

A Mixed Methods Study of Shared Leadership in a
K-12 School District Enhanced by a Case Study of the Former Superintendent's Role

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Abstract

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to identify what practical applications of shared leadership have been applied and which initiatives will further the building of trust and vision in a small town school district in an eastern region of a western state.

A quantitative assessment survey was conducted in the fall of 2004 by the school district. A modified survey instrument was administered by the district in April, 2007. The former superintendent was interviewed at length during winter 2007-2008.

A longitudinal analysis of both surveys, plus the interview data, provides a database for the administration as well as other school districts to vision and plan for the present and future development of shared leadership dynamics. The qualitative case study also provides insights for all stakeholders to learn how to participate in their school and community in overcoming embedded challenges to a leadership style change.

The structure of shared leadership can be fragile in the early stages of development unless all leadership groups are supportive and engaged. The study seeks to provide an inside look into critical processes which must be in place and operating to achieve maximum effectiveness. Disengagement by any of the stakeholders may ultimately result in mediocrity or complete failure.

Introduction

“Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.” John Kennedy was not allowed to utter these words on November 22, 1963. A fatal bullet prevented him from reaching the podium. However, the truth of the statement is just as powerful today in a society which is much different than it was in 1963. Stagnant thinking by any leader will ultimately bring failure at worst and mediocrity at best. An effective leader must be a lifelong learner, never satisfied with the status quo.

I spent over thirty years in the business world, both as a manager and a front line employee. The leaders in our schools may not deal with a profit and loss statement, but with the passing of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) they are certainly expected to deliver results. My leadership skills have been developed by attending corporate training and applying those methods in management. Why? To deliver expected results!

I will also draw upon the experience of spending more than 26 continuous years on a local city council in the Northwest. The process of facing election every four years and then having the electorate return me for seven continuous terms has provided a wealth of experiential knowledge. While the setting of the study is school-based, the correlation between the organizations will be germane to the conclusions found in the study.

The path to a thesis about shared leadership began with my interest in leadership from the corporate world but brought to life by a class on biblical leadership at Corban College. A longstanding relationship with a district superintendent prompted me to contact him and discuss my desire to use the district for the project. His sharing of the

initiatives already begun in the district concerning shared leadership confirmed the choice to study this district to satisfy the thesis requirements.

“Our Students, Our Focus, Our Future’ is the mission statement for the school district. An eight year old statement which no one fully believes or understands.” Thus begins my interview with the district superintendent. But first, the reader must understand where the journey began. The district was saddled with a revolving door at the superintendent’s office. During the 1995-2001 time period tenure by the superintendent averaged 1.5 years. Four leaders in six years had created instability with very little trust in the system.

Booker T. Washington stated that “Few things help an individual more than to place responsibility upon him, and to let him know that you trust him.” The present superintendent was hired beginning in the 2001-2002 school year after serving as assistant superintendent for one year. Declining enrollment necessitated the closing of an elementary school. Budget cuts during the 2001-2004 period amounted to 25% of the overall budget of the district. Additionally, new contracts were negotiated during this time going to mediation twice, but avoiding a strike. Particularly in the present era of *NCLB*, a climate of district trust needs to be established for changes to occur (Chhuon, Gilkey, Gonzalez, Daly, & Chrispeels, 2006). The climate in the district had not been favorable for trust to grow between all the stakeholders in the district. The Chhuon, et.al. (2006) study cited above argues that “trust is a central element of social capital in a school system that can open clearer lines of communication, thereby increasing the likelihood of systemic change” (p. 3).

The first line of trust to be established by the district superintendent was his commitment to stay in the district. The 2006-2007 school year was the sixth year of his tenure, equal to the previous four superintendents. Beginning in the fall of 2005 the administration team in the district began to focus on shared leadership. A tool used was a meta-analysis titled *School Leadership that Works—From Research to Results*. Authors Robert J. Marzano, Brian A. McNulty, and Timothy Waters (2005) analyzed 69 studies dating from 1970. The book also contains a survey of more than 650 building principals. Based on the data collected, the authors have created 21 leadership responsibilities which can have a positive effect on student achievement.

In a follow-up interview with the superintendent, the following statements set the direction the district wished to pursue. Two themes emerged as well, encompassing the viewpoint of where they were and where they wanted to go.

The present:

- Trust. Because of difficult financial times trust is down.
- Change. The closure of schools has eroded any feelings of security.
- Finance. Seen as volatile and unreliable.
- Leadership. Present leadership is stable, but change will occur.
- Staff. The majority is supportive.
- Vision/Plan. It is admitted that visioning and planning has not been done well.

The future:

- Trust. The need to continue to rebuild real trust and a perceived lack of trust in the district's decision making processes. Shared leadership will be very important for us to accomplish this task.
- Change. People need to be taught how to deal with change and become a part of the process.
- Finance. There is now more transparency and consistency in the business office.
- Leadership. The present administrative team will only remain so for a few more years. New leaders need to be found and brought into the mix.

