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The Impact of Spiritual Leadership on the Leadership Practices of Public School Superintendents

Mark D. Hedger

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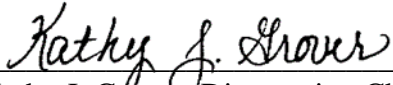School Superintendents

by

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This Dissertation has been approved as partial fulfillment

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Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree.

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Abstract

The role of the superintendent is crucial in providing the form of leadership necessary to meet the needs of all stakeholders within a school district, it takes clarity and consistency for a leader to deliver on this promise of public education (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). By demonstrating the qualities of a spiritual leader, the superintendent can play a critical role in accomplishing the goals of a school district through relationships with employees that exemplify the transformational process (Northouse, 2016). Björk et al. (2018) pointed out that superintendents must research and act on information from reliable sources to make the best choices for their students and families. In this study, the intent was to investigate the impact of spiritual-centered leadership on public school superintendents and their decision-making processes. In this qualitative study, 12 superintendents from public school districts in the state of Missouri were interviewed. Four themes emerged from the research: vision and expectations matter, hope and faith matters, love matters, and serving matters. Based on the findings of this study, public school superintendents must be knowledgeable of and free to utilize spiritual leadership qualities in leadership practices as this impacted the leadership practices and decision-making processes of those interviewed in this study.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter One: Introduction

Effective superintendent leadership is central to meeting all stakeholders' needs within a school system, and this requires clarity and consistency to deliver the promise of public education (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Superintendent success is dependent on the ability to foster high levels of student achievement. (Kirtman & Fullan, 2016). A superintendent can only achieve a high level of success by developing systems that support student needs while producing school environments that support high expectations for all students (Cawn et al., 2016).

Egel and Fry (2017) described spiritual leadership as an intrinsic motivational model designed for organizational transformation. Servant leadership is one example of spiritual leadership in that the servant leader develops credibility by not asking their followers to do anything they are not willing to do themselves (Greenleaf, 2008). Prior studies have revealed positive outcomes for organizations relating to servant leadership styles (Coetzer et al., 2017). Further research on spiritual leadership might lead superintendents to understand that their impact on a school district and community goes far beyond the scope of curriculum and instruction. (Schutte, 2016). This study's results may reinforce the idea that spiritual-centered leaders are leaders who feel a sense of calling that their lives and roles have a more significant meaning, fueled by hope and faith (Mabey et al., 2017). This study's rationale is to understand better the leadership styles of current school leaders, who are grounded in faith, and identify leader attributes that may enhance student and school success.

This introductory chapter was organized into the background of the significance of spiritual leadership and the relevance of servant leadership and transformational

leadership, the conceptual and theoretical frameworks, the statement of the problem,

research questions, the significance of the study, definitions of key terms, delimitations,

limitations, assumptions, and summary. This dissertation's research was focused on the

importance of school leaders who consider themselves to be Christian leaders using

Biblical principles as a guide in all areas of their leadership.

Background of the Study

Previous studies have shown that spiritual leadership behavior can have an

abundance of beneficial impacts on employees, which include increasing life satisfaction

and organizational commitment (Fry & Slocum, 2008; Salehzadeh et al., 2015),

enhancing organizational citizenship behavior (Chen et al., 2013; Chen & Yang, 2012),

and encouraging performance (Krishnakumar et al., 2015). Pio and Tampi (2018)

concluded that spiritual leadership positively impacts life quality, job satisfaction, and

organizational behavior. More specifically, when spiritual leaders are perceived as having

high integrity levels, employees whose beliefs are in high congruence between their

values and their leader's values may be more attentive and receptive to the spiritual

leader's influence (Low & Ayoko, 2020). On the other hand, when spiritual leaders are

perceived to have low integrity levels, employees may feel more comfortable deviating

from their leader's values (Hewlin et al., 2017). Çimen (2018) found a positive and

significant relationship between spiritual leadership and organizational culture and

academic achievement through his research. Çimen (2018) studied the relationship

between high school teachers' spiritual leadership behaviors, organizational culture, and

academic success. Therefore, the idea of spirituality in educational leadership is

warranted because organizational transformation depends on effective leadership (Egel & Fry, 2017).

Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

This study's conceptual framework was Fry's (2013) spiritual leadership model. In Fry's (2013) spiritual leadership model, organizations that foster spiritual wellbeing through modeling the leadership qualities of altruistic love, vision, hope, and faith create a sense of membership and calling in the employees, which increased organizational commitment, life satisfaction and productivity. Servant leaders seek to build others up through several foundational characteristics: love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service (Shaw & Newton, 2014).

Transformational leadership, a theoretical framework of this study, has been one of the most influential leadership models of educational leadership over several decades (Berkovich, 2016). As Kouzes and Posner (2017) proposed, transformational leadership theory is based on inspiring and motivating individuals toward a shared vision to achieve goals at a high level. Kouzes and Posner (2017) conducted an extensive study of over 75,000 leaders over a three-decade span, which concluded with the creation of a leadership framework that identified five exemplary leadership practices that are transformational: (a) model the way, (b) inspire a shared vision, (c) challenge the process, (d) enable others to act, and (e) encourage the heart. Quin et al. (2015) concluded that the five leadership practices from Kouzes and Posner (2017) were frequently identified in successful schools. Of the five practices, inspiring a shared vision and challenging the process appeared to have the most influence on student achievement (Quin et al., 2015).

Statement of the Problem

This study's research problem was to determine if practicing spiritual leadership principles matters to public school superintendents (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Several researchers have determined that spiritual leadership practices can be defined as the leader modeling Biblical practices; inspiring others through a shared vision and image of what could be; challenging the status quo, and looking for new ways to do things; enabling, strengthening, and mentoring employees and future leaders; and encouraging, recognizing, and celebrating employees (Black, 2015; Kouzes & Posner, 2017a; Northouse, 2016). Research has shown that transformational leaders can impact the effectiveness of employees (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018) as well as demonstrating that transformational leadership required not only senior leadership endorsement but also sustained efforts at the organizational and individual levels of the organization (Bakker et al., 2011)

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the impact of spiritual-centered leadership on public school superintendents and their decision-making processes. The spiritual leadership models of servant leadership and transformational leadership were used to evaluate how and to what extent superintendents in Southwest Missouri public school districts are using the Biblical principles of spiritual leadership to guide their leadership.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following research questions and hypotheses guided the study:

1. What opinions and attitudes do superintendents believe drives their purpose as

school superintendent?

2. What role do superintendents perceive spirituality plays in becoming better leaders?

3. What specific decision-making practices do superintendents believe reflect spiritually centered school leadership?

Significance of the Study

Exemplary leadership matters in education to positively influence commitment to and motivation for the organization's success (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Educational research results have revealed the fundamental premise that impactful leadership matters, second only to teaching regarding student learning (Leithwood et al., 2004). Political, economic, and social change significantly affect education (Kirtman & Fullan, 2016), leading the superintendent to play a crucial role in leading the educational system successfully through society's changes and demands for equity and excellence in education. As a spiritual leader, the superintendent can play a critical role in times of change through relationships with employees that exemplify the transformational process (Northouse, 2016). The school leader is confronted with many challenges and responsibilities that create increased pressure, stress, and burnout (Howard, 2014; Pengilly, 2010; Roelle, 2009), diminishing the leader's effectiveness (Darmody & Smith, 2016; Federici & Skaalvik, 2012). This study's significance was in exploring the views of leaders of public-school districts, the superintendents, whose perspectives are lacking in the literature (Ronfeldt, 2015), by adding to the literature articulating the essential qualities of superintendent spiritual leadership behaviors on school success.

Definition of Key Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined:

Authentic Leadership

Authentic leadership overlaps contemporary perspectives that include transformational, charismatic, servant, and spiritual leadership. (Klenke, 2007).

Follower

Followers are defined as those taking the direction from the leader and applying their knowledge and skill to accomplish the goals laid out by the leader (Aleksic, 2016).

Leadership

Leadership is a process used to guide, direct, and manage a group of people in an organization (Chavous, 2016).

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership is "an (1) other-oriented approach to leadership (2) manifested through one-on-one prioritizing of [individual follower's] needs and interests, (3) and outward reorienting of [the leader's] concern for self towards concern for others within the organization and the larger community" (Eva et al., 2019, p. 114).

Spiritual Leadership

Spiritual leadership is a type of leadership that inspires workers with a myriad of intrinsic motivation factors that include vision, hope and faith, altruistic love, task involvement, and goal identification (Fry, 2003)

Superintendent

The superintendent is the school district's chief educational officer hired by the school board to provide operational and instructional leadership to the school district. The

superintendent is a customized role that ensures collaborative learning among educators for students' cyclical learning commitments (Domenech et al., 2016).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is a leadership theory in which organizational goals are achieved through motivation and increasing employees' self-values, seemingly different from instructional leadership models (Ross & Gray, 2006).

Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions

The scope of the study was bounded by the following delimitations:

Time Frame

The research study was conducted during the spring semester of 2021.

Location of the Study

This study took place in Southwest Missouri.

Sample

The participants in this study consisted of practicing superintendents in the state of Missouri.

Criteria

The participants of this study were superintendents who were members of the Missouri Association of Christian Administrators.

The following limitations were identified in this study:

Sample Demographics

This study's primary limitation was that the participants represent superintendents in the state of Missouri who are members of the Missouri Association of Christian Administrators. Since only one state was studied, the results might not reflect those of

leaders in other areas of the United States who are implementing Biblical leadership practices. The practices of Missouri school leaders surveyed and interviewed could be the exception rather than the norm for all superintendents across the United States. Thus, the limited scope of location could reduce the generalizability of research results.

Researcher Bias

The researcher of this study is the director of the Missouri Association of Christian Administrators. Therefore, the individuals interviewed by the researcher might feel pressure to respond in a certain way because the one asking the questions and conducting the study was the organization's director. Since the researcher was the director of this association, the director's position could have affected the outcome of the study, which could have led to skewed responses from participants.

Instrument

The researcher created the survey. Therefore, the instrument could be considered a limitation.

The following assumptions were accepted:

1. The responses of the participants were offered honestly and willingly.

2. The school leaders would have demonstrated at least a few of the characteristics of spiritual leadership. Since the 10 characteristics of Greenleaf's (1970, 1996, 2002) servant leadership theory were common positive leadership traits, this seemed a safe assumption (Northouse, 2016).

Summary

Chapter One was focused on spiritual leadership and the essential components of servant leadership and transformational leadership. Despite its documented existence,

productivity, and positive impact on organizations, the theory of spiritual leadership and its impact at the district level on public education has yet to be thoroughly researched (Creswell & Poth 2018). This lack of research necessitated the need for additional research, thus prompting this study.

Chapter Two is a review of literature defining spiritual leadership and discussing two prominent spiritual leadership styles, servant leadership, and transformational leadership. An analysis comparing and contrasting the different models was made, and the qualities and characteristics of spiritual leadership were addressed. Following an introduction of Chapter Two, the Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks were discussed. Servant leadership, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, laissez-faire leadership, and authentic leadership were described and compared.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Researchers have analyzed spiritual leadership from a diverse perspective, with varying viewpoints, and engaged in different approaches to studying the topic over the past few decades (Elias et al., 2018). According to Makkar and Singh (2018), spirituality is defined "as a transcendental relationship with the higher being, leading us to the path of self-awareness and self-engagement, which enables us to serve others for the benefit of society at large" (p. 6). Among the many organizations in need of impactful leadership are school districts (Ross & Cozzens, 2016). Many people value the importance of educating children, as proven by the funding and resources allocated to our education systems (Ross & Cozzens, 2016).

Kareem and Patrick (2019) defined educational leadership as "the process of enlisting and guiding the talents and energies of teachers, pupils, and parents toward achieving common educational aims" (p. 53). An educational leader's actions either help or hinder the school in terms of staffing, direction, and curriculum. (Ronfeldt, 2015). The same is true for identifying and stabilizing the school's direction because school leaders may lead as many as five competing generations within their school district (Kareem & Patrick, 2019).

A literature review relative to spiritual leadership is provided in Chapter Two. Fry's (2013) spiritual leadership model is presented. The servant leadership model (Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, 2016) and transformational leadership theory (Kouzes & Posner, 2017) are presented as the study's frameworks. A comprehensive review and comparison among servant leadership, transformational leadership,

transactional leadership, and laissez-faire leadership is presented. The impact of these theories on educational leadership concludes the review of literature.

Conceptual Framework and Theoretical Framework

The frameworks for this study support Fry's (2013) spiritual leadership model. In the spiritual leadership model, Fry (2013) suggested organizations foster spiritual wellbeing through modeling the leadership qualities of vision, altruistic love, hope, faith, and spiritual survival. These qualities create a sense of membership and calling in employees, which increased organizational commitment, life satisfaction, and productivity (Fry, 2013).

According to Fry (2013), vision provides a picture of the organization's potential that contains implicit or explicit reasons people should work to reach that potential. Vision serves three critical functions: it clarifies the overall direction of the organization; it coordinates the activities of a large variety of people within the organization; and it motivates members of the organization by providing direction to where the organization is going, giving meaning to the work of the organization, and encouraging hope and faith (Fry, 2013).

Altruistic love is essential to spiritual leadership in that it defines a sense of wholeness, harmony, and well-being (Fry, 2013). This quality is produced through the values of care, concern, and appreciation of others (2013). According to Fry (2013), the practices of patience, kindness, lack of envy, forgiveness, humility, trust, loyalty, and truthfulness are all evident in a spiritual leader and consistent with the idea of agape love (Fry, 2013). A compassionate or altruistic love is important within the organization

because it enables leaders to develop empathy for others, therefore enabling followers to desire to see others within the organization succeed (Smylie et al., 2016).

Hope and faith are interrelated and serve as the basis on which the members of the organization are committed to the belief that the vision of the organization will be achieved (Fry, 2013). According to Fry (2013), "People with hope and faith have a vision of where they are going and how to get there" (p. 93). This hope and faith provide the members of the organization to be willing to do what it takes to achieve the goals of the organization (Fry, 2013). Researchers have analyzed spiritual leadership from many perspectives, investigated a variety of viewpoints, and engaged in a handful of approaches to study the concept over the past few decades (Elias et al., 2018).

Spiritual survival is considered a sense of calling or a feeling of being called to a certain profession and how it pertains to the need for social connection (Fry, 2013). Calling is associated with how an individual derives meaning and purpose in life (Frick, 2016). Feelings of understanding and appreciation result from social interactions people in the organization are involved in and the perception of the quality of those interactions (Fry, 2013). This sense of calling is universal and is the foundation of what people seek at work: meaningful work that provides a sense of purpose; a sense of connection and positive social relationships; and the ability to live a connected life consistent with the goals of the organization (Fry & Egel, 2017).

Two examples of spiritual leadership are the servant leadership model and transformational leadership theory. Servant leaders seek to build others up through several foundational characteristics: love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service (Shaw & Newton, 2014). The transformational leadership theory, developed

by Kouzes and Posner (2017), is based on the concepts of inspiring and motivating individuals toward a shared vision to achieve goals at a high level.

Overview of School District Leadership

Many chief executive officers are charged with leading a potentially large group of people in one direction toward a common goal; this requires the leader to develop and perfect critical skills such as political intelligence and work with teams (Anderson, 2016). Influence is a tool used by leaders throughout time to produce results, even before language was developed (Sharot, 2017). Heath et al. (2017) found influence to be a skill that leaders can use to impact people in such a way to encourage followers to support their initiatives. Bridges et al. (2019) stated, "Influencer superintendents can increase board effectiveness, public confidence, and expectations for effective democratic governance by building trust and better school board practices" (p. 35). Björk et al. (2018) found that superintendents must seek and then act on information from reliable sources to make the best choices for their students and families.

