director 2 worked at removing barriers. When the researcher asked him how to build the perfect school, he replied, "Hire great teachers and get out of their way." He felt as though some leaders become the barriers to great teachers, and these bad leaders squash great ideas of teachers before giving them a chance.

The successful executive directors of this study developed people through building trust, providing support, and getting buy-in from staff members. Leithwood and Reihl (2003) and Leithwood et al. (2008) also named developing people as a core

leadership practice for successful executive directors. Executive Directors 1, 2, and 4 developed trust and worked toward getting staff buy-in. This is in line with research by Kouzes and Posner (2007), where they stated that successful leaders developed trust by their words and actions and following through on them. Executive Director 1 described this idea of following through with her 30-second feedback and coaching plans.

Bruckman (2008) also talked about the importance of creating successful leaders and building trust with his staff in his charter school research. Executive directors can build trust by giving staff members authentic opportunities to take part in important decisions. Executive Director 2 realized that he did not always have to give all the answers. He found that stepping back and listening to talented staff and then allowing them to implement their ideas with his feedback was a better way to go about building trust and having lasting change. Executive Director 4 also used the approach of giving staff members authentic opportunities to make decisions. He felt that it was important to trust the professional faculty he hired to know, to teach, and to gather materials for their curriculum. He put his trust in his staff to go through the available materials and be able to make the decisions on which materials to buy. Both of these executive directors' approaches were very similar to the approach that Bruckman described: A leader needs to realize that their workforce are the ones in the trenches and can give a critical eye to new plans or ideas and spot possible problems early. It was also important to know how to give the group ownership. This can be accomplished by allowing the group to change the leaders' ideas into their own ideas or, better yet, let them come up with initiatives (Bruckman, 2008).

Executive Director 3 also used the core leadership practice of understanding and developing people. She developed her staff through professional training. Furthermore,

she started every staff meeting with reflection through journaling activities. She wanted

them to become reflective practitioners and to increase their effectiveness to use school-

wide strategies like data-driven instruction and character education. The research of the

Public Impact Project also talked about the importance of developing people through

increasing their effectiveness. According to the Public Impact Project, "developing

others is influence with the specific intent to increase the short and long-term

effectiveness of another person" (Steiner et al., 2008, p. 19). Professional development

included giving instruction, providing expectations, giving feedback, and letting others

have the power to make decisions so they can learn from failure as well as success

(Steiner et al., 2008). Learning from failure is what Executive Director 3 described as

having "grit." She described grit as learning from failures and not giving up, even in the

face of failure.

Obtaining buy-in will never happen if staff members do not trust the executive

director. Trust takes time to build and is affected by every decision an executive director

makes. If the decision is one that makes a positive impact, trust is increased. If,

however, the decision is one that makes a negative impact, trust is diminished. To build

trust and staff buy-in, executive directors of charter schools need to look for ways where

staff and community members can see a change happen in a positive way and be a part of

it. This change needs to happen quickly at first. Also noted by the National Charter

School Resource Center (2010), a required characteristic for hiring turnaround executive

directors is the skill of looking for early successes.

The successful executive directors in this study looked for ways to collaborate and

network with other charter school executive directors. These connections did not already

exist and had to be developed by the executive directors themselves. Executive Director

1 described making connections with other charter leaders: "There is one in another town, and he and I meet once a month to collaborate, but I have had to make these connections myself." The importance of building a network of other leaders was also noted in research conducted by Streshly and Gray (2008); they referred to this as building relationships. They argued that the most important aspect of a successful executive director was the ability to build relationships. All six of their superstar executive directors had this trait (Streshly & Gray, 2008). One principal summed up his job this way: building relationships and helping others build relationships with each other in the school building was important to the success of the executive director. Furthermore, reaching beyond the school building to the community was critical for executive director success. Portin et al. (2003) also noted the importance of building connections; he stated that it was important for the success of executive directors in their study. These connections helped supplement programs or even increased funding (Portin et al., 2003). The types of connections Portin et al. described were also used by Executive Director 3; she built her networks of people and stayed in touch with them so she could later use that connection for her own charter school. She described how she kept in touch with the co-founder of KIPP and then used that connection to have five of her staff members trained for free at the yearly KIPP summit. She also used her KIPP connection to get full staff training on data-driven instruction, training for a high-performing teacher to create a model classroom, and weekly principal meetings with the trainer from KIPP. Executive Director 4 summed up why successful executive directors need to use these networks:

> As a leader you are not supposed to know everything. You are just supposed to get the resources to the people needing to get the job done and have some connections out there that you can bring in people that know stuff.

