CHANGE LEADERSHIP PRACTICES FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF
ALTERNATIVE BREAKTHROUGH MODELS IN BLENDED AND
ONLINE LEARNING AT SELECT K-12 SCHOOLS:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Jason Scott Haas

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Liberty University

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover what change leadership practices are utilized by educational leaders at selected K-12 schools when alternative breakthrough models in blended and online education are implemented. Using a phenomenological approach, I explored three public schools, two private schools, two charter schools, and two virtual schools. The 10 participants in this study were either heads of school, district superintendents, or department principals. The central research question was: What are the lived experiences of K-12 educational leaders who are implementing alternative breakthrough models of blended and online learning? Data was obtained via the following methods: (a) questionnaire, (b) one-on-one interviews, (c) analysis of artifacts used in the implementation, and (d) focus group. While Moustakas’s Seven Steps were utilized as a tool to analyze the data, the overall data analysis framework followed Schutz’s (1967) phenomenological reductionism: the reality of the data is neither confirmed nor denied initially. Using this framework, I analyzed the data using the following techniques: (a) reading and organizing the data, (b) memoing, (c) coding and categorizing the data, and (d) bracketing and development of themes. If blended education or any other alternative method enhances learning, if pedagogical standards are upheld, and if technology can provide some personalization and flexibility to enable students to learn at a higher level, then the possibilities of alternative models of education are limitless. To implement these alternative changes, sound change leadership practices must be utilized.

Keywords: blended learning, online learning, change leadership, change management
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

How effective leaders implement change is a continual topic of interest in the modern-day sector—especially the corporate world. Change is an ongoing process in which discovery, constant evaluation of current methods, and the ability to adapt are essential for any work environment to remain healthy (Jick, 1993). Incorporating change is often the necessary element for an organization to maintain a competitive advantage, and changing the way individuals behave in the workplace can be impossible unless a leader follows proper change leadership practices (Mento, Jones, & Dirndorfer, 2002). Proper leadership to implement this change requires the ability to influence the thoughts and actions of other people (Taleghani, Salmani, & Taatian, 2011). Success in the workplace depends heavily on the ability to foresee change, comprehend its potential impact, and apply proven methods to turn unpleasant situations into opportunities of development (Laura-Georgeta, 2008). To enable a successful path toward change, many companies utilize successful change-management models to help create a culture of change (Atkinson, 2013). Nowhere is this more needed than in the changing environments of education. Many educators who are trying to implement structural changes in the current educational system are realizing the difficulty in changing teaching-learning methods that do not always heighten the interest of many digital generation students (Jukes, McCain, & Crockett, 2010).

Background

Because teachers are now teaching students of the digital generation (Jukes et al., 2010), educational leaders are slowly incorporating alternative models of content delivery that implement technology in present-day classrooms. In many situations, models that incorporate
technology enable students to learn at a more individualized pace than traditional K-12 typically allows (Davidson & Goldberg, 2009). This personalized learning allows students to take advantage of various learning styles and provides freedom from the constraints of time, location, or a below-average learning environment (Imbriale, 2013). For these changes to take place, a strategic implementation of proper change leadership best-practices must occur. Change leadership practices have been used in other commercial sectors and, especially for education, can assist in a more successful transition of incorporating change in many of the difficult-to-change aspects of K-12 education (Cloud, 2010).

To incorporate breakthrough models of education, change leadership practices must be implemented to effectively deploy new ways for students to learn in the technology age. Alternative methods of content delivery are infiltrating the educational setting at an alarming rate (Blackboard, 2009). Classrooms are now filled with students of the digital generation where many are desiring structural changes to the classroom setting to more fully engage their digital interests and abilities (Vander Ark, 2011). Since education is under constant scrutiny, educators often seek new and innovative ways to improve the educational process (Hennig & Hess, 2010); for many educators, these changes are needed to meet the demands of 21\textsuperscript{st} century education. The changes seen in students, as well as the implementation of technology, more fully allow teachers to teach students about digital literacy and other 21\textsuperscript{st} century technology-literacy-related skills (O’Brien & Scharber, 2008).

Most of the alternative delivery methods that utilize individualized formats integrate efficient technology tools to reach students who are, in many ways, unable to be reached as effectively by traditional education (Hill & Johnston, 2010). This structural change leads many educators to believe that the traditional educational system’s ability to adapt to the 21\textsuperscript{st} century’s
technology age is possible, but believe there is little difference between the majority of present educational systems and the educational structure of the early 1900s. Hess and Meeks (2010) added, “Schooling and teaching today look remarkably like they did in 1910. One wouldn’t say that about medicine or engineering or about commercial sectors such as air travel, farming, or auto manufacturing” (p. 41).

Educational technology integration offers promise and challenge for today’s traditional classroom structure. Research is being conducted at an accelerated pace to examine the effects that alternative pedagogical methods such as blended learning have on the achievement and satisfaction levels of today’s students, teachers, and parents (Al-Qahtani & Higgins, 2012; Vernadakis, Giannousi, Tsitskari, Antoniou, & Kioumourtzoglou, 2012). So far, the blended learning model has been the most popular alternative educational delivery method that incorporates technology (Hennig & Hess, 2010). Blended learning combines multiple modes of content delivery with the positive elements of online learning and technology under the supervision and leadership of a teacher in a traditional classroom (Larson & Sung, 2009).

Blended learning can also be defined as a flexible structure that merges the availability of learning at different times, places, and levels. In addition, this structure offers the convenience and resources of online courses without the complete loss of the security and structure of a face-to-face teacher (Vernadakis et al., 2012). Blended learning deviates from the traditional format of teaching to the average student by using technology to augment learning experiences so students can receive the flexibility and quality of personalized digital learning plans (Larson & Sung, 2009).

To institute an alternative model of education such as blended learning, several important elements must be present: (a) leadership, (b) professional development for the faculty, (c)
teaching, (d) operations, (e) content, and (f) proper technology (Darrow, Friend, & Powell, 2013). Most schools have failed to effectively utilize digital technology. Instead, it has been added to the current education model (Moe, 2009). This incorporation of technology, personalized digital learning plans, and learning management systems (LMS) in the current teaching/learning process must represent a shift in instructional strategy. Watson (2008) added, “Just as online learning represents a fundamental shift in the delivery and instructional model of distance learning, blended learning offers the possibility to significantly change how teachers and administrators view online learning in the face-to-face-setting” (p. 5). If technology is here to stay in the educational setting, educators must do their part to understand and reach the students of the digital generation.

Situation to Self

This study is important for several reasons. First, I have been in leadership positions most of my life, and I value any training and experiences I have had in administration and leadership. I appreciate the strategic mindset needed to enable change, the influence required, and the weighty responsibility of leadership. This study includes many aspects of leadership that have added to my own knowledge regarding change and leadership. Second, I have always had a keen interest in and ability to use technology to make various aspects of my professional life more efficient and productive. In context, technology can become a hindrance if it does not effectively offer an advantage to the task at hand. Third, today’s world is different because technology is a part of almost everything we do. Technology is enabling many students to become more interested in school, and can assist in providing teachers with software systems to adapt to the mastery-learning needs of the student. Because many digital generation students are comfortable with and surrounded by technology at all other times (Jukes et al., 2010), it makes sense for educators to
capitalize on the student interests that come from the use of technology, while leveraging the best-practices of technology to assist teaching and learning.

**Problem Statement**

Education is at a crossroad. Educational leaders are researching alternative content delivery methods that will engage today’s learners (Hennig & Hess, 2010). These alternative models of teaching and learning offer the possibility for educators to reinvent the teaching and learning process (Gonzales & Vodicka, 2012). Because many students are now bombarded by technology at every turn, educational classrooms may benefit from implementing technology tools that could potentially heighten student interest and provide a more personalized learning experience (Gonzales & Vodicka, 2012). These students are part of the digital generation that many refer to as the iGeneration, the NET generation, or digital natives (Jukes et al., 2010). Even though a digital divide still exists where countless students do not have access to useful technology, many students were born surrounded by technology and spend much of their day using technology. Unfortunately, many reasons exist why the majority of the classrooms in which these students sit incorporate little or no technology (Jones & Czerniewicz, 2010). Hess and Meeks (2010) stated, “Schooling and teaching today look remarkably like they did in 1910. One wouldn’t say that about medicine or engineering or about commercial sectors such as air travel, farming or auto manufacturing” (p. 41). Because large structural changes are needed to implement alternative models of education, more research must be done to determine the change leadership practices that effective leaders implement when various breakthrough models of education are added to their educational program.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to discover what change leadership
practices are utilized by educational leaders at selected K-12 schools when alternative
breakthrough models in blended and online education are implemented. The change leadership
practices needed to implement alternative methods of content delivery were explored from the 10
participants who represented three public schools, two private schools, two charter schools, and
two virtual schools.

**Significance of the Study**

This study will deliver qualitative research to educational communities in the area of
creating and managing a culture of change and instituting established change leadership
strategies to implement breakthrough alternative models of education. While there is much
research on change leadership and the various benefits of alternative models of learning that
utilize technology, more research is needed on what leadership practices are necessary for
schools to implement alternative breakthrough models of education that utilize technology to
enable more meaningful learning for the students.

**Research Questions**

The research conducted as part of this dissertation was designed to answer the following
questions:

- Central Question—What are the lived experiences of K-12 educational leaders who are
  implementing alternative breakthrough models of blended and online learning?

- Subquestion 1—What challenges do educational leaders face when implementing
  alternative breakthrough models such as blended and online learning?

- Subquestion 2—What role does leader preparation play in developing the skills and
  knowledge necessary to design and implement alternative breakthrough models such as
  blended and online learning?
• Subquestion 3–How did procedures and policies shape leaders’ experiences when implementing alternative breakthrough models such as blended and online learning?

Van Manen (1984) noted that a phenomenological question must not only be clear, but also appear to be alive, relative, and must pull the “reader into a question in such a way that the reader cannot help but wonder about the nature of the phenomenon in the way that the phenomenologist does” (p. 8).

Online learning is growing rapidly, and many school leaders, teachers, and parents are excited about its possibilities. However, as school leaders begin to consider implementing the tools needed for personalized learning, they are quickly confronted with the challenges of locating content; finding, hiring, and managing teachers; organizing systems to support students; selecting and managing technology; and evaluating the products (Watson & Gemin, 2009). Even though implementation steps are continually being published, many educational experts feel that more must be done to detail the change leadership practices needed to implement alternative learning models such as blended learning. The International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) (2013) has listed this very area in their current research agenda and added:

As reported by educators time and time again, one of the most difficult processes for creating a breakthrough model in K-12 blended and online learning, is creating a culture of change. In order to plan for this, it’s important to research change management and what practice is most promising in implementing breakthrough models in K-12 blended and online learning. (p. 3)

Even though many implementation decisions must be decided, most schools have years of operating experience to help them develop and revise operations models as they go (Watson & Gemin, 2009). Alternative breakthrough models in education such as online and blended learning
vary according to program type, goals, and implementation. Once a school determines the initial goals, then the school leadership can begin working on implementation decisions such as leadership, professional development, teaching, operations, content, and technology (Darrow et al., 2013). For the purposes of this study, the central research question as well as the subquestions will help add to the body of literature as it relates to understanding the leadership and culture of change that is needed to implement alternative breakthrough models of education.

**Research Plan**

This study will utilize a qualitative methodology that will follow a phenomenological approach. Because the topic requires the structure of studying the participants’ lived experiences of the phenomena being researched, a phenomenological study is best suited for this research. Creswell (2013) stated that a phenomenological approach has an emphasis on a shared phenomenon that is to be explored with a group of individuals who have all experienced the phenomena. According to Merriam (2009), qualitative research is most suitable for inductive research in which data is gathered to build theories and explain phenomenon rather than deductively testing a hypothesis. Qualitative research is well-suited to understand a contemporary phenomenon as well as provide the details of context and rich description of data. This method will enable me to gain a deeper understanding of the everyday lived experiences of the participants and the phenomena being studied (Patton, 2002).

The setting for this study was three public schools, two private schools, two charter schools, and two virtual schools that have implemented alternative models of education. The participants in this study were the leadership teams from these schools consisting of the head of school, the department principals, the IT directors (if applicable), and any department heads who were instrumental in these implementations. The data for this study was collected utilizing four
different instruments: (a) questionnaire, (b) one-on-one interviews, (c) analysis of artifacts used in change leadership and in the implementation of alternative models, and (d) focus group. The overall analysis framework followed phenomenological reductionism and was carried out by reading and organizing the data, coding and categorizing the data, and identifying and developing themes from the data (bracketing).

**Delimitations and Limitations**

Delimitations typically refer to choices made by the researcher to limit and define the parameters of the study. Limitations of this study refer to various aspects that may impact the study’s results in a way that would affect the ability to generalize the study’s findings to a different and larger population beyond this study’s specific participants and research sites. Before and during this study, all possible delimitations and limitations of such a study were considered and addressed, especially during the data collection and data analysis process. Because of this, these areas have been held to a minimum. While there are general limitations that exist with change leadership or with an alternative educational model like blended learning, specific limitations include: (a) the participants’ lack of familiarity and knowledge of general change leadership and change management principles, (b) the small number of participants, (c) the dependency on the extent and authenticity of the participants’ submitted data, (d) the uniqueness of the participants’ role, (e) the lack of research in what change leadership policies are needed to implement alternative models of education.

In the Participant Questionnaire, the vast majority of participants submitted data stating their overall lack of knowledge of change leadership and change management. The majority of participants seemed to have skills that would utilize the basic tenets that change leadership would encompass, but most were not familiar with the popular change management theories that are
typically used when an organized change management process is implemented. Depending on a participant’s knowledge in this area, it would certainly impact the data that was submitted on the various data collection instruments that were related to change leadership and change management.

Although utilizing 10 participants is the accepted minimum for a phenomenological study (Creswell, 2013), it is likely that using a greater number of participants would have enhanced the study. Because the participants’ geographical locations, job positions, and formal educational training were considered, many issues that generally stem from gender diversity, as well as small and large research sites, were considered before starting the research. However, additional participants may have increased the diversity of training and experience and could potentially have produced some level of variations in the submitted data.

In qualitative research, the researcher is the key instrument (Creswell, 2013). However, to a certain extent, the success of the study depends entirely upon the degree and the authenticity of the participants’ submitted data. None of the participants worked at the same location, so there were no internal employee-related factors that would have hindered the transparency of the data submitted. When utilizing qualitative research, the researcher must trust the participants and the data they submit, but on the other hand, the participants must trust that the researcher accurately depicts their stated information. To address confirmability, I utilized a technique called member checking. The participants completed a debriefing form detailing their approval or disapproval of the conclusions. Thankfully, the participants agreed that the final themes accurately depicted their submitted data.

A final limitation of this study is the lack of research in what change leadership policies are needed to implement alternative models of education. Compared to the numerous studies of
blended learning within higher education communities, there is very little research on the effects of and issues related to alternative learning (Oliver & Stallings, 2014), as well on the leadership practices needed for K-12 schools to implement alternative breakthrough models of education. A third minor limitation is that it is still too early to know the impact of alternative models of education on the social lives of students, or to know if alternative models of education foster a student’s desire for lifelong learning.

**Definitions**

*Change leadership* – the “style of leadership in which the leader identifies the needed change, creates the vision to guide through inspiration, and executes the change with the commitment of the members of the group” (Kotter, 2012b, p. 1)

*Change management* – the technique of creating a culture that recognizes and embraces change and creates techniques to implement these changes (Laura-Georgeta, 2008)

*Blended learning* – a formal education program in which a student learns, at least in part, through online delivery of content and instruction with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace (Staker & Horn, 2012, p. 3).

*Qualitative research* – “multimethod in its focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 2).

*Phenomenological approach* – “Phenomenological analysis seeks to grasp and elucidate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or a group of people” (Patton, 2002, p. 482).
Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover what change leadership practices are utilized by educational leaders at selected K-12 schools when alternative breakthrough models in blended and online education are implemented. Using a phenomenological approach, I explored three public schools, two private schools, two charter schools, and two virtual schools. The 10 participants in this study were either heads of school, district superintendents, or department principals. The central research question was: What are the lived experiences of K-12 educational leaders who are implementing alternative breakthrough models of blended and online learning? Data was obtained via the following methods: (a) questionnaire, (b) one-on-one interviews, (c) analysis of artifacts used in the implementation, and (d) focus group.