The turnover rate for school district superintendents is high and directly correlates to the numerous and challenging responsibilities of the leadership role (McCormick, 2016). The variety of impact of job performance factors influences the school district superintendent to act with a sense of urgency to provide a sense of leadership stability for the school district (Zheng et al., 2017). The superintendent must assume a leadership role of shared decision-making of responsibilities while communicating and supporting the district's mission and goals (Lanoue & Zepeda, 2018).

The challenges faced by school district superintendents lead to a more specific need to develop specific and effective leadership skills (Machell & Evans, 2019).

According to Duke and VanGronigen (2018), school district superintendents can utilize leadership teams to train personnel. School district leaders are challenged to train leadership team members due to limited personnel (Marsh & Koppich, 2018). It is important in school districts for a school leader to cultivate a collaborative culture within the school district (Preston & Barnes, 2017). Humility is an important component of collaboration in that this quality allows leaders to develop of view of themselves that is reflective of their strengths and weaknesses, allowing them to fully invest in their followers (Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2017).

The high expectations of the community and the school board for achieving the measures on both accountability systems are a pressure that weighs heavily on the school district superintendent regularly (McCormick, 2016). In a school district culture, the superintendent's leadership practices are grounded in the belief that the leaders must monitor improvement activities to achieve desired outcomes (Gannon-Slater et al., 2017). The school board is tasked with holding the superintendent to high expectations for performance by providing leadership role clarity through a credible evaluation system (Henrikson, 2018).

According to Campbell and Fullan (2019), "there is a direct relationship between purposeful board superintendent engagement, a shared moral imperative, a collaborative, trust-based governance culture, and sustainable, long term success" (p. 72). Effort and continuous focus on building and sustaining relationships can be nurtured to increase the sustainability of the district vision, mission, and goals and the superintendent's tenure (Briggs et al., 2017). During difficult times, "Superintendents are typically the only ones who see the big picture" (Nyland, 2019, p. 17). Pressures of increased educational costs

and needing to serve a more diverse student population can cause controversy when demographics shift, along with resources allocated to close gaps in achievement (Nyland, 2019). James Harvey, executive director of National Superintendents Roundtable, stated, "The sense you get from the discussion is that school leaders all share similar problems, but they manifest themselves in different ways" (Davis, 2019, p. 22).

There is current research on how superintendents can successfully accomplish their leadership role; however, there is little research regarding how superintendents "can persuade people whom they can't control but on whom their success depends" (Hill & Jochim, 2018, p. 2). Superintendents need to have the ability to respond to the diverse interests of school board members who may be representing differing constituents within the community (Hill & Jochim, 2018). McGee (2019) noted, "Superintendents owe it to their students to develop positive working relationships with all board members because without board support, leaders cannot help students or staff, schools or communities" (p. 30).

Allen (2017) found that superintendents can play a critical role in influencing student achievement. Superintendents can positively contribute to student achievement through several methods, including by creating opportunities for professional development and collaboration that is focused on rigorous and relevant instruction that can improve student learning (Allen, 2017). An intensive study by Midcontinent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) showed that consistency in school district leadership was attributed to higher student achievement levels (Sparks, 2017). It has also been argued that alignment between the board and the superintendent can significantly impact student achievement (Blasko, 2016). In summary, superintendent leadership

supports successful outcomes for school districts by creating stability and continuity within the school district (Mincberg, 2017).

Servant Leadership

In 1970, Greenleaf launched the servant leadership movement with the classic essay, *The Servant as Leader* (Frick, 2016). Leo's spiritual journey, a character from Herman Hesse's 1956 novel *Journey to the East*, inspired Greenleaf to believe in the idea of an individual serving and leading (Fitzgerald, 2015). Greenleaf was a Quaker; therefore, he based the essay on spiritual qualities such as the Quaker teachings and practices (Frick, 2016).

According to the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership (2016), a servant-leader focuses primarily on people's growth and well-being and the communities in which they exist. The servant-leader is committed to sharing power, putting the needs of others first, and helping people develop and perform to their potential. Servant leadership often seems contradictory to the concept of a leader demonstrating strength and power, such as military leadership (Borchers, 2016). The servant-leader leads from the organization's center, not from the top of a hierarchy (Von Fischer, 2017).

While many leadership theories operate to a certain degree of command-and-control processes, servant leadership works in direct contrast to that way of thinking; in other words, it is counterintuitive to the modern top-down leadership structure (Northouse, 2018). Servant leadership is based on the premise that the leader's needs are subordinate to those of the follower and the leader's higher purpose (Northouse, 2018). However, Afaq et al. (2017) determined a significant and positive impact between servant leadership and employees' job satisfaction.

Servant leadership requires a person to embrace a new paradigm of leadership where community, teamwork, and shared decision-making take the place of traditional top-down leadership (Crippen & Willows, 2019). Lu (2018) determined servant leaders could cultivate more profound and meaningful relationships with their employees. Therefore, servant leaders engage their employees through their intentional and moral commitment (Bao et al., 2018).

Bao et al. (2018) encouraged servant leaders to regularly communicate with employees and initiate meaningful dialogue with others through three approaches: mentorships, modeling, and collaborative decision-making. An added benefit to this method is that these approaches provide a perception of genuine care and, thus, can enhance employee alignment and identification with the leader (Verdorfer, 2019). Wang (2017) also found that servant leadership transcended the leader and follower relationship to positively spill over to the leader and follower's work-family balance.

Autry (2001) viewed servant leadership through performance expectations created by employees and reciprocal performance reviews of the leader. Servant leadership requires the leader to embrace a new paradigm of leadership in which community, teamwork, and shared decision-making take the place of traditional hierarchical leadership models (Crippen & Willows, 2019). Therefore, the servant leader mindset requires leaders to exhibit the qualities of being authentic, vulnerable, accepting, present, and useful (Northouse, 2018).

The concept of a leader being authentic is centered on simply being and acting consistently in every circumstance (Autry, 2001). Authenticity is vital in the expectations that leaders have for their followers (Crippen & Willows, 2019). Employees find

security and safety through the assurance that authenticity provides while allowing

followers to perform at higher levels (Sun, 2019).

Verdorfer (2019) stated that higher perceptions of a leader's level of authenticity

increased their employees' respect for the leader, making it highly likely to encourage

more direct and intentional influence by the leader. The authenticity of a servant leader

enables them to maintain their moral obligation of ensuring follower success by

providing clarity and support (Bande, 2016). Thus, servant leaders can engage their

employees through intentional and moral commitment (Bao et al., 2018). It is crucial for

servant school leaders to put systems in place that can lead to the engagement of parents,

staff, and other stakeholders in the process of shared decision-making within the school

environment (Liden et al., 2014).

Vulnerability calls for servant leaders to trust in employees and admit the leader's

lack of control (Autry, 2001). Therefore, servant leaders must recognize their meekness

while empowering followers, potentially laying the foundation for the misconception of

weakness (Bande, 2016). Servant leadership may not always be the appropriate

leadership approach for every situation, depending upon the organization's culture (Brohi,

2018).

True servant leaders must exhibit the quality of acceptance by abandoning the

idea of winners and losers (Autry, 2001). Servant leaders need to embrace the idea that

their followers are not perfect because they understand the imperfection and vulnerability

within themselves (Bande, 2016). Lu (2018) believed that leaders need to be empathetic

with their followers and encourage personal expression from employees. Listening alone

is not sufficient; authentic acceptance required leaders to invest in identifying situational

characteristics and meet the specific needs of the employees (Sun, 2019). Thus, authentically accepting leaders shed their judgment of followers as they expect others would do for them (Sun, 2019).

Being present provides reassurance to employees through the actions of the servant leader (Bande, 2016). Bao et al. (2018) called for servant leaders to communicate with followers regularly and develop meaningful conversations to eliminate misconceptions through three approaches: mentorships, modeling, and collaborative decision-making. This approach to relationship building provides the employee with a feeling of genuine care and cultivates the relationship between the follower and leader (Verdorfer, 2019). The presence of the leader is essential when attempting to lead holistically (Wang, 2017). Servant leaders need to be compelled to monitor their actions while continuing to understand the idea that their presence is essential for personal preservation (Stollberger, 2019).

Servant leaders must remain helpful to both the follower and the organization (Bande, 2016). This idea of usefulness is aligned with building community (Bauer, 2019), cultivating productive behaviors (Stollberger, 2019), and preserving care (Autry, 2001). In addition, helpful servant leaders seek to actively invest in the future career success of their followers (Bao et al., 2018). When servant leaders seek to influence others and invest in cultivating employees, two results are produced, prosocial behaviors and employee performance (Stollberger, 2019). Hung et al. (2016), concluded the ability of a leader to exhibit the quality of service can be the necessary agent of change to achieve success within the organization.

Transformational Leadership

The transformational leadership theory has been one of the most influential leadership models in education over the past few decades (Berkovich, 2016). Political and business leaders utilized the transformational leadership model before the model was identified as an effective leadership model for educational leaders (Berkovich, 2016). Transformational leaders in education focus on creating a positive school climate, building relationships, and communicating a shared vision with staff (Urick & Bowers, 2014).

Hooper and Bernhardt (2016) provided an overview of transformational leadership that emphasized: "the unique role of the transformational leader to understand school culture as influenced by the values, beliefs, and mindsets of teachers, students, and families that shape their behavior" (p. 14). The transformational leader develops a learning community with both teachers and parents based on trust, respect, and civility (Hooper & Bernhardt, 2016). Kouali (2017) suggested that transformational leadership may enhance teacher job satisfaction, effort, and effectiveness due to the school leader's ability to respect teachers' unique personal needs.

Transformational leaders utilize Kouzes and Posner's (2017) theoretical framework, one of the leadership frameworks chosen for this study due to its use in assessing superintendents' leadership practices (Jordan, 2018). Transformational leadership has been one of the most influential leadership models applied to educational leadership over several decades (Berkovich, 2016). As Kouzes and Posner (2017) proposed, transformational leadership is based on the concepts of inspiring and motivating individuals toward a shared vision to achieve goals at a high level. Kouzes

and Posner (2017) conducted an extensive study of over 75,000 leaders over a three-decade span, which concluded with the creation of a leadership framework that identified five exemplary leadership practices that are transformational: (a) model the way, (b) inspire a shared vision, (c) challenge the process, (d) enable others to act, and (e) encourage the heart. Quin et al. (2015) concluded that the five leadership practices from Kouzes and Posner (2017) were frequently identified in successful schools. The practices of inspiring a shared vision and challenging the process influenced student achievement (Quin et al., 2015).

Transformational leadership theory is similar to servant leadership in that it falls under the category of relationship theories that study the connections formed between the leader and the follower (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). Engagement between the leader and the follower is necessary to create a bond that motivates and morally uplifts both the leader and the follower (Lamb, 2013). Transformational leaders develop a high level of trust in their organizations by standing by their positions that are communicated (Northouse, 2013).

The foundation for transformational leadership is based on an agreement rooted in the school's vision between administrators and teachers, focusing on student achievement and leading to the school district's success (Moolenaar & Sleegers, 2015). Commitment, participation, and performance are enhanced when a relationship is created between the leader and followers (Anderson, 2017). Transformational leaders can motivate followers beyond self-interest utilizing five leadership dimensions: (a) idealized attributes, (b) idealized behaviors, (c) inspirational motivation, (d) intellectual stimulation, and (e) individualized consideration (Allen, 2015).

The dimension, idealized attributes, is in reference to leaders who exhibit charismatic social personality traits (Dartey-Baah, 2015). The leader exhibits the qualities of confidence, power, and focus on the ethical considerations of the school (Allen, 2015). The leadership dimension of idealized attributes is very similar to idealized attributes, which is in reference to the leaders' actions, which are also charismatic (Allen, 2015). The leader is focused on values, beliefs, and communicating a clear purpose and vision for the organization (Allen, 2015). These two dimensions are often combined, and the two behaviors are frequently combined and called idealized influence (Arenas, 2018). A leader exhibiting the qualities of idealized influence is charismatic, admired, trusted, and respected (Arenas, 2018).

The third dimension, inspirational motivation, focuses on a leader who is a strong communicator with the skills to develop and inspire shared responsibility in followers (Dartey-Baah, 2015). The inspirational leader can motivate followers by providing purpose to their work and challenging them in their work (Arenas, 2018). Leaders who demonstrate inspirational motivation are adept in the ability to share the school's vision, mission, and goals while optimistically inspiring followers to envision success and fulfill goals (Allen, 2015).

The fourth dimension of transformational leadership, intellectual stimulation, is based on the belief that transformational leaders can inspire employees to be innovative and creative problem solvers (Dartey-Baah, 2015). The leader inspires followers and challenges them to find innovative solutions to existing problems in new creative ways (Arenas, 2018). School administrators who exhibit intellectual stimulation will not

publicly criticize a teacher's mistakes but will provide support in a way that builds efficacy and confidence in teachers (Northouse, 2016).

The fifth transformational leadership dimension, individualized consideration, references that transformational leaders treat each follower as an individual, both personally and professionally (Dartey-Baah, 2015). Leaders who demonstrate the dimension of individualized consideration believe in an approach centered on coaching, mentoring, and supporting followers to promote growth in an organization (Dartey-Baah, 2015). Administrators who utilize individualized consideration skills recognize teachers' strengths and seek to mentor them to influence teachers' perceptions and the school climate (Allen, 2015). Employees will exhibit skills specific to their strengths and weaknesses and the consideration of the leader, who will adjust and adapt to the needs of each follower accordingly (Lawlor, 2015).

Sarwar and Mumtaz (2017) identified the importance of transformational leaders in developing trust from their followers and understanding what motivates their followers. There is research to indicate that a servant leader's trust is perceived differently because these types of leaders put their followers ahead of themselves (Hasel & Grover, 2017). This act of putting followers' needs before themselves enables servant leaders to develop a personal, rewarding, and bonding trust with their followers (Heyler & Martin, 2018).

Transformational leader's goal is to focus more on followers' systems, while transactional leaders focus more on controlling or organizing followers (Rathnaraj & Vimala, 2018). This argument suggests that transformational and transactional leaders focus more on structure and systems than on their followers. (Rathnaraj & Vimala, 2018).

This focus does not necessarily suggest that transformational and transactional leaders are not people leaders but suggests the follower serving others is not necessarily as important to the leader as encouraging followers to complete the task at hand (Heyler & Martin, 2018). In addition, Heyler and Martin (2018) stated that transformational and transactional leaders are more focused on the task, objectives, and goals as the vehicle to accomplish the organizational goals and believe the follower's needs should be the same as the organization's needs.

Rathnaraj and Vimala (2018) describe transformational leaders as viewing the organization's need to influence followers and form them into an organization's purpose. This study also showed that transactional leaders used rewards to influence followers to gain support in order to accomplish the goals and objectives of the organization (Rathnaraj & Vimala, 2018). Imen et al. (2018) described transformational leaders as building inspiration around the vision and using this gain follower commitment, implying that transformational and transactional leaders project a self-focus behavior rather than a follower focus. It is imperative for a leader to have the ability to communicate the vision of the organization in order to maximize success (Jensen et al., 2018). This Effective communication develops consistency in belief systems between leaders and followers, helping to develop the necessary culture for the vision to be implemented (Seto & Sarros, 2016).

In a study, Gandolfi et al. (2017) described how leadership styles are shifting into categories and are continuously emerging and transitioning as leadership changes. Miranda and Allen (2017) showed that new generations are seeking and expecting

different leadership styles. Ohmer et al. (2018) argued that younger generations seek leadership that focuses on people than on goals and objectives.