The question addressed and the purpose of this study was to identify what practical applications (or facets) of shared leadership would have been applied and which initiatives would have furthered the rebuilding of trust and vision in the district if the superintendent had been allowed to continue. A comprehensive, district-wide, needs assessment survey was conducted in the fall of 2004 with the population consisting of administrators, staff, parents and K-12 students. A simplified survey was administered at the end of the 2006-2007 school year with new questions added. The 2004 survey has not been thoroughly analyzed as of this date. The goal of this study was to conduct an analysis of the superintendent's tenure. A snapshot from both surveys concerning leadership is included in this document.

The opportunity for debriefing of the superintendent after he left the district in spring 2007 allowed me to bring the study a mixed methods approach. The interview provided deeper insight into the dynamic of the atmosphere of the district. Specifically,

what practical applications utilizing shared leadership were found operating within the district and what should be the direction of the district are discussed in the conclusion of the thesis.

Literature Review

The review of literature will comprise three intertwined components. The first will explore the foundational need of trust. Secondly, the dynamic of trust allows the progression towards shared leadership, and finally a connection to the subject population by the Marzano, et al. book, a meta-analysis of school leadership currently used by the district leadership team.

Trust

Multiple authors suggest the bedrock of a relationship is composed of trust, which is crucial to communication, without which little change will occur in the organization. (Choun, Chrispeels, Daly, Gilkey, & Gonzalez, 2006) The idea of changing a school culture is not simply born from a desire to trust, but is a directed effort containing five elements as suggested by Choun et al. as follows—

- (1) a district-wide vision and strategy to improve instruction,
- (2) data-based inquiry and accountability,
- (3) a commitment to the development of and investment in teachers and staff.
- (4) collaboration among and communication between all shareholders; and
- (5) trust. (p. 5)

Although the ultimate goal as suggested by Choun et al. (2006) are worthwhile, many barriers exist to reach a shared vision. Most school districts are faced with similar barriers to developing trust. One significant external barrier offered by Brewster and Railsback (2003) is unsteady or insufficient financial support. Brewster and Railsback also confirm the dynamic of a workforce seeking a district in which the ability to feel stable concerning the finances of a district affects a teacher's decision to remain in a

district. Choun et al. found that further interviews, document reviews, and observations revealed that the lack of trust between districts and schools was fueled by rapid demographic changes in the community.

Historically, funding problems and demographic changes are pandemic in the American school system. However, even in this cauldron Choun et al. (2006) believes an atmosphere of trust can bring conditions in which academic excellence is symbiotic with staff. Literature suggests there is a powerful relationship between teacher “trust and student achievement” (p.13). How do the stakeholders arrive at this level of trust? Sergiovanni (2005) explores the path to trust describing an organization containing stakeholders wanting to do the “right thing” (p. 15) coupled with usable results. Sergiovanni (2005) also suggests that no one group can complete the path to trust, it takes every member working together, with each student, teacher, administrator, and parent willing to fulfill their “obligations of each role” (p.116).

One of the fruits of internal trust is student learning. Mercurious (2004) offers that “trust and respect” (p.12) are elevated as representative of their expectations of an administration in support of classroom dynamics. Mercurious specifically states that in a positive learning environment “most teachers rebel against any sort of management style that scrutinizes every detail of their work performance. Teachers’ effectiveness depends on their freedom” (p. 16). Somewhat surprisingly, Mercurious discovered a desire for supervision which makes clear their expectations and goals. Mercurious continues by describing an emerging theme of trust coupled with accountability, which explains why teachers welcome their principals to express confidence in their efforts, while affording each teacher a clear pathway, void of distractions.

Choun et al. (2006) sums up the role of the professional community when stating that growing trust depends on mutual actions among the schools and district office, which is evident across the district. Additionally, Caron and McLaughlin (2002), described schools as excellent when schools acted in a realm of cooperation which is imbued with trust and a realization of true cooperation and common goals for the students is in operation.

Shared Leadership

A general discussion about defining shared leadership will be followed by an overview of the four stakeholder groups consisting of superintendents, teachers, (community members) parents, and students, finishing with comments about succession and community involvement.

Caron and McLaughlin (2002) suggest an important theme of success when stating that cross pollination occurs when staff form partnerships. Multiple outcomes result with joint development of instruction, increased group effort, “shared leadership, and shared decision making” (p.296). A unified outlook by students and a shared way of life result from the above dynamic. As change occurs within a school, five stages of leaders are defined by Southworth and Du Quesnay (2005) as “emergent leaders, established leaders, entry to headship, advanced leaders, and consultant leaders” (p.214). Leighton and Nadeau (1996) echo a similar theme, reporting continued transformation happens because of the allowances of giving a platform to speak from for parents as well, thereby honoring differences. Additionally Leighton and Nadeau (1996) would believe this openness supports the communities’ right to be heard and their opinions are honestly desired.