These connections were imperative to the success of each executive director of this study, and each one used such networks to help them come up with solutions to solve their problems. It is unfortunate that these networks do not already exist for charter school executive directors. Would it not be feasible to make this a part of what the department of public instruction for charter schools does? A quick Internet search of their website offers no such support, no connections, no networks. Why? The research has pointed to the importance of these networks, and the need to develop them is of the utmost importance so executive directors of charter schools can be successful.

The research clearly indicates that building a vision and setting directions is a core leadership practice for executive directors of charter schools (Leithwood et al., 2008). Buell (1992) explained that the most essential aspect to instructional leadership is the ability of the executive director to lead others toward a vision; but to the researcher's surprise, this area of leadership was found to be of low importance to the executive directors of this study. Of the four executive directors of this study, only one, Executive Director 4, communicated building a vision and setting directions importance as high. The lack of building vision came as a shock, because the research was abundant and unhindered about the importance of vision building. A vision was essential to have a shared commitment to a purpose for an executive director to be successful (Gurley et al., 2015). Sarros and Sarros (2007) also talked about the importance of building vision and how much time must be devoted to this activity to develop a new vision. One explanation for this outcome may be that the population under study was too small. The study had only four participants. With a larger participant group, building a vision could have been found to be moderately or even highly important to the success of charter school executive directors.

Findings: Research Question 3. Research Question 3 intended to find the administrative and instructional differences between charter schools and traditional public schools. As a result of the research, two findings emerged. The first finding was that executive directors of charter schools face monetary issues that traditional public schools do not face. The second finding was that executive directors of charter schools lack human resources, forcing them to fulfill more roles than they would in traditional public schools. The third finding was that successful executive directors of charter schools enjoy the autonomy and freedoms that come with working in charter schools such as autonomy of budget, discipline, calendar, year, and curriculum.

The findings of this study align with research by Campbell and Gross (2008); executive directors of charter schools had difficulty with finances and funding. In their study of 401 executive directors, 12% of the executive directors stated that finances were a severe problem, while another 25% stated it was somewhat of a problem (Campbell & Gross, 2008). In the current study, successful executive directors do not have access to the same monetary resources as traditional public schools. Executive Director 1 talked about how charter schools do not receive capital funding for buildings and such but instead need to pay a mortgage. Executive Director 3 and Executive Director 2 talked about their difficulties in finding suitable buildings for housing their schools. Executive Director 3 described her difficulties with the financial burden of meeting proper building codes. Executive Director 4 also noted that funding for buildings is difficult because charter schools do not get capital funding from the state. He also described his need for saving money to fix his existing buildings and again linked that to his lack of capital funding.

There was a lack of human resources for successful charter school executive

directors as compared to the resources afforded to traditional public school principals. This finding seems to be backed up by Cravens et al. (2012), who reported that all executive directors of charter schools in their study described difficulty in acquiring human resources. Acquiring human resources was also mirrored by Campbell and Gross (2008), attracting qualified human resources was difficult; 14% of executive directors in their study stated it was a serious problem, while 22% stated it was somewhat of a problem. Executive Director 2 stated that although he was in a small school, it had far less administrative staff than his traditional school counterparts. Executive Director 4 had the same problems with not having enough administrative staff to help him run his charter school. He talked about how as a traditional school administrator, he had a much larger team to help than he does now.

Executive directors of this study enjoyed the autonomy and freedoms that come with working in charter schools, and that is the main part of what drew them to work at their respective charter schools. Campbell and Gross (2008) found a similar response from charter leaders about why charter school executive directors take or stay in their positions. In their study, executive directors of charter schools enjoyed the autonomy that comes with the job. For example, they wanted to be able to work with a specific group of students and feel committed to their students to make a difference in the lives of those students (Campbell & Gross, 2008). The executive directors in this study all liked the freedoms that came with being a charter school executive director. They enjoyed the freedom to design their curriculums, create a flexible school calendar, and enforce student-centered polices. Executive Director 1 shared the same sentiment of wanting to make a difference in the lives of students. She wanted to be able to spend her time focusing on teaching children rather than managing children's behaviors. Executive

Director 3 wanted to work with a specific group of students and designed her school to serve poor and minority students. Executive Director 4 also enjoyed the autonomy that came with being a charter school executive director; he liked having the freedom to start school outside of the traditional school calendar, to design his own curriculum, and to hire teachers who were the right fit even if they did not have a teaching license.