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership is evident in an organization when changes occur during exchanges between leader and follower (Dartey-Baah, 2015). This type of leadership cultivates a subordinate culture in the school setting (Mette & Scribner, 2014). The transactional leader is task-oriented and more focused on job performance than on relation-based practices (Dartey-Baah, 2015). The three factors of transactional leadership are (a) contingent reward leadership, (b) active management-by-exception, and (c) passive management-by-exception (Dartey-Baah, 2015).

Contingent reward leadership describes administrators who focus on the assignment of tasks and supervision and reward performance for creating the desired outcome, leading to extrinsic motivation (Dartey-Baah, 2015). This factor of transactional leadership is a quality of leaders who are known to maintain the status quo (Northouse, 2016). Followers of transactional leaders understand what must be done to be rewarded by praise, recognition, resources, or monetary methods (Arenas, 2018).

Active management-by-exception is evident when a leader ensures that specific standards are met by continuously monitoring the performance of followers on various tasks (Sayadi, 2016). Leaders who utilize active management-by-exception focus attention on deviations from standards (Dartey-Baah, 2015). Transactional leaders who rely on this component of leadership could increase stress on followers leading to a lowering of employer self-esteem (Arenas, 2018).

Passive management-by-exception is evident when a leader is inactive and steps in only when standards are not met (Dartey-Baah, 2015). Leaders who apply this type of leadership do not take action until mistakes are made, waiting passively until the leader sees the need to engage (Sayadi, 2016). If followers are not complaining and operations seem to be running well, the leader will not get involved (Arenas, 2018).

Laissez-Faire Leadership

Laissez-Faire leadership is on the opposite end of the spectrum from servant, transformational, and transactional leadership (Yang, 2015). Laissez-Faire leaders provide followers with freedom within the school environment (Yang & Dong, 2017). This approach provides followers with complete independence, making it crucial for educators to be highly skilled, trustworthy, and confident in their motivation (Yang & Dong, 2017).

Decision-making is one characteristic that is lacking in a laissez-faire leader due to the leader's belief that educators are skilled and professional, and therefore should be capable of making decisions without interference from the leader (Yang, 2015). Yang (2015) contended that leader involvement could negatively impact performance, and leaving educators to decide for themselves can lead to empowerment and intrinsic motivation for the employee. The laissez-faire leader's responsibility is to be supportive and ensure the resources are available for teachers to do their jobs (Yang & Dong, 2017).

Cooperative planning is an approach embraced by the laissez-faire leader (Al-Maki & Juan, 2018). The belief is that the leader assigns the task, but the plan's development is left to the educators, leading to cooperative teamwork among the staff

(Al-Maki & Juan, 2018). A laissez-faire leader has confidence and respect for the educators in their charge; therefore, there is no regular feedback (Sharma & Sing, 2013). Instead, laissez-faire leaders trust that expectations will be met and are comfortable sharing authority with the staff (Sharma & Sing, 2013).

The laissez-faire leader is resourceful and strives to provide resources to teachers to better help the educators meet the needs of their students (Anastasia, 2017). Problem-solving skills are utilized in this leadership approach while seeking resources and assessing the needs of the staff (Anastasia, 2017). A laissez-faire leader also connects people, allowing educators to learn from observing others to determine what works and what does not work (Anastasia, 2017).

Some researchers believe that the basis of laissez-faire leadership is trust (Al-Maki & Juan, 2018). A laissez-faire leader needs to trust their educators as the leader is accountable for the educator's actions and results (Anastasia, 2017). An essential component of gaining the trust of the educators is actively listening to the employee's needs and having a clear plan (Anastasia, 2017). Trust can have a significant impact on the relationship between teachers and school leaders, which can therefore have a major impact on the overall climate of the school district (Lu et al., 2019). This establishment of trust can help create the transparency needed to promote teamwork within the organization (Kars & Inandi, 2018). Schools should seek to establish trust within their school district in order to reach the desired outcomes for students (Jeyaraj & Gandolfi, 2019).

A disadvantage to the laissez-faire leadership style in education is that student academics can suffer, and a lack of educator motivation can occur (Yang & Dong, 2017).

A laissez-faire leader is not concerned with achievement outcomes, feeling their role is not interfering and allowing the teacher to control the outcomes (Yang & Dong, 2017). This hands-off approach can lead to inconsistency in expectations from the leader and a lack of consequences for not completing tasks (Anastasia, 2017).

Authentic Leadership

Authentic leadership theory does not have a clear definition; however, it can be categorized into three different perspectives: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and developmental (Northouse, 2016). Northouse (2016) contended that these perspectives use four primary factors to establish the characteristics of authentic leadership: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency. There are four attributes that have an impact on authentic leadership: confidence, hope, optimism, and resilience (Lee et al., 2019).

Authentic leadership has emerged in the last two decades and is based on the foundational premise that authentic leadership is an open and non-defensive manner of interacting with others and oneself in the form of self-reflection (Gill et al., 2018). Gill et al. (2018) proposed that authentic leadership is an effective leadership style and is needed to establish alignment between intended, actual, and perceived leadership practices through the leader's intrapersonal qualities and the trust established between leaders and followers. Covelli and Mason (2017) rationalized that authentic leadership is a leadership theory that has influences from a multitude of other theories, including but not limited to transformational leadership, servant leadership, ethical leadership, and situational leadership. The major difference in authentic leadership from other leadership theories is that leaders strive to be authentic in all actions above everything else, and there are no

necessarily unique skills needed to accomplish this goal (Covelli & Mason, 2017). Covelli and Mason (2017) contended that this unique concept allows the leader to adjust to certain situations more effectively based on self-reflection from past experiences. This concept helps the leader initiate action, motivate followers, build confidence, increase morale, and create a positive work environment (Hoch et al., 2018).

The Greek philosopher Socrates emphasized the significance of self-awareness; current researchers have built on this concept of authentic leadership and agree with the importance of self-awareness (Podrez, 2017). Recent researchers have established self-awareness, authenticity, and self-regulation as critical elements of leadership (Wei et al., 2018). One model for authentic leadership from the organizational perspective is Bill George's model, which emphasizes the need for authentic leadership in management by reflecting on successes over time as a successful entrepreneur (Qureshi & Hassan, 2019).

Huat and Rampersad (2017) described an authentic leader as one "who leads by core values strongly rooted in ourselves and not leading by emotion, indecisiveness, and lack of transparency . . . leads by example and not by words alone . . . someone who is trusted and respected" (p. 11). Authentic leaders need to provide the follower with the impression that the leader genuinely cares for the people he or she leads as well as what is best for the organization (Huat & Rampersad, 2017). This practice was demonstrated by the Apostle Paul, who showed heartfelt emotion and affection towards the members of the early church (Ledbetter, 2016). Hoch et al. (2016) noted, there "appears to be significant overlap between authentic and transformational leadership" (p. 6).

The outcomes for research on authentic leadership include attitudinal and behavior outcomes (Banks et al., 2016). There are strong correlations in the areas of

authentic leadership and follower job satisfaction (Levesque-Cote et al., 2018), follower

satisfaction with supervisor (Banks et al., 2016), group and organizational performance

(Banks et al., 2016), and task performance (Levesque-Cote et al., 2018). Banks et al.

(2016) suggested that these outcomes could influence group and organizational

performance levels, which is in contrast to transformational leadership, which focuses

upon individual performance. There is also a gap in the literature regarding developing

the moral aspect of authentic leadership (Banks et al., 2016).

      One of the most important aspects of authentic leadership theory is relational

transparency and has been consistently apparent throughout authentic leadership

development as a leadership theory (Kempster et al., 2019). Kempster et al. (2019)

suggested there is the potential for conflict to exist when a leader attempts to promote

relational transparency and discusses the importance of leaders to be authentic and

transparent, but careful to control pure emotion to promote the follower and

organizational expectation of sound leadership. The ability of a leader to utilize relational

transparency has a tremendous impact on the perceived trustworthiness of the leader in

the view of the follower, which can lead to improved job performance and job

satisfaction of the employee (Gatling et al., 2017). Gatling et al. (2017) emphasized the

importance of conveying that poor relational transparency can impact followers' ethical

behaviors. The lack of relational transparency can result in distrust of the leader and

covering up errors to the detriment of the organization and leader (Gatling et al., 2017).

      Iszatt-White and Kempster (2019) noted that relational transparency could occur

when leaders make intentional efforts to share their sincere feelings, part of which is their

emotions with others appropriately. Individuals should express both negative and positive

aspects of self through open communication framed by the courage to be genuine when interacting with followers (Iszatt-White & Kempster, 2019). Authentic leaders often share their feelings with followers regarding their work, personal and professional hardships and successes, and their reflection of professional development (Wei et al., 2018). Due to the relational transparency with employees, authentic leaders can earn genuine respect from their followers, giving the followers the ability to connect with the leader's values, beliefs, and goals becoming more committed to the organization (Mehmood et al., 2016)

A low level of authentic leadership within an organization can exist in leaders as a lack of purpose, leading to a lack of self-awareness regarding where the leader stands, their direction, and their purpose (Qu et al., 2019). Qu et al. (2019) further found that authentic leaders act in a way that reflects their words and values, which can create a resistance to external pressures that could comprise those values into the organization. Self-awareness is a lengthy process, mainly because authentic leadership can influence followers' work engagement, which can have a positive or negative effect on job performance over the years (Wei et al., 2018). According to Sandhu and Dastgeer (2019), a leader's purpose is demonstrated through passion; leaders who are not authentic lack interest in what they do and the intrinsic motivation and enthusiasm needed to derive their energy and internal will to execute their leadership duties.

A lack of values can exist within organizations by employees and their leaders when a leader's behaviors fail to show their commitment to morality; there is a potential for dishonesty and a disregard for an employee's rights (Schein & Schein, 2018). Social learning theory suggested that employees within an organization learn appropriate

behavior from the behavior and norms observed through an organization's leader (Cheng et al., 2019). Internal moral perspective is described as a process of self-regulation in which leaders use their inner moral values and standards to guide their behaviors instead of giving in to external pressure that could control their actions; the lack of an internalized moral perspective undermines the authenticity of leadership in an organization (Wei et al., 2018). Qureshi and Hassan (2019) emphasized the importance of the self-regulatory aspect of authentic leadership by contending that individuals can control the degree to which they accept the influence of others on their practices.

Sandhu and Dastgeer (2019) described self-discipline as the ability to identify and focus on a particular goal and move forward to put the necessary actions in place to implement the strategies that facilitate its attainment, setbacks, and resistance. Leaders who lack authentic leadership skills do not have consistency in their planning, delegation, organization, and coordination of duties and often are prone to be reactive in their decision-making, leading to unpredictability and inconsistencies in their leadership practice (Qu et al., 2019). The leadership in organizations without authentic leadership lacks focus and the ability to adjust and adapt to changes necessary for the organization's success (Wei et al., 2018).

Authentic leadership within an organization can be determined based on the level of balanced processing demonstrated by leaders in an institution (Iszatt-White & Kempster, 2019). The low levels of authentic leadership evident in some leadership may involve biased leaders who give preferential treatment to employees based on personal or group issues (Qu et al., 2019). This leadership style can lean more toward a transactional leadership model, where leaders tend to expect followers to agree with, accept, and

comply with the leader's opinions or direction in exchange for such items as gratitude,

monetary reward, organizational resources, or to avoid punishment (Masa'deh et al.,

2016). Qureshi and Hassan (2019) described the importance of reinforcing authenticity as

openness on a personal perspective level without losing sight of the organization's

objectives when considering others' viewpoints. Research has been conducted that led to

an association of such behaviors with incompetent and insecure leaders, who are

desperate to instill fear and force loyalty to retain their authority in the organization

(Schein & Schein, 2018).

Research has indicated that emotions and decision-making are often

interconnected (Huang et al., 2019). Authentic leaders tend to reflect hope in their actions

because they have clearly defined goals and believe they can accomplish those goals,

which can instill hope, inspiring their followers to trust and believe in their work (Wei et

al., 2018). Research by Qu et al. (2019) revealed leaders who demonstrate optimism are

often positive and confident regarding their achievable outcomes.

Authentic leadership also demands leaders to utilize moral reasoning and

consideration for life events (Northouse, 2016). Kohlberg's 1969 theory of moral

development suggested that an individual's self-perception or judgment of morally right

or wrong choices is defined by how the individual reasons about moral issues (Giurge et

al., 2019). Sandhu and Dastgeer (2019) described moral reasoning as a process that

enables organizational leaders to be selfless and enhances their ability to make decisions

that promote the greater interest of the group, company, or community, part of which is

the promotion of doing what is right. Giurge et al. (2019) noted three types of moral

reasoners; pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. Pre-conventional

moral reasoners are focused on cause-and-effect type of actions associated with their self-interest, as opposed to the post-conventional moral reasoner who places the well-being of others over their self-interest (Giurge et al., 2019). The conventional moral reasoner can be viewed as interested in their self-interest and interested in gaining social approval (Giurge et al., 2019). There is agreement among researchers that life experiences significantly impact the leaders' performances and decision-making processes; this is particularly true for authentic leadership because of the dependence on the understating of personal life experiences (Lee et al., 2019).

Spiritual Formation

Several studies regarding spiritual formation emphasize the importance of spiritual formation for those in leadership positions (Equizabla, 2018). One study of the formation of spiritual leadership of school administrators revealed that a desire for leadership and ongoing continual spiritual formation are essential qualities for spiritual leaders (Stukenschnieder, 2017). These qualities showed the administrator had a direct influence on the spiritual formation of other leaders and members of the staff (Piwowarski, 2019).

Using scripture as a foundation, Bloom (2017) asserted that there are five points to being a servant leader: first is that the leader continually seeks the glory of God rather than glory for themselves; second is that the servant leader sacrifices to obtain happiness for those he or she serves; third the leader holds the message of the gospel to a higher place than his or her wants, needs, or desires; fourth, a servant leader exemplifies humility and avoids personal recognition; fifth he or she understands that they must decrease for Christ and His message to increase. Tischler et al. (2016) observed a

predictive relationship between servant leadership and self-evaluation, which can serve as a predictor of job satisfaction. This observation supported research in this area and applied directly to the viability of servant leadership as a method that can inspire follower satisfaction, growth, development, and productivity (Tischler, 2016).

Akerlund's (2016) study was related to Tischler's (2016) findings by exploring the relationship between leadership and spiritual formation. Akerlund (2016) focused on how the Apostle Paul used 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 to show his method of using leadership to enhance the spiritual formation of the community of believers while using this passage to emphasize the contention that spiritual formation occurs best within the community (Akerlund, 2016). In addition, Mehdinezhad & Nouri (2016) identified a positive correlation between spiritual leadership and spiritual well-being. In this study, spiritual leadership was defined as a combination of transformational and servant leadership (Mehdinezhad & Nouri, 2016). Well-being is a component of spiritual formation; however, spiritual well-being from the standpoint of this particular study had more to do with a sense of wholeness and wellness than with spiritual formation (Mehdinezhad & Nouri, 2016).

A study concerning the relationship between transformational leadership and spiritual formation was also conducted regarding the concept of spiritual formation (Varnado, 2018). In this study, Varnado (2018) compared the relationship between a senior pastor's transformational leadership style and parishioners' spiritual development and found a positive correlation, providing support for the idea that leadership can positively impact spiritual formation. Vanderbilt (2017) measured the relationship between servant leadership and spiritual formation by focusing on the association

between leadership and student performance. Vanderbilt (2017) found servant leadership to positively correlate with improved reading achievement scores, suggesting that educators can impact this process by utilizing the servant leadership model as demonstrated in scripture.