Caron and McLaughlin (2002) continue this theme in their work, believing that the collective efforts of staff and lay people alike can fill leadership roles. The depth of the commitment becomes evident according to Leighton and Nadeau (1996) when:

Partnerships emerge because stakeholders see the bit that they promoted become part of the whole; they claim their share of the work cheerfully, because it gives expression to their own sense of what is right for a school to do. (p. 7)

Southworth and Du Quesnay (2005) suggest a similar idea when stating the idea of multiple leaders will have the effect of also raising the bar in the classroom for the teacher and the student.

Caron and McLaughlin (2002) view excellent schools as developing across the organization a population willing to share leadership and the desire to act as one. Another theme which was reported by Caron and McLaughlin (2002) demonstrated “in most instances, teachers reported high degrees of satisfaction with shared decision making and felt that it provided a concrete goal and process for collaboration” (p. 305).

The literature has much to say about shared leadership in general. However, the four stakeholders in a District have their own sphere of influence. Hord (1990) points out that “one way to strengthen the relationship of superintendents and principals is by sharing leadership through team management” (p. 64).

Duke and York-Barr (2004) pursue the results of teacher leadership from two decades suggesting an organization which allows teachers to work with the administration in assessing programs improves the educational environment. The outcome of this collaboration results in better equipped teachers and in turn improves academic success.

Duke and York-Barr continue describing a scenario in which “teacher leadership is reasonably situated within four concepts of leadership that are inclusive of formal and informal leaders; participative leadership, leadership as an organizational quality, distributed leadership, and parallel leadership” (p. 261).

Expanding on this formal view, Duke and York-Barr (2004) found when direction is established in casual habits, including advising fellow teachers in overcoming classroom obstacles, looking for parental help, utilizing informal associations, exhibiting thoughtful habits, and vocalizing a plan for development these four leadership concepts take root and bear fruit. A far reaching conclusion of Duke and York-Barr defines the teacher’s role as:

The process by which teachers, individually or collectively; influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement. Such leadership work involves three intentional development foci: individual development, collaboration or team development, and organizational development. (p. 287)

Lambert (2005) discovered in schools filled with good leaders, the students gain the ability to lead, which promotes academic success. Teachers not only studied leadership, they acted like leaders and used the classroom in modeling leadership scenarios for students. Lambert continues, stating all stakeholders play their roles, with “these congruent concepts of school improvement involve team structures” (p.242) such as groups of teachers and families in actions and interactions which result in increased involvement and leadership abilities.

From an inner city setting, principles for success were studied by Alber (2005) The intervention revealed “all relationships contain elements of politics and power” (p. 1). Alber found that participants realized that “parental involvement was framed in three notions. The first element in the definition of parental involvement was the belief that parents are equal partners on an education team” (p. 3). Also recognized by the Alber study was the operational dynamic in which “parents needed opportunities to assume leadership roles to increase their confidence” and that “leadership roles need to occur in a real and meaningful setting” (p. 5). Sergiovanni (2005) ends this section by succinctly pointing out that “in reality, leadership is more about helping people understand the problems they face, helping them manage these problems, and even helping them learn to live with them” (p. 122).

A companion theme to shared leadership involves succession. Hargreaves (2005) believes “successful succession depends on sound planning, successful employment of outbound and inbound leadership knowledge, limiting the frequency of succession events, and preserving leadership in the face of movements toward more management” (p. 164). Unfortunately, Hargreaves (2005) believes most cases of succession are a contradictory blend of “unplanned discontinuity and continuity: discontinuity with the achievements of a leader’s immediate predecessor, and continuity with (or regression to) the mediocre state of affairs preceding that predecessor” (p. 167). Hargreaves (2005) further reveals the dynamic in which leadership is often moved to another building in order to calm an emergency. Unfortunately, their replacement is installed with little forethought, perpetuating the cycle.

However, according to Hargreaves (2005), researchers “found that three kinds of knowledge are used during the succession process” (p. 169). “Inbound knowledge is leadership knowledge” (p. 169) required to personalize one’s tenure. “Insider knowledge to improve schools” (p. 169) grows after the learning population understands the program established by the leader. “Outbound knowledge” (p. 169) allows the school to safeguard a new paradigm and preserve a legacy.

Martin (2005) posits that the landscape of leadership has changed by stating that a core characterization of effectual management are “three tasks: setting direction, building commitment, and creating alignment” (p. 8). Clearly, the student’s success is joined with the sustainability of the landscape as stated by Leighton and Nadeau (1996) suggesting that each school’s achievement involves a partnership with staff and “other community members who want to be partners in creating conditions for student’s success” (p. 6).