While Moustakas’s Seven Steps were utilized as a tool to analyze the data, the overall data analysis framework followed Schutz’s (1967) phenomenological reductionism: the reality of the data is neither confirmed nor denied initially. Using this framework, I analyzed the data using the following techniques: (a) reading and organizing the data, (b) memoing, (c) coding and categorizing the data, and (d) bracketing and development of themes. If blended education or any other alternative method enhances learning, if pedagogical standards are upheld, and if technology can provide some personalization and flexibility to enable students to learn at a higher level, then the possibilities of alternative models of education are limitless. To implement these alternative changes, sound change leadership practices must be utilized.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover what change leadership practices are utilized by educational leaders at selected K-12 schools when alternative breakthrough models in blended and online education are implemented. Using a phenomenological approach, I explored three public schools, two private schools, two charter schools, and two virtual schools. The 10 participants in this study were either heads of school, district superintendents, or department principals. The central research question was: What are the lived experiences of K-12 educational leaders who are implementing alternative breakthrough models of blended and online learning?

To strategize for this culture of change needed for implementing breakthrough models of education, it is imperative to research change leadership and to know which change models are most beneficial when implementing alternative models of education such as blended and online learning (iNACOL, 2013). There is minimal chance at a successful implementation unless proper leadership in place. Leadership must cast a vision for these changes and answer the questions of why, and present the need for the overall paradigm shift (Goodwin, Leveine, Marks, & Matsuoka, 2013). The leadership must carefully lay out the main elements for the planning and implementation of any new alternative breakthrough model in education and define areas such as: (a) leadership, (b) professional development, (c) teaching, (d) operations, (e) content, and (f) technology (Darrow, Friend, & Powell, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

A proper theoretical framework is foundational to the structure and overall guidance of a study. Four theories will guide this study’s theoretical framework: (a) Transformational
Leadership Theory, (b) Transcendental Leadership Theory, (c) Cognitivism Theory, and (d) Connectivism Theory.

**Transformational Leadership Theory**

Early on as theories of leadership began to be formed and followed as an underlying framework, many companies, organizations, and even schools followed the instructional leadership model throughout the 1980s and early 1990s (Leithwood & Poplin, 1992). This top-down model was more focused on control, allowed very little collaboration with employees, and focused little on professional development (Leithwood & Poplin, 1992). In relation to education, this model focused more on efficiency and the growth of students, and less on the professional growth of teachers. Fast-forward to the 21st century and its surplus of leadership theories for organizations to follow. In fact, Jerome Burns (2003), an influential leadership theorist in America, stated that more leadership research was conducted from 1992-2002 than in the previous 30 years.

The Transformational Leadership Theory is leadership that cares less about positional power and more about influential power (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). Transformational leaders are adaptive leaders who effectively work in changing environments while responding to the challenges that may confront them and their followers (Bass, 1993). Transformational leaders focus restructuring efforts on improving work conditions and employee morale (Gardiner, 2006), while asking followers to transcend their own views and self-interests for the good of the organization (Burns, 1978). Transformational leadership embraces levels of change to benefit both the relationship and the resources of those involved. Transformational leadership originates in the personal values and beliefs of leaders, not necessarily in an exchange of commodities between leaders and followers as in transactional leadership. Transformational leaders lead best
when they can model the example to others (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). The result is a change in the level of commitment and the increased capacity for achieving mutual purposes (Gardiner, 2006).

Theorist James Burns (1978) discussed the idea of transformational leadership in his book *Leadership*. In this book, Burns described two types of leaders: transactional leaders and transformational leaders. Burns helped improve the management industry by assisting organizations that operated with a top-down leadership style. Burns described transformational leadership by stating that “leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation” (p. 20). Bass (1991) later applied these ideas and further implied that transformational leaders attempt and succeed in raising colleagues and employees to a greater awareness about the issues of consequence and effectiveness. Additionally, Bass stated this is how transformational leaders raise followers to become leaders, and that transformational leaders must maintain a collaborative culture, foster teacher development, improve group problem solving, and increase relationships with the leader(s). Quality transformational leadership occurs when leaders increase the productivity, awareness, and work-interest of their employees to be concerned with not only their self-interests but also the overall good of the group (Bass, 1991). Transformational leaders are interested in converting their followers into leaders (Gardiner, 2006). Even further building upon previous work in transformational leadership, Poutiatine (2009) developed nine principles of transformational leadership that provide a framework for leaders to follow:

- Transformation is not synonymous with change.
- Transformation requires assent to change.
- Transformation always requires second-order change.
• Transformation involves all aspects of an individual’s or organization’s life.
• Transformational change is irreversible.
• Transformational change involves a letting go of the myth of control.
• Transformational change involves some aspect of risk, fear, and loss.
• Transformational change always involves a broadening scope of worldview.
• Transformation is always a movement toward a greater integrity of identity—a movement toward wholeness (p. 190).

Transformational leaders achieve results in one or more ways: (a) They may be charismatic to their followers and thus inspire them; (b) they may meet the emotional needs of each employee; and (c) they may actually intellectually stimulate employees (Bass, 1991; Gardiner, 2006).

Additionally, Bennis (2003) added that transformational leaders do not focus on immediate needs, but instead ask their followers to consider the long-term needs of the organization while developing and improving themselves as employees.

Possible weaknesses exist with the transformational leadership model. Some may say that transformational leadership has many leader-centered assumptions that could produce heroic bias, limited impact of followers’ input, followers’ self-identity that is too closely aligned with the charismatic leader, indecisive leaders with low self-esteem, and followers’ over-dependence on the leader (Liu, 2007). Followers may buy into this type of leadership style as they seek to increase their relationship with the leader versus the leader’s ideas. Many times, the leader convinces his followers to accept his vision, which may cause the followers to think that only work-performance consistent with the leader’s vision will be noticed and rewarded (Rafferty & Griffin, 2004).

For the purposes of implementing alternative models of education, the head of school will
need teachers to take ownership of these new learning and teaching models. Gardiner (2006) added, “We must create organizations that model new approaches to human relationships and interactions, to organizational structure, and to collective decision-making” (p. 6). Quality transformational leadership occurs when productivity increases, awareness, and work-interest of the employees are concerned not only with their self-interests but also the overall good of the group (Bass, 1991). The Transformational Leadership Theory is an integral part of this study because the head of school will utilize aspects of this theory to motivate the teachers and other workers to properly implement alternative models of education, to set aside their own self-interests, and to work together for the overall good of the organization (Burns, 1978).

**Transcendental Leadership Theory**

The second guiding theory in my study is the Transcendental Leadership Theory. This leadership theory is a newer leadership model that assembles and combines the best aspects of other leadership theories. Transcendental leadership uses attitudes, vision, and values to motivate followers to believe that life and the workplace have true meaning; this, in turn, will result in a more positive workplace environment with more product outcomes (Fry, 2003; Fry, Vitucci, & Cedillo, 2005). The concept of transcendental leadership was first submitted by Cardona (2000). Cardona viewed transcendental leadership as incorporating aspects of transactional and transformational leadership that combined to form a contribution-based exchange relationship (Sanders, Hopkins, & Geroy, 2003). Cardona “views the transcendental leader as developing followers’ transcendent motivation…the development of followers’ intrinsic motivation, so that their needs are aligned with the needs of the leader” (p. 22).

To truly understand transcendental leadership, the individual must focus on three dimensions: (a) consciousness, (b) moral character, and (c) faith (Sanders et al., 2003).
Transcendental leadership views leadership from more of a relational perspective and places a considerable premium on human relations and interactions between leaders and employers (Cardona, 2000). While very similar to a visionary leadership approach, transcendental leadership is values-based and supports an ethical and servant-based leadership model that utilizes relationships, partnerships, and collaborations among employees. Cardona (2000) hinted at the spiritual dimension of transcendental leadership and submitted that the transcendental leader is truly a servant leader. While transactional leadership is based on material exchange and transformational leadership is based primarily on social exchange, Sanders et al., (2003) stated that transcendental leaders possess many of these same characteristics but are “positioned at a higher point on the effectiveness continuum than transformational leadership theory” (p. 25).

A transcendental leader is concerned with his followers and views leadership as a contribution-based exchange relationship (Sanders et al., 2003). Unlike transactional leaders that trade rewards and benefits for their followers’ good work and obedience, transcendental leaders provide motivation for their employees to do things for others (Gardiner, 2006). Because of the relational element of this leadership theory, transcendental leaders address various weaknesses of the transformational leader by explaining the motives behind the leader’s values and decisions. This, in turn, produces empowered and enabled followers who are able to make sound decisions, accomplish high-quality work, and in many regards, lead on their own (Liu, 2007).

Liu (2007) added that since transcendental leaders do not have a desire to manipulate others, “transcendental leaders address the weakness of transformational/charismatic leadership by providing the motives behind a leader’s practices . . . a sense of wholeness, harmony and well-being produced through care, concern, appreciation of both self and others, and authentic selfless concern for people” (p. 4). Transcendental leaders utilize a visioning and ethical process
that reflects both follower-centered and leader-centered models (Liu, 2007). One aspect of transcendental leadership that sets it apart from other leadership theories is the idea of shared governance (decision-making). Venable and Gardiner (1988) listed six characteristics of shared governance that must be part of any transcendental leader’s model of leadership:

- A climate of trust
- Informational sharing
- Meaningful participation
- Collective decision making
- Protecting divergent views
- Redefining roles (p. 66).

With this study, the head of school may use the aspects of this theory to encourage the employees when implementing change to submit work by specific deadlines or to reach other goals set forth by the school leadership. Because transcendental leadership follows a more trusting model of leadership, there is more collective decision making that will enable school leaders to allow more dialogue and group dissent and a greater willingness to serve the will of the participants involved (Gardiner, 2006). In a school setting in which the school leadership is trying to implement change, the transcendental leadership model may allow shared decision making and collaboration that will engage followers and can allow for a better chance at effective implementation.

Cognitivism Learning Theory

The third theoretical basis for this study is the Cognitivism Learning Theory. Cognitivism is built upon several theories that rely on the schema and the ability of an individual to reconstruct data and facts upon each other (Yilmaz, 2011). Cognitivism’s main emphasis is the
active mental processing and building of schema on the part of the learner (Nagowah & Nagowah, 2009). The beginning of cognitivism can be traced back to the early 1900s. This theory was not built on a single work or theorist. Rather, early leaders of this learning theory included Piaget’s theory of individual cognitive development, Bruner’s cognitive constructivist learning theory, Festinger’s cognitive dissonance theory, Spiro’s cognitive flexibility theory, Sweller’s cognitive load theory, Vygotsky’s theory of social cognitive growth, and Tolman’s theory of sign learning (Nagowah & Nagowah, 2009). Edward Tolman is considered a pioneer in the cognitivism movement that led to the individuals and their theories mentioned above (Bruner, 1990). Yilmaz (2011) added, “Out of the spectrum of cognitive theories, the individual cognitive trend deriving from Piaget’s studies and the sociocultural trend based on Vygotsky’s works constitute the backbone of cognitivism” (p. 205).

There was a shift from behaviorism to cognitivism that stemmed from the “behaviorist tradition’s failure to explain why and how individuals make sense of and process information” (Yilmaz, 2011, p. 205). The strength of cognitivism is that learners can be trained in the correct way. Knowledge built upon previous knowledge will produce a higher-end result. Since the premise of cognitivism is that new knowledge is built upon existing knowledge, a possible weakness of this learning theory is that if an individual learns to do something incorrectly, he could continue doing it incorrectly (Nagowah & Nagowah, 2009). In this scenario, because the task was done repetitiously, it would be difficult for that individual to change and learn the correct way. Cognitivism is also vital to employees as they learn and adapt to the changes needed to implement these models. Yilmaz (2011) added that the primary emphasis of the cognitivism theory is “how knowledge is acquired, processed, stored, retrieved, and activated by the learning during the different phases of the learning process” (p. 205). Yilmaz further added that
cognitivism affects education by two schools of thought: (a) Learning is an active process that involves the acquisition and organization of the learning structures when students process and store information; and (b) the student is active in the process of acquiring knowledge and integrating it with previous knowledge (Yilmaz, 2011). The overall goal of the cognitivism theory is to focus learning, make knowledge more meaningful for students, and relate new information to previous memory (Yilmaz, 2011).

Cognitivism is an integral part of this study because the process of reconstructing data and building upon previous learning is foundational to students, teachers, and parents who are learning about alternative models of education. When applying cognitive principles to alternative models of learning such as blended learning, students and even teachers will need to construct knowledge upon existing knowledge to learn the material (Swann, 2013). Because blended learning may utilize flexible avenues of education to master the content, this reconstruction of data and previous learning is even more important as students learn to utilize their own learning styles at their own pace.

**Connectivism Learning Theory**

The fourth theory that forms the theoretical framework of this study is the Connectivism Learning Theory. Like Vygotsky’s social learning aspect that helped form cognitivism, connectivism is social learning that is networked for the digital age (Duke, Harper, & Johnston, 2010). Developed by Siemens (2004) and Downes (2006), Duke et al. (2010) added, “Connectivism is characterized as a reflection of our society that is changing rapidly. Society is more complex, connected socially, globally, and mediated by increasing advancements in technology” (p. 6). Downes (2007) added that connectivism is the “thesis that knowledge is distributed across a network of connections, and therefore that learning consists of the ability to
construct and traverse those networks” (para. 1).

Connectivism is a theoretical response to a perceived need to develop and express various meanings, and to gain and share knowledge through various collaborative activities (Tschofen & Mackness, 2012). Bell (2010) added:

The exponents of connectivism characterize it as a network theory of learning that draws on a diverse set of theories from learning, education, philosophy of knowledge, and knowledge management, situated within a discourse of change in education and related to the transformative possibilities offered by emerging technologies. (p. 103)

At its core, connectivism is a reflection of our rapidly-changing society. Connectivism is based largely on a uniform principle that all student-learning begins with a connection (Siemens, 2004).

As a learning theory, connectivism has faced opposing viewpoints that it should not be a learning theory. Siemens (2004) believes connectivism is a learning theory because the student’s learning is enhanced through his own personal network. Second, because of the sheer amount of data available to the learner, it is virtually impossible for a learner to assimilate all of this knowledge without being able to tap into huge databases as well as communicate and collaborate on a global scale (Siemens, 2004). Opposing viewpoints submit that connectivism is not necessarily a new educational approach to learning. McMahon (1997) submitted that all learning can be defined and placed into existing theoretical approaches: behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism (McMahon, 1997). Kerr (2006) stated that connectivism “misrepresents the current state of established alternative learning theories such as constructivism, behaviorism, and cognitivism, so this bias for a new theory is also dubious” (para. 5-7). Verhagon (2006) added that connectivism is a pedagogical view only and that learning theories should be established
only to address how students learn. In response to opposing viewpoints, Kop and Hill (2008) added that Siemens responded, “a new learning theory, in fact, is required, due to the exponential growth and complexity of information available on the Internet, new possibilities for people to communicate on global networks, and for the ability to aggregate different information streams” (p. 7).

Connectivism follows four key principles: (a) autonomy, (b) diversity, (c) openness, and (d) connectedness (Tschofen & Mackness, 2012). The unavoidable and inescapable role that technology now plays in our society demands that educators embrace the new role of technology and its impact on 21st century students. Tschofen and Mackness (2012) added, “Learning in connectivism terms is a network phenomenon, influenced, aided, and enhanced by socialization, technology, diversity, strength of ties, and context of occurrence” (p. 125). Today’s use of technology has provided support for a digital theory such as connectivism that shows how technology and networking are related to knowledge (Ravenscroft, 2011).

Because this study investigated the change leadership practices of schools that have implemented alternative models such as blended learning, as well as models that lend themselves to students taking more control of their own learning, relying on a theory such as connectivism and listing it in the theoretical framework is foundational. A student will have access to vast amounts of data and additional learning methods to help him build upon previous levels of learning and then combine it with the networking and collaborative opportunities that are now available to most learners. Because of this, connectivism and the ability to distribute knowledge are fundamental for today’s learner.

**Related Literature**

The following sections provide an overview of the literature related to this study. To
discover what change leadership practices are utilized by educational leaders at selected K-12 schools when alternative breakthrough models in blended and online education are implemented, an understanding of related literature is vital to this study. To strategize for this culture of change needed for implementing breakthrough models of education, it is imperative to research change leadership and to know which change models are most beneficial when implementing alternative models of education such as blended and online learning (iNACOL, 2013). There is minimal chance at a successful implementation unless proper leadership in place. Leadership must cast a vision for these changes and answer the questions of why and present the need for the overall paradigm shift (Goodwin et al., 2013). The leadership must carefully lay out the main elements for the planning and implementation of any new alternative breakthrough model in education and define areas such as: (a) leadership, (b) professional development, (c) teaching, (d) operations, (e) content, and (f) technology (Darrow et al., 2013).