Summary

In this chapter, the spiritual leadership models of servant leadership and transformational leadership were explained. In addition, the leadership models of transactional leadership, laissez-faire leadership, and authentic leadership were identified. These leadership models were compared and contrasted with the spiritual leadership models of servant leadership and transformational leadership while noting the strengths and weaknesses of each.

The methodology used to gather the study's data to answer the research questions was described in Chapter Three. The population and sample size, and participant selection through purposeful sampling, were explained. Specific criteria for instrumentation used for this study were identified, along with a synopsis of the data collection and data analysis to be utilized. The chapter concludes with the study's ethical considerations and the chapter summary.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter includes the purpose of this qualitative study, the research questions, and the study design. The research design was identified, the research approach selected, and the study's population and sample were described. The procedures for data collection and data analysis were given. Strategies for ensuring the reliability and validity of the study were outlined. Lastly, the ethical considerations of the study were presented.

Problem and Purpose Overview

The research problem for this study was to determine why practicing spiritual leadership principles matters to public school superintendents (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the impact of spiritual-centered leadership on public school superintendents and their decision-making processes. The spiritual leadership models of servant leadership and transformational models were used to evaluate how and to what extent superintendents at Southwest Missouri public school districts were using the Biblical principles of spiritual leadership as a guide for their leadership.

There is an ongoing and increasing focus on accountability for leaders and school reform attempts; defining the leadership role remains a priority to create successful superintendents (Willis & Ingle, 2018). Strong leadership has emerged as a key characteristic of successful schools (Kouzes & Posner 2012). The continued development of strong leadership practices must be a priority for those seeking quality education in schools (Beare, 2018). Identifying common perceptions of successful leaders will enable a better understanding of what others expect from superintendents (Beare, 2018). The

ability of superintendents to identify strengths and weaknesses within their leadership

practices and decision-making processes could be beneficial in helping leaders better

meet the needs and expectations of the school district. Thus, the superintendent can better

meet the school district's expectations, in turn improving student achievement (Willis &

Ingle, 2018).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following research questions and hypotheses guided the study:

1. What opinions and attitudes do superintendents believe drives their purpose as

   school superintendent?

2. What role do superintendents perceive spirituality plays in becoming better

   leaders?

3. What specific decision-making practices do superintendents believe reflect

   spiritually centered school leadership?

Research Design

Qualitative researchers seek to interpret phenomena and understand the meaning

and perspectives of participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative research was chosen

for this study because it is a naturalistic way to explore an issue while capturing the

authentic setting and culture under study (Creswell, 2018). This method enables sharing

results that are authentic, relevant, and trustworthy.

In a qualitative study, the truth is allowed to emerge (Creswell, 2018). The results

of qualitative research could contain many truths, revealed by the approach, while some

of the data of a qualitative study come from the participants' perspectives, with focus

placed on the participants' understanding of the topic studied and the interpretation of

their experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Grounded by the conceptual framework for the study, interview questions were developed to answer the study's research questions.

Population and Sample

Creswell (2015) described a population "as a group of individuals who have the same characteristics" (p. 140). The term *sample* refers to a subgroup of the population to be studied to generalize the sample of the target population (Creswell, 2018). The population for this study is 12 superintendents who belong to the Association of Christian Administrators and who lead school districts in the state of Missouri. The region of Missouri was selected for geographical access to participants to provide for ease of interviews.

Each superintendent was asked to participate in a semi-structured, one-on-one interview. Therefore, the sample for this study was a census of the entire population, and participants were selected based on purposive sampling that selects participants based on characteristics aligned with the study's objective (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Purposive sampling is a sampling method where participants who can answer the study's research questions are chosen (Burkholder et al., 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Purposive sampling was used to ensure that the individuals interviewed complied with the central idea of Christian beliefs and how those beliefs impact the role of the superintendents.

A purposive sample was selected for this study due to the fact the sample could be logically assumed to represent the population (Sharma, 2017). The identified purposive sample to be used in this study was a homogeneous sample as all participants will have the same occupation (Sharma, 2017). An advantage to utilizing purposive sampling is time efficiency (Mills & Gay, 2018). Some of the disadvantages to using purposive

sampling are the difficulty of precisely generalizing research findings and researcher bias (Sharma, 2017). These disadvantages were diminished since the sample was developed from a homogeneous population whose criteria were established by licensure requirements associated with the population's occupation (Mills & Gay, 2018).

Instrumentation

In qualitative research, instrumentation refers to the tools developed to be used for data gathering (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The instrument used to gather data for this study was a semi-structured interview conducted using an interview question guide (see Appendix A). An interview question guide was developed with specific follow-up questions to guide the interviews and provide consistency in asking follow-up questions. An interview question guide is a protocol that structures the order of interview questions and includes prompts for each question (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The interview questions must align with the purpose and goal of the study (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). The interview guide was intentionally created to assure each question asked during the interviews related to a particular research question (Ngozwana, 2018).

Reliability

Creswell and Creswell (2018) defined reliability as the "consistency or repeatability of an instrument" (p. 154). Typical threats to reliability, such as ambiguous questions, disordered questions, instructions that are not clear, were minimized through a pilot testing approach (Mohajan, 2017). To ensure the instrumentation's reliability, three professional colleagues reviewed the interview questions for clarity and content. The three colleagues hold doctorate degrees and superintendent positions in their school

districts. Each participant interviewed was asked the same questions in the same order to enhance reliability (Mills & Gay, 2018).

Validity

Validity refers to the extent to which a test or instrument measures what it is intended to measure (Mills & Gary, 2018). Validity was accomplished with the interview questions utilized in this research through triangulation of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By utilizing the method of triangulation, qualitative validity was increased by justifying themes found in the data from multiple participant perspectives (Mills & Gay, 2018). Each participant had the opportunity to review their interview transcript to comment before finalizing the transcript, further adding to the validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data Collection

Participants for the study were invited to participate using the participants' school district e-mail addresses (see Appendix B). A consent form (see Appendix C), attached to the email invitation to participate, provided an overview of the study and researcher contact information. A copy of the interview questions was also attached to the invitation to participate.

Once e-mail consent responses were received, interviews were scheduled with each participant at a mutually agreed upon time and location. The interviews were conducted either through phone or video conference interviews. The data collection instrument was the semi-structured interview. An audio recording was made of each interview. Once the data were transcribed, member checking was utilized as a method to prevent bias and to provide validity. Participants were asked to review the transcript of

their responses to the interview questions for accuracy. Ravitch and Carl (2016) defined member checking as a process for participants to review and validate the responses provided during the interview process. Triangulation of the data collected through the interview responses was utilized to ensure validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Participants who agreed to participate in the interviews were sent an email confirming the date and time for the one-on-one interviews. Informed consent was reviewed with each interview participant prior to beginning the interview. Creswell and Creswell's (2018) phenomenological study procedure for collecting data was utilized; data were collected about participants' perceptions of the impact of spiritual leadership on their decision-making processes. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for further analysis of the participants' responses (Mills & Gay, 2018).

Data Analysis

The goal of qualitative research is to develop descriptive statements about a particular subject that can in turn be applied to a wider variety of subjects (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Thematic analysis was used to identify common themes or trends related to the different areas of spiritual leadership. These data were grounded in evidence using quotes, excerpts, and the engagement of the interviewer in the data collection.

Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and the process of content analysis was utilized to analyze the responses to the interview questions (Ngozwana, 2018). According to Fink (2017), content analysis is a method of analyzing qualitative data with the intent to draw inferences regarding the meaning of the responses and comments derived from the interview questions (Fink, 2017). Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommended reading through the data intensely to gather a sense of the tone, depth,

meaning, and general ideas conveyed by the interview participants upon preparing the qualitative data for analysis. After intensive reading, interview responses were coded manually to identify significant themes (Ngozwana, 2018). As major themes emerged through this process, the themes were documented to assist in analyzing the data (Ngozwana, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were implemented to ensure the protection, confidentiality, and anonymity of study participants. Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board approval (see Appendix D) was sought to ensure participants involved in the study would be free from harm (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Participants received an Informed Consent Form, describing in detail the purpose of the research, possible risks, and the opportunity to opt-out of the study at any time. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Participants were assigned a pseudonym to provide anonymity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data were kept locked or in a password-protected device under the researcher's supervision (Fraenkel, 2018). Three years after the research is completed, the data will be securely destroyed (Fraenkel, 2018).

Summary

In Chapter Three, a synopsis of the methodology of this qualitative research study was provided, and the research design was identified as a qualitative case study. The population and sample size were described, and participant selection through purposeful sampling was identified. Specific criteria for instrumentation used for this study were described, along with a synopsis of the data collection process and data analysis utilized.

Chapter Three concluded with a discussion of the ethical consideration that were adhered

to in this study.

In Chapter Four, interview questions utilized in this study were presented.

Additionally, qualitative data gathered from participants' responses were analyzed.

Finally, several emerging themes were identified and explained.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Data

This study was created to explore the impact of spiritual-centered leadership on public school superintendents and their decision-making processes. Identifying common perceptions of successful school leaders can enable a better understanding of what others expect from a superintendent (Beare, 2018). To better understand the impact, if any, spiritual leadership plays in the leadership and decision-making of superintendents, interview questions were developed to allow participants to reflect on their own beliefs about leadership. In addition, questions were asked regarding the degree of experience of participants in the superintendent role and regarding district demographic information.

A brief discussion of the demographic characteristics of participants is provided in this chapter. In addition, a comprehensive analysis of participants' responses is offered. Finally, emerging themes from the research are identified and discussed.

Demographics

The sample population for this study consisted of 12 superintendents from the state of Missouri who belong to the Association of School Administrators. After the sample population was identified and appropriate permissions were obtained, interviews were conducted. All 12 interviews were conducted through Zoom conference calls. This method was chosen due to COVID protocols, as well as the proximity of participants.

The sample population was chosen using purposive sampling; participants were selected based on characteristics that aligned with the study's objective (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). An advantage to using purposive sampling is time efficiency (Mills & Gray, 2018). Purposive sampling was selected to ensure that the individuals interviewed

complied with the central idea of Christian beliefs and how those beliefs might impact their role as a superintendent and decision-making processes.

The sample included participants with superintendent experience ranging from one year to 19 years. The overall experience level of public education experiences for the superintendents ranged from 21 years to 32 years. Of the sample, nine men and three women participated. The size of institutions represented ranged from a student population in the low 200s to a population of almost 9,000 students.

Data Analysis

A semi-structured interview process was created to identify and understand the perceptions of public-school superintendents regarding their leadership and decision-making regarding spiritual leadership (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this section, the responses of the superintendents who participated in the interview process for this study are explored. Findings are delineated by the appropriate interview question. An analysis of responses showed although each participant explained their answers in their own words and from their viewpoint, a series of common themes emerged from the interview questions. Additionally, participants' comments are separated into the comments given by participant.

Results by Interview Question

Survey questions one through four collected personally identifiable information. Questions five through ten collected demographic data from each participant. The responses to these questions are provided in tables one through six.

Interview Questions 1-4. Survey questions one through four collected personally identifiable information.

Interview Question 5. *How many years have you been a superintendent?* The number of years of experience as a superintendent for each participant varied in their responses. Joel and Keith had the least amount of experience, both being in their first year as school district leaders. John had been in the district leadership role the longest, with 19 years of experience (see Table 1).

Table 1

Years of Experience of Participants as Superintendents

Pseudonym	Years of Experience
Joel	1
Keith	1
Rachelle	2
Lori	3
Jamie	4
David	5
Shawn	7
Nate	9
Jim	10
Larry	13
Tom	15
John	19

Interview Question 6. *How many years have you been in your current position?* Several of the participants were new to their current roles. Being first-year superintendents, Joel and Keith had the least amount of time in their current positions.

Tom had spent the most time in district leadership at his current school, with 11 years in his current district (see Table 2).

Table 2

Years of Experience of Participants in current position

Pseudonym	Years of Experience
Joel	1
Keith	1
Rachelle	2
Lori	3
Jamie	4
David	5
Shawn	7
Nate	1
Jim	3
Larry	6
Tom	11
John	6

Interview Question 7. *How many employees do you currently supervise?* The number of employees supervised by the participants in each district varied significantly. The fewest employees supervised by a participant were 50, with Joel being in charge of that particular district. Larry had the largest number of staff to supervise, with nearly 1,500 employees (see Table 3).

Table 3

Number of Employees Participant Supervises

Pseudonym	Number of Employees
Joel	50
Keith	154
Rachelle	73
Lori	400
Jamie	63
David	705
Shawn	346
Nate	700
Jim	700
Larry	1498
Tom	265
John	900

Interview Question 8. *How many years of total professional educational experience do you have?* Most of the participants had several years of experience as professional educators. Therefore, the range of experience for the participants was not very broad. Joel, Lori, and Nate had the least amount of experience with 21 years. John had the greatest number of years of experience in education, with 32 years (see Table 4).

Table 4

Number of Years of Participants Total Years of Educational Experience

Pseudonym	Total Years of Ed. Experience
Joel	21
Keith	23
Rachelle	26
Lori	21
Jamie	27
David	29
Shawn	29
Nate	21
Jim	23
Larry	26
Tom	25
John	32

Interview Question 9. *Which of these best describes your campus setting? Rural Urban Suburban* All of the participants described their campus settings as rural communities. The only participant whose district was not a rural setting was the district led by Larry. Larry stated, "I consider my district to be between rural and urban." He noted the nature of his district because it is a large community; however, not one considered suburban because it was not a suburb of Kansas City or St. Louis (see Table 5).

Table 5

Campus Setting of Participants

Pseudonym	Type of Campus Setting
Joel	Rural
Keith	Rural
Rachelle	Rural
Lori	Rural
Jamie	Rural
David	Rural
Shawn	Rural
Nate	Rural
Jim	Rural
Larry	Rural (Slightly Urban)
Tom	Rural
John	Rural

Interview Question 10. *How many students are in your district?* The number of students enrolled in the district of each participant varied greatly. Joel had the fewest number of students, with 235 in his district. Larry had the largest number of students in his district, with nearly 9,000 students (see Table 6).

Table 6

Number of Students in Participant's District

Pseudonym	Number of Students
Joel	235
Keith	740
Rachelle	469
Lori	2600
Jamie	390
David	4300
Shawn	2300
Nate	4800
Jim	4700
Larry	8920
Tom	1850
John	5600

Interview Question 11. *What does effective school leadership mean to you?*

When asked what effective school leadership meant to them, participants' responses

varied; however, several centered their responses around the concept of relationship

building with people. John responded, "Effective school leadership is about finding the

right people for the right job." Shawn stated that leadership is about "hiring good

people." Keith added "the ability to work with others" as an important area of effective

school leadership. According to Joel and Rachelle, it is important to "know where people

are and meet them there." Rachelle added to this concept by stating that leaders should be able to "clear a path to help take care of staff."

Another central concept that emerged from the responses was the idea of empowerment. Nate noted that effective school leadership is "understanding the vision/mission of the district, providing resources to achieve that vision/mission, and empowering those around them to strive toward those goals." Lori added her thoughts to this concept by stating effective leadership involves empowering others to be their best and cultivating other leaders.

The idea and importance of trust were mentioned in several responses. Jamie stated that leaders need to be "trusted individuals" and willing to "do the right thing." Tom also indicated the importance of being trustworthy, stable, and honorable. Nate took this concept a step further indicating that a leader needs to be a "true servant" and a "doer, not just a sayer."