Finally, just how does the district check the pulse of a community? In 2004 the North Central Educational Laboratory (NCEL) brought forth strategies for reaching the audience suggesting “community assessments (which) focus on local assets, resources, and activities as well as gaps, barriers, or emerging needs” (p. 1). What happens for the district as stated by NCEL brings illumination to visibly be aware of the environment of families and concerns about their children. NCEL believed the assessment also helps to plan mutual programs which address their present needs and gives the family and all district employees a forum for input and action within the plan. Continuing in this vein NCEL affirms an ongoing dialogue creates a reliable information pipeline connected to the “families and community members about their perceptions, experiences, values, and beliefs. It is also a good way to encourage community involvement” (p. 6).

Meta-Analysis

The book, *School Leadership that Works—From Research to Results* (2005) by Marzano, McNulty, and Waters had become a tool utilized by the unified school district. As such, its salient points are important to the literature review as a separate section. The book had become a resource for giving direction to the district.

Based on a meta-analysis of 69 studies Marzano, McNulty, and Waters (2005) conclude their study is in opposition to others' research on leadership which offers no explicit direction and little nexus to the students' accomplishments. Marzano et al. assert their work over the last 35 years offers direction "for school administrators and that those behaviors have well-documented effects on student achievement" (p. 7).

Marzano et al. (2005) focused on 21 responsibilities and their correlation with student academic achievement. The list focuses on the school leader, but for the purposes of this study of shared leadership the transfer of principles is appropriate to all stakeholders. Marzano et al. states that "affirmation produces the specific behaviors and characteristics associated with this responsibility as found in our meta-analysis are the following:

- Systematically and fairly recognizing and celebrating the accomplishments of students.
 - Systematically and fairly recognizing and celebrating the accomplishments of teachers.
 - Systematically and fairly recognizing the failures of the school as a whole"
- (p.44).

Marzano et al. (2005) developed 21 responsibilities of the school leader. Number six concerned discipline. They believed a key duty of building managers is to shield staff from unnecessary pressure and provide “acts of ‘buffering’ and ‘protection’ (which) converge to form our responsibility of discipline” (p. 48). Additionally, “situational awareness would include knowledge of the leader’s awareness of the details and the undercurrents regarding the functioning of the school and their use of this information to address current and potential problems” (p. 60).

Marzano et al. (2005) proposes a five step plan for effective school leadership including:

1. Develop a strong school leadership team.
2. Distribute some responsibilities throughout the leadership team.
3. Select the right work.
4. Identify the order of magnitude implied by the selected work.
5. Match the management style to the order of magnitude of the change initiative.

(p.98)

The key to effectiveness, as offered by Marzano et al. (2005), is a setting in which answers will come to the surface as long as shared leadership operates. Not without surprise, as the leadership group provides true leadership and the principle is part of the team, “all 21 responsibilities can be adequately addressed” (p. 99). Thus led, Marzano et al. suggest “a purposeful community must be crafted and defines a purposeful community as one with the *collective efficacy and capability to develop and use assets to accomplish goals that matter to all community members through agreed-upon processes*” (p. 99).

Collective efficacy, as defined by Marzano et al. (2005) “is group members shared perception or belief that they can dramatically enhance the effectiveness of an organization, but in simple terms, collective efficacy is the shared belief that we can make a difference” (p. 99).

The literature review has brought insight and structure to the study. The landscape of the case study revealed three necessary components for potential district success.

- The need for trust to be developed.
- Developing trust allows a district to progress toward shared leadership.
- The connection to the entire subject with practical opportunities to develop operational shared leadership using the suggestions from the meta-analysis.

The three components have been validated through the literature review as well, allowing for solid and justifiable conclusions contained in the study.

Methodology

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to identify what practical applications of shared leadership were applied and which initiatives furthered the building of trust and vision in the district. The case study format will shape and explain the dynamic of what was proposed and what actually transpired in the shared leadership initiative.

A specific analysis of two surveys, focusing on leadership, required an integration of the quantitative and qualitative data. The interview consisted of 25 questions posed to the district superintendent with full permission to use all answers in the results section of the analysis. The survey questions are found in Appendix A.

Setting and Participants

The district in which the research was conducted is in a small town in a western state. The district is comprised of four elementary schools, a middle school, and high school. The student population as of the 2006 school year was 2,177. Participants of the quantitative portion of the study were administrators, teachers, parents, and K-12 students.

The community is located on a major east/west freeway and has a small, but high caliber state university. The district has been plagued by a revolving door superintendent's office with four changes of leadership in six years prior to the 2001-2002 school year. The superintendent in the study brought stability to the district as desired by the school board and populace by remaining in the position for five years.

Data Collection

The district administered the 2004 survey and conducted the spring 2007 survey. The 2007 survey was modified with additional questions. The student survey was shortened to allow completion in a 10-15 minute time frame. The survey was primarily offered online.