Executive directors of charter schools struggle with having enough financial resources and human resources but enjoy the autonomy that comes with running a charter school. The findings of financial support and human resources under Research Question 3 are related, in the fact that money resources affect human resources. If the executive director of a charter school does not have enough monetary resources, the executive director will not be able to have the human resources. Executive Director 2 stated this point best when he talked about the most important challenges facing his school: "Most of this ties back to funding, we have things that we probably need, but it ties back to whether we have the funding for it. So facility is obviously one that comes back to money."

Implications of Findings

The results of this study have implications for charter school executive directors, charter school boards of directors, and educational organizations. Three implications evolved from the study of successful executive directors of charter schools. The first implication was that executive directors of charter schools needed to utilize the four-core leadership practices developed by Leithwood et al. (2008). The second implication was that there was a need for networks to be set up in order for executive directors of charter schools to collaborate and build partnerships. The third implication was that there was a need for reform and improvement in the way in which charter schools are funded.

Implication 1: Utilization of the core leadership practices. Executive directors of charter schools can use the results of this study to become better directors of their charter schools by using the core leadership practices developed by Leithwood et al. (2008). The four core leadership categories included building vision and setting directions, understanding and developing people, developing organization, and managing the teaching and learning program (Leithwood et al., 2008). Charter school boards of directors and other educational organizations can use the results of this study as well to aid executive directors of charter schools in the implementation of the core leadership skills.

Executive directors could use the category of understanding and developing people by developing their staff members through creating trust, achieving staff buy-in, and creating a community feel. In the current study, it was a highly critical area of leadership used by all four of the successful executive directors. Just as these four successful executive directors used this core leadership skill to develop teachers by giving feedback, to develop coaching plans, and to build staff buy-in, so to could other executive directors.

Executive directors of charter schools can increase their use of the core leadership practice of developing organizations by developing structures. They could develop a student tracking system or develop structures for the purchase of curriculum materials, just as the successful executive directors of this study have done. Developing structures can be used to help executive directors of charter schools increase student achievement.

Executive directors of charter schools also need to apply the core leadership skill of managing the teaching and learning program. They could do this just as the successful executive directors of this study did by removing barriers from their staff members. They

could reduce redundant paperwork, deal with parent concerns and questions, and deal with stakeholder concerns. By removing barriers just as the successful executive directors of this study did, executive directors set their staff members up for success and therefore increase student success.

Executive directors of charter schools can improve their success by building vision and setting directions. Executive directors can accomplish this by building a shared commitment to a purpose (Gurley et al., 2015). As noted earlier in this dissertation, the research indicates that building a vision and setting directions is a core leadership practice for executive directors of charter schools (Leithwood et al., 2008). Buell (1992) explained that the most essential aspect of instructional leadership is the ability of the executive director to lead others toward a vision. This area of leadership may have been found to be of low importance to three of the four executive directors of this study because of the time constraints of this study. There were two interviews and one observation of a staff meeting or community event. If there were more observations or an increase in the number of interviews, maybe the outcome would have included more use of the core leadership practice of building vision and setting directions. With just a snapshot in time, it would be difficult to suggest that successful leaders use all four of these categories all of the time (Leithwood et al., 2008). The researcher believes that it would be challenging for an executive director to develop an organization or to develop people without some use of building a vision and setting directions. This is why building staff buy-in and developing trust was so important to successful executive directors of this study. Building buy-in and trust was part of what Executive Directors 1, 2, and 4 of this study did. Building buy-in is closely related to what Gurley et al. (2015) referred to as building a shared commitment to a purpose. Building a vision to set the direction must

be used and is of the utmost importance to the success of executive directors of charter schools.

Charter school boards of directors can improve the success of current executive directors and also look for up and coming executive directors through the use of the four core leadership categories developed by Leithwood et al. (2008). Boards of directors can provide time for current executive directors of charter schools to go to training on building trust and obtaining staff buy-in. Charter school boards of directors could use the results of this study to help them find qualified candidates to lead their charter schools. They can even look for candidates who already have the ability to utilize the four core leadership skills. They can look for candidates who already know how to build a vision and set directions, be understanding of people and have knowledge of building trust within a staff, develop organizations, and manage the teaching and learning program. Boards also need to help develop their organizations by enabling the executive directors to develop lasting structures just as the successful executive directors of this study have done.