Interview Question 12. *Why did you enter this profession?* This interview question elicited varied responses from the participants; however, the majority of participants indicated their entry into this profession was either a calling of sorts or influenced by others. Seven of the respondents indicated they felt specifically called into the profession. Nate stated he entered the education profession because he "felt a calling" in his life to do so. He envisioned his path to be much different after high school, however during the first week of his junior year in college, "God laid it" on his heart that he was supposed to be an elementary teacher. John, Larry, David, and Tom stated they felt called to the profession to make a difference in the lives of young people. David

specifically described his entry into the profession as a "spiritual endeavor," he believes this is his mission field.

Several participants stated family and others influenced their entry into the profession. Rachelle stated, "God placed someone in my life" to direct and influence her path, leading to her becoming an educator. Shawn mentioned a former administrator he worked under as a teacher, who encouraged him to get into administration. This individual took time to invest in Shawn and mentor him to provide growth opportunities for him. Keith went as far as to say that "school saved him." He stated, "I had several teachers who took me under their wing, and if not for them, I not only might not be in education, but I am not sure where I would be now."

Joel and Jim each came from a family of educators; therefore, they felt their upbringing influenced their decisions to enter the education profession. Jim also attributed his decision to several former coaches with whom he had the opportunity to interact. He stated he was fortunate they had "similar beliefs" to his and mentored him in education and spiritually as well.

Interview Question 13. *How would you describe your leadership?* Nearly all 12 participants mentioned servant leadership as an integral part of how they would describe their leadership. Joel specifically mentioned Greenleaf's Theory of Servant Leadership (Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, 2016) as the basis for his leadership. He noted that part of this included the idea that his emphasis in leadership is "there you are, not here I am." Nate admitted that his leadership has evolved during his 21 years in education. He feels he has become a better listener over time and began to understand

how God transformed him to understand better what being a servant leader meant to him. He started to understand how serving can inspire those around him to be better.

David described his leadership as a combination of being a servant and being collaborative and distributive. His goal is to develop a growth mindset, which in turn can inspire hope in others. John felt his role as a servant leader is to "shepherd" those around him to be better. Jim described his leadership as not only a servant but also respectful with a common-sense approach.

Collaborative leadership was discussed by several of the participants in terms of how they would describe their leadership. Lori described her leadership as shared and collaborative. Tom included collaborative in his response, but also commitment, hard work, and a diplomatic visionary. Larry was one of only two respondents to mention transformational leadership in his response to this question to describe his leadership.

Several participants described many of the qualities previously mentioned but included the concept of their leadership being situational. Meaning they used a variety of these approaches depending upon the situation. Rachelle described her leadership as a "melting pot." She indicated she intermittently uses servant, transactional, and transformational leadership styles and adjusts according to the need. Shawn and Nate also added to this idea of utilizing these concepts based upon situational need.

Interview Question 14. *What personal traits and beliefs do you bring to the job?* This interview question led to varied responses as well. The overwhelming central theme centered on honesty and integrity. Over half of the participants mentioned this in their response. Nate indicated that he is a big believer in "mean what you say, say what you mean." He tries to live his life and lead his district with the idea of glorifying God

through both. He believes if he is going to have integrity, he needs to be the same person when people are watching and when they are not. He referenced Bible verses, Ephesians 6:7, "Serve wholeheartedly as if you were serving the Lord, not man" and Luke 16:10, "He who can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with very much, and whoever is dishonest with little will be dishonest with very much."

Tom stated that his beliefs include kindness, faith, and a love of people. This love of people helps drive his commitment to his district. John added care and concern for people as a belief in addition to honesty and integrity. Jim took it a step further regarding relationships by adding that he believes everyone has value and his desire to show respect to others through his leadership. Jamie also stated that everyone is essential and that empathy plays a part in her relationships with others.

High expectations were also mentioned by two participants as traits and beliefs they bring to the job. Lori and Dave both mentioned that they believe all students can learn, and expectations should not be lowered as a means to meet expectations. Dave added his belief that being a driven, goal-oriented, strategic leader is essential for him to be effective in his job.

Interview Question 15. *What are some defining characteristics that you use to make yourself a better decision-maker?* Five of the participants specifically mentioned prayer as a defining characteristic they use to make themselves better decision-makers. Larry and Jim both indicated they pray for wisdom and read the Bible to spend time in scripture to seek counsel from God. Joel indicated he tries to "sit on the decisions" and pray for them. Nate stated he understands God placed him where he is for a reason, so he places his trust in God to help him do his job. Nate described his decision-making

perspective as using the lens of "how does this glorify God, or how can he glorify Him through this." Dave also stated that he relies heavily on his faith when it comes to decision-making, and he specifically spends time reading Proverbs when he has decisions to make. He also believes it is important to be decisive with input.

Five participants stated a team approach as a defining characteristic they use to make themselves better decision-makers. Rachelle likes to talk things out and collaborate with others when faced with decisions. She elaborated by indicating that she thinks it is important to "put yourself in others' shoes" when faced with making these decisions. Tom feels that he is "never the smartest person in the room"; therefore, he likes to ask lots of questions and gather input before making decisions. He also feels loyalty is essential when it comes to the decision-making process. Lori believes it is important to be a good listener and "fact-finder" by thoroughly researching decisions and asking colleagues for input. She added her idea of self-reflection as a key component of decision-making and learning from past decisions. Jamie took this a step further by stating that it is important to be a fact-finder and a "solution finder" as well. She likes to ask why and also feels follow-through is very important in decision-making.

Two of the participants felt that decision-making comes down to the processes the district has in place. John believes it is important to know your values and core beliefs, and decisions need to be made that are in line with those values and beliefs. Keith added his belief that decisions should all be tracked back to the district's continuous improvement plan.

Interview Question 16. *From the characteristics you just described, which do you feel is the most crucial characteristic and why?* Half of the participants responding

felt that the spiritual aspect of decision-making was the most crucial characteristic. These aspects include prayer, faith, a relationship with the Lord, and a willingness to serve. Jim stated it is important for him to be grounded in what he stands for, including his spiritual beliefs. Larry believes his relationship with the Lord is most important to his decision-making. John feels it is important to truly care about people and have a true willingness to serve others. Nate mentioned he feels the most important thing for him to do when it comes to decision-making is to surrender himself to God and rely on Him to guide him and lead him. He believes this focus allows him to lead others in a productive way.

Four participants based their most important characteristics on people and relationships. Shawn stated, "I want to keep kids as a compass when it comes to decision-making." He went on to say that he uses his own children as a compass for these decisions as well. Lori, Keith, and Rachelle all felt the most important characteristic was relationships and being able to show empathy and listen to others. Two respondents discussed loyalty and follow-through as the most important characteristic for them. Tom believes loyalty is established and enhanced through relationships with others. Jamie feels follow-through is the most important characteristic in her decision-making. She wants to work with others to find solutions and follow through with them to make sure she can continue to be forward-thinking.

Interview Question 17. *What do you do on your own to grow as a leader and a decision-maker?* All 12 participants mentioned the spiritual components of prayer and scripture reading as methods they used to grow as leaders and decision-makers. Some went deeper into this than others; however, they all alluded to this as part of their process. Tom indicated that he uses prayer as a tool for discernment. Keith responded to this

question by stating prayer helps him stay grounded and have the right heart for dealing with people. Jim and Nate both mentioned devotions and prayer journals as methods they use to grow as leaders and followers of Christ. Nate elaborated by indicating that he likes to surround himself with a network of "like-minded" believers and leaders. He commented that this enables him to have others to bounce ideas off of, share prayer requests, share burdens with, and disciple one another while being a great way to grow as a leader.

A couple of participants mentioned Self-reflection as being integral to their leadership growth. Rachelle noted the importance of learning from past experiences, both successful and not successful experiences. She likes to ask a lot of questions to gain input into how she can improve. Lori also indicated that she feels it is crucial to self-reflect when growing as a leader. Networking was a concept that was brought up by some participants as well. Jamie stated the importance of learning from other professionals while also researching articles and journals. Shawn commented that he likes to "read, read, read" and network with colleagues.

Interview Question 18. *What reference or data points do you use to reflect and determine that you are growing as a leader and decision-maker?* Most of the responses to this question focused on more structured school district or School Board-specific data points to measure the participant's growth as a leader and decision-maker. Three participants referenced scripture and the spiritual quality of trust as a means of measuring their success. Nate noted that quantifying leadership can be difficult, "but using God's Word as an evaluation tool is the best way." He indicated that he interpreted this as looking for the fruits of his leadership and his life. Nate noted this can be accomplished

by looking at the culture and climate of the district as components of effective leadership. Joel stated he looks to scripture as a measurement of his leadership. Tom believes there is an "unspoken trust" that can be used to measure a leader's effectiveness.

More specific data points mentioned by multiple participants included surveys, quality measurement tools, student achievement scores, feedback from patrons and School Board members, and informal discussions. Keith mentioned his belief that climate surveys are useful to him to gather feedback from students, staff, and patrons regarding his leadership. Larry added progress as a district as a measurement tool as well. This progress includes APR scores, MAP scores, formative assessments, and other accountability measurements. He believes his success is measured by his ability to build the leadership capacity of his principals.

Some participants also discussed relationships as a way to gauge the success of a leader. Shawn and Jim both mentioned staff turnover numbers as a successful method of measuring the success of a leader. Shawn indicated low staff turnover numbers were indicative of a feeling of belonging and ownership of his staff.

Interview Question 19. *What are some of the challenges you face which keep you from being the leader you would like to be?* Five of the participants mentioned the spiritual component of public education as one challenge they face, which keeps them from being the kind of leader they would like to be. David stated that "differing perspectives and beliefs of the many stakeholders in education can be very challenging." Joel referenced the challenges of public-school legislation regarding scripture keeping him from being the leader he wants to be. Jim added it could be challenging to be grounded in faith in public education for this reason. Nate responded by saying, "other

obstacles could be that we have to be mindful of how we present the gospel to others since we are in public education." He feels the best way to do this is "by letting our walk be our testimony to others, not by the words we speak, but by the way we treat others." He previously noted the easy answer would be that our human nature can keep us from being as effective as we would like to be.

Jim and Larry also mentioned legislative beliefs toward education as a challenge to their leadership. They both stated that public education is under attack, which adds to the challenge of being a public-school leader. Larry noted that society does not necessarily give the benefit of the doubt to educators as in the past. Skepticism and negativity in society make the job of public-school leaders more challenging.

Three leaders mentioned time and job duties as challenges to them being the leader they want to be. Shawn discussed the nature of working in a smaller community and dealing with certain "sacred cows" as a challenge for implementing necessary change. Jamie and Rachelle both noted the idea of working in smaller school districts and having to "wear many hats." This idea of multiple responsibilities makes it difficult for them to focus on certain aspects that may need more attention to reach the level of improvement for which they strive.

Internal characteristics of their own leadership were mentioned by four of the participants after self-reflection. Keith noted his own fears as a first-year superintendent were probably the biggest challenge to becoming the type of leader he would like to become. Lori added to this by stating that her lack of confidence and desire to make everyone around her happy impacted her ability to lead the way she would like. Tom discussed his conservative nature as being something that he could change to become the

leader he desires. John responded that sometimes being honest and transparent with people is not easy.

Interview Question 20. *What sacrifices, if any, have you made to be the leader and decision-maker you are today?* This interview question elicited the same response from the overwhelming majority of the participants, family time. Larry noted that leadership takes a toll on a leader's family, including marriage and kids. Keith indicated he is driving and living a long distance from home to be a school leader, impacting his time with family. Lori discussed how she had sacrificed family time to some extent because she "wants her boys to be proud of her." Rachelle responded she put her administration career on hold for a certain amount of time to spend more time with her family.

Lori and Nate both mentioned that they had lost friendships over their leadership; some due to the nature of the job and decisions that have to be made. Nate noted that "other than changing his circle of close friends," he has not sacrificed much to be the leader he is today. Joel mentioned he has had to sacrifice past jobs to stand up for what he believed was right.

Interview Question 21. *What are some things you are not willing to sacrifice to grow as a leader and decision-maker, and why?* Nine participants described spiritual qualities as something they are not willing to sacrifice to grow as a leader and decision-maker. Nate stated he is not willing to sacrifice his core values of honesty and integrity, "as that is something that God has impressed on his heart." He prides himself on not wavering from what he believes to be morally and ethically correct.

Larry indicated he is not willing to sacrifice his morals and values or his standards for the sake of his leadership. Tom added to this by stating he is unwilling to sacrifice his honesty, ethics, or faith for his leadership. Joel said he is not willing to sacrifice anything of a spiritual nature. Jim described his integrity and how he wants his people to know they can trust him and know he "has their back" and is unwilling to compromise that promise.

Several participants also mentioned family as something they are not willing to sacrifice. David stated he would not abandon his family for the sake of growing as a leader. John included family as something he is not willing to sacrifice as well. Jamie added that she would not sacrifice her family, ethics, or integrity.

Two of the respondents focused on items of a more educational nature in their responses. Shawn stated he is unwilling to sacrifice when it comes to "remaining a learner." He wants to continue to learn and will not compromise anything to "go with the status quo." Lori noted she is not willing to sacrifice in her belief that all kids can learn. She is not going to "lower the bar" to accomplish goals.

Interview Question 22. *How do you believe others would describe you as a leader?* The responses to this question were varied but centered mainly on spiritual qualities such as servant leadership and dealing with people. Four participants specifically mentioned their faith or servant nature as a quality they believe others would use to describe them. John stated that he believes people feel he puts others first, is a servant, and is a compassionate father figure. Rachelle noted her feeling that others would describe her as someone who is positive, supportive, caring, kind, and loving, which all come from her relationship with Christ.

Joel stated he believes others describe him as a Christ-follower and a servant whose desire is to serve others. Nate added to this by describing how others would say that he has boldness in his faith and leads with that boldness. He believes they would also describe him as someone who would not ask them to do something that he is not willing to do himself and that he is an honest person with high moral standards.

Many other qualities were mentioned to describe the participants' feelings toward how they believe others would describe them as leaders. David described how others would describe him as kind, caring, considerate, focused, and goal-oriented. He described his motto as, "mission first, people always." Larry reflected on his feelings that others would describe him as someone whose goal is to make a difference. He added the qualities of encouraging, persistent, caring, empathetic, and someone who makes sure people know where they stand and what they will get.

Lori described her opinion that others would describe her as caring, collaborative, relationship-building, empowering, and someone who wants others to take risks. Jim's thoughts included honest, trustworthy, leading by example, and driven or "driving" with high expectations. Jamie included forward-thinking and passionate in her response. Trusted, committed, and loyal was Tom's response. Shawn noted that others would describe him as approachable, headstrong, and one who will not settle. Keith added a good communicator, caring, listener, and willing to make decisions that are best for all in his response.

Themes

The results of qualitative research could reveal many truths, while some data from a qualitative study come from the participants' perspectives, with focus placed on the

participants' understanding of the topic studied and the interpretation of their experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To analyze qualitative data, codes are used to break down the information into areas of useful common information (Creswell, 2018). The codes are further broken down into emerging themes or categories of information (Creswell, 2018). The emerging themes represent the meaningful details of the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2018). The emergent themes of this study are included in this section.

Vision and Expectations Matter

Vision is to create a broad appeal to key stakeholders, define the destination and journey, reflect high ideals and expectations, encourage hope and faith, and establish a standard of excellence. (Fry & Egel, 2017). Shawn knows the vision of his district is to move students toward academic achievement. He expects and leads in a way teachers will believe all their students can learn at a high level, regardless of their obstacles. The vision Shawn has for himself and his teachers is to strive to move beyond test scores, which he knows are important, toward setting students up for future success. His response indicates he chooses to lead his staff in this manner because he believes in the vision that all students can achieve academically.