The sequence of this study was a quantitative (2004) to quantitative (2007) to qualitative (2007) progression. Because of the existence of the initial survey and its results, the first Phase, followed by the Phase II survey with added questions was analyzed to develop the qualitative interview instrument. The respondent population of the initial and follow-up survey approaches 2,000. An initial interview was conducted in the spring of 2006 to determine the strength of pursuing the subject, from which the material in the introduction was obtained. The qualitative instrument was delivered to the superintendent via e-mail. Subsequent follow-up took the form of telephone conversations concerning clarification of responses to the instrument. A face to face meeting occurred in January 2008 during which the respondent further clarified the written answers. See Appendix A for the survey instrument.

Data Analysis

Data analysis of the quantitative surveys occurred in conjunction with the interview phase. Themes were identified from the quantitative data and correlated with the qualitative data. Interview data collected by the instrument developed by the researcher became part of the database. Specific conclusions about current initiatives involving shared leadership have been assessed. Additionally, new directions have been suggested for other district leadership teams from the data. For clarification, the

superintendent was an elementary principal for the district during the 1997-2001 school year. The subject was promoted to the personnel and curriculum position (considered the assistant superintendent) for the 2001-2002 school year and promoted into the superintendent's position beginning in 2002 and ending in resignation at the end of the 2006-07 school years.

Timetable

The duration of the study was twelve weeks, representing the 2007 school year from September through December. The 2004 quantitative Phase I survey was followed by the quantitative Phase II in April, 2007. Phases I & II were joined by the qualitative Phase III and was submitted in March 2008 for approval.

Results

Life events often intervene in the midst of research. While the 2007 District survey was being conducted, a schism developed among the school board members concerning the initiative of shared leadership. Initially perceived as a normal bump in the road by the superintendent, a full blown attack by some board members on the superintendent resulted in his resignation. During this time of upheaval, the second survey was completed, which will be discussed later in this section.

A set of twenty five questions was developed to probe the progression from optimism to the failure of the tenure of the superintendent. Results are organized around three themes of pre-tenure, tenure, and post tenure.

Pre-Tenure

The catastrophic events which emerged in the midst of the thesis project have created the necessity of the project to become focused on a case study. Prior to the arrival of the recent superintendent, the district had four leaders in six years (1995-2001). The commitment of the new superintendent was deep and full of promise. When asked what dynamic within the district was causing the high turnover, the revelation is telling.

The answer to this question could fill volumes! There are many issues that I am aware of for each superintendent. One constant seemed to be the school board. With the last four superintendents (which is as far as my personal knowledge extends) there has been a strained relation with the board because the board wanted to overstep their boundaries and manage the district when their real job is to direct policy and set budgets. This is, in part, due to the community as well. They feel a real connection to their schools which is good but sometimes turns into they want to control the schools. This attitude is often reflected in the board members. I also know two superintendents had very rocky relations with the employee associations and one superintendent had a total protected door policy which means he was never out in schools or the public or in any venue that he could not control which of course does not work in a small community. (Interview 2007)

Somewhat surprising was the fact that the gains in visioning and planning made during his tenure had their seeds of failure planted in previous administrations. The superintendent stated:

The superintendent prior to my predecessor was a visionary and led the school district through a strategic planning process. Because he left early and the next superintendent wanted nothing to do with the strategic plan it not only fell flat but people did not want to go through the process again. During my tenure we made gains in this because we worked it from the direction of staff helping with planning for where we were going as a district. It was sideways decision making rather than top down. (Interview 2007)

The lack of vision and planning prior to promotion is succinctly stated that ...”because of non-implementation of any kind of visioning and planning hit immediate roadblocks because it was felt that nothing would come of the work that was put in” (Interview 2007). When asked about the barriers which existed to develop trust among all stakeholders three issues emerged. “Budget, past experience and issues with the administration and board” (Interview 2007). Into this setting the new superintendent began to develop and implement the shared leadership program.

Tenure

There is nothing like a failure to bring about an idea for change. In 2003 “one of our elementary schools received a failing grade on the state report card” (Interview 2007). One of the strategies suggested by a group of consultants was shared leadership. “In the first year, shared leadership started paying off in the low performing school” (Interview 2007). Success in an area often leads to a decision to push the initiative to other areas as the superintendent felt shared leadership fit his style.

A lack of “leadership from my predecessor” (Interview 2007) for the year prior to being promoted from assistant to the superintendent allowed staff to “know me as a

leader” (Interview 2007). The “vision was shared with the administrative team...making the changes in decision processes and generating groups and opportunities for input” (Interview 2007). In this spirit of optimism the “board was very supportive, but did not totally understand what it was all about” (Interview 2007). Leadership tension appeared to be just below the surface as evidenced during the interview when the superintendent shared that “prior to my departure from the district a couple of the board members were wanting more top down leadership..... (some) board members wanted us to be top down and tough which does not work well with the philosophy that we were going with” (Interview 2007).