**Change Leadership**

Many aspects constitute an effective leader. Many authors define leadership by stating that leadership is mainly about influence (Maxwell, 1998; Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Maxwell (1998) stated, “The true measure of leadership is influence–nothing more, nothing less. If you don’t have influence, you will never be able to lead others” (p. 11). Leadership is obtaining wisdom and applying it with humility. A true leader does not confuse his leadership style with his position or power (Maxwell, 1998). A leader’s influence is either positive or negative. If a leader had a negative impact on others in the past, the ability to turn it around and impact that person in a positive way is a sign of a true leader (Maxwell & Dornan, 1997). According to leadership experts Kouzes and Posner (2007), there are five practices of exemplary leadership that any leader should strive to attain when implementing change: (a) Model the way, (b) inspire
a shared vision, (c) challenge the process, (d) enable others to act, and (e) encourage the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

**Definition of change leadership.** Change leadership takes a somewhat different angle as it specifically encompasses the leadership needed to make sweeping changes in an organization by moving people or a group in a general direction. Change leadership involves the process of developing a vision for the future, winning the hearts and minds of people to work toward a common goal, crafting strategies to make leadership visions a reality, and making sure people can adapt to change (Gill, 2003). A successful model of change leadership includes, “vision, values, strategy, empowerment, motivation, and inspiration” (Gill, 2003, p. 312). Change leadership very closely relates to the transformational leadership theory as it is interested in converting followers into leaders (Gardiner, 2006). Change leadership anticipates change, analyzes internal and external factors, accurately decides the timing for change and the strengths of team members, and affirms institutional goals with the purpose of continuous improvement (Cloud, 2010). Change leadership concerns the driving forces, visions, and processes that fuel large-scale transformation (Grady, 2013). Kotter (2012b) added that change leadership is the “style of leadership in which the leader identifies the needed change, creates the vision to guide through inspiration, and executes the change with the commitment of the members of the group” (p. 1).

Change leadership enables change in employees as well as in the overall organization (Cloud, 2010). Change leaders seek out employees with leadership potential, prepare them for future leadership roles through a formal succession plan, and help ensure stability and continuity in the organization (Mathis & Jackson, 2009). Kouzes and Posner (2007) repeatedly added that leadership is not necessarily about personality as much as it is about behavior. A leader cannot
have influence among others if the leader does not properly model the way. Positional leadership will carry a leader only so far, but behavior and knowledge win respect. Kouzes and Posner (2007) added, “Leaders must find their own voice, and then they must clearly and distinctively give voice to their values” (p. 15). A quality leader challenges the process, recognizes good ideas, supports the input and questions from others, and realizes that change involves an element of experimentation and risks. Any change a leader proposes is more successful when the leader supports and involves himself with the change. On the other hand, actions that contradict the change “will be seized upon by others as a compelling excuse for not taking the change seriously” (Russo, 1997, p. 12). Communicating change as a leader is a constant and never-ending requirement as a leader and one that must involve others and set a mindset that change is something in which everyone must be involved (Russo, 1997).

**Change leadership in relation to education.** Change leadership and the development of others are critically important to the continued success of many organizations (Cloud, 2010). A powerful combination of forces has been bearing down on K-12 and higher education in recent years. These forces include: an increase in competition, a decrease in funding from government sources, greater government scrutiny and control, a growing consumer rights’ movement, and the rapid spread of communication and information technology into every aspect of our lives (Scott, 2003). To initiate these educational changes, it is important for leaders to be smarter at what is changed as well as how it is changed. Michael Fullan added, “Good ideas with no ideas on how to implement them are wasted ideas” (as cited in Scott, 2003, p. 66). Scott (2003) further stated that simply having a good idea regarding improving education will not itself make the change happen. Quality change leadership principles must be utilized.

Clearly, one of the change leadership challenges facing K-12 schooling is bringing the
traditional education method together with the benefits of technology and a current educational model such as blended learning (Hennig & Hess, 2010). As with any implementation, key issues of management and leadership are involved with this change. Many challenges exist with what is to be implemented, how it is implemented, how it will be organized, how it will be led, whether or not it will be funded, and how it will be accepted by teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders. In this study, much content was applicable to these questions and answered the major questions that surround what change leadership practices are needed when implementing alternative breakthrough models of education such as blended learning.

In many change leadership studies, the researchers stressed the role the leader of the school has in any change related to that school. The role of school leaders as change agents and culture builders is paramount to change in any educational organization. Leo and Wickenberg (2013) added that “other common ingredients include the role of fundamental, guiding values that principals articulate, and the significance of the principal’s purpose for the change effort” (p. 407). Hargreaves and Fink (2006) added, “Sustainable educational leadership and improvement preserves and develops deep learning for all that spreads and lasts, in ways that do no harm to and indeed create positive benefit for others around us, now and in the future” (p. 17.).

**Change Management**

Change is inevitable. Change is a simple process. Change is learning, and learning is change (Scott, 2003). In reality, change is simply replacing the old with the new. Changing for the sake of change is not always the answer either (Battilana & Casciaro, 2012). An organization can become stale, refuse to consider new ideas, and enter a strategic shift of stagnation which is highly dangerous to the health of the organization (Hudescu & Ilies, 2011; Todnem, 2005). In fact, learning and change processes are interchangeable. Beckhard and Pritchard (1992) added
that “change is a learning process and learning is a change process” (p. 14). Businesses are continually implementing and adapting to ever-changing environments in order to maintain their position in their market (Biedenbach & Söderholm, 2008). Most experts believe that at successful organizations, change never actually starts because it never stops (Weick & Quinn, 1999). However, for those organizations that must implement change, many discover that change is quite difficult.

Because of the increasing global competition and the advances in overall knowledge assisted by technology tools, many organizations continually seek to reinvent themselves, capitalize on new opportunities, and separate themselves from their competitors (Hudescu & Ilies, 2011). Most change management experts state that there is a large gap in the actual definition and practicality of change management that differs from the community of theorists versus the change management experts (Lichtenstein, 1997). Because of this, a natural gap has formed between change management theorists and change agents with declining support for academic knowledge in the business community (Hudescu & Ilies, 2011). In fact, Young (2009) added that there are basically two main philosophies of change management: (a) Mode 1 that is founded on knowledge production by scientific facts, and (b) Mode 2 that is founded on the production of knowledge and driven by “practitioner learning from application” (p. 525). Huff (2000) offered a third approach called Mode 1.5 in which “academic skills and standards are applied in developing definitions, comparing literature and data from across organizational settings, and suggesting generalizable frameworks for further sensemaking” (Young, 2009, p. 525). This scholarly approach can be valuable as both the practical relevance of one approach and the rigor associated with methodological approaches are combined for the best of both approaches.
Hudescu and Ilies (2011) added, “The degree of change differentiates between first-order and second-order change. A first-order change is a minor adjustment and improvement in one or a few dimensions of the organization; it does not change the organization’s core” (p. 126). Second-order change typically refers to transformational changes that amend core values, mission statements, and the overall culture (Kezer, 2001). First-order change does not affect the system itself, whereas second-order change transforms the organization’s very essence (Pádár, Pataki, & Sebestyén, 2011). First-order changes are manufactured by control, while second-order changes involve more planning, strategizing, and reorganizing (Kotter, 1995). Because change can be small and incremental as well as large-scale, the need for change can be unpredictable with leaders overreacting to situations that many times are triggered by organizational crisis (Burnes, 2004). Change affects not only the organization, but also many other areas associated with this change. Other change areas can include personal change, changing group behavior, helping others change, system approaches to organizational change, organizational change through process improvement, situational factors in organizational change, emergent changes, and the leader of these major changes (Young, 2009).

**Definition of change management.** Change is a constant reality for any organization that wishes to remain healthy and maintain a competitive market share (Merrell & Watson, 2012). Perhaps not surprisingly, companies that plan for change, execute change, and manage change well are the companies outperforming their peers. The actual definition of change management can mean many things to many different people. To some, it is simply a strategic initiative to improve communications and training. Some may see it as the process of managing people, hardware, software, and the overall external view of a particular company. In defining change management, Prosci (2014) added, “Change management is the application of a
structured process and set of tools for leading the people side of change to achieve a desired outcome” (p. 1).

Moran and Brightman defined change management as “the process of continually renewing an organization’s direction, structure, and capabilities to serve the ever-changing needs of external and internal customers” (as cited in Hudescu & Ilies, 2011, p. 125). Barrett (2012) defined change management as the process of planning and executing major steps in an organization to achieve the organization’s goals, maximize the positive impact on employees who do the work after a change, and help leaders and staff make the new ways become a habit. (p. 1)

Metre (2009) defined change management as the “systematic approach and application of knowledge, tools, and resources to leverage the benefits of change, managing an as-is process or function moving toward a better or more efficient process or function in hopes to positively impact performance” (p. 4).

Some experts state that the definitions and meanings of risk assessment and change management are interchangeable. Atkinson (2013) added, “A risk culture is reflected in the attitudes, behavioural and managerial norms within an organisation that determine the way in which they identify, assess and act on challenges and risks confronted” (p. 9). Roussel (2006) added that planned change is the calculated and collaborative effort to bring about improvements and change with the assistance of a change agent. What is important in change management permeates the vision and strategic planning of an organization and is reflected in the leadership, decision-making, and work-performance of the employees. Change management seeks to improve the effectiveness and quality of an organization primarily by persuading the leaders and employees that change is necessary and by creating and maintaining a culture of change (Zand &
Pioneers and Popular Theories of Change Management

Many times when organizations begin the process of deciding the best avenue to implement change, the change literature itself may become a barrier. The overload of literature about change management theories “is a continuing challenge to those who seek simplicity, or at least clarity, and as a result few practitioners and management theorists understand or manage to follow the basic principles surrounding the change process” (Young, 2009, p. 524). Those that attempt to put the literature in some type of order typically do so when comparing change based upon size and speed of the change needed, the nature of the change, or the degree of complexity and uniformity (Dunphy & Stace, 1988; Romanelli & Tushman, 1994). However, the very nature of various change management models seeks to answer different aspects of change, so trying to compare various models may prove very difficult.

The most popular models of change management that most organizations refer to or implement are: (a) Kotter’s (1995) eight-step process for leading change, (b) Jick’s (1993) 10-step approach, (c) Lewin’s (1947) three-step organizational change process (Mento, Jones, & Dirmdorfer, 2002), and (d) Bridges’s (1991) transition model. Though not as popular, several other models of change management include: General Electric’s (GE) seven-step change acceleration process developed by Jack Welch and used by Garvin (2000), and Lippitt, Watson, and Westley’s (1958) seven-phase change implementation model.

Kotter’s eight-step model. After studying over one hundred organizations, Kotter (1995) developed a model that relies on the foundational premise that the change process goes through many phases and centers around leadership. Arguably the most popular change management model, Kotter’s model incorporates new approaches designed for the 21st century and further
defines the relationship between behaviors and corporate achievements (Gupta, 2011). Formed primarily around organizational behavior theories, Kotter’s model provides a three-dimensional linkage between groups, organizations, and individuals (Stragalas, 2012). More recently, Kotter further developed his change management model to more fully represent modern-day change management. Kotter’s (2015) updated change model is called the 8 Steps to Accelerate Change in 2015. This updated model follows eight stages: (a) Create a sense of urgency, (b) build a guiding coalition, (c) form a strategic vision and initiatives, (d) enlist a volunteer army, (e) enable action by removing barriers, (f) create short-term wins, (g) sustain acceleration, and (h) institute change. Kotter identified essential elements in these eight steps for successful transformations to take place (Stragalas, 2012). Perhaps unlike any other change management expert, Kotter attempted to design a model that was a scientific approach to management. Furthermore, what separated Kotter from other change experts was his dependence on leadership (Appelbaum, Habashy, Malo, & Shafiq, 2012). Kotter (1995) added, “Successful transformation is 70-90 percent leadership and 10-30 percent management” (p. 26).

Kotter (2012b) submitted that the globalization of markets and competition has made successful change a requirement as well as the force that drives it. The previous generation that followed a strategy of little change would have a difficult time in the 21st century with the magnitude of change that organizations must go through to remain competitive. Kotter (2012b) added, “A globalized economy is creating both more hazards and more opportunities for everyone, forcing firms to make dramatic improvements not only to compete and prosper but also to merely survive” (p. 20).

The first four steps of Kotter’s (2012) model are what he calls the transformation process to help “defrost the hardened status quo” (p. 24). Kotter added that major change does not
happen easily. If change at organizations was easy, then the effort of change management would not be necessary. Kotter (2015) “observed that the rate at which our world is changing is increasing, but our ability to keep up with it is not” (p. 5). Phases five to seven introduce many new aspects of the change needed in the organization, and the last stage firmly roots the change in the corporate culture to help make it stick (Kotter, 2012b). Kotter added that many times, organizations skip several of these steps and believe that simply reorganizing, acquiring, or laying off people will produce the needed change. Some may race through the steps or fail to firmly strengthen earlier stages.

As stated earlier, Kotter’s emphasis on leadership separates this model from other popular change management models (Appelbaum, et al., 2012). Kotter even stated the major differences between management and leadership. With management, Kotter (2012) added that this can include planning, organizing, budgeting, staffing, controlling, and problem-solving. Kotter added that leadership is a “set of processes that creates organizations in the first place or adapts them to significantly changing circumstances. Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles” (p. 27). For a detailed view of Kotter’s eight-step model, see Appendix A.

**Jick’s 10-step tactical model.** Jick (1991) developed a tactical model to guide implementation of major organizational change. Jick’s 10-step approach is highly popular for organizations that are implementing the change process in conjunction with an evaluation on the change culture already in progress. Jick added that change is an ongoing process and that the change implementation is both an art and a science (Mento et al., 2002). Jick defined roles of change management as strategists, implementers, and recipients. Change implementers are the
ones who make the change happen, and change recipients represent the largest group that must adapt to the desired change (Mento et al., 2002).

Jick’s (1991) approach relies on accurately defining the change initiative tasks and defining the roles of the key players in the change efforts. In Jick’s model, change strategists are responsible for “identifying the need for change, creating a vision of the desired outcome, deciding what change is feasible, and choosing who should sponsor and defend it” (Mento et al., 2002, p. 49). Even though the leaders create the vision, the change implementers take the vision, create the strategy, and make the change happen. Because preparing the target audience and recipients of change is important in the change process, Jick argued that change “is not possible unless, at the very least, the change recipients accept the change. Change is not possible unless people are willing to change themselves” (Mento et al., 2002, p. 53). For a detailed view of Jick’s 10-step model, see Appendix B.

**Lewin’s three-step approach.** The change management theory created by Kurt Lewin (1951) dominated organizational and change management for over 40 years (Burnes, 2004). In the past 20 years, this three-step approach has been critiqued numerous times. Change management experts felt that Lewin’s approach relied too much on a top-down management system; it ignored organizational politics and was suitable only for small-scale change projects (Burnes, 2004). Lewin argued that a successful change project involved three important steps: (a) unfreezing, (b) moving, and (c) refreezing. Unfreezing was a concept that “the stability of human behavior was based on ‘quasi-stationary equilibria’ supported by a large force field of driving and restraining forces. For change to occur, this force field had to be altered under complex psychological conditions…” (Schein, 1996, p. 59). This unfreezing is necessary in any change environment to overcome the tensions of individual conflicts and group traditionalism (Kritsonis,
The unfreezing of current policies and procedures creates the motivation needed to learn new concepts, but does not necessarily control the direction of the new learning (Schein, 1996).

The second step, moving, encompasses all the changes needed to make the change happen, and refreezing is the idea to make the changes stick (Quinn et al., 2012). It is the process of changing behavior, because it is “necessary to move the target system to a new level of equilibrium” (Kritsonis, 2005, p. 2). This changing behavior includes persuading employees that the current status quo is not healthy for the organization and that everyone must work together, connect, and follow the leadership to support the change (Kritsonis, 2005). The third step of Lewin’s model is refreezing, which takes place after the change has been implemented. Refreezing is the idea of making the changes sustain or stick (Schein, 1996). For a detailed view of Lewin’s model, see Appendix C.

**Bridges’s transition model.** The Transition Model was created by change consultant, William Bridges, originally in 1991 and published in his book, *Managing Transitions* (2010). The differentiator in this model is that it focuses more on transition and not on change. Change happens more to people. Transition is more internal. It is what stakeholders must face and go through when presented with change. The three major transitions in Bridges’s transition model are: (a) endings, (b) the neutral zone (explorations), and (c) new beginnings. In the first step, the specific activities can include: (a) describing change reasons, (b) communicating during transition, and (c) consider and encourage endings (see Appendix D).