Jim's vision is to foster a culture of trust and respect for the ability of others and to facilitate that trust to serve students, parents, and community members within his district. He believes that everyone has value and should be treated with respect. The idea of treating all people with respect creates a vision of a culture where people come to work and exhibit kindness toward each other, free of criticism and negativity. Jim feels the most important aspect of creating a vision or mission for his district is to be grounded in what he stands for. Jim uses the term "genuine" to describe further his belief that being

authentic is important to school culture. Success is the result, which can be achieved if others buy into the vision and align it to educating students.

Lori recognizes her staff desires a leader who provides autonomy and trusts them to make the best decisions for kids. She takes what she knows about her staff's desire and shapes a vision in which people can take risks. She wants to create an environment in which people's talents are recognized and appreciated and those talents are utilized to ensure that all stakeholders are working towards a common goal. She knows that a collaborative leadership style is essential to building trust. In essence, Lori's vision for her district is empowering others to strive to be their best in doing what is best for kids. She feels part of this empowerment is cultivating other leaders.

Hope and Faith Matter

Hope and faith were common responses for all of the participants. Hope and faith include the concepts of endurance, perseverance, doing what it takes, stretching goals, and expectations of reward and victory (Fry & Egel, 2017). Each participant's description of what faith was and looked like in their life was unique, even though some shared the same views and belief systems. The participants' practice of faith as a form of spirituality was evident in their faith in prayer, their faith in scripture, and their faith in a higher power.

The participants perceived spirituality in diverse and personalized ways yet shared some common views. For example, their compassion for students, their belief in God, and faith as a support system were connected to their views as what they use as a support system and as a reminder of their purpose in their work regularly. Each participant's personal vantage point of spirituality was expressed in a complex yet intimate way. It was

sometimes difficult for the participants to verbalize, but each one knew that spirituality played a role in their lives. However, a sense of understanding of spirituality was developed over time from life experiences, work demands, decisions they have had to make, as well as relationships they have developed over the years

Nate noted that his leadership has developed over time. He stated he used to be very task-oriented, and nothing could stand in his way. He said he had utilized scripture as a means to grow as a leader. He attempts to implement what he learns in scripture and apply it to his life as a leader. Nate believes this has helped him focus on the calling in his life to be the leader he is. He also stated he uses scripture as a reference or data point to measure his success as a leader. He tries to look for the "fruits" of his leadership in the culture of his school district.

Joel noted he works hard to be a Christ-follower and apply the principles of scripture into his leadership. He also described the importance of developing a network of other administrators with similar beliefs in this profession. He described one of the challenges he faces as a school leader: the public-school legislation limiting what he can do as an educator.

In each of the participants' responses, all participants share a common thread: spirituality is an internal process that each of them uses to keep balance in their life, between their home life and their work life, or simply that spirituality is an aspect of faith. Each participant used the term as unique and internal to them and utilized it regularly as a part of their lives as school leaders. Spirituality is the inner part of the participants, which helps them demonstrate their faith in their work as school leaders.

During reviewing the interview responses, prayer emerged as a major theme of three of the participants' faith. Prayer was used by nearly all the participants, not just to make decisions but to help them through the process of making difficult decisions in their role as educational leaders. Larry's faith is a major part of who he is, and through prayer, he makes difficult decisions in his professional life while using this as an outward expression of his faith. Prayer, for Larry, was used to seek counsel and create peace in his heart while going through the decision-making process. He believes it is important to be intentional in his prayers and often prays for wisdom and discernment. Larry's admission that he uses some other form of guidance to help him make the best decision in specific instances is evident when he speaks of his unwillingness to compromise his morals, values, or standards for the sake of his leadership.

Nate's perspective of prayer is one of surrendering himself to God and relying on him to guide and lead him. Nate's action of prayer is centered on how he can use his regular experiences and opportunities to glorify God in what he does. He believes God placed him where he is for a very specific reason, and he places his trust in Christ to help him do his job. He prays for obedience, never to miss an opportunity to share God's love with others that God places in his path. Nate stated he uses the lens of "how does this glorify God, or how can I glorify Him through this" when faced with decision-making opportunities.

David, Tom, Jim, and Joel, used prayer to gain peace during times of making a difficult decision, as an act of kindness in offering a prayer for others in their organization, or as a petition to help guide in a manner that is in the best interest of all. For the participants, prayer is an act derived from faith, acquired either by going to

church or through their relationship with God. Prayer is something that they spoke about and turned to without hesitation during their time of need and as a support system for themselves and others.

Love Matters

Altruistic love is composed of forgiveness, kindness, integrity, empathy/compassion, honesty, patience, courage, trust/loyalty, and humility. (Fry & Egel, 2017). Many participants used the word "love," not in the usual sense that some would verbalize their like for something or someone. The word takes on a deeper meaning that describes an unselfish devotion and regard the participants have for others and the dedication they have to the people they serve.

Nearly all of the participants noted that they entered education as a form of a calling. Nate described a specific calling from God to enter the profession during the first week of his junior year in college. Tom referred to a calling to make a difference as a reason for getting into education. Rachelle stated that God placed someone in her life who significantly impacted her decision to become an educator. David, John, and Larry all referred to a calling to make a difference and impact the lives of young people as their reason for getting into the field of education. Rose rebukes those who enter the teaching field as a fallback plan or as a way to make a living without understanding the importance of teaching.

Shawn emphasized the importance of those who work with children to exemplify love, humility, and respect. Tom took this a step further, describing his commitment to being kind and truly loving people. He believes one must move beyond the academic sense and begin to delve into the deeper parts of what it truly means to love people, not

just as their leader, but as a human being who has a genuine desire to invest in someone's life. Rachelle desires to show integrity, honesty, and transparency in her leadership. John wants to move past his specific job description and treat others with genuine care and concern. He believes it is crucial to show honesty and integrity and be a true advocate for kids. Jamie introduced the idea of modeling the example for others when she discusses her love for her job. The love can be seen by the way she models her expectations for others in her district. She desires to be a compassionate leader who shows empathy for others while leading with passion, focus, and positivity.

Jim brings up the idea of having genuine respect for people and believing everyone has value if one is going to associate it with spiritual leadership because he believes you cannot have one without the other. He thinks a leader cannot say they lead through spirituality and then constantly treat others with disrespect. His belief is one must truly walk the walk when it comes to qualities of spiritual leadership. Keith believes caring about others means being compelled to care for people regardless of the situation and always basing decisions on what is best for all.

The idea of treating people "right" can carry many different meanings, but treating people right is respecting them, showing them kindness, and always be willing to tell the truth, according to John. He noted that sometimes being honest with people is not easy, and people do not always like what he tells them, but he believes truly caring for people means telling them the truth. Shawn added that he believes he is sometimes perceived as being headstrong and not willing to settle when it comes to being honest with people. He likes to use kids, including his own kids, like a compass regarding leadership. David desires to be viewed as a kind and caring leader whose motto is

"Mission First, People Always." In other words, he believes it always needs to be about people.

Serving Matters

The majority of the participants regarded their roles as that of servant leaders. According to the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership (2016), a servant-leader focuses primarily on people's growth and well-being and the communities in which they exist. The servant-leader is committed to sharing power, putting the needs of others first, and helping people develop and perform to their potential. Shawn's sense of calling in his organization is to take on the role of a servant leader and provide those within his district with the things his staff and students need to succeed. He references that he must be willing to be flexible within his role as a servant to remain fluid in providing essentials for those he serves. In this regard, he described his leadership as a combination of servant leadership and situational leadership.

Being a servant is a role Rachelle embraces in her district. She believes, too often, leaders refuse to take on a role that appears to diminish their status as a leader within an organization; however, Rachelle's attitude of being a servant creates a culture she strives to create. Rachelle believes she serves something bigger than herself, and this enhances her idea of belonging to a specific cause which is to educate children and serve their needs. In society today, the word servant can create so many negative views, but Rachelle knows her district, students, teachers, and parents and is willing to do her part and commit to the work that must be done without seeking attention. Rachelle is a graduate of her district and is convicted to pursue her calling of being a servant due to her relationship with the community she serves.

Shawn associates his servant leadership style with being student-centered. He is not afraid to admit everything he does starts and ends with students in mind. His service to students solidifies his decision-making by always keeping in mind the idea of doing what is best for students. Shawn's strong position on the student-centered approach provides meaning to his role as a school leader and a servant. He believes in using students as a compass when striving to serve others.

Nate reflected on the fact that he has evolved over his 21 years in education. He noted he was very task-oriented when he first got into administration, and nothing could get in his way of getting the job done. He described how with experience, he began to understand how God was transforming him and began to understand what being a servant leader meant and how serving could inspire those around him to be better. He believes servant leadership best describes his leadership style. However, he admitted his role does sometimes require situational leadership, meaning he has to be the one to make a decision and go with it.

Summary

A total of 12 public school superintendents from the state of Missouri were interviewed regarding their perceptions of the impact of spiritual-centered leadership on their leadership and decision-making processes. The 12 participants were members of the Missouri Association of School Administrators. Through the use of a semi-structured interview protocol, the participants' experiences were documented.

After the interviews were complete, responses were analyzed and broken down into more useful information utilizing a coding process (Creswell, 2018). The role of spirituality in educational leadership and decision-making was not identified in isolation

from the data gathered, but the findings showed that spirituality was a component that was intertwined, either consciously or unconsciously, in the role the participants served as public school leaders. Subsequent to the coding process, a series of four themes emerged, culminating in the participants' experience (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). These emergent themes are discussed further as findings in Chapter Five. Additionally, conclusions, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research are discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Implications

Exemplary leadership matters in education to positively influence commitment to and motivation for the organization's success (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). As a spiritual leader, the superintendent can play a critical role in times of change through relationships with employees that exemplify the transformational process (Northouse, 2013). In this chapter, findings of the research regarding the perceptions of public-school superintendents regarding the role of spiritual leadership in their leadership and decision-making process are discussed in detail. Additionally, conclusions drawn from the findings are revealed and supported by relevant literature, after a discussion of the conclusions, implications for future practice in spiritual leadership and decision-making are addressed. Finally, recommendations for future research regarding the perceptions of public-school superintendents regarding spiritual leadership are considered.

Findings

This qualitative study was designed around three research questions. The questions were written to explore the impact of spiritual-centered leadership on public school superintendents and their decision-making processes. The research design utilized an interview of practicing public school superintendents, and data provided from the interview sessions resulted in the following findings.

Interview Questions

Interview Questions One through Four. Interview questions one through four were used to collect personally identifiable information.

Interview Question Five. *How many years have you been a superintendent*?

The number of years of experience of each participant varied. Two of the participants in the study were in their first year as a superintendent. One participant had the most experience with 19 years as a superintendent.

Interview Question Six. *How many years have you been in your current position?* Two of the participants were in their first year in their current position. Most of the participants had between three and seven years in their current role. The longest tenure of any of the participants in their current role was 11 years.

Interview Question Seven. *How many employees do you currently supervise?* The number of employees supervised by the participants in each district varied significantly. The fewest number of employees supervised by a participant was 50 employees. The majority of the number of staff to be supervised was between 300 and 700. The largest number of staff to supervise for any of the participants was 1,498 employees.

Interview Question Eight. *How many years of total professional educational experience do you have?* All of the participants in the study had over 20 years of experience as professional educators. Therefore, the range of experience for the participants was not very broad. The least amount of experience was 21 years in education. The majority of the participants had between 23 and 29 years of experience in the field of education. The largest number of years of experience of the participants in education was 32 years.

Interview Question Nine. *Which of these best describes your campus setting? Rural, Urban, or Suburban?* All of the participants in the study described their campus settings as rural communities. One participant considered his district to be unique in that

it was a large community regarding population; however, it was not considered one of the two major cities in Missouri. Due to this, he described his campus setting as between rural and urban.

Interview Question Ten. *How many students are in your district?* The student population in the district of each participant varied greatly. The participant with the fewest number of students had 235 enrolled in their district. The majority of the participants had districts with student enrollments between 2,300 and 5,600 students. The participant with the largest number of students in their district had 8,920 students enrolled.

Interview Question Eleven. *What does effective school leadership mean to you?* The participants in this study believe in the importance of relationship-building when it comes to a definition of effective school leadership. The responses indicate the school leaders feel it is vital for school leaders to establish trust amongst those with whom they work and the patrons of the school district. A couple of the participants also believe in the importance of empowerment of those with whom they work. One of the participants even mentioned cultivating other leaders as part of this empowerment process.

Interview Question Twelve. *Why did you enter this profession?* The majority of the participants indicated they entered the profession due to a sense of calling. Five of the participants specifically mentioned a sense of God speaking to them as part of their reason for entering the school leadership profession. A few respondents attributed other people or mentors as reasons for becoming school superintendents. Two of the respondents indicated their reasoning was the fact they come from a family of educators.

Interview Question Thirteen. *How would you describe your leadership?* Nearly every participant used servant leadership in their response to how they would define their leadership. One participant specifically cited Greenleaf's Theory of Servant Leadership (Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, 2016) to describe his leadership. The central components of collaboration and situational use of various leadership styles were prevalent in the responses of many of the participants.

Interview Question Fourteen. *What personal traits and beliefs do you bring to the job?* Honesty and integrity were mentioned by participants as characteristics or traits they bring to the job. One participant referenced several Bible verses to place importance on these traits of honesty and integrity. The characteristics of empathy and genuine concern for the well-being of others were mentioned by a variety of participants. Two participants emphasized high expectations for themselves and others as a key trait characteristic or trait they bring to their leadership.

Interview Question Fifteen. *What are some defining characteristics that you use to make yourself a better decision-maker?* Prayer was mentioned by five of the participants as a defining characteristic they use to make themselves better decision-makers. A couple of leaders indicated they utilize prayer to pray for wisdom and discernment and read scripture to help make decisions. Almost half of the participants interviewed believe in a collaborative approach to decision-making. They stressed the importance of talking to others, including other leaders and colleagues, to gather facts to help aid in making the best decisions.

Interview Question Sixteen. *From the characteristics you just described, which do you feel is the most crucial characteristic and why?* Half of the participants responded

that a spiritual aspect was the most important characteristic of their decision-making.

These aspects included prayer, faith, a relationship with the Lord, and a willingness to

serve. On the other hand, four participants stated their most important characteristic was

centered more on collaborating with people. This collaboration included an emphasis on

relationship building, loyalty, and follow-through.

     Interview Question Seventeen. *What do you do on your own to grow as a leader*

and a decision-maker? The participants mentioned the spiritual aspects of prayer and

scripture reading as methods they used to grow as leaders and decision-makers. Some of

the participants went deeper by indicating the importance of surrounding themselves with

people of similar beliefs and values to collaborate, fellowship, and grow in their

leadership. A couple of participants mentioned self-reflection and learning from past

successes and failures as integral to their leadership growth.

     Interview Question Eighteen. *What reference or data points do you use to*

reflect and determine that you are growing as a leader and a decision-maker? Most of

the reference or data points they use to improve their leadership focused on more

structured school district or School Board specific measures to gauge the participant's

growth as a leader and decision-maker. For example, three participants referenced

scripture and the spiritual quality of trust to measure their success as a school leader.

More specific data points mentioned by multiple participants included surveys, quality

measurement tools, student achievement scores, feedback from patrons and School Board

members, and informal discussions.