A brief glimpse into the early thinking of the superintendent will enable the reader to understand the path of promise which ended in failure. Initially, during the first years of the superintendent’s tenure, a strategy was developed which “began with my administrative team and showed them what it meant and how it looked and we started acting that way in administrative meetings” (Interview 2007). In line with the dynamic of shared leadership “[District] administrators also started taking the lead in a number of areas and were given freedom to make the decisions needed in the area of the district that they supervised” (Interview 2007). The maturation process of the initiative resulted in a superintendent’s cabinet comprised of teachers, classified and community members to reflect what “shared leadership really meant at the building level” (Interview 2007).

The framework for the initiative “was designed by a number of different leadership authors such as Marzano et. al. in the book *School Leadership that Works* and other leaders that came to work with our low performing elementary school” (Interview 2007). Surveys were measurement tools and were to be used as a “gauge to help us

determine how staff, students and community were feeling about our schools and if those feelings changed with the implementation of shared leadership across the district. Eventually staff would have had more say in district goals, budgets and curriculum” (Interview 2007).

Thus far, the inquiry into the failure of the shared leadership initiative has focused on what happened in a minimal and compressed narrative. The following condensed quotes sums up the desired outcome of an operating, shared leadership culture.

...shared leadership would look like students practicing government.

At the principal level...curriculum issues would be driven by teacher groups. The principal’s role...orchestrate this process and to keep parameters in place so the school...was in line with the district.

...administrative team and district level decision makers gather input from principals and when possible, teachers, and then make the decisions for the district direction.

The board should be allowing the administrators to create the direction while supporting it in their policy and budgetary decisions.

Citizens need to be involved in shared leadership through superintendent’s cabinet, principal’s coffee groups and site based leadership teams. (Interview 2007).

From this long view of the hoped for result of shared leadership, let’s draw back to the reality of the loss of momentum, but with overtones of change in the district. Opposition was observed at two levels. “One was when a tough decision needed to be made, people at all levels still wanted the superintendent to make the decision in order to avoid the rocks and arrows that may be thrown. The second was by the few board members who decided they wanted a top down process where they would have more control” (Interview 2007). The superintendent admitted that the “initiative derailed in part because I failed to

educate the board fully on what this style of leadership was and how it worked. It also failed because certain board members refused to listen to how we wanted to work and were more interested in how they wanted things to run” (Interview 2007).

Looking back on the last year of tenure the superintendent felt that “shared leadership was growing...with the advent of the superintendent’s cabinet and the fact that I visited staff meetings on a regular basis in each school in order to share what was happening in the district office” (Interview 2007).

The end of tenure is connected to the evaporation of trust. Because of “turnover of leadership at all levels within the district....one of the first things I did was to create stability in all principal positions and within my office by keeping people in their buildings and positions” (Interview 2007). The entire tenure of the superintendent was dogged by “budget issues of the State” (Interview 2007). At the point of failure “People were always afraid of when the next hammer was going to fall. So, I am not sure if it was lack of trust in the individuals, but rather the whole” (Interview 2007).

Post-Tenure

Reflection can be painful. Based on reports from the district “the atmosphere (of shared leadership) is completely gone” (Interview 2007). Communication has become so stilted that “Individual departments within the district office are no longer even talking to each other, the trust and family feeling that I worked hard to create is gone and in its place is competition” (Interview 2007). Even discussions between principals have gone underground, and they are “starting to meet on their own in private in order to decide what they can do....and seems afraid to offer new ideas because they have been shot down so harshly in meetings” (Interview 2007).

The reality in the district is that the shared leadership vision has not only “faded, it has been obliterated” (Interview 2007). The replacement superintendent “is very much a top down leader who delegates most of the work to others....but is not directly involved in the work” (Interview 2007). Upon reflection, and now with distance from the district, the former superintendent states that “I probably would have tried harder to educate certain board members in this style of leadership and show them the value....the staff on the other hand seemed to like my leadership. I was told by the president of the teachers association that no superintendent had ever received a standing ovation at their farewell speech” (Interview 2007).

Accomplishing shared leadership begins at the top. The former superintendent believed himself to be “on the road with my leadership team to accomplishing true shared leadership” (Interview 2007). However, “the board had not really bought into” (Interview 2007) the process. A survey was conducted at the start of the shared leadership initiative. The purpose was to gauge the stakeholders of the district.

Survey Analysis

In order to understand the correlations between the 2004 and 2007 surveys the reader needs to understand the basic differences concerning the rationale behind the changes between the surveys. The 2004 survey used national norms developed by Victoria Barnhart (Data Analysis for Continuing School Improvement). The district concluded the 2004 survey was cumbersome and was time consuming for those taking the survey. The 2007 survey was chosen for its simplicity and the shorter time frames needed to complete the instrument. The changes limited the researcher to discuss correlations, but the sections discussed are germane to the research.

Following are specific results of the surveys conducted by the district. For the purposes of this study three areas of concern will be defined. Scores are based on a 0-5 rubric.