Educational organizations that include colleges and universities or state departments of education could use these results to improve the way executive directors are prepared for their jobs. They could include training on the business aspect of running a charter school, the processes for developing organizational structures, and the importance of developing people. Levine (2005) remarked that schools of education in colleges and universities are not preparing school leaders for their jobs. The current study also found that executive directors of charter schools are not prepared because they are not trained in the business aspects of their positions as charter school executive directors. Schools of education could work collaboratively with schools of business at

the local colleges and universities to better prepare executive directors of charter schools with the skill sets needed for charter school leadership success.

Implication 2: Collaboration/networking. Executive directors of charter schools need networks set up in order to collaborate and build partnerships. The need for collaboration/networking was clear in the current study of successful charter school executive directors. Each of the directors searched beyond the walls of their charter school to collaborate and network with other charter school leaders. Charter school executive directors could increase their likelihood of being successful through the use of collaboration/networking. Through the use networks, each executive director can gain access to funding sources, professional development opportunities, and educational resources including best practices for both teachers and students. Networks increase buying power to each executive director and their school and thus get resources at a lower cost (Hanover Research, 2012). This study can help executive directors realize they are not alone in their struggles and look for ways to collaborate and network with others. Executive directors could attend charter school conferences or create collaborative training in order to make connections with other charter school executive directors.

Charter school boards could increase collaboration/networks for executive directors of charter schools by allowing time for executive directors to meet and even set up collaboration/networks for charter school executive directors. They could set up times for executive directors of charter schools to meet quarterly, semi annually, or even annually. During this time, executive directors of charter schools could talk about situations and problems they each face and possible solutions. Charter school boards can also utilize the results of this study in their hiring practices. They could search for

candidates who already have networks that can be used to help them solve the unknown problems that will arise.

Educational organizations including colleges, universities, and state departments of education could all use the results of this study to improve collaboration/networks. One way these organizations could use the results of this study would be to aid in the process of developing professional networks for charter school executive directors to work through and make connections. Best practices for building networks called for creating compacts, and some already exist for building networks between charter schools and traditional public schools. The research about compacts was sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation and offers some guidance to starting networks. The following ideas offer some guidance to starting a compact between charter schools and traditional public schools and could be used to also create networks. Included in each compact was a statement of common purpose, a description of the community, stakeholder commitments (share facilities, resources, sharing best practices), and an evaluation form (Hanover Research, 2012). The ideas from building compacts between traditional public schools and charter schools could also be used to help start networks between stand alone charter schools. These connections could be used to solve the everyday challenges that executive directors of charter schools face. The executive directors of this study pointed out that these structures were needed because it is difficult to find existing networks through which to work. Networks help to distribute resources and enhance each school's capacity (Wohlstetter, Malloy, Chau, & Polhemus, 2003). The results of the current study need to be utilized by all stakeholders of charter schools to help executive directors collaborate/network. All four of the successful executive directors of this study used networks and collaboration to help them solve problems they

faced. The stakeholders could implement ways for charter school executive directors to network and collaborate to solve many of the existing problems charter school leaders face.

Implication 3: Reform and/or improve charter school funding. Executive directors of charter schools should reach out to their local politicians to advocate for better funding practices. As the results and previous research pointed out, successful executive directors need to be well versed in the business aspects of charter schools, including funding (Campbell & Gross, 2008). Another way these organizations could use this study is through improvement in the way charter schools are funded. All of the executive directors of this study pointed to the way funding for charter schools was accomplished and to the challenges that were created from the existing structure. In the existing structure, charter schools are paid on a per-pupil basis from the public school from which the student is coming to them. As Executive Director 4 pointed out, funding should follow the child by going directly from the state to the school. In other words, get rid of third-party funding. If funding was done in this way, traditional public schools might not feel as though charter schools are stealing their funds. As it is now, traditional public schools in North Carolina have to pay charter schools directly from their funds, and that puts an undue burden on the relationship between public school leaders and charter school executive directors.