     Interview Question Nineteen. *What are some of the challenges you face which*

keep you from being the leader you would like to be? The spiritual component of being a

Christian Believer in public education was mentioned by five of the participants as one challenge they face, keeping them from being the kind of leader they would like to be. In addition, they indicated it is sometimes challenging to live out their faith in the public education environment in which they work due to concerns about legal restrictions. Four of the participants focused their responses more on their internal qualities causing challenges to being the type of leader they would like to be. These qualities included fear, lack of confidence in themselves, and conservative nature.

Interview Question Twenty. *What sacrifices, if any, have you made to be the leader and decision-maker you are today?* Time with family was indicated as the overwhelming response to what the participants had sacrificed to be the leader they are today. A couple of participants included losing friendships as a sacrifice they have made for their leadership. One respondent mentioned past jobs as something he had sacrificed to stand up for what he believed was right.

Interview Question Twenty-one. *What are some things you are not willing to sacrifice to grow as a leader and decision-maker and why?* Nine participants described spiritual qualities as something they are not willing to sacrifice to grow as a leader and decision-maker. These qualities included their beliefs, morals, standards, and values. Several participants also mentioned honesty and integrity as something they are not willing to sacrifice for their leadership. A couple of respondents indicated family as something they are not willing to sacrifice. Two participants noted being unwilling to lower their expectations or belief that all kids can learn.

Interview Question Twenty-two. *How do you believe others would describe you as a leader?* The responses to how the participants believed others would describe their

leadership were varied but centered mainly on spiritual qualities such as servant leadership and dealing with others. Four participants specifically mentioned their faith or servant nature as a quality they believe others would use to describe them. Many other qualities were mentioned to describe the participants' feelings toward how they believe others would describe them as leaders. These qualities included kind, caring, trustworthy, collaborative, trusted, committed, and loyal.

Conclusions

Several dominant themes emerged from the participants' answers. The four prevalent themes were vision and expectations matter, hope and faith matters, love matters, and serving matters. These emerging themes are discussed further as they help form the conclusions of the research.

Research question one. *What opinions and attitudes do superintendents believe drives their purpose as school superintendents?* School leaders often consider their purpose to be that of a calling. According to Frick (2016) this calling is described as the manner in which a person determines the level of meaning and purpose the individual derives from their work. Elements of the spiritual leadership model were evident in the participants' responses which were used to help the participants reach their goal of creating meaningful impact within their organization. This is supported by research by the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership (2016), a servant-leader focuses on the development of others within the organization and the communities they serve, committing themselves to the sharing of power, placing a higher priority on the needs of others, and helping those in the organization continue to grow and reach their full potential.

The opinions and attitudes identified by the participants are affirmed by the research of Fry and Egel (2017). In their spiritual leadership model, Fry and Egel (2017) found successful organizations have the ability to develop spiritual wellbeing by focusing on modeling the leadership qualities of vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love. The responses of the participants would indicate all of these qualities are incorporated into their purpose as school administrators.

Creating a culture of high expectations for one's self as well as for others is crucial to developing the vision of the organization. The vision of an organization includes the creation of a wide perspective which should include invested stakeholders, helping to define the desired destination as well as the journey, incorporating high morals and expectations, promoting hope and faith, and defining the standard to which others within the organization should strive to attain (Fry & Egel, 2017). However, opinions and attitudes described by the participants, went beyond just setting a vision for those in their organization. The qualities were used to help fulfill the needs of those in their charge and create an environment where all could feel a sense of value and respect. This concept allows for the use of the spiritual leadership model by current and aspiring public school superintendents as a foundation in which to refer to when deciding which leadership style is best for each of them, or possibly, another option for a current or future leader to choose from.

Instilling a culture of hope and faith is crucial to the success of school leaders. Hope and faith are defined as establishing the ideas of endurance, perseverance, doing whatever it takes, stretching goals, and expectations of reward/victory (Fry & Egel, 2017). The participants' practice of faith as a form of spirituality was evident in their

faith in prayer, their faith in scripture, and their faith in a higher power. Hope and faith go

hand in hand and serve as the foundation for which the members of the organization are

committed to the belief that the vision of the organization can be achieved (Fry, 2013).

The word "love" takes on a deeper meaning which describes an unselfish

devotion and regard the participants have for others, as well as the dedication they have

to the people they serve. The concept of altruistic love contains the ideas of forgiveness,

kindness, integrity, empathy/compassion, honesty, patience, courage, trust/loyalty, and

humility (Fry & Egel, 2017). It is important for school leaders to have a deep love for

others. This can best be accomplished through the type of love that can only come from

Christ. The practices of patience, kindness, lack of envy, forgiveness, humility, trust,

loyalty, and truthfulness are all traits that are reflected by a spiritual leader, therefore

making these qualities consistent with the concept of agapao love (Fry, 2013).

The elements from the spiritual leadership model are more than just labels placed

on the participants' actions, but were utilized due to the participants' belief system in

leading by example and constructing an organization which was exemplified by a sense

of self-worth, service, and modeling as components of their leadership ability. This is

supported by the research conducted by Ross and Cozzens (2016) which identified school

districts as being among the various organizations that are in need of the type of

leadership that can develop sustained success. Not only were elements of the spiritual

leadership model discovered, other elements such as humility, empowerment,

compassion, empathy, respect, and faith were identified as well. It is important to be

careful not to limit the spiritual leadership model to only elements identified by Fry and

Egel (2017), but to be open to incorporating additional characteristics, such as those

listed above, and study how each one plays a relevant role in the decision-making and impact of leaders in public education. Each new characteristic has meaning, and it is up to the researcher to identify and report such meaning so the limited literature can continue to be expanded upon, and also challenged

Research question two. *What role do superintendents perceive spirituality plays in becoming better leaders?* The participant's internal thought of spirituality was one that was unique and defined by each participant as they spoke about the various methods used throughout their work as a public- school superintendent. The meaning and use of the term spirituality were unique and authentic to each of them, and the way they defined spirituality in their life differed from one another. This aligns to the idea that spirituality is difficult to define from one person to another. Researchers have analyzed spiritual leadership from a diverse perspective, with varying viewpoints, and engaged in different approaches to study the topic over the past few decades (Elias et al., 2018). The meanings of what spirituality was, and the manner in which the participants implemented it in their educational leadership and decision-making was not limited to a single definition or method. Makkar and Singh (2018) defined spirituality "as a transcendental relationship with the higher being, leading us to the path of self-awareness and self-engagement, which enables us to serve others for the benefit of society at large" (p. 6). The broad interpretations shared by the participants conveys that spirituality is a complex human phenomenon, one that the individual shapes and reshapes his or her meaning of spirituality through his or her life-experiences and differing perspectives.

The participants noted that practices of faith in regard to spirituality were utilized by the participants in the forms of faith in prayer, faith in scripture, and faith in a higher

power, as a means to assist in their role as a public-school superintendent. This use of these practices by the participants provides support to the research that asserts servant leaders use the qualities of moral commitment in an intentional manner in order to engage with their employees (Bao et al., 2018). Spirituality is the inner part of the school leader, which helps them demonstrate their faith in their work as school leaders. According to Fry (2013), "People with hope and faith have a vision of where they are going and how to get there" (p. 93).

The personal connection that each participant had with prayer, scripture, and a higher power supports the literature that a person's connection one has with spirituality is unique, and individuals have the need to desire a higher calling or purpose in their life. This sense of calling is universal and is the foundation of what people seek at work: a sense of purpose found in work that is considered to be meaningful by employees; a sense of belonging and interactions with others that leads to collaborative relationships; and the ability to live life that is consistent with the goals of the organization (Fry, 2013). The participants' use of prayer, scripture, and a relationship with a higher power was not done to necessarily create better outcomes within their organization, rather was utilized to provide balance and find peace and direction in their responsibilities as a public-school superintendent. The identification of these practices was not done to create an all-encompassing approach for leaders to implement spirituality into their work as leaders or decision-makers, but to simply provide specific practices which current and future leaders can identify with in order to assist in their own leadership and decision-making. In addition, the extension of spirituality does not conclude a claim that those who implement such practices will become better decision makers. These practices are left up to the

individual to utilize by taking into consideration his or her situation. Servant leaders should strive to evaluate their actions regularly and consistently to understand how these align with their belief systems in order to preserve their personal success (Stollberger, 2019).

In this study, the participants reflected on their use of spiritual leadership and the elements of vision, hope/faith, altruistic love, and service in their pursuit to become a better leader within their organization. Although spiritual leadership is seen as a relatively new type of leadership approach over the past few decades (Elias et al., 2018), the literature does suggest that spiritual leadership is a viable option for those in the field of education to utilize in their leadership approach (Bande, 2016). In addition, leadership in general, regardless of the type of organization, is grounded in spiritual ideals which provide leaders the opportunity to align personal and organizational values (Berkovich, 2016). The participants' use of spiritual leadership was not necessarily one they spoke of openly to everyone in their organization; however, the goal was that the qualities of spiritual leadership would show through their actions and the manner in which they treated people.

Participants could not necessarily clearly define the role spiritual leadership plays in their responsibilities as leaders within their organization from the standpoint of how they use reference or data points to measure their effectiveness as leaders. Each participant has certain values they prioritize and utilize in their self-reflection, which becomes evident in the participants' personal and professional lives. This is supported by research stating that effective leadership requires leaders to exhibit the qualities of being authentic, vulnerable, accepting, present, and useful (Northouse, 2018). By using the

personal and professional aspect of their lives, participants utilize spiritual leadership to help them grow as a leader and to improve in their role as an educational leader, while at the same time serving the needs of those they lead. The importance of presence is crucial to the success of the organization in order for the leader to attempt to lead in a holistic manner (Wang, 2017). By utilizing this holistic approach, public school superintendents are able to manage organizational policies, mandates from the state, and a variety of social and emotional aspects. This can be accomplished through utilization of spiritual leadership as a means to move their district forward to without to stray from his or her spiritual leadership style or beliefs.

        Research question three. *What specific decision-making practices do superintendents believe reflect spiritually centered leadership?* Through this study, the influences in which participants noted their decision-making was influenced by included scripture and prayer, life experiences, and collaboration. The influences which emerged is not an all-inclusive list, but instead, a list of influences in which participants recognized and identified as playing a role in their decision-making process. None of the influences guaranteed a more correct or better decision for each participant; however, the influences were used as a compass to guide participants to a decision that seemed the best for all they served. The influences each participant described, served as a filter of information for each participant to consider while going through the decision-making process. These influences helped mold the course of action each participant could take within a given circumstance. This is supported by the research from a study in which participants used a spiritual filter as a basis of decision-making, to inform a framework of their leadership style while aligned to spirituality (Elias et al., 2018). Unfortunately, there is not one

resource guide for leaders to help guide them in making good or correct decisions, however the influences identified in this study can be useful in assisting in the conversation of how these influences can play a role in decision-making for leaders.

When it comes to scripture and prayer, these both go hand in hand. Decisions grounded in scripture and prayer are admirable, honorable, transparent, sound in judgement, and not grounded in selfish intent. They are products of decision-making through character, ethics, and morals. This is supported in the literature, servant leadership forces leaders to pursue a new form of leadership in which community, team-work, and shared decision-making take the place of traditional leadership models (Crippen & Willows, 2019). It was sometimes through trials and challenging times that scripture and prayer began to play a role in the decision making of some participants. Often these qualities played a role on how others viewed them, and how they viewed their decisions. This is backed up by the research of Verdorfer (2019) which stated that higher perceptions of a leader's level of authenticity increased their employees respect for the leader, making it highly likely to encourage more direct and intentional influence by the leader. The influence of our decision-making reverts back to having a firm foundation in scripture and prayer through a relationship with Christ which can build qualities inside of us to help us as leaders and decision makers.

Although life experiences were identified as influential factors, it is important to be careful not to simplify this to being the only factors to be considered in leadership and decision-making in regard to spirituality. Stollberger, (2019) concluded leaders need to self-reflect on past experiences and seek to influence others by investing in cultivating others in order to promote prosocial behaviors and increase employee performance. In

addition, authentic leadership also demands moral reasoning and consideration for life events (Northouse, 2016). Decision-making is an integral part of leadership, and it is crucial to be careful not to make the process so prescriptive that it creates an attitude that everyone can become an effective leader and decision-maker by following simple steps within a decision-making framework. Scholars agree that life experiences can play a significant part in the performance of a leader; authentic leaders understand this concept and seek to make it a basis for their leadership by understanding the impact of personal life experiences (Lee et al., 2019). When leaders acknowledge and appreciate their moral reasoning and personal life experiences, they demonstrate a higher level of authenticity in their decision-making practices.

Reflection on past experiences is crucial for school leaders in order to improve professionally as well as using this refection in their decision-making processes. Sandhu and Dastgeer (2019) agree with this concept and define moral reasoning as a process that establishes leaders in an organization to take on a selfless approach which improves their ability to make decisions which have an impact on the broader interest of the entire group or community, which includes the promotion of doing what is right for everyone in the system. The influences discussed within this study are not intended to create a singular framework for decision-making, but instead, meant to add to the literature in exploring the effects such influences play in leadership of public-school superintendents. Influences should be seen as a means to an end where a leader increases his or her capacity to make decisions, act, and can be part of a collaborative approach in order to assist school leaders in their decision-making processes and leadership.

Collaboration is an element which is essential to decision-making. Collaboration represents many things in the responses from the participants. First and foremost, working with people through collaboration helps develop the idea of shared decision making. It enables the leader to know what others are thinking, what others might be struggling with, and how the decision can impact others. This form of decision-making can help to promote a new form of leadership in which community, team-work, and shared decision-making take the place of more traditional top-down leadership styles (Crippen & Willows, 2019).

By collaborating with various stakeholder, a leader can tap into a variety of knowledge bases which can in turn create worth and investment in the minds of others. This is backed up by Hooper and Bernhardt (2016) who concluded that transformational leadership is rooted on the importance of understanding school culture and the extent that culture can be influenced by the values, beliefs, and mindsets of teachers, students, and other stakeholders. This sense of worth and investment that can be created in members within the organization can prove to be extremely valuable. When an effective relationship can be developed amongst the leader and the follower commitment, participation, and performance can all be improved (Anderson, 2017). Everyone has something to offer within the decision-making process, and it is up to the leader to create this collaborative process where their ideas can be heard. The influence and importance of collaboration is one that is crucial to the decision-making process.

These themes are further illustrated in the context of the spiritual leadership model in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Model of Spiritual Leadership

Note. Model of spiritual leadership proposed by Fry & Egel (2017).

Implications for Practice

The findings indicated that the role of spirituality within educational decision-making and school leadership regarding public school superintendents was evident. Several aspects of spiritual leadership were identified as being relied on to assist the participants in their decision-making and school leadership practices. Participants were able to use these qualities to help make decisions they felt were in the best interest of various stakeholders and for their organization as a whole, which, therefore, enhanced the influence for spirituality to be utilized by public school superintendents in other leadership practices.

A thorough study of the data leads to many implications for future practice. By using the four emerging themes as a framework, it became clear there are differences in

the ways that superintendents perceive spiritual leadership qualities in their leadership

practices, especially in decision-making matters. The following implications are offered

as ways various public-school superintendents utilize spiritual leadership in their

leadership and decision-making processes.

   Exposing public school superintendents to the qualities and benefits of spiritual

leadership is important. The first implication is directly related to educational leadership

reflection practices and spirituality as a viable leadership model. Among the many

organizations in need of impactful leadership are school districts (Ross & Cozzens,

2016). Spiritual leadership is not often associated with leadership practices in the field of

public-school educational leadership. Many public-school superintendents have not been

introduced to the benefits of spiritual leadership and the positive impact these qualities

can have within a public-school setting. Exposing superintendents to spiritual leadership

allows this form of leadership to be introduced to future educational leaders, encouraging

and teaching them how to apply this model in their leadership tasks, assisting with their

decision-making process, and developing and utilizing this form of leadership as an

effective leadership style.