- **Parent/Community Involvement:** Level 5 defined as a strong continuous improvement structure is set into place that allows for input from all sectors of the district, school, and community. The district vision is student focused, based on data and appropriate for district/school/community values, and meeting student needs.
- **Outcome/Competency:** Level 5 defined as site-based management and shared decision making truly exists. Schools support and communicate with each other in the implementation of quality strategies.

Comparative Results from District Surveys

Year	2004	2007
Parent/Community Involvement	2.5	3.6
Outcome/Competency	2.0	4.2

The shared leadership initiatives begun by the district can be measured in their success as observed by the changes between the 2004 and 2007 surveys. Key to the success of the initiatives required Parent/Community Involvement with the schools. As indicated, a full point (2.5-3.6) gain is statistically significant and represents ownership by the parents and community at large. Parents are key to change in a school culture and I would assert the parents began to believe their input was solicited and valued.

The Outcome/Competency change between 2004 and 2007 of two full points (2.0-4.2) confirms almost complete buy-in of the shared leadership initiative. Walls have come down, allowing the individual schools to view themselves as a valuable and necessary part of the whole.

- Administrative Team Perception

The original survey also contained a section measuring the “Prioritization of Needs by Administration.” The administrators ranked perceived staff needs across the District. The number one need from the 2004 survey was to “have an action plan in place which can get us to our vision.”

To address the number one need from the survey, shared leadership initiatives using the Marzano, et.al. studies were begun. Details of the tools used can be found in the meta-analysis section beginning on page 12 of the literature review. A salient factor from the 2004 survey concerns the administrators’ views of leadership pertaining to the school board. A leadership rubric was used to “grade” the board. Under the implementation column the board was ranked at 1.8 out of 5. To fully understand the true meaning of the ranking, a description of Level 1 reads as follows:

The School Board makes all decisions, with little or no input from administrators, teachers, the community, or students. Leadership inspects for mistakes.

(1991-2004 Education for the Future Initiative, Chico, CA.)

Three questions from the 2007 survey address the progress made in having an “action plan in place to get us to our vision.” Results are provided below:

Question 7. Ability to Implement District Improvement Goals and Initiatives

Score	Ratings	No. of Respond.	Percent Of Population
0	Not at all proficient	4	3%
1		24	19%
2	Somewhat proficient	35	28%
3	Proficient	36	29%
4		21	17%
5	Extremely proficient	4	3%
	Total	124	100%

Question 8. Knowledge of School Improvement Goals and Initiatives

Score	Ratings	No. of Respond.	Percent Of Population
0	Not at all proficient	5	4%
1		9	7%
2	Somewhat proficient	32	26%
3	Proficient	32	26%
4		30	24%
5	Extremely proficient	16	13%
	Total	124	100%

Question 9. Ability to Implement School Improvement Goals and Initiatives

Score	Ratings	No. of Respond.	Percent Of Population
0	Not at all proficient	6	5%
1		11	9%
2	Somewhat proficient	27	22%
3	Proficient	34	27%
4		36	29%
5	Extremely proficient	10	8%
	Total	124	100%

Tables from www.zoomerang.com/web/reports/PrintResultsPage.aspx

The data suggests the shared leadership initiative had begun to address the need to have a shared vision encompassing the district employees. From the initial 1.8 ranking of the atmosphere of the school board driving the district in 2004, a direct link between the first survey (2004) and the second survey (2007) can be made from Table 9. The change in viewpoint in 2007 with 64% of the respondents ranking their ability to implement school improvement goals as *proficient to extremely proficient* indicates progress in stakeholder ownership. The qualitative and quantitative data contained in the report suggests shared leadership was taking root in the minds and actions of the stakeholders of the district.

Of high significance in all three tables is the combination of the proficient-
extremely proficient ratings. The original survey ranked the board at 1.8 as previously
described. The 2007 surveys would correlate an equivalent score of 4.0 by 49-64% of the
total population. Questions 7 and 9 specifically represent the ability to implement district
and school goals and initiatives. The positive change represents the belief by
administration and school personnel that permission to act fully within their job
descriptions has taken root. They are trusting themselves and their environment, a change
because of the message sent by the district superintendent.

Discussion and Conclusions

The road to shared leadership is fraught with many dangers, not the least of which is the understanding of the mindset of the stakeholders. The discussion will center around three dynamics: trust, leadership, and learning. I will utilize my observations, professional opinion, and research to bring understanding and useful conclusions to the reader.

Trust

The entire tenure of the superintendent in this case study was clouded by budget deficits, thus creating a lack of trust by all stakeholders in the very landscape in which shared leadership was trying to take root. The first extension of trust was between the superintendent and the school board regarding his commitment to stay in the position for an open ended period of time. Inference on my part would point to the necessity of a performance document, with years tied to a milestone measurement system, specifically noting the shared leadership project. The aforementioned issue appears to have not been in place. An approval of silence by the school board seemed likely for the tenure; this misunderstanding of silence resulted in the eventual resignation of the superintendent.