Thirty charter school experts recently discussed improvements at the federal level for charter school capital outlay funding, and their proposals were reported by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (2015). The first proposal is for federal policy makers to improve programs that already exist. One such policy that exists is the Credit Enhancement for Charter School Facilities. The recommendation was to improve

access for start-up, rural, and independent charter schools, as it is difficult for these schools to access the funding. They are seen as a high risk to creditors due to their limited track records. Another policy that exists is the Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant Program run through the USDA. To access this program, the school must be in a community with less than 20,000 people. This limits access to many charter schools, and the recommendation is to open this program to larger communities so more charter schools can gain access to these funds. The second proposal was to create new policies with charter schools in mind. The first such policy was the Charter School Infrastructure Tax Program. This program would allow for long-term, low-interest financing to charter schools for facilities with loans up to 30 years. The second policy was the Equitable School Facilities Investment Program. This policy would be geared toward start-up charters and allow for investors to charge a higher interest rate due to the higher investment risks associated with a start-up charter school (Wolfe, 2018).

Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate leadership traits successful charter school executive directors perceived to be most important. This study identified that successful charter school leaders utilized the four core leadership skills identified by Leithwood et al. (2008). The core leadership skills were building vision and setting direction, understanding and developing people, developing organizations, and managing the teaching and learning program (Leithwood et al., 2008). The successful executive directors of this study also used collaboration/networking to help them solve problems. The skills identified can be utilized to help emergent leaders, charter school boards, and other educational organizations help existing and up and coming leaders improve performance.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study of successful executive directors provided detailed descriptions of their qualities and skills. While there were many relevant findings from these four North Carolina charter school executive directors, there are still questions to be answered. Recommendations for further study follow.

1. Even though this study was already a replication and some of the findings were similar, it should be replicated again so others can validate the similarities.

2. The findings relating to the differences between traditional public schools and charter schools must be replicated and studied more in depth. Other states may have different laws that will affect this outcome.

3. It is a recommendation that this study be replicated in private schools, because private schools operate similarly to charter schools because they are mission-driven and operate without a central office.

4. It is a recommendation that this study be conducted as a quantitative study with many more participants so the findings have more validity and reliability.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Project Title: An investigation of the characteristics successful executive directors perceive to be most important in charter schools.

Time of interview: _____

Date of interview: _____

Location: _____

Interviewer: _Jeremy Quick_____

Interviewee: _____

Interview Introduction
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. With your permission I would like to record this interview in order to reflect accurately your thoughts and observations. You may request that the recorder be turned off at any time.

The success of your charter of the past two years has been impressive. Your community should be proud of this accomplishment. While most of the credit certainly should go to the students and their hard work, some of that credit and praise should go to your staff, administration, and board.

Today we are going to talk about the work of the executive director. In our discussion, I am going to ask you a few questions that will require you to describe, in your own words and based upon your own observations, your work and activities. In particular, I will ask you to describe your work activities and habits. I am looking for value-based opinions and judgments (i.e., "I do this well and that not so well"), but also, I will be asking for you to describe or give examples of the your work habits, activities and practices ("I send an email every Friday, or meet with the teachers every Tuesday morning").

Are we ready? Let's begin.

Executive Director Interview:
    1. Can you briefly describe your background, career path, and how you became the leader of this charter school?
            a. Your educational background:
            b. Highest degree earned:
            c. Years working in education:
            d. Experience teaching:
            e. Experience in charter schools:
            f. Your race:
            g. Your age:

      h. Your gender:

2. Please describe of the mission and program of this charter school, and speak about what drew you to work here?

3. What have you learned about the administrative demands of your job here?

4. What have you learned about the instructional demands of your job here?

5. How would you describe your personal leadership style?
   a. How would you describe your strengths and challenges as a charter school leader?
   b. Which factors and experiences have strongly shaped your leadership style?

6. Describe the most important challenges facing your school and discuss ways that you have sought to meet them?
   a. Administrative, financial structural, instructional
   b. State funding, Fundraising, Grants, Federal subsidies, Fund balance
   c. Facility
   d. Other

7. What are the student achievement challenges facing your charter, and what have you done to address them?
   a. General
   b. Math
   c. Reading
   d. Science
   e. Writing
   f. Other

8. Under your leadership, what has your school done to document, track, and improve student growth?
   a. General
   b. Math
   c. Reading
   d. Science
   e. Writing
   f. Other

9. Describe how lessons you have learned have helped you to overcome the challenges you mentioned.

10. What resources have you used to help you to overcome these challenges?
    a. Leadership networks
    b. Colleagues/leadership team
    c. parents
    d. others