   Self-reflection is important to educational leadership as related to the qualities of

spiritual leadership, leading to the next implication. Qu et al. (2019) found that authentic

leaders act in a way that reflects their words and values, which can create a resistance to

external pressures that could have a negative influence on the organization. The leader

who demonstrates the practice of self-reflection is effective in the pursuit of spiritual

leadership, has a firm foundation regarding what they believe and can apply those beliefs

and values in their professional leadership lives. Humble leaders tend to seek more of a

view or a picture that is indicative of their strengths, abilities, and limitations by

thoroughly investing in the lives of others and to the organization of which they are a part

(Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2017).

As self-reflection skills become more advanced, the educational leader

understands how their spiritual practice affects their professional practices. Internal moral

perspective is described as a process of self-regulation in which leaders use their inner

moral values and standards to guide their behaviors as opposed to giving in to external

pressure that could control their actions; the lack of an internalized moral perspective

undermines the authenticity of leadership in an organization (Wei et al., 2018). The

leader begins to see value in applying these beliefs, particularly in areas where difficult

decisions have to be made. The leader understands how their spiritual practices give them

insight into the importance of developing spiritual leadership skills in their approach to

interactions with students and staff. The leader takes time to reflect on what they believe

and finds purpose through their spiritual leadership practices.

An attitude of service is important to school leaders, serving as an additional

implication. The importance of serving others allows for genuine growth and concern for

students, teachers, and staff members and allows relationships to develop and thrive

(Frick, 2016). School leaders must have a vision and goal for service, which would

enable all involved to be empowered to grow to establish a culture of high performance

(Northouse, 2018).

According to Hung et al. (2016), a leader's service attitude promotes selfless

contributions to be the change agent needed for their staff members to promote success.

Wise servant leaders recognize and gear their service of creating high-performing schools

to understand reciprocal influences in nature (Northouse, 2018). School servant leaders should strive to develop organizations that can assist in developing community engagements that work to develop the involvement of parents, staff, and stakeholders to participate in the decision-making processes within a school setting (Liden et al., 2014).

Another implication is the importance of a school superintendent to have a compassionate love for all students, staff, and stakeholders to create a culture of high performance and excellence in his or her school district. Altruistic love is composed of forgiveness, kindness, integrity, empathy/compassion, honesty, patience, courage, trust/loyalty, and humility (Fry & Egel, 2017). Servant leaders must understand that goals exist for the empowerment of the follower through care and love so that the employee will then desire to exist to do the work with passion. A compassionate or altruistic love serves to develop community within the organization by improving compassion and empowering love for one another, causing employees to act as concerned colleagues with a passion for seeing each other succeed, allowing the community to be built in the organization (Smylie et al., 2016).

Research indicates another possible implication is that school superintendents should have a vision for the district that is spiritually based to most effectively create a culture of high performance and excellence in their school district (Fry & Egel, 2017). The leader must communicate this vision with others to create the highest level of performance (Jensen et al., 2018). When developing this vision, leaders must share their strategic values, relationship values, and behavioral values to communicate the details of this mission or goal (Jensen et al., 2018). This communication allows for followers who

have a similar belief and thought processes to that of the leader to help transform the culture to implement the vision needed for optimal success (Seto & Sarros, 2016).

The final implication from the research and the literature is that school superintendents must develop trust through their actions for their students, staff, and stakeholders to create a culture of high performance and excellence within their districts. This type of trust allows students and staff members to make meaningful decisions that result in the overall attainment of goals. Trust is an essential building block in the development of the relationship between servant leaders and the stakeholders and followers, who are the fundamental building blocks for the climate and culture of the organization (Fry & Egel, 2017). Trust and the subordinates of trust, such as organizational trust, affect teachers and the teachers' relationships within an organization significantly because they can affect the overall organizational climate within the district (Lu et al., 2019).

The development of trust within a team can additionally help create a level of transparency needed to develop the organizational climate, professionalism, authenticity, and cooperation among coworkers (Kars & Inandi, 2018). Schools and organizations must establish working levels of trust within their school system to develop and cultivate a culture of success (Jeyaraj & Gandolfi, 2019). Trust then can become an important variable, leading to a mutual understanding of a developed culture of competence, honesty, openness, loyalty, and consistency (Lu et al., 2019).

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was designed using a qualitative methods approach to capture the full essence of the perceptions of public-school superintendents in how spiritual leadership

influences their leadership practices. However, this study is not comprehensive because the research only included superintendents serving at public school districts in the state of Missouri. Although this study captured the perceptions of a small sample of superintendents, countless other superintendents serve in public school districts in other regions of the United States.

The perceptions of public-school superintendents could vary by geographical location. Superintendents' perceptions may differ in larger metropolitan areas or on either of America's coastal regions when compared to the perceptions of superintendents in the state of Missouri. Therefore, extending the research to explore whether institutional location impacts the perceptions of public-school superintendents is one method to expand the research. Another recommendation is to study the perceptions of superintendents of private school districts to determine if the distinction affirms or contradicts the information revealed in this study.

A longitudinal study is also recommended to follow up on the impact spiritual leadership has on the school districts where spiritual leadership practices have been implemented. A five-year follow-up to study staff, student, and patron satisfaction could help determine if spiritual leadership practices are an appropriate technique to influence the culture and climate of the school district. Additionally, a measurement of student achievement scores might provide some insight into the effect spiritual leadership practices might have on the overall academic performance of a school district.

Another apparent need for future research in terms of spiritual leadership in education is for further application and refinement of the qualities and the impact on other levels of school leadership. Use of spiritual leadership by other educational

researchers could provide information regarding its use to understand how spirituality affects decision-making at the building level. The most apparent refinement could be achieved by applying the process to other school leaders not described in this study. For example, more research could be applied to educational leaders working in elementary and secondary schools exclusively. This research could explain how this type of leadership impacts the educational practice in specific building levels.

More research could be beneficial to determine the use of spiritual leadership as a tool to help to enhance understanding of the role of self-awareness and the use of well-defined spiritual practices in achieving perseverance and effectiveness in educational leadership. This research could have an impact on the longevity of school district leadership. These studies would also help develop frameworks for applying spiritual qualities more naturally to common but challenging situations.

Lastly, this research could serve to impact the training and development of future public school educational leaders through administrator preparation programs. This study design could provide the opportunity for educational leadership preparation programs to expose aspiring educational leaders to the responsibilities and situations which could be encountered in their respective leadership roles within a public school district. With the demands of school leadership, it is crucial for educational leadership preparation programs to expose future leaders to the challenges they will encounter and how they can navigate difficult periods of decision-making. Additionally, more research on this topic could provide more resources and opportunities for discussion with peers who share similar belief systems or struggles, offering a variety of perspectives to aspiring

educational leaders to build their core belief systems before entering the field of educational leadership.

Summary

Many people value the importance of educating children, as proven by the funding and resources allocated to our education systems (Ross & Cozzens, 2016). Exemplary leadership matters in education to positively influence commitment to and motivation for the organization's success (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Political, economic, and social change significantly affect education (Kirtman & Fullan, 2016), leading the superintendent to play a crucial role in leading the educational system successfully through society's changes and demands for equity and excellence in education. This study's significance was in exploring the views of leaders of public-school districts, the superintendents, whose perspectives are lacking in the literature (Ronfeldt, 2015), by adding to the literature articulating the essential qualities of superintendent spiritual leadership behaviors on school success.

As stated in Chapter One, as a spiritual leader, the superintendent can play a critical role in times of change through relationships with employees that exemplify the transformational process (Northouse, 2016). Despite its documented existence, productivity, and positive impact on organizations, the theory of spiritual leadership and its impact at the district level on public education has yet to be thoroughly researched (Creswell & Poth 2018). Identifying common perceptions of successful school leaders can enable a better understanding of what others expect from a superintendent (Beare, 2018). The focus of this qualitative study was to determine if practicing spiritual leadership principles matters to public school superintendents (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The spiritual leadership model proposed by Fry et al. (2017) was used as the theoretical framework for this study.

In Chapter Two, a comprehensive review of the literature defining spiritual leadership and discussing two prominent spiritual leadership styles, servant leadership, and transformational leadership, was introduced. An analysis comparing and contrasting the different models were made, and the qualities and characteristics of spiritual leadership were addressed. Servant leadership, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, laissez-faire leadership, and authentic leadership were described and compared. Finally, literature concerning the spiritual formation and its implications on educational leadership was discussed.

In Chapter Three, an explanation of the methodology used in the study was provided. A qualitative method of research was chosen for this study because it is a naturalistic way to explore an issue while capturing the authentic setting and culture being studied (Creswell, 2018). The sample for this study was a census of the entire population (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Participants were selected based on purposive sampling that selects participants based on characteristics aligned with the study's objective (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The population for this study was 12 superintendents who belong to the Association of Christian Administrators and who lead school districts in Southwest Missouri. Southwest Missouri was selected due to the geographical access to these districts to provide for ease of interviews. Once identified, participants were contacted to schedule interviews which were recorded and transcribed for further analysis of responses of the participants (Mills & Gay, 2018).

In Chapter Four, findings from the interviews were recorded and analyzed. Through the analysis of participants' responses, four themes emerged. The emerging themes represented the meaningful details of the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2018). The four prevalent themes were vision and expectations matter; hope and faith matter; love matters; and serving matters.

In Chapter Five, relevant findings of the three research questions were discussed. Logical conclusions were drawn and discussed from the findings and supported by the literature. Several implications for practice emerged from the data and suggested more exposure of public-school superintendents to the qualities and benefits of spiritual leadership is important to the organizations in need of impactful leadership (Ross & Cozzens, 2016). These implications include the idea that self-reflection of the use of spiritual leadership qualities is important to educational leaders to uphold the values of the school district (Qu et al., 2019). Another implication is that an attitude of service to others is crucial to the success of a school district.

To address limitations of this study, future research should focus on additional populations of public-school superintendents to determine if the region or geographic location has an impact on the superintendents' perceptions of the impact of spiritual leadership on their leadership and decision-making practices. Additionally, long-range studies should be implemented to determine if spiritual leadership practices are an appropriate technique to influence the culture and climate of the school district. Additionally, a measurement of student achievement scores was recommended to provide some insight into the effectiveness of spiritual leadership practices on the overall academic performance of a school district. Finally, public school superintendents must be

knowledgeable of and free to utilize spiritual leadership qualities in public school district

leadership practices. The use of spiritual leadership practices does impact the leadership

practices and decision-making processes of those interviewed in this study.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. What would you like to use as a pseudonym?

2. What is your mailing address?

2. What is your telephone number?

3. What are the best times to contact you?

4. What is your preferred Email address?

5. How many years have you been a superintendent?

6. How many years have you been in your current position?

7. How many employees do you currently supervise?

8. How many years of total professional educational experience do you have?

9. Which of these best describes your campus setting?

               Rural   Urban   Suburban

10. How many students are in your district?

11. What does effective school leadership mean to you?

12. Why did you enter this profession?

13. How would you describe your leadership?

14. What personal traits and beliefs do you bring to the job?

15. What are some defining characteristics that you use to make yourself a better decision-maker?

16. From the characteristics you just described, which do you feel is the most crucial characteristic and why?

17. What do you do on your own to grow as a leader and a decision-maker?

18. What reference or data points do you use to reflect and determine that you are growing as a leader and a decision-maker?

19. What are some of the challenges you face which keep you from being the leader you would like to be?

20. What sacrifices, if any, have you made to be the leader and decision-maker you are today?

21. What are some things you are not willing to sacrifice to grow as a leader and decision-maker and why?

22. How do you believe others would describe you as a leader?

Appendix B

Invitation to Participate

Date:

Dear _____,

My name is Mark D. Hedger, and I am a doctoral student at Lindenwood University. I am conducting a study for a dissertation titled, *The Impact of Spiritual Leadership on the Leadership Practices of Public School Superintendents.* The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of spiritual centered leadership on public school superintendents and their decision-making processes.

As a participant in this study, you will have the opportunity to be interviewed via phone or video chat. The interview questions will be sent prior to the actual interview in an email. The amount of time required to complete the interview is approximately 30 minutes.

If you are willing to be interviewed about your experiences and perceptions of the impact of spiritual leadership on your decision-making processes, please email me at mdh625@lindenwood.edu. The interview will be scheduled at your convenience. If you are selected for an interview, a Research Information Sheet will be provided in advance.

If you have any questions about the survey or the study, please feel free to contact me. Thank you in advance for your time and participation!

Sincerely,

Mark Hedger
Doctoral Student
Lindenwood University

Appendix C

LINDENWOOD

Research Information Sheet

You are being asked to participate in a research study. We are doing this study to explore the impact of spiritual-centered leadership on public school superintendents and their decision-making processes. During this study you will be asked to participate in answering a series of interview questions regarding your perceptions of how the qualities of spiritual leadership may impact your decision-making process. It will take about thirty minutes to complete this study.

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time.

There are no risks from participating in this project. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. We will not collect any data which may identify you.

We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. We do not intend to include information that could identify you in any publication or presentation. Any information we collect will be stored by the researcher in a secure location. The only people who will be able to see your data are: members of the research team, qualified staff of Lindenwood University, representatives of state or federal agencies.

Who can I contact with questions?

If you have concerns or complaints about this project, please use the following contact information:

Mark D. Hedger: mdh614@lindenwood.edu

Dr. Kathy Grover: kgrover@lindenwood.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or concerns about the project and wish to talk to someone outside the research team, you can contact Michael Leary (Director - Institutional Review Board) at 636-949-4730 or mleary@lindenwood.edu.

Appendix D

Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board Approval

Apr 6, 2021 12:43:33 PM CDT

RE: IRB-21-125: Initial - The Impact of Spiritual Leadership on the Leadership Practices

of Public School

Superintendents

Dear Mark Hedger,

The study, The Impact of Spiritual Leadership on the Leadership Practices of Public

School Superintendents, has been Approved as Exempt - Limited IRB.

Category: Category 2. (iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational

tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview

procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if

at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the

identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers

linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the

determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

The submission was approved on Apr 6, 2021.

Here are the findings:

Regulatory Determinations

This study has been determined to be minimal risk because the research is not obtaining

data considered sensitive information or performing interventions posing harm greater

than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine

physical or psychological examinations or tests.

The IRB has conducted a limited IRB review to ensure that the provisions of 45 CFR

46.111(a)(7) for the privacy and confidentiality of subjects is effective for the purposes of

this Exempt study. The data set will include email addresses, and while email addresses

are considered a direct identifier, it is necessary to capture data in this manner to ensure

the integrity of this interview-based research design. The PI has created an adequate plan

to protect privacy and confidentiality of participants in this research, including

technical safeguards for the security of recorded audio, coding of research data, and

associated protections outlined in the IRB application.

Sincerely,

Lindenwood University (lindenwood) Institutional Review Board

Vita

Mark Daron Hedger currently serves as superintendent of schools for Strafford R-VI School District in Strafford, Missouri. Hedger graduated from Missouri Western State University with a degree in Elementary Education. Upon graduation, he taught first grade and coached high school basketball in the Knob Noster R-VIII School District. Hedger went on to complete his master's and specialist degrees from the University of Central Missouri.

After completing his graduate degrees, Hedger served in elementary principal roles in the Holden R-III School District and Ozark R-VI School District. He then served as the head men's basketball coach and athletic director at Baptist Bible College, before starting his career as a superintendent in the Laclede Co. R-1 School District. In addition, Hedger serves as a deacon at Marshfield First Baptist Church.