In the first major transition of endings, Bridges and Mitchell (2000) noted,

The first requirement is that people have to let go of the way that things—and, worse, the way that they themselves—used to be. You are asking them to let go of the way of engaging or accomplishing tasks that made them successful in the past. (p. 2)
The second stage, the neutral zone, encompasses activities such as (a) listening and supporting, (b) developing temporary roles, (c) setting short-term goals, (d) celebrating small wins, and (e) providing learning opportunities. (Change Activation, 2016). The final step is new beginnings. It is the step where the organization moves forward. Many organizations fail because they cannot get through the transition, or they fail because they are frightened and confused in the neutral zone (Bridges & Mitchell, 2000). Bridges and Mitchell concluded that the third phase “requires people to begin behaving in a new way, and that can be distracting—it puts one’s sense of competence and value at risk” (p. 3).

**The Importance of Employees When Implementing Change**

Many change experts have long acknowledged the political nature of change in organizations (Frost & Egri, 1991); for the proper implementation of change to be successful, calculated strategic measures that involve employees must be utilized to modify any organization. Because lasting change typically involves the transformation of employees, the involvement of employees in the change process is key (Năstase, Giuclea, & Bold, 2012). Many times, it takes some type of scandal, such as the collapse of Enron, to give change management procedures the proper attention and treatment they deserve (Battilana & Casciaro, 2012). Many organizational crises could be avoided through the regular, strategically-targeted monitoring of the need for change and of stakeholder engagement.

Some leaders realize that the biggest obstacle in implementing lasting change can be the organization’s own employees (Rothermel & Lamarsh, 2012). These employees may resist changes, fight for their own ideas, cause unnecessary political dissention, or eventually cause the change implementation to suffer enough that the necessary changes are unable to be made (Rothermel & Lamarsh, 2012). To institute large changes, leaders must cast the proper vision,
enable others to act, and empower employees to get the job done. Stakeholder buy-in is not only important, it is paramount for successful change implementation. A good leader is not intimidated by quality work or certain talents and skills from those underneath him. Kouzes and Posner (2016) added, “Leaders enable others to act not by hoarding the power they have but by giving it away. Exemplary leaders strengthen everyone’s capacity to deliver on the promises they make” (p. 21).

In speaking on leadership, Kotter (2012) defined leadership as a:

set of processes that creates organizations in the first place or adapts them to significantly changing circumstances. Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles. (p. 28)

Some experts such as Strebel (1996) would submit that managers, leaders, and employees would all view change differently, and felt most employees would view change as an opportunity to strengthen their position with the company. However, for most employees, “change is neither sought after nor welcomed. It is disruptive and intrusive. It upsets balance” (Strebel, 1996, p. 86).

Organizations that choose to use a professional change agent must prepare their employees for this added disruption to the work environment (Metre, 2009). Many times, the use of a change agent causes a leader to think his own employees are incompetent, which can result in unnecessary feelings from the employees to the leader and to the change agent (Metre, 2009). For example, Bäcklund and Werr (2008) argued that “Several studies show that consultant-supported change projects may trigger critical reactions within the client organization toward consultants and their ideas, inflicting self-protective behavior by the client’s peers, subordinates and superiors” (p. 759). In a worst-case scenario, current employees might refuse to cooperate
with the change agent and his strategy, make things difficult for him, or hide information; this, in turn, may endanger the entire change process (Metre, 2009). Whittle (2006) submitted that two conflicts may erupt if an organization does not properly prepare for a change management expert: (a) Consultants that come in from the outside can abuse the power and disrupt the internal politics of the organization, and (b) organizational issues typically arise regarding jurisdiction and who makes the decisions regarding change.

For change to be successful, organizations must decide on a strategy that seeks the opinions of its employees and stakeholders. Teamwork is a necessity for proper change implementation, and organizations should continually seek ways to encourage the participation of the employees (Bramer, 1992). Bramer (1992) added, “Adult workers will be more receptive to change if they believe their employers think enough of them to upgrade their skills” (p. 35). According to Conner (1993), employees have four distinct roles in change management: sponsors, agents, targets, and advocates. In addition to these responsibilities, Kerzner (2013) listed other responsibilities that organizations may give to their employees when going through a change implementation: project manager, project management team, influencer, project board, team manager, project champion, and corporate user. Consultants are often seen as those who legitimize or rubber stamp decisions already made by senior management (Metre, 2009). On the flipside, a change consultant can be the perfect scapegoat for diverting blame and in deflecting unneeded criticism from the employees.

In the end, resistance to change occurs because people become accustomed to a certain way of doing things; with that consistency comes confidence in the knowledge it takes to do that job. Metre (2009) added, “Change affects people’s ability to feel comfortable, capable, and confident because it means that they must learn new systems, work in new ways, and accept new
responsibilities while being expected to maintain or increase existing productivity levels” (p. 17). Although change effort will encounter various forms of human resistance, the leadership must involve the organization’s employees and other stakeholders. If employees feel they have a voice in the change implementation, the change efforts will likely be much more successful (Năstase et al., 2012).

**Pre-existing Change Knowledge Needed When Implementing Change**

In many educational settings, the ability to change educational models may be affected by the amount of knowledge the employees already have on issues such as alternative models of education and basic principles of instituting change. Change and stakeholders’ resistance to change are common occurrences that organizations have always faced (Egan & Fjermestad, 2005). An important factor that can positively or negatively affect the implementation of change is the employees’ resistance to change (Mariana, Daniela, & Nadina, 2013). Barrett (2012) added, “Managers must first identify their organization’s resources, processes, and values to understand its capacity to change. ‘Resources’ includes people, equipment, and money, plus product designs, information, and relationships” (p. 2). Mariana et al. (2013) added, “Employees opposition towards manager’s proposed changes occur in any change process . . . the role of the reducing resistance to change methods alongside managers’ knowledge and skills are essential for a successful implementation” (p. 1607).

The nature of pre-existing change knowledge of the leaders of the organization needing change will determine the structure, plan, and potential need for change (Huff, 2000). Many experts have reported that pre-existing change paradigms include categories such as: learning, personal change, helping, social change, system approach, process improvement, situational factors, emergent change, and leading change. One of the strengths of a pre-change paradigm is
that “without a paradigm which encourages ‘active search,’ organizations, like individuals, often ignore early warning signs and wait until a crisis highlights the need for change” (Young, 2009, p. 537).

Because of the lack of uniformity in the pre-existing change knowledge needed to implement change, most change agents will end up using the approach or change theory that they are most familiar with and comfortable in implementing (Hudescu & Ilies, 2011). Although not exact, many times individuals use parts of a popular change theory without even realizing it (Battilana & Casciaro, 2012). While many change management models and even a few approaches on dealing with the need for change exist, the change management message is clear: “Make sure you know who is important to you, regularly canvass their opinion on what they want, how you are doing, and what if anything could be improved” (Young, 2009, p. 538). It is vitally important to validate and prepare for the need, involve the stakeholders, and ensure there is a high commitment to act.

Change Management Versus Change Leadership

There is a general misunderstanding of the differences between change management and change leadership. Change management is much more task-oriented, focusing on managing the various processes, tools, and techniques of the work environment that the leader has instructed. Change management refers to the tools and structures that manage change effort. It is the set of processes, tools, and mechanisms designed to ensure that changes are implemented smoothly and that any negative external and internal factors are handled properly. Change leadership is the overall vision for change. It is the driving force and vision that implements large-scale implementation. Kotter (2012b) added, “Change leadership is much more associated with putting an engine on the whole change process, and making it go faster, smarter, more efficiently. It’s
more associated, therefore, with large scale changes” (p. 1).

Management is concerned with managing the complexity of any organization. Leadership is about developing vision and change (Bencivenga, 2002). Change management is concerned with budgets, planning, creating steps and timetables for results, allocating resources, organizing staff, and delegating the responsibility and authority to carry out the leader’s plan (Kotter, 1999). Change leadership is direction. It develops a vision for the future. It aligns people and increased followership by delegating authority and influence. Leadership motivates, inspires, and empowers the employees to rise above political and bureaucratic barriers (Kotter, 1999). Most of what is read about change refers to change management. Kotter (2012b) believed that while management is obviously important with any organization, management is not leadership, but is rather about controlling and problem solving for short-term results. Kotter (2012b) defined management as “a set of processes that can keep a complicated system of people and technology running smoothly. The most important aspects of management include planning, budgeting, organizing, staffing, controlling, and problem solving” (p. 28).

As with any work environment, especially those implementing change, the leaders must decide who will implement the change, whether they will use onsite leaders and managers, or if they will use change management strategists. Of particular importance in this discussion is that the organization understand the differences between leaders and managers. In speaking about change management, Lucey (2008) added, “Leaders foster change and create an environment where change is the norm, whereas managers stabilize the organization and ensure that the changes are well implemented” (p. 12).

Kotter (2012b) defined leadership as a:

set of processes that creates organizations in the first place or adapts them to significantly
changing circumstances. Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles. (p. 28)

Because change leadership involves bigger leaps, those leaps must be made at lightning speed because of bigger and faster hazards that can disrupt any organization. Kotter (2012b) concluded, “Change leadership is going to be the big challenge in the future, and the fact that almost nobody is very good at it is—well, it’s obviously a big deal” (p. 1).

Despite the many definitions of change management and change leadership, true change cannot happen unless the work-environment culture and the behavior of people change. Changing culture is at the very core of change. Culture is founded on the beliefs of the organization’s founders and leaders, and these values are shaped through the years by other key players as well as various crises and situations the organization has endured (Atkinson, 2013). “The organizational culture is represented as an iceberg. The majority of the culture is below the water line, opaque and difficult to define with precision” (Atkinson, 2013, p. 11). The only way to build a strong and robust culture is by communicating, creating a culture of change, listening, questioning assumptions, and being willing to make large-scale changes despite traditionalism that might be present (Hinkley, 2009).

Because of the monumental change and paradigm shift required for a school to implement an alternative breakthrough model in education, having quality leadership in place is an imperative priority. Without the “vision, values, strategy, empowerment, motivation, and inspiration” (Gill, 2003, p. 312) that quality leaders provide, efforts to transform an educational setting may fail. Because simply implementing technology provides no automatic guarantee of improved student learning or satisfaction, quality leaders must surround themselves with personnel that can actively implement the leader’s vision and utilize the shared leadership
approach to implement the necessary changes the leader desires. While change management may have more public recognition, this study will encompass the necessary change leadership practices needed to implement alternative educational models.

**Introduction to the Challenges With Traditional Education**

Alternative methods of teaching and learning are being implemented in K-12 classrooms at a startling rate. Many digital generation students are requesting major foundational changes to the traditional classroom that will more fully engage these students’ abilities and desires which stem from their technology-filled environment (Vesisenaho et al., 2010). Educators are seeking new ways to increase student interest, and most of the alternative delivery methods that utilize individualized-centered formats integrate efficient technology tools to reach students who are, in many ways, unable to be reached as effectively by traditional education (Hill & Johnston, 2010). While many strides have been made in the traditional educational system’s ability to adapt to the 21st century, many educators still believe there is little difference in the majority of present-day educational systems and the educational structure of the early 1900s.

There is no doubt that traditional education models have served students well and continue to educate the minds of today’s students. Traditional education has challenges when trying to meet various levels of student ability in the classroom (Napier, Dekhane, & Smith, 2011). Cottle and Glover (2011) added, “With the challenges of traditional, lecture-based methods, some have begun to call for more effective methods of content delivery. Additionally, today’s student may approach learning in new ways and may need new and more active learning environments” (p. 205). With the advent of technology and the availability of breakthrough alternative learning models, the integration of the traditional classroom with an online blended approach offers benefits never before seen in a traditional model (Al-Hebaishi, 2012). Some
educators and researchers have stated that traditional education classes are unchangeable, lack flexibility, teacher-centered, and too static for today’s student (Tucker, 2001).

Many educators feel that educational models must utilize a constructivist design to fully engage today’s learner (Yilmaz, 2011). Some even state that current models must be centered by three common elements: (a) context, (b) collaboration, and (c) construction (Jonassen, 1994). Additionally, Jonassen (1994) submitted a more “meaningful, authentic context for learning and using the knowledge” (p. 37) that students construct is extremely valuable in the learning process. In some ways, the adaptation needed for this type of learning is many times not available in traditional classrooms (Jaffer, 2010). Researchers are predicting that by 2019, 50% of all high school courses will be delivered in an online format (Horn & Staker, 2011).

Integrating technology with the supervision and expertise of a face-to-face teacher offers much promise and many benefits to the future of education. To examine the benefits of alternative models, researchers have been conducting studies on the effects that alternative models of education implementing technology have on student achievement and student satisfaction.

So far, the blended learning model has been the most popular alternative educational delivery method in K-12 that incorporates technology (Hennig & Hess, 2010). Blended learning combines various methods of content delivery with the benefits of online technologies under the supervision and leadership of a teacher in a traditional classroom (Larson & Sung, 2009). Even though there are many barriers and potential road blocks when implementing alternative breakthrough models of education, many K-12 schools have begun looking at new ways of teaching and learning and are considering blended learning an option (Werth, Werth, & Kellerer, 2013). When used meaningfully, technology and alternative learning models can many times engage students of the digital generation and help increase student interest to levels not seen with
traditional education (Vernadakis, Giannousi, Tsitskari, Antoniou, & Kioumourtzoglou, 2012).

**Lack of Student Satisfaction and Teaching Flexibility**

Some educators believe that the student achievement issues facing education today are partly because this generation of students has become disinterested in the bureaucratic system and inflexibility of traditional schooling (Napier, et al., 2011). Can leveraging technology intelligently in a format that personalizes learning to each student’s needs reinvigorate the educational system? Vernadakis et al. (2012) added, “Student satisfaction is one of the five pillars of quality, together with faculty satisfaction, learning effectiveness, access, and institutional cost-effectiveness” (p. 138). Various components of student satisfaction need additional investigation as alternative learning models become more prevalent and forces such as adoption rates, level of support, and learn expectations continues to change as well (Vernadakis et al., 2012). Many educators believe a model that utilizes technology can enable advantages for the current educational classroom not before seen.

In the traditional K-12 classroom, students with strong auditory and recall skills quickly grasp new material and characteristically do very well. However, not all students learn the same way, and many different learning needs typically exist in a single classroom (Larson & Sung, 2009). Bergmann and Sams (2012) stated, “The present model of education reflects the age in which it was designed; the industrial revolution. Students are educated in an assembly line to make their standardized education efficient” (p. 6). This teach-to-the-middle approach has a glaring weakness because not all students learn the same way, nor do they all have the same chances to learn at home, and many do not have access to technology at home or at school. Some students lack adequate parental support, some are uninterested in the subject-matter, and some have become disinterested with the present educational model (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). Since
the traditional setup teaches mainly to the middle of the classroom, many students are
disadvantaged because there are so many different needs (Vander Ark, 2011). Gifted students get
bored easily because there is no system for them to work at their own pace, and students with
special needs typically fall farther behind because the teaching is geared for the middle-of-the-
class-type student.

The Digital Generation and Why Many Dislike the Traditional Classroom Format

With all the distractions facing students, perhaps more than ever it is important to engage
students in the classroom. Since many digital generation students report that the current
educational system does little for their digital interests, meaningful technology and alternative
learning models should be implemented with greater urgency (Jukes, McCain, & Crockett,
2010). One of the greatest challenges faced in the traditional classroom is the power-down effect
that many students experience when they enter a classroom that, to them, seems boring. It is easy
to see why many students report boredom when they sit and listen to a teacher lecture for a
majority of the class period, experience little if any student-collaboration, and use paper
textbooks as the primary source of information.

Contrast that with the way the many student lives away from school. These students sit in
their bedroom at night watching television, listening to music on their iPod, browsing Facebook,
Twitter, or Instagram on their laptop or tablet, and checking multiple text messages on their
mobile phone, all while working on homework (Jukes et al., 2010). Student-culture and the way
friendships are formed have changed. Many of the educational skills needed years ago may not
necessarily be applicable for tomorrow’s workforce (Friedman, 2006). These students make up
the digital generation that many refer to as the iGeneration, the NET generation, or digital
natives. Many of these students were born surrounded by technology and utilize technology as
part of their lives; unfortunately, many of the classrooms in which these students sit do not incorporate technology or utilize it to enhance learning (Jones & Czerniewicz, 2010).

Rosen, Carrier, and Cheever (2010) added, “Education has not caught up with this new generation of tech-savvy children and teens. It is not that they don’t want to learn. They just learn differently” (p. 3). Many studies have shown that when compared to traditional education, alternative learning models that incorporate technology report equivalent or improved learning outcomes (Cottle & Glover, 2011; Horn & Maas, 2012). Many students report increased satisfaction in classrooms that integrate technology in the teaching/learning delivery methods and assessment practices (Oliver & Stallings, 2014). Many of these students are ready to learn online, but they cannot do this on their own. Because the goal of education is to teach and assist students in acquiring knowledge and critical thinking skills, students need schools to support, rather than judge and push against the skills and expectations they bring to their learning (Vander Ark, 2011). Rosen et al. stated, “Technologies that are loved and consumed by the [Digital Generation] present many unique possibilities, and any barriers to them, in my opinion, are insignificant compared to the technologies’ ability to engage our young students in the learning process” (p. 180).

Digital Generation Characteristics

In some instances, digital generation students have developed specific characteristics and patterns that make learning very difficult (Jukes, et al., 2010). New research indicates that because of the availability of technology and growing up within a digital environment, students are changing physically and chemically. These students are actually neurologically wired differently than the students of previous generations (Jukes, et al., 2010). Each person processes information differently because of gender, age, ability level, and experience. While conventional
wisdom has always stated that the brain is hardwired, research being submitted stated that today’s students have learned to deal with various pieces of information on a parallel structure, rather than a sequential structure as in past generations (Sánchez, Salinas, Contreras, & Meyer, 2011).

While research indicates that many students learn differently (Jukes et al., 2010) and have access to much more information than in years past, teachers have begun to complain that digital generation students do not concentrate or memorize as well as students in past classes. Many students have lost interest in memorizing basic facts such as the states and capitals when they can simply Google the answer on their phone in a matter of seconds. Students who may think it is a waste of time to memorize basic educational concepts or historical facts can recite the lyrics to thousands of songs or remember the complexities of popular games (Jukes et al., 2010). While major strides have been made to re-engage this generation, more must be done with greater urgency.

Another characteristic of digital generation students is their ability to multitask. Students growing up in a society that is enhanced by technology adapt to new learning opportunities at a startling rate (Rosen et al., 2010). Because of the students’ typical surroundings, many find it difficult to work on one task without wanting to do a multitude of other tasks at the same time. Rosen et al. (2010) added, “Whether multitasking is a form of pride or is fostered by technology that encourages attending to more than one task at a time, it is a reality” (p. 78). Despite the obvious disadvantages of trying to focus on more than one task at a time, multitasking is a natural result of the fact that many of the devices these students own perform multiple tasks at breakneck speeds.

Because the majority of the traditional K-12 educational system is built on working on
singular task at a time, many educators find that digital generation students who wish to multitask find it difficult to stay interested in the slow, singular-task pace of traditional education. If digital generation students grow up in a society in which access to technology and digital devices is the norm rather than the exception, and if students cannot connect their social lives of texting, social media, and other forms of technology to their educational lives, then many of these students will lose interest in traditional education (Vander Ark, 2011).

**Unbundling and Restructuring the Current Educational Landscape**

The traditional educational structure has been in existence for over 100 years (Hess & Meeks, 2010). Because of this, most students still sit in desks for a majority of the class period, handwrite their notes from the teacher’s lecture, and use large, cumbersome textbooks. Students use little technology and have little limited flexibility if they fall behind in schoolwork due to an absence. Schools have no software that enables students to take advantage of a personalized digital learning plan to enhance their specific learning needs (Vander Ark, 2011). Many times when new content is assigned as homework, students are still confused about content from the night before (Larson & Sung, 2009).

Because of the increasing availability of meaningful technology, and with the overall desire to help students learn in meaningful ways, much research suggests unbundling the entire educational process and dramatically rethinking and restructuring its foundation (Hess & Meeks, 2010). This radical thought is possible because new technology tools, management practices, and leadership trends are convincing educators that the foundational elements of K-12 schooling need to be completely unbundled and then recombined in new ways (Hess & Meeks, 2010). Other commercial sectors have implemented technology tools at a shocking rate (Hess & Meeks, 2010). Even more recently, teachers in traditional schools are adapting their classrooms and
teaching structure to more fully represent the connected world the students live in (Powell et al., 2015). It is vitally important for educators to understand and appreciate the differences and learning potential of the digital generation, and to realize that many interests that students may have are not being met in the traditional education system (Hill & Johnston, 2010). Powell et al. (2015) added, “The advent of learning that combines online and face-to-face delivery is not merely a theory or construct—it is an instructional model shift being implemented by schools throughout the country and the world” (p. 5).

Some schools are currently making efforts to devise policies that would make the long-term process of absorbing new technology smooth and efficient (Hennig & Hess, 2010). Hess and Meeks (2010) stated, “The irresistible push and pull of new tools, technology, and talent have created the opportunity to dramatically rethink and restructure school. These forces are dragging us into a new world – whether we desire it or not” (p. 41). Educators realize that change is needed and that the current system is not meeting students’ needs. These educators feel that change is inevitable, but that it is not happening with as much urgency as it should (Hennig & Hess, 2010).

**Meaningful Learning Through Technology**

Unbundling the current landscape would not be worth the effort if educators did not implement alternative models of education and technological tools in a smart, efficient manner. In *Meaningful Learning With Technology*, Jonassen, Howland, Marra, and Crismond (2008) submitted that technology cannot be inserted into the educational process without productive thinking spent on schools fostering a more meaningful learning environment for students. Technology must become an educational partner with students, and because technology is more than just hardware, educators must implement technology only if the designs and new learning
environments engage students to increased satisfaction and learning levels (Jonassen et al., 2008). Technological devices do not communicate meaning and should not control all of the learner’s interactions. Jonassen et al. stated, “Technologies should function as intellectual tool kits that enable learners to build more meaningful personal interpretations and representations of the world. These tool kits must support the intellectual functions that are required by the course of study” (p. 7).

Since the primary educational goal is to ensure that various technologies are used to foster meaningful learning, educators must cautiously guard against technology being used only as a vehicle to deliver the education. (Jonassen et al., 2008). Technology and its partnership with alternative breakthrough models of education should primarily be used to engage and facilitate learning (Jaffer, 2010). Educators can promote meaningful learning by using technology to assist students to think and reason. Students learn at a deeper level when they apply previous knowledge to new information. Jonassen et al. (2008) concluded, “Thinking meditates learning. Learning results from thinking” (p. 8). Jonassen et al. posited that many types of learning can be fostered when technology is properly applied: (a) causal, (b) analogical, (c) expressive, (d) expressive, (e) experiential, and (f) problem solving (Jonassen et al, 2008). Additionally, Jonassen et al. (2008) added that technology fosters learning through five main avenues:

- Technology as tools to support knowledge construction
- Technology as information vehicle for exploring knowledge to support learning by constructing access to needed information
- Technology as authentic context to support learning by representing and simulating meaningful real-world problems
- Technology as a social medium to support learning by conversing and collaborating with...
others

- Technology as an intellectual partner to support learning by reflecting on helping learners articulate and represent what they know (p. 8).

By itself, technology cannot teach students, and the type of deeper learning needed for today’s student can be more easily attained by students implementing technology that enables a deeper, more meaningful learning experience.

**The Digital Divide**

Even though many students are connected to technology more than ever, unfortunately the digital divide is still noticeable for many low-income children. The term *digital divide* has been in existence for many years and refers to the gap and digital literacy level between students who possess the accessibility, ownership, and the comfort level with technology versus those who do not own technological devices or have normal access to technology (Peña-López, 2010). Henderson (2011) added that “there is evidence that the digital divide between schools and homes continues to widen as more and more technologies become available” (p. 152). Henderson and Honan (2008) added:

> the gaps between real-world uses of technology and new technology in the classroom are a cause for concern. There is a growing sense that the divide is actually between the rich literate practices used by young people in their homes and the narrow and restricted practices engaged in by schools and teachers. (p. 86)

Celano and Neuman (2010) added, “If low-income children want to use a computer for a research assignment or merely to wander around on the Internet, they often must rely on the public library, after-school programs, or community organizations” (p. 50). The recent U.S. Census revealed that over 50% of children in homes with incomes of $75,000 or above owned a
home computer. On the other side, only 15% of those with incomes between $20,000 and $25,000 owned a computer. Because low-income students do not have the same access to technology equipment that average-income students do, they are falling further behind in their technological skills. Leaders in low-income school districts must convince parents to be more proactive in helping solve these issues (Celano & Neuman, 2010). Unfortunately, the digital divide has been used as a political argument against instituting any type of digital content or alternative models because educators fear that access to learning and assignments would further advantage students that have access to technology away from school (O’Brien & Scharber, 2008).

Celano and Neuman (2010) stated, “Schools in low-income neighborhoods must help their students stay up-to-date with their more advantaged peers. Quite simply, low-income children need greater access to technology in school to make up for their limited access at home” (p. 53). While Celano and Neuman preferred getting parents of low-income homes involved, more than likely this approach will not be advantageous as many low-income parents are not even involved in their kids’ overall education. An understandable technological gap exists between various socio-economic statuses, and students’ parents must be more proactive in assisting their children versus solely relying on others to meet all of their needs. Peña-López (2010) submitted that any educational institution that is working on bridging the divide must have a comprehensive understanding of six key areas: (a) hardware and software connectivity, (b) affordability, (c) digital literacy level, (d) digital literacy training, (e) educational resources, and (f) new e-pedagogies (Peña-López, 2010). Henderson (2011) believed that most K-12 schools do not draw on the technology that many students already possess. Henderson added, “In most cases, schools do not have access to the range of technological devices—or the funds to
make such devices available—that many students use in their lives outside of school” (p. 153).

Some schools have been successful at implementing a one-to-one digital initiative in which students are provided hardware and software. However, because digital literacy levels are sometimes not considered, Peña-López (2010) added, “Maybe because of this lack of negotiated meaning, maybe because of lack of strategic plans or teaching training, we have yet to find sound evidence for laptop-only based programmes to bridge the digital divide in education” (p. 26). Although many barriers impact the approaches taken by teachers of students with various literacy levels and access to digital technology, “teachers need opportunities to reflect on current practices and to examine and re-examine the possibilities for pedagogical change” (Henderson, 2011, p. 160). It is vitally important that educators consider various barriers such as the digital divide and socioeconomic levels when considering the implementation of an alternative breakthrough model of education. Additionally, educators must consider the location and culture of the school, along with the methods of addressing these possible issues.

**The Introduction and Advantages of Blended Learning**

To address the needs of transforming the traditional K-12 classroom, educators are beginning to implement technology tools and alternative breakthrough models of education that incorporate technology. Blended learning has been referred to as the third generation of distance learning (Merisotis & Phipps, 1999). Correspondence education was the first generation that used a one-way delivery method that included mail, radio, and even television. The second generation was generally called distance education and was based on a single technology such as web-based learning. Blended learning is characterized by maximizing the best advantages of face-to-face learning with the best aspects and benefits of multiple technologies (Vernadakis et al., 2012). A blended learning model upgrades most teachers from lecturers reading fixed
Blended learning combines the best elements of online learning, learning management systems (LMS), and other technology resources with the traditional brick-and-mortar classroom and the security and supervision of a teacher (Vernadakis et al., 2012).

**Definitions of blended learning.** Presently, there are numerous definitions for blended learning (see Figure 1). Blended learning can also be defined as a flexible structure that merges the availability of learning at different times, different places, and different levels. In addition, this structure offers the convenience and resources of online courses without the complete loss of the security and structure of a face-to-face teacher (Vernadakis et al., 2012). Blended learning is about flexibility, personalization, and technology integration. It moves away from the traditional lecture method and leverages technology to enhance the learning environment so students can receive the flexibility and quality of a personalized digital learning component (Vander Ark, 2011). In researching over 80 organizations and 100 teachers who were involved in blended learning models, Christensen, Horn and Staker (2013) defined blended learning as:

> a formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online learning with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace and at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home. The modalities along each student’s learning path within a course or subject are connected to provide an integrated learning experience. (p. 14)

Blackboard (2009) described the method of blended learning as the teaching practice that combines methods from both face-to-face and online learning, an established, rapidly-growing instructional model proven highly effective in helping schools address challenges of “student achievement, limited resources, and expectations of 21st century learners” (p. 1). Al-Hebaishi
(2012) added, “BL [blended learning] integrates opposite approaches, such as formal and informal learning, face to face and online experiences, directed paths and reliance on self-direction” (p. 375). Blended learning combines teaching methods from both face-to-face and online learning (Al-Hebaishi, 2012). As alternative models become more popular and mainstream, positive research is continuing to accumulate on the positive outcomes from using these models (Kenney & Newcombe, 2011). Educators have found that this model of technology meets the immediate need for excellence by combining technology and flexibility with the continued security and leadership of a classroom teacher (SETDA, 2008).

**Advantages of blended learning.** The advantages of blended learning are numerous. Some of the primary benefits are as follows: (a) flexibility and individualization that focuses personalized digital learning on the needs of the student; (b) the ability to adapt instruction that takes into account learning disabilities and can appeal to auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learners; (c) the use of synchronous platforms and software that provide flexibility of time and location; (d) implementation of technology software and devices; (e) efficiency in accessing the world’s knowledge and training due to the availability of larger amounts of data and expertise from online instructors; (f) cost-effectiveness; (g) pedagogical methods that evolve with current best trends/practices; (h) student mentoring and differentiated instruction; (i) increased flexibility and adaptation in a student’s overall curriculum; (j) strategic uses of technology to utilize the power of today’s Internet; and (k) opportunities for group interaction and collaboration through discussion forums that can help eliminate participation barriers such as talking out in class (Al-Qahtani & Higgins, 2013).

Because blended learning many times fosters independent academic growth, students are able to learn at their own pace and are not ushered through class as if they were on an assembly
line (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). With the availability of technology, it is difficult to see why any educator would assume that all children learn in the same way and at the same rate; yet most traditional classrooms are structured this way. In an educational environment delivered with the assistance of the blended learning model, the learner typically follows a method that is more conducive to his learning style (Carnahan, 2010).

For the student, blended learning could mean freedom from some of the constraints of time, location, or even a below-average learning environment (Al-Qahtani & Higgins, 2013). Students who miss class for any length of time find it easier to maintain their classwork in an online learning management system. At the heart of blended learning models is technology, flexibility, and a departure from a one-size-fits-all structure to a personalized approach that allows each child to learn at a different speed (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). Although many benefits of the blended learning model exist, students are most successful in this model when they learn to manage their time and increase their own self-efficacy while using technology (Napier, et al., 2011).

Studies have investigated the effects of blended learning versus the traditional structure regarding student achievement and student/parent satisfaction. Allen and Seaman (2010) added, “Over three-quarters of academic leaders at public institutions report that online is as good as or better than face-to-face instruction” (p. 3). Schools that have implemented blended models are seeing achievement and satisfaction gains at an alarming rate (Darrow et al., 2013). Students in these models often take advantage of a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) method and are able to use their devices or some form of technology in class, which increases the interest and output of students (Sangani, 2013). This interest engages the students at new levels, motivates them to learn, empowers them with individualized learning choices, and allows them to express
themselves in a variety of learning formats at their disposal (Pape, Sheehan, & Worrell, 2012).

Because blended learning truly allows for the structural and fundamental redesign of the teaching and learning model, blended learning has the potential to revolutionize K-12 education in terms of quality and costs in ways never seen (Horn & Staker, 2011). Following a model that allows a more consistent and customized learning approach, blended learning allows students to work at their own pace and gives them the additional confidence they need to be successful at school. These alternative models also require fewer, specialized teachers and use the space at schools much more efficiently (Horn & Staker, 2011). Schools are already leveraging technology to create drastic changes in teaching structures as students use technology to experience more personalized learning (Horn & Staker, 2011).

**Popular Models of Blended Learning**

The Innosight Institute has listed four main profiles (see Figure 1) of emerging models of blended learning: (a) rotation model, (b) flex, (c) a la carte, and (d) enriched-virtual model (Staker, 2011). The rotation model has four sub-models: (a) station rotation, (b) lab rotation, (c) flipped classroom, and (d) individual rotation. Additionally, some districts are transforming blended learning to a hybrid innovation that continues to deliver the best of both worlds. While many models of blended learning are a change from the regular classroom, hybrid models truly offer the “advantages of online learning combined with all the benefits of the traditional classroom” (Christensen et al., 2013, p. 5). Hybrid models include the station rotation model, lab rotation, and flipped classroom. Blended learning models that are structured more like hybrids follow a teaching/learning trajectory that is most like a traditional classroom (Staker, 2011).
Figure 1. Graphic showing the various models of blended learning. From Blended learning: The evolution of online and face-to-face education from 2008-2015 (p. 7), by A. Powell et al., 2015.

**Rotation model.** The basic premise of this model is that students rotate on a fixed schedule between online learning, self-paced learning, and traditional face-to-face learning with a teacher in a lecture setting. Staker and Horn (2012) defined the rotation model as:

A program in which within a given course or subject (e.g., math), students rotate on a fixed schedule or at the teacher’s discretion between learning modalities, at least one of which is online learning. Other modalities might include activities such as small-group or full-class instruction, group projects, individual tutoring, and pencil-and-paper assignments. (p. 8)

In California, 80% of schools that follow a blended learning rotation model do so in elementary classes (Dreambox, 2013). This rotation is usually on a fixed schedule or at the teacher’s discretion. Other learning modalities that can be included in this model can be small-group
collaboration, group projects and problem-based learning, individual tutoring, and pencil-and-paper assignments (Christensen et al., 2013). Inside the rotation model are four sub-models: (a) station rotation, (b) lab rotation, (c) flipped classroom, and (d) individual rotation.

**Station rotation.** This rotation model (see Figure 2) is typically within a course or subject-area that rotates on a fixed schedule or at the teacher’s discretion. The station-rotation model differs from the individual rotation model because the students are rotating through all of the stations, not necessarily those specific to their personalized learning schedules (Staker & Horn, 2012). It is normal for these models to implement this rotation with the whole class, with small groups, or in some cases, one-by-one rotations. This model differs from the individual-rotation model because students will eventually rotate through all the stations, whereas individual-rotation model alternates students only when it is specific to their customized learning schedules (Staker & Horn, 2012).

*Figure 2.* Graphic showing the Station-Rotation model. From Classifying K-12 Blended Learning (p. 9), by H. Staker & M. B. Horn, 2012, Innosight Institute.
**Lab rotation.** The lab-rotation model (see Figure 3) is one of the older alternative models and encompasses the idea that students participate with various offline learning activities in a traditional classroom (DPI, 2013). These students then rotate to a computer lab to take part in online learning activities. Typically, this model requires that students change rooms and rotate to the computer or media lab. Differing from the station-rotation model, this model rotates students among various locations on the campus instead of staying in one classroom (Staker & Horn, 2012).

*Figure 3.* Graphic showing the Lab-Rotation model. From Classifying K-12 Blended Learning (p. 10), by H. Staker & M. B. Horn, 2012, Innosight Institute.

**Flipped classroom.** While the lab rotation and station rotation may be setup somewhat more traditional in their approach of blending online learning and face-to-face instruction, the
flipped classroom model is not (see Figure 4). The flipped classroom model typically flips the lecture and homework elements of the course. Educause (2012) added, “Short video lectures are viewed by students at home before the class session, while in-class time is devoted to exercise, projects, or discussions” (p. 1.). The flipped classroom model has had a popularity surge in the last few years thanks to Bergman and Sam’s (2012) book entitled, *Flip Your Classroom: Reach Every Student in Every Class Every Day*. This model follows a structure where a student’s homework encompasses new material that even includes watching traditional lectures outside the class online. Class time is then spent on various inquiry-based learning and collaboration where the teacher is more able to communicate and assist the students (Staker & Horn, 2012).

![Graphic showing the Flipped Classroom model. From Classifying K-12 Blended Learning (p. 10), by H. Staker & M. B. Horn, 2012, Innosight Institute.]

*Figure 4.* Graphic showing the Flipped Classroom model. From Classifying K-12 Blended Learning (p. 10), by H. Staker & M. B. Horn, 2012, Innosight Institute.

With the flipped classroom, the delivery of content and instruction is primarily online, which differentiates this model from other models (Bergman & Sams, 2012). This model follows the idea that the students have some element of control over time, place, path, and pace of instruction (Staker & Horn, 2012).
Individual rotation. With the station rotation, lab rotation, and the flipped classroom models, students are normally given the same curriculum path; regardless if the path is online or offline. The individual-rotation model (see Figure 5) is typically within a specific subject as a student rotates on an individual customized schedule with various models available to the student, which generally includes at least some form of online learning. The student motions through various activities and stations defined by the teacher, or via an algorithm-driven learning path, as the student learns according to his specific needs (Blois, 2013). Staker and Horn (2012) added, “The individual-rotation model differs from other Rotation models because students do not necessarily rotate to each available station or modality” (p. 11).

Flex model. Schools who use this model (see Figure 6) typically follow an approach to first support the non-traditional or at-risk students (Dreambox Learning, 2013). Online learning
is paramount to this model. Blois (2013) added, “Instead of working from station-to-station or classroom-to-lab, the students primarily learn online, while being seated in a brick-and-mortar structure” (para. 10). Material is primarily delivered online, and while there are teachers that may be in the room for supervision and help if needed, this learning is primarily self-guided (Staker & Horn, 2012). Some school models follow an implementation structure where the teacher provides substantial face-to-face support, while other models use very little teacher interaction. Horn and Staker (2011) added, “Teachers provide on-site support on a flexible and adaptive as-needed basis through in-person tutoring sessions and small group sessions” (p. 4).

**A La Carte Model.** Schools using this model (see Figure 7) follow a traditional format, but allow students to take one or more courses online to supplement their learning experience. This model resembles the traditional classroom more than any other blended learning model. The self-blend approach allows students who are struggling or working above their grade level to

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**Figure 6.** Graphic showing the Flex model. From Classifying K-12 Blended Learning (p.13), by H. Staker & M. B. Horn, 2012, Innosight Institute.
progress at their own pace using other online supplemental materials (Dreambox Learning, 2013). Staker and Horn (2012) added, “This [self-blend model] differs from full-time online learning and the enriched-virtual model because it is not a whole-school experience” (p. 14). Some schools have used this model when reaching English language learners (ELL) who might fall behind because of the lack of understanding of a particular concept.

**Enriched-virtual model.** This final model (see Figure 8) offers students the ability to learn in traditional brick-and-mortar classrooms and fully online courses where the instruction and course content are outsourced to an online vendor. While somewhat like the a la carte model, this model differences because this is a whole classroom experience, “meaning each student takes the same exact course load online and offline classes (instead of the pick-and-choose nature of the a la carte model)” (para. 14). Many enriched-virtual schools began initially as full-time online schools and then added traditional brick-and-mortar school experiences to take advantage
of the educational leadership and supervision of a face-to-face teacher.

![Figure 8. Graphic showing the Enriched-virtual model. From Classifying K-12 Blended Learning (p.15), by H. Staker & M. B. Horn, 2012, Innosight Institute.](image)

**The Advantages of Adaptive Learning Management Systems**

Blended learning is a departure from traditional education as it allows students to be in control of their schooling and tailors instructional learning to each student’s needs through the use of personalized digital learning systems (Vander Ark, 2011). Blended learning models now incorporate software systems that can monitor students’ progress more like private tutors (Vander Ark, 2011). New interactive adaptive systems built into the newest blended learning models can assess students and change in real time, depending on what and how much the student is learning (Vander Ark, 2011). These systems analyze data that is derived from each student’s responses to tailor what the student sees or hears next.

The adaption software ensures that students work on content until it is mastered. As these models continue to mature, teachers have more quality time to answer questions, work with students who need assistance, collaborate with small groups at increased levels, and guide the
learning of each student with an individualized approach. This is all possible because learning management systems (LMS) have become the hub of the blended learning model. One of the greatest benefits of an alternative teaching/learning method such as blended learning is that overall interaction increases: Teacher to student and student to student. Since the role of the teacher changes from content presenter to learning coach, more time is spent communicating with students (Bergmann & Sams, 2012).

A personalized digital learning component can provide the student a more customized, engaging learning experience that can help change the learning curve and ignite decades of significant academic improvement (Aroyo et al., 2006). Next-generation learning already includes a myriad of engaging content, gaming, and social networking features (Göbel, Wendel, Ritter, & Steinmetz, 2010). The next-generation classroom will be more like spending time on Facebook or YouTube than reading a textbook. Because content is hosted in the cloud, personalized digital learning has the potential to provide round-the-clock course access to all students, regardless of their location. Because the curriculum software actively adapts to the student, both the gifted student and the struggling student will benefit. Personalized learning is driven by instant student feedback with embedded assessment, increasing the success of the student learning the content. As more student learning shifts to digital education, the data gained from these students is invaluable to the educational process. Vander Ark (2011) added, “The ability to customize learning and the knowledge to be gained about students will make this the most important development of the decade” (p. 37).

Implementation of the Blended Learning Model

The implementation of any type of alternative breakthrough model in education is dependent upon quality educational leaders. Schools are implementing blended learning in a
variety of ways, ranging from primarily online with some face-to-face interaction to primarily face-to-face instruction integrated with some online resources. Many schools have begun this alternative breakthrough model of education by implementing blended learning techniques for advanced placement courses or for credit recovery. Years ago, alternative models of education were theoretically good ideas, but little knowledge was available regarding proper implementation methods. Fast forward to the present day, and this is becoming less of an issue. There are multiple models and implementation guides available. Organizations such as iNACOL, the State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA), and Digital Learning Now publish blended learning implementation guides that are free to download and implement.

Before any type of implementation begins, many decisions must be made including the academic goals, funding, strategy and timeline, support, instructional models, platform and content selection, devices, staffing and development, data analytics, integration, professional development, tech support, assessment, communication, and many more (Digital Learning Now, 2013). Oliver and Stallings (2014) add that educators wishing to implement blended learning models must address at least three broad considerations: (a) contextual considerations, (b) instructional strategy and teaching considerations, and (c) technology considerations. At the center of any alternative model is the flexibility that technology brings, allowing a student to depart from a one-size-fits-all approach to a more personalized approach (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). Despite the amount of information available, many educators still find the implementation difficult as many parts of the schooling process must be re-decided. iNACOL (2013) added:

As reported by educators time and time again, one of the most difficult processes for creating a breakthrough model in K-12 blended and online learning, is creating a culture of change. In order to plan for this, it’s important to research change management and
what practice is most promising in implementing breakthrough models in K-12 blended and online learning. (p. 3)

To strategize for this culture of change needed for implementing breakthrough models of education, it is imperative to research change leadership and to know which change models are most beneficial when implementing alternative models of education such as blended and online learning (iNACOL, 2013). There is minimal chance at a successful implementation unless proper leadership in place. Leadership must cast a vision for these changes and answer the questions of why and present the need for the overall paradigm shift (Goodwin et al., 2013). The leadership must carefully lay out the main elements for the planning and implementation of any new alternative breakthrough model in education and define areas such as: (a) leadership, (b) professional development, (c) teaching, (d) operations, (e) content, and (f) technology (Darrow et al., 2013).

Many schools are trying to implement technology, but often are going about it incorrectly. Unfortunately, educators who implement technology into their classrooms by using projectors and PowerPoint are not utilizing technology in meaningful ways. While these tools are helpful, they do not incorporate the benefits from a blended learning model. Some schools have begun allowing students to use e-books on their tablets, but even this does not fully implement the blended learning format. In this scenario, students still take paper tests; teachers have no software to help them adapt the content for each student; schools have no central cloud site to store teacher/student notes; and many students must find their own videos online as support resources (Vander Ark, 2011). Many schools that have integrated alternative learning paradigms follow models already in place: (a) School of One, (b) Rocketship Education, (c) Kunskapsskolan, (d) AdvancePath Academics, (e) Carpe Diem, (f) K12, (g) Khan Academy, or
Blended Learning—Stay Informed

While many schools are celebrating over 10 years in a blended learning environment, other educators are still unaware of any new alternative breakthrough models of education that incorporate technology. Educators who wish to learn more about alternative models of education would benefit by reading some of the thousands of online articles and videos about alternative pedagogical methods such as the blended learning or the flipped classroom models. Many of these articles are available to those who have access to ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), Education Research Complete, Academic Search Complete, or other educational databases that contain this type of content. The following are just a few examples of books that provide a foundational introduction about the topic of alternative learning and blended learning and its benefits: *Disrupting Class* by Clayton M. Christenson; *The World is Flat* by Thomas Friedman; *Understanding the Digital Generation* by Ian Jukes, Ted McCain, and Mick Harper; *Getting Smart* by Tom Vander Ark; and *Blended: Using Disruptive Innovation to Improve Schools* by Michael Horn and Heather Staker. In addition, many blended learning documents and resources are available at the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) at http://www.inacol.org, at the State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA) at http://www.setda.org, at the Michigan Virtual Learning Research Institute (MVLRI) at http://www.mvlri.org, at the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) at http://www.iste.org, and at the Clayton Christensen Institute for Disruptive Innovation at http://www.christenseninstitute.org/.

**Summary**

In order to discover what change leadership practices are utilized by educational leaders
at selected K-12 schools when alternative breakthrough models in blended and online education are implemented, one must understand the related literature. To strategize for the culture of change needed to implement breakthrough models of education, it is imperative to research change leadership and to know which change models are most beneficial when implementing alternative models of education such as blended and online learning (iNACOL, 2013). Unless proper leadership is in place, the chance of successful implementation is minimal. Leadership must cast a vision for these changes, answer the questions of why, and present the need for the overall paradigm shift (Goodwin et al., 2013). The leadership must carefully introduce the main elements of the planning and implementation of any new alternative breakthrough model in education and define areas such as: (a) leadership, (b) professional development, (c) teaching, (d) operations, (e) content, and (f) technology (Darrow et al., 2013).

As the researcher in this study, part of my role is to research, analyze, and provide a summary of facts on the relevant research on this topic. Much research exists on change leadership, change management, and various change management theories used when implementing change. There is a growing base of literature on alternative models of education such as blended and online learning. However, minimal research is available on change leadership and change management theories and their relationship to implementing alternative models in education. The goal of this study was to analyze current literature, strategically formulate research questions, collect and analyze data, fill gaps in the literature related to this study, and add additional content to the body of literature in this field.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to discover what change leadership practices are utilized by educational leaders at selected K-12 schools when alternative breakthrough models in blended and online education are implemented. The change leadership practices needed to implement alternative methods of content delivery were explored at three public schools, two private schools, two charter schools, and two virtual schools. For this study, it is important to utilize a methodology that best fits the research questions and enables me, as the researcher, to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of the participants who have experienced the phenomena being studied.

Design

This study utilized a qualitative methodology that specifically followed a phenomenological approach. Qualitative research is most suitable for inductive research in which data is gathered to build theories and explain phenomena rather than deductively testing a hypothesis (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative methods support research that is detailed (Patton, 2002) and well-suited to investigate a contemporary phenomenon as well as provide the details of context and rich description of data. The strength of qualitative research is its “ability to provide complex textural descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. It provides information about the ‘human’ side of an issue—that is, the often contradictory behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals” (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005, p. 1).

Phenomenological research is simply the study of lived experiences. Van Manen (1984) stated that phenomenology is the “study of the lifeworld—the world as we immediately
experience it rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, and theorize about it. Phenomenology aims to come to a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences” (p. 1). Creswell (2013) added that a phenomenological approach has an emphasis on a shared phenomenon that is to be explored with a group of individuals who have all experienced the phenomena (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology is concerned with uncovering the essence of intentional phenomenon. It looks at the “inner core of what the ‘thing’ is, and without which it could not be what it is” (Larsson & Holmstrom, 2007, p. 59). Phenomenology searches for what it means to be human as the researcher investigates the lived experiences of the participants, rather than as the researcher conceptualizes it (Van Manen, 1984).

Phenomenology became a foundational philosophy in Germany before World War I, and it has since maintained a significant role in modern philosophy and research (Dowling, 2007). The word was first used in the 18th century by Kant and later by Hegel (Dowling, 2007). It was Brentano’s (1838-1917) use in descriptive phenomenology that laid the foundation and intellectual motivation for Husserl’s development of phenomenology as a major philosophical tenant (Dowling, 2007). As a principal founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) became one of the most influential philosophers of the 20th century. Husserl was further influenced by Descartes and saw value in phenomenology that relied on human experiences to “discover the nature and meaning of things” (Oberg & Bell, 2012, p. 204). Husserl embraced phenomenology as a philosophy with its intent to study human phenomena without interference of reality, appearance, or questions of their cause and surroundings (Wilson, 2002). Husserl believed that phenomena were the building blocks to science, and, “like Aristotle, he posited that experiences of ‘things’ are the basis for all knowledge” (Oberg & Bell, 2012, p. 204). Dowling (2007) added that for Husserl, “the aim of phenomenology is the rigorous and unbiased study of
things as they appear in order to arrive at an essential understanding of human consciousness and experience” (p. 132). Lester (1999) added, “The purpose of the phenomenological approach is to illuminate the specific, to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actions in a situation” (p. 1). This translates into gathering deeper information through qualitative methods such as interviews or discussions and representing it without any bias (Lester, 1999).

In 1967, Alfred Schutz published *The Phenomenology of the Social World*. While Schutz was never a student of Husserl, Schutz did study Husserl’s work intensively as a foundation for his own work in phenomenology. It was Schutz’s work that propelled phenomenology into the field of sociology. Building upon Husserl’s work of phenomenology as a philosophy and Schutz’s work as phenomenology in the field of sociology, it was Moustakas who built phenomenology as a popular framework to build research upon (Patton, 2002; Moustakas, 1994). The two major approaches to phenomenology are as follows: (a) hermeneutic phenomenology and (b) transcendental phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenology is more empirical as “a means to combine hermeneutics with phenomenology, and is thus both interpretive and descriptive” (Simon & Goes, 2011, p. 3). By contrast, transcendental phenomenology requires the researcher to set aside prejudgments and various opinions through bracketing and “by using systematic procedures for analyzing data” (Simon & Goes, 2011, p. 4).

In 1994, Clark Moustakas published *Phenomenological Research Methods*, as Moustakas sought to articulate phenomenology as a transcendental approach. Transcendental science grew out of discontent with science being based only on material things (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas posited that phenomenological research in its entirety should search for the essence of what is being studied and should focus on the wholeness of the participants’ lived experiences and view experience and behavior as an integrated and inseparable relationship (Moerer-Urdahl
& Creswell, 2008). Simon and Goes (2011) added, “Moustakas viewed experience and behavior as an integrated and inseparable relationship of a phenomenon with the person experiencing the phenomenon” (p. 1). Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell (2008) stated, “The transcendental emphasis includes these features but launches a phenomenological study with the researcher setting aside prejudgments as much as possible and using systematic procedures for analyzing the data” (p. 6).

In *Phenomenological Research Methods*, Moustakas (1994) added that phenomenological analyses include: (a) immersion, (b) incubation, (c) illumination, (d) explication, and (e) creative synthesis. Moustakas added that phenomenology attempts to eliminate every view that represents a prejudgment or presupposition. While this study certainly could be structured to follow other qualitative approaches and may even closely mirror certain aspects of other approaches, I feel a phenomenological approach studying the lived experiences of the participants best fits this research model. It is my desire to explore and describe what the participants have in common as they experience the phenomenon being studied.

**Research Questions**

The research conducted attempted to answer the following questions:

- **Central Question**–What are the lived experiences of K-12 educational leaders who are implementing alternative breakthrough models of blended and online learning?
- **Subquestion 1**–What challenges do educational leaders face when implementing alternative breakthrough models such as blended and online learning?
- **Subquestion 2**–What role does leader preparation play in developing the skills and knowledge necessary to design and implement alternative breakthrough models such as blended and online learning?
- **Subquestion 3**–How did procedures and policies shape leaders’ experiences when
implementing alternative breakthrough models such as blended and online learning? Van Manen (1984) noted that a phenomenological question must not only be clear, but also appear to be alive and must pull the “reader into a question in such a way that the reader cannot help but wonder about the nature of the phenomenon in the way that the phenomenologist does” (p. 8). Phenomenologists frame their research questions to make the reader deeply question and ponder the subject at hand (Van Manen, 1984). While much research exists on change leadership, change management, and alternative models of education, there are no research studies that add to the body of literature on what change leadership practices are needed for school leaders who wish to implement alternative content delivery methods such as online or blended learning.

Setting

The setting for this study was three public schools, two private schools, two charter schools, and two virtual schools that have successfully implemented alternative models of education. For this study, only schools that have implemented alternative models of education and have displayed innovation and effective leadership teams that led the implementation of these alternative models were selected. All personal, institutional, and location names in this study are pseudonyms. The schools in this study were: (a) DSGM Elementary School, (b) DSGM Intermediate School, (c) DSGM High School, (d) SCV Academy, (e) ACC Academy, (f) GMK Charter, (g) SCHK Academy, (h) SVD School, and (i) CDST School.

Participants

To gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of interest through the lived experiences of the participants, I used a qualitative method of research. The personal connection with the participants and programs in the study included a questionnaire, in-depth interviews, a
focus group, and analysis of artifacts which epitomizes the essence of qualitative research (Patton, 2002). The 10 participants in this study were members of the leadership teams from three public schools, two private schools, two charter schools, and two virtual schools consisting of heads of school, district superintendents, or department principals who were instrumental in implementing change at their educational setting. Of these 10 participants, there were nine males and one female. Because only a certain type of participant fit into this study, I used a criterion-based sampling approach. Patton (2002) added, “The logic of criterion sampling is to review and study all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance, a strategy common in quality assurance efforts” (p. 238).

Creswell (2013) submitted that researchers typically use purposive sampling when the study demands specific individuals and sites “because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p. 156). The rich cases that purposive sampling can yield offer insights that are much more valuable to the qualitative researcher than empirical generalizations (Patton, 2002). While quantitative research typically relies on larger numbers that are randomly selected, qualitative research is much more selective with individuals fitting a predetermined set of criteria. Qualitative research typically uses a much smaller sample in which the participants are selected purposefully (Patton, 2002).

**Procedures**

First, I applied for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (see Appendix E). After approval, I solicited participants with a purposive sampling approach specifically using a criterion-based technique since I needed to select participants that would best fit this study. After permission for the locations and participants were solicited and details regarding consent forms and scheduling were finalized, I began the data collection process at these locations (see
Appendices F, G, & H).

Because I wished to work from a broader set of data collection toward a more specific and narrow focus, I used the following collection instruments that were sequenced in order: (a) questionnaire, (b) one-on-one semi-structured interviews, (c) analysis of artifacts used in implementation, and (d) focus group. The sequencing of a research study is important to the overall structure of the data collection process. The sequence of these collection methods allowed me to begin with a general questionnaire, and the data gained enabled me a smoother transition to the one-on-one interviews and other collection methods. It also enabled me a chance to view the first submitted data from the participants that would help me to have a more efficient engagement with the participants during the interviews and focus group. Patton (2002) stated, “Qualitative inquiry–strategically, philosophically, and therefore, methodologically–aims to minimize the imposition of predetermined responses when gathering data” (p. 353).

After data collection, I began analyzing the data with Moustakas’s Seven Steps with an overall phenomenological reductionism framework (Schutz, 1967), and I utilized the following tools: (a) reading and organizing the data, (b) memoing, (c) classifying and categorizing the data (coding), and (d) identifying and developing themes. Phenomenological reductionism states that the reality of the data is neither confirmed nor denied initially. It is the bracketing of all opinion about the culture and perceived nature of the study’s participants (Schutz, 1967). To assist with researcher bias as well as developing themes, I bracketed out researcher bias and commonalities across the data.

The Researcher’s Role

I conducted the research in this study. I have been involved in education, leadership, and administration since graduating from college. I am also extremely comfortable with technology
and utilize technology in various aspects of my life. Most individuals take advantage of many aspects of technology, but one area that has not truly leveraged technology to its fullest is the educational sector. I hope that many aspects of this study will help schools develop a culture of change and apply change leadership practices that will help schools more meaningfully implement alternative models of breakthrough education.

**Data Collection**

Using multiple methods of data helps the researcher ensure data triangulation and strengthens the validity of the study (Patton, 2002). Because a qualitative study lends itself to inductive analysis, verifying the data using multiple sources of study (triangulation) is paramount. Because I wish to work from a broader set of data collection toward a more specific and narrow focus, I used the following collection instruments that were sequenced in order: (a) questionnaire, (b) one-on-one semi-structured interviews, (c) analysis of artifacts used in implementation, and (d) focus group. The sequencing of a research study is important to the overall structure of the data collection process. The sequence of these collection methods allowed me to begin with a general questionnaire, and the data gained enabled me a smoother transition to the one-on-one interviews and other collection methods.

**Questionnaire**

A questionnaire (see Appendix I) was utilized as the first round of data collection. Questionnaires typically ask the same questions to the sample where respondents record their answers. A questionnaire best fits this study to collect data about a shared phenomenon on issues that are not directly observable, such as “inner experience, opinions, values, interests, and the like” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 228). A questionnaire was valuable to this study as participants had the freedom to express their opinions of their lived experiences. The
questionnaire used in this study consisted of 25 open-ended questions that covered areas related
to the central research question as well as to the subquestions. I administered the questionnaire
using Survey Monkey®. After the initial introduction, I emailed a select group of participants
from each site and requested that they review the questionnaire before I sent it to all the
participants to ensure that the questions were clear and valid. The questionnaire assisted me with
the research regarding change leadership and answered questions regarding alternative
breakthrough models of education such as blended learning.

**One-on-One Interviews**

The second method used to collect data was one-on-one interviews with the participants. I emailed the questions to the same select group to make sure the questions were clear to these individuals and to obtain their input about whether these interview questions would be significant to this study. The purpose of interviews “is to allow us [researchers] to enter into the other person’s perspective” (Patton, 2002, p. 341). Utilizing interviews as a data collection instrument allowed me to truly understand the participants’ various perspectives of the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2002). Interviews were administered after all the participants submitted the questionnaire. Mack et al. (2005) added, “The in-depth interview is a technique designed to elicit a vivid picture of the participant’s perspective on the research topic. During in-depth interviews, the person being interviewed is considered the expert and the interviewer is considered the student” (p. 29). These open-ended interviews were structured in a way that questions were given to each participant in advance. The same questions were used for each participant. Patton (2002) added that there are several advantages of this structure: (a) Participants are able to view the questions in advance, (b) there will only be slight differences in the submitted data since all of the participants are asked the same questions, (c) the interview is
structured to maximize the participants’ time, and (d) analyzing the data is somewhat easier because the responses to the same questions can be located more quickly (2002).

The interviews took place using web-conferencing software Skype for Business™. Each interview lasted 30-40 minutes. I followed guidelines set by Patton (2002) and combined methods from the informal conversational interview and the standardized open-ended interview (see Appendices J & K). The informal conversational interview is the most unstructured and open-ended approach to interviewing (Patton, 2002). The standardized open-ended interview involved more structure and carefully worded questions that assisted me in gaining data from each respondent in the same sequence, since questions were asked in the same order (Patton, 2002). The participants were notified that the interviews were being recorded, and during the interviews, I took notes and transcribed the audio file as soon as each interview concluded. All data was accessed and stored digitally on Microsoft SharePoint Online®, a top-tier enterprise cloud site that is automatically backed up and maintains certification for nationally accepted security protocols, access and syncing, and archival purposes. The data location was accessed and secured behind password-protected equipment that I used during this process.

Many researchers state that the challenges of the qualitative interview process are typically with the mechanics of the actual interviews (Creswell, 2013). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) and Rubin and Rubin (2012) have both developed steps that assist researchers when conducting qualitative interviews. Creswell (2013) added that despite the process of managing quality interviews, he did not lose sight of the main goal and stated, “I focus on the data collection process in some detail, recognizing that this process is embedded within a larger sequence of research” (p. 163). Creswell added that it is important not to get bogged down in the steps of the interview process, but that the interview process yields the data needed and that the
data analysis tools assist the researcher in analyzing the data. Because true qualitative inquiry seeks to strategically and philosophically uncover the participants’ true feelings and aims to minimize predetermined answers, questions were asked in an open-ended structure so participants could share the answer in their own words (Patton, 2002). All of the interview questions pertained to either the central research question or to each of the three subquestions.

**Artifacts**

The artifact reviews were carried out by gathering relevant documents that pertained to each school’s implementation of alternative models of education, as well as the training materials provided to principals and teachers. The analyzing of records, documents, artifacts, implementation plans, strategic goals, and any archived documents presented a rich source of information for the study. Patton (2002) noted that analyzing artifacts not only provides valuable direct information but also additional paths of inquiry for the researcher that can be pursued through other means of data collection. Participants in this study were requested to provide this information in digital format to enable a more efficient process when reviewing these documents. Part of this process was to observe what is not public and to ensure that the documents are congruent with what is carried out in public. Reviewing the artifacts enabled additional data on decisions, background, processes, as well as generated further questions that could be used when contacting the participants. This data was also accessed and stored digitally on Microsoft SharePoint Online® and automatically backed up and accessed only with the proper credentials. The information gained from artifact observation assisted me with data needed for the central question as well as for subquestions 2 and 3.

**Focus Group**

The final data collection technique used was a focus group. Mack et al., (2005) stated,
“Focus groups are a qualitative data collection method effective in helping researchers learn the social norms of a community or subgroup, as well as the range of perspectives that exist within that community or subgroup” (p. 51). The focus group allowed me to interview a small group of people on a specific topic. The purpose is to gather a variety of perspectives and to increase the confidence and accuracy of the data on whatever themes may emerge. The focus is first and foremost an interview; it is not a decision-making group or a strategy meeting. Patton (2002) added, “Unlike a series of one-on-one interviews, in a focus group participants get to hear each other’s responses and to make additional comments beyond their own original responses as they hear what other people have to say” (p. 38).

After the initial questionnaire and one-on-one interviews were administered, key leaders from each institution were invited to take place in a focus group. Questions and other discussion prompts were created once the data from the questionnaires and interviews were completed (see Appendix L). The focus group was carefully planned to minimize perceptions and was held in a comfortable, non-threatening environment. This final data collection method used web-conferencing technology platform Skype for Business™ to communicate and interview the group of participants. The focus group lasted 45 minutes. Like previous collection instruments, this data was accessed and stored digitally on Microsoft SharePoint Online® and automatically backed up and accessed only with the proper credentials. This data collection method further enabled me to add the data needed and to assist in developing themes for the central research question. Collectively, the data collection instruments provided the triangulation of data needed to report credible and trustworthy data analysis.

**Data Analysis**

In any research study, data collection is of little value unless a credible, quality data
analysis framework is utilized. Patton (2002) noted, “Phenomenological analysis seeks to grasp and elucidate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences of a phenomenon for a person or group of people” (p. 482). To assist with analysis, I followed the seven steps developed by Moustakas (1994):

- Listing and grouping significant statements
- Reducing and eliminating redundancies
- Clustering and thematizing
- Identifying and synthesizing themes
- Constructing a textural description
- Constructing a structural description
- Constructing an overall textural-structural description of the meaning of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

While I used Moustakas’s Seven Steps as a tool to analyze the data, the overall data analysis framework followed Schutz’s (1967) phenomenological reductionism: the reality of the data was neither confirmed nor denied initially. It is the bracketing of all opinion about the culture and perceived nature of the phenomenon under exploration as perceived by the participants (Schutz, 1967).

Alfred Schutz was an important pioneer of phenomenology that was directly related to sociology in the United States (Fouche, 1993). Schutz made sociological contributions in the areas of concept of types and typifications. Schutz refers to typification as the ordering of things so that they are commonly recognized as belonging to specific types (Fouche, 1993). Closely related to typification is relevance. In *Structures of a Life-World*, Schutz (1973) identified and discussed various forms of relevance: thematic or topical and hypothetical. In relation to
presuppositions, Schutz distinguishes between life-wordly stock of knowledge and common sense knowledge (Fouche, 1993). In *The Phenomenology of Social Relations*, Schutz “analyzed and discussed minutely the life-world as a pre-constituted and pre-organized realm in the sense that humans find themselves in a world which others have already meaningfully organized and which in general they accept without question” (Fouche, 1993, p. 131).

Phenomenological reduction was proposed by Husserl, revised by Heidegger, reinvented by Merleau-Ponty, and endorsed by Levinas (Dowling, 2007). Schutz agreed with Husserl that a qualitative difference exists between natural and human science (Fouche, 1993). Husserl first expounded his ideas of phenomenological reduction in *Ideas I* of 1913 (Fouche, 1993). Husserl introduced the concept of bracketing into his analysis methods (Valentine, 2011). This first step of the phenomenological reduction process is what is termed epoché. Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell (2008) noted, “It [epoché] is an approach taken at the beginning of the study by the researcher so that he/she can set aside his/her views of the phenomenon and focus on those views reported by the participants” (p. 7). Fouche (1993) added that the first step of reduction (bracketing) separates the researcher from the natural attitude of acceptance of the fact-world, it brackets all presuppositions about the world, such as whether or not it really exists. The presuppositions which are suspended are those both of common sense and of theory, including natural scientific theory. (p. 115)

This framework requires the researcher to look at things openly, undisturbed by his own personal views. The challenge is to describe things as they are and to understand meanings and essences in the light of intuition and self-reflection (Moustakas, 1994). The reduction of phenomenology leads the researcher to the phenomena or pure meanings of the lived experiences
of the participants (Fouche, 1993). It requires the researcher to view the experiences as free and unprejudiced as possible “in order that the phenomenon presents itself as free and unprejudiced a way as possible so that it can be precisely described and understood” (Dowling, 2007, p. 132).

This framework was carried out by utilizing several data analysis tools.

**Reading and Organizing the Data**

After all the data collection was completed, I carefully began to review and organize the data. Because the initial structure of the data was in various formats, several days were spent in organizing the data and setting it up in a structure that allowed for maximum efficiency. I then began to read the data several times. I followed Creswell’s (2013) recommendation to carefully read through the data to gain a full understanding of the data “as a whole unit before breaking it into parts” (p. 182). This process assisted me in examining the documents, questionnaire, transcripts from interviews and the focus group as this process began to focus on the details in identifying various categories and themes. I then began to organize the data in a meticulous fashion. The data was in digital format and allowed me to better organize the data. Agar (1980) advised researchers to “read the transcripts in their entirety several times. Immerse yourself in the details, trying to get a sense of the interview as a whole before breaking it into parts” (p. 103).

**Memoing**

Secondly, I utilized a technique that employed a strategy of making notes in the actual transcripts to help me begin bracketing and developing themes that I could report at a later time. The questionnaire, interview, and focus group data were exported to Microsoft Excel® and Microsoft Word®. All artifacts that were uploaded from the participants were available in Adobe® PDF or Microsoft Word®. Having the data in these formats enabled me to access, create,
and sync my notes across multiple platforms and devices. Creswell (2013) stated, “Writing notes or memos in the margins of field notes or transcripts or under photographs helps in this initial process of exploring the database. These memos are short phrases, ideas, or key concepts that occur to the reader” (p. 183). These memos were personal reflections that I noticed and the meaning of this specific data in light of the phenomenon being studied. Lempert (2007) added, “Memoing is the act of recording reflective notes about what the researcher (fieldworker, data coder, and/or analyst) is learning from the data. Memos accumulate as written ideas or records about concepts and their relationships” (para. 1).

Coding and Categorizing

Thirdly, I coded and categorized the data to begin describing, classifying, and interpreting the data. The use of coding assisted me as text and other data were assigned into small categories of information. Creswell (2013) added, “Forming codes or categories represents the heart of qualitative analysis” (p. 184) Significant statements were coded and “clustered into meanings or themes and repetitive statements removed” (Creswell, 2013, p. 284). Initially, I manually coded the data using a color-coordinated method and later assigned alphanumeric codes to the various colors. This process involved grouping data into small categories of information, and then these assigned codes enabled a smoother transition of developing themes at a later time (Creswell, 2013).

Coding is a component of data analysis defined as “segmenting data into one or more categories” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 634). This first step of the phenomenological reduction process is what is termed epoche. Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell (2008) noted, “It [epoche] is an approach taken at the beginning of the study by the researcher so that he/she can set aside his/her views of the phenomenon and focus on those views reported by the participants” (p. 7). Fouche (1993)
explained that the first step of reduction (bracketing) separates the researcher from the “natural attitude of acceptance of the fact-world, it brackets all presuppositions about the world, such as whether or not it really exists. Patton (2002) added, “Developing some manageable classification or coding scheme is the first step of analysis. Without classification there is chaos and confusion” (p. 463). Detailed descriptions and an interpretation of the experiences in light of my time in data analysis were recorded.

**Bracketing and Development of Themes**

Finally, after I listed my preliminary grouping, I began removing any overlapping, repetitive, or nonessential statements that would not contribute to the overall data. After this process, statements that had been noted and comments that had been inserted were read again to identify the common phrases that would eventually form the integral components of the themes that are essential to the phenomenon being observed (Moustakas, 1994). As similar codes began to be grouped together, I identified and developed themes (bracketing). Bracketing is a term first used by Husserl (1913). With this analysis technique, the researcher closely analyzes and closely inspects the phenomenon that is being studied (Patton, 2002). Creswell (2013) added, “Themes in qualitative research (also called categories) are broad units of information that consists of several codes aggregated to form a common idea” (p. 186). Themes were identified and reported from the lived experiences of the participants involved in this study. To assist with researcher bias, I continually considered and bracketed out my own opinion and bias (Patton, 2002). True to the data analysis framework, this bracketing of all opinion about the culture and perceived nature of the phenomenon under exploration as perceived by the researcher is an integral part of a credible data analysis strategy (Schutz, 1967).
Trustworthiness

Ensuring that internal and external validity have been addressed through methods such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability is essential in the data analysis phase of any study. Trustworthiness is the extent to which submitted data and content in a study can be trusted by the reader. I strived to remain ethical and trustworthy as the researcher in this study. To assist in this process, I employed various trustworthiness strategies such as credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability. Creswell (2013) indicated that credibility speaks to the accuracy of the researcher’s interpretation of the participants’ submitted data. Confirmability is a research technique that allows participants the ability to review and confirm the accuracy of the overall submitted data (Creswell, 2013). Transferability details the researcher’s ability to review the data and compare it to other content (Creswell, 2013). Dependability refers to the ability to replicate a qualitative study using the data and documentation from the research (Creswell, 2013).

Credibility

Perhaps one of the key criteria addressed by qualitative researchers is that of internal validity in which researchers seek to ensure their study is conducted in a credible manner (Shenton, 2004). Negative case analysis ensures that all data is being reported—both the positive and negative in relation to the study’s research questions. As patterns, themes, and trends begin to emerge, the credibility of the findings will be enhanced when negative analysis and instances and cases that do not fit within the themes are also reported (Patton, 2002). Many times, the researcher is shown additional information and themes by searching and analyzing negative data. Patton (2002) suggested, “Dealing openly with the complexities and dilemmas posed by negative cases is both intellectually honest and politically strategic” (p. 555). While I was planning to
include data that did not corroborate with my study’s intentions, no data was submitted that was opposite of the study’s intentions or from the general consensus from the other participants. Generally, negative data can lead to additional analysis on why data that is opposite of this study’s findings was submitted by participants. Utilizing the negative case analysis technique ensures that my study’s findings are credible in their analysis and reporting.

**Confirmability**

The concept of confirmability is one of the qualitative research methods of being objective (Shenton, 2004). To address confirmability, I utilized a technique called member checking. Member checking can be configured for individuals or can take place in a group. In this study, each participant was asked to help me verify the accuracy of transcripts, comment on the accuracy of the interpretation, and to check the codes and corresponding themes that were derived from the collection to see if they accurately depicted the participants’ lived experiences (Carlson, 2010). Member checking is best done when the data is in near-final form, and the themes and patterns that were identified are from the data rather than the actual transcription process (Creswell, 2013). This method enabled me to ratify the confirmability and dependability of this study. The confirmability is in reference to the study’s objectivity and the accuracy of participant interpretation (Shenton, 2004). To view the form that was used for participants to submit their opinion of the codes and themes that emerged, see Appendix M.

Additionally, I utilized a second confirmability method called Audit Trail. As the researcher, I kept accurate and detailed records of all interviews, questionnaires, and focus group communication (Creswell, 2007). This helped ensure that all reports are valid and trustworthy. All original data has been saved, and an outside qualified researcher periodically audited this process for appropriateness in terms of design and analysis. This method also lends to the
dependability and confirmability of the study.

**Transferability**

Thick descriptive data formed the third aspect of addressing trustworthiness and addressed transferability and external validity. Patton (2002) stated that the research should gather data that will enable the researcher to “open up a world to the reader through rich, detailed, and concrete descriptions of people and places in such a way that we can understand the phenomenon studies and draw our own interpretations about meanings and significance” (p. 438). In an attempt to show that my research was conducted respectably, detailed descriptions of settings, data collection, participants involved in the study, and analysis procedures have been included (Carlson, 2010). Another purpose of using thick descriptive data is that the researcher has a chance to draw interest from the reader and to create a sense of connection with the study. Using this method enabled me to confirm transferability of the themes and findings to like settings (Creswell, 2013).

**Dependability**

The final aspect of addressing trustworthiness and reliability is data triangulation. Using multiple methods of data helps the research ensure data triangulation and strengthens the validity of the study (Patton, 2002). Because a qualitative study lends itself to inductive analysis, verifying the data using multiple sources of study (triangulation) is paramount. The various sources of data collection may result in different findings, and it was important for me to understand the inconsistencies and what real-world issues cause any inconsistencies. Using the multiple methods of data collection ensured that I properly addressed dependability issues that may arise within the data.
Ethical Considerations

As with any quality research study, ethical considerations are highly important. All participants were given the participant consent form to sign and it was communicated to them that they may choose to withdraw at any time. All data was accessed and stored digitally on Microsoft SharePoint Online®, a top-tier enterprise cloud site that is automatically backed up and maintains certification for nationally accepted security protocols, access and syncing, and archival purposes. The data location was accessed and secured behind password-protected equipment that I use. As one of my first steps in the dissertation process, I sought and gained IRB approval. This approval provided me the authority and credibility needed to ensure that all human ethical considerations were addressed. As part of my IRB approval, I maintained an Ethical Issues Checklist that assisted me in maintaining the purpose of my study, making available any consent forms, and ensuring that all participation was on a volunteer basis.

All participant data and information are completely confidential, and all participants are listed in the study using pseudonyms. The master list matching pseudonyms to the participant names was stored in a separate folder on Microsoft SharePoint Online®, and again, accessed and secured behind password-protected equipment. This security and confidentiality ensures that all participant information is protected and that each participant is given the freedom to share data concerning the lived experiences of the shared phenomenon being studied. Because the questionnaire and interview questions revolve around the participants’ knowledge of change leadership and the implementation of blended learning, there should not have been an unusual level of stress or discomfort for those being interviewed or questioned because they have knowledge of these areas being studied.

For me to maintain high ethical standards throughout this study, each participant was
given a consent form that presented information on why this study is important, the reasons for
the importance, and my willingness to explain to any participants the reasons for the study. An
introductory paragraph briefly explained the study, a paragraph introduced me and explained my
role in this study, and several paragraphs explained the research procedures. Participants were
asked to read and sign a consent form stating that they read and understand the procedures of the
study, and by signing their name, gave their consent to participate in the study. Because
participation was voluntary, participants had full authority to withdraw from the study at any
time.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover what change leadership practices
are utilized by educational leaders at selected K-12 schools when alternative breakthrough
models in blended and online education are implemented. Using a phenomenological approach, I
explored three public schools, two private schools, two charter schools, and two virtual schools.
The 10 participants in this study were either heads of school, district superintendents, or
department principals. The central research question was: What are the lived experiences of K-12
educational leaders who are implementing alternative breakthrough models of blended and
online learning?

Data was obtained via the following methods: (a) questionnaire, (b) one-on-one
interviews, (c) analysis of artifacts used in the implementation, and (d) focus group. While
Moustakas’s Seven Steps was utilized as a tool to analyze the data, the overall data analysis
framework followed Schutz’s (1967) phenomenological reductionism: the reality of the data is
neither confirmed nor denied initially. Using this framework, I analyzed the data using the
following techniques: (a) reading and organizing the data, (b) memoing, (c) coding and
categorizing the data, and (d) bracketing and development of themes. Ensuring that internal and external validity have been addressed through methods such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability is essential in the data analysis phase of any study.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover what change leadership practices are utilized by educational leaders at selected K-12 schools when alternative breakthrough models in blended and online education are implemented. The change leadership practices needed to implement alternative methods of content delivery were explored at three public schools, two private schools, two charter schools, and two virtual schools. To better understand this phenomenon, the following research questions guided the study:

- Central Question–What are the lived experiences of K-12 educational leaders who are implementing alternative breakthrough models of blended and online learning?
- Subquestion 1–What challenges do educational leaders face when implementing alternative breakthrough models such as blended and online learning?
- Subquestion 2–What role does leader preparation play in developing the skills and knowledge necessary to design and implement alternative breakthrough models such as blended and online learning?
- Subquestion 3–How did procedures and policies shape leaders’ experiences when implementing alternative breakthrough models such as blended and online learning?

The data was collected from 10 participants using (a) a questionnaire, (b) one-on-one interviews, (c) analysis of artifacts used in change leadership and in the implementation of alternative models, and (d) focus group. Prior to beginning the data collection process with the participants, I obtained IRB approval from Liberty University’s Institutional Review Board (Appendix E) and permission from each research site (Appendix F). Once I received this approval, I presented an electronic version of the participation consent form containing the IRB
approval number to the participants. I began with my first data collection instrument when I received a signed copy of the consent form from all of the research participants. After all of the participants completed the first three data collection instruments, I selected six participants for a focus group—the final data collection instrument.

**Participants**

The participants in this study were members of the leadership teams from three public schools, two private schools, two charter schools, and two virtual schools. These heads of school, district superintendents, department principals, and department heads were instrumental in implementing change in their educational setting. Because only a certain type of participant fit into this study, I used a purposive sampling approach. More specifically, I used a criterion-based sampling approach. Patton (2002) noted, “The logic of criterion sampling is to review and study all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance, a strategy common in quality assurance efforts” (p. 238). Creswell (2013) submitted that researchers typically use purposive sampling when the study demands specific individuals and sites “because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p. 156).

Prior to beginning the data collection process with the participants, I obtained IRB approval from Liberty University’s Institutional Review Board (Appendix E) and permission from each research site (Appendix F). I have also listed the Participant Invitation Letter (Appendix G) and the IRB-approved Participant Consent Form (Appendix H).

**Marshall**

Marshall is the chief executive officer of a state-wide public virtual charter school. He has worked in this position since 2009. He has a master’s degree in educational leadership and a doctorate in educational leadership. He has been in public education for over thirty-two years.
and has experience as a teacher, department chair, assistant principal, principal, and superintendent. Marshall is passionate about student-centered learning, and as CEO of a larger virtual charter school, his mission is to help faculty members, students, and parents understand that a new pedagogical paradigm exists. The classroom procedures used in this new pedagogy are completely different from the model that most were successful at. He feels that 21st-century education has changed and that the majority of schools are receiving students that may not necessarily be attracted to online learning. He credits the creative thinkers and highly intelligent individuals from across the United States who have joined his team.

Christopher

Christopher is a principal at an upper-elementary public school. He has been principal since 2014 and has a master’s degree in curriculum and instruction and a doctorate in educational leadership. Christopher believes that there are two main challenges when implementing a new content delivery method such as blended or online learning. He first believes a challenge exists in making sure that the school has the proper infrastructure in terms of finances, leadership, professional development, teaching, operations, content, and technology. Secondly, he believes the challenge that schools must solve from the beginning is the buy-in. Not only buy-in with community stakeholders, but also with teachers, students, and families, thus setting a consistent vision as the leader. Christopher added, “The buy-in piece is so important, that once it picks up momentum, stakeholders become more supportive, student attendance increases, student engagement increases, discipline issues are reduced, and a lot of those factors are seen only when the buy-in increases” (personal communication with Christopher, December, 2015).

Jace

Jace is the principal of a middle school and is in his fourth year in this position. He
earned a master’s degree in school administration and a doctorate in educational leadership. Jace believes that many K-12 educators who implement various change initiatives are unfocused and unprepared. Jace added, “One of the things we always struggle with is how to fit it into all courses, and you have to be careful you don’t fall in love with the technology and forget about where it fits into the entire educational program” (personal communication with Jace, December, 2015). He says his school spends a considerable amount of time on professional development with a focus on instruction and technology integration. Jace is a big believer in stakeholder buy-in and looks for team members with a vast understanding of culture and student relationships.

**Walter**

Walter is the director of the senior high at a private academy. He has been employed at this academy for eight years and has a master’s degree in educational leadership. Walter strongly promotes quality professional development and believes schools must implement a system in which students have sufficient access to quality, reliable, and suitable digital tools. When speaking about the importance of faculty members to the change process, Walter added, “Faculty members must have patience, encouragement, time, and freedom to fail” (personal communication with Walter, November, 2015). Walter’s school utilized a pilot phase for many of its change initiatives, and he feels this allowed everyone to test the pedagogical change before it was implemented into the entire senior high.

**Marisa**

Marisa is an instructor and one of the directors of a charter school. She has been employed at this charter school for four years. Marisa has a master’s degree in curriculum and instruction and a license in administration for curriculum and instruction. Marisa sees two large obstacles when a school implements an alternative model of education such as blended or online
learning. Marisa added, “I think two of the biggest obstacles for us was our infrastructure and support needed for the technology that we had in place, as well as the transition for kids being online most of the day” (personal communication with Marisa, December, 2015). Marisa believes a digital divide still exists but admits that they