A statement in the first interview with the superintendent concerned a “perceived lack of trust in the district’s decision making process.” I believe the top down methods of the school board had contributed to this environment. Based on my experience as a city council member, the stakeholder’s lack of trust must reside in the elected body. It is the direct actions of these officials which must bear initial responsibility for not involving the rest of the community. The fact of four superintendents in six years on the district creates

a highly probable scenario of either poor hiring practices or poor management of the person's job performance. I submit the latter.

Examination of the quantitative data suggested an improving climate of trust between the superintendent and stakeholders other than the school board. The outcome/competency measurement from the two surveys moved from a 2.0 in 2004 to a 4.2 in 2007. The increase in confidence, with this measure defined as "site-based management and shared decision making" portrays an initiative well on its way to full implementation at Level 5. The post tenure interview reveals a complete reversal, if not disintegration of the foundation built in the years 2001-2007 caused by the hiring of an interim, autocratic superintendent. A return to business as usual may not allow the district leadership to recover trust, even with a different board. The original action plan has no champion, and with no champion there is no plan. Status quo stagnation may follow.

Leadership

If trust is the air stakeholders' breathe, then leadership is the work to be accomplished. Without an atmosphere of trust most stakeholders in an organization will not step into a leadership role. The change in perception by administrators in the intervening time between the 2004 (first survey) and the 2007 (second survey) is statistically significant. From a 1.8 (out of five) to a 64 percent (proficient-extremely proficient) identifies an administrator's ability to implement school improvement which I believe is likely due to the implementation of the Marzano et al. meta-analysis.

The change in opinion would have a direct correlation to the stakeholders truly believing they could be leaders. Marzano et al. would describe the operating dynamic in

the district as “collective efficacy” (p. 99). The stakeholders, having developed a trust in the new framework, began to make a difference in their surroundings.

Learning

I believe the effect on the teachers would be positive because of the openness of the leadership. This openness shown to the teachers would probably produce a higher performing student. The meta-analysis conducted by Marzano et al. “provides strong guidance on specific leadership behaviors for school administrators and that those behaviors have well-documented effects on student achievement” (p. 7). While this case study is just a snapshot, it would be likely, after time, that the district would achieve the same statistical results as those districts studied in the meta-analysis.

Limitations/Strengths

This case study was limited in the ability to probe the deeper effects of the shared leadership initiative for several reasons, including:

- The resignation of the chief contact, creating an atmosphere of mistrust.
- The inaccessibility of stakeholders for follow-up and clarifying interviews.
- The inability for contact in order to probe for further implications for study.
- The bias of the researcher because of his knowledge of good leadership in a public setting and its positive results.

The strength of the study is the connection to other school districts facing budget and leadership issues which cause instability and a discouraging learning environment. I believe the findings of the study will assist all stakeholders to be better leaders and educators.

In Retrospect

The opportunity to succeed often rests on events which are outside of our control. It is this rare chance to take control of destiny to which the end of this study has come to rest. In the middle of a shared leadership development, the gains of six years of planning and implementation came to an end.

Generally, those in leadership positions want to bring the organization under their control down a different path. Thus, the superintendent of this case study began a journey encompassing a shared leadership framework, which was new ground for the district. The danger of exploring uncharted territory is not having the full trust of the final decision makers in this matter, the school board. Success rested on a non-existent trust platform. Unfortunately, failure in this endeavor was the final result.

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Appendix A

Superintendent Interview Questions

1. Could you give me an overview of the start of the shared leadership initiative?
2. How deep was the buy-in of the school board in the beginning? Just prior to your departure?
3. What strategy was developed for implementation?
4. What role were the surveys to play?
5. Who designed the framework for the initiative? What drove the design?
6. How would shared leadership have looked in the classroom? At the principal level? At central office? At school board level? At the citizen level?
7. What indifference or opposition was observed? And to what level?
8. Has the vision now faded of shared leadership?
9. What is the current vision?
10. What derailed the initiative?
11. Looking back, what would you have done differently?
12. How has your leadership supported the development and maintenance of a shared leadership atmosphere?
13. How was your vision presented to your administrative team? To faculty? To the school board? To the citizens?
14. What dynamic within the District was causing the high turnover in the Superintendent's position prior to your promotion?
15. At what point did trust evaporate?
16. How would you define shared leadership as you saw it develop in the District?
17. What gains in visioning and planning were made during your tenure? To what level among the stakeholders?
18. What was lacking in visioning and planning in the District prior to your promotion?
19. What gains, if any, were made concerning trust?
20. What barriers existed to develop trust among all stakeholders?
21. Were partnerships between stakeholders formed during your tenure?

22. What role did parents play during your tenure?
23. What effect did the Marzano, et al. meta-analysis have in the District?
24. Describe any collective efficacy as described by Marzano, et al.
25. What level would you assign to yourself and others in accomplishing shared leadership in the District? What helped? What hindered?