11. What do you do specifically that helps you to grow and to develop as a leader?
    a. Conferences
    b. Professional organizations
    c. Independent work
    d. Networking
    e. Authorizer

12. As your school's leader, describe two accomplishments of which you are the proudest?

13. As your school's leader, describe two significant challenges you have overcome and how that process took place.
14. Thinking about your previous experience as a traditional school leader, how do the demands of the job of executive director/principal compare or contrast?
    1. Administratively
    2. Instructionally
    3. Other

Appendix B

Consent Letter

Consent Letter:
Date:

Street:
City, State Zip Code

Dear Participant:
I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Education at Gardner-Webb University. I am writing to request your participation in my dissertation study. The focus of my research is to identify traits of successful charter school leaders. The purpose will be to identify common traits of successful executive directors.

This study will allow for a greater understanding of the phenomenon of successful charter leadership by identifying traits which successful leaders utilize. I will interview several charter leaders for this study. In addition, I will conduct a limited on-site observation and a review of relevant official documents.

I am requesting you be a part of this study because you have demonstrated success as a charter school leader. Your participation is completely voluntary, and any responses shared with me will be kept confidential. All study data will be maintained in secure files and will be accessible only to me and members of my dissertation committee. Reports and other communications related to the study will not identify respondents by name, nor will they identify any schools. All participants will be invited to review and provide comments on a copy of their interview remarks prior to their inclusion in the study. All participants will be offered the final study and its findings for their consideration.

I hope that you will be able to assist me in this important research project. If you have any questions regarding the study, please feel free to contact me by phone at 315-679-2447 (home), or e-mail me at jquck723@gmail.com. My doctoral work is through Gartder-Webb University and will comply with the University IRB. My research advisor is Dr. Jeff Peal.

Attached you will find an Informed Consent Form. If you agree to participate, please fill it out and return it to me in the enclosed self-addressed and stamped envelope.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Quick

Appendix C

Consent Form

Project Title	An investigation of the characteristics successful executive directors perceive to be most important in charter schools.
Purpose of the Study	This research is being conducted Jeremy Quick at Gardner-Webb University, Boiling Springs, NC. I am inviting you to participate in this research project because you have been identified as a successful leader of a charter school. The purpose of this research project is to identify traits of successful charter school leaders.
Procedures	The procedures involve the researchers reviewing certain relevant school documents (handbooks, manuals, policies), conducting two on-site interviews with you (60-minutes and then 30-minutes), and observing you at either a staff meeting or a community event. Your participation should last no longer than 6 total weeks, and will be scheduled to cause minimal interference with your daily routine. All interviews will be audio recorded and later transcribed for accuracy. Participants must consent to be audio recorded in the interviews in order to participate in the study. All questions and research will focus on leadership traits you have demonstrated in the normal course of performing your job. Questions include: How would you describe your personal leadership style, and As your school's leader, describe two significant challenges you have overcome and how that process took place. Observation of the staff- or community meeting will be pre-arranged with you, and observation notes will be taken by the researcher. This meeting or event need last no longer than 30-minutes.
Potential Risks and Discomforts	There are no known risks associated with participating in this research project.
Potential Benefits	There are no direct benefits to you, but some possible benefits include may be findings for you, your supervising Boards of Directors, and others interested in school leadership by identifying personality and behavior traits leaders need to demonstrate in order to lead your schools to greater successes. These findings could potentially form the basis for professional development, conference presentations, and leadership evaluations.
Confidentiality	Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by storing all notes and computer files in a secure location. Notes will be locked in an office and the computer files will be password protected. The data will be retained for 12 months and then permanently destroyed. In the final study, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. A code will be placed on the survey and other data so your name and identifying data will not be recognizable. Your information may be shared with representatives of Gardner-Webb University or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.
Medical Treatment	Gardner-Webb University does not provide any medical, hospitalization or other insurance for participants in this research study, nor Gardner-Webb University provide any medical treatment or compensation for any injury sustained as a result of participation in this research study, except as required by law.
Right to	Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose

Withdraw and Questions	not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the chair or the researcher: **Jeff Peal** effpeal2010@gmail.com **Jeremy Quick** Jquick723@gmail.com
Participant Rights	If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: **Gardner-Webb University** This research has been reviewed according to the Gardner-Webb University IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.
Statement of Consent	Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form. If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.
Signature and Date	**Name Of Subject (Please Print)**
	Signature of Subject
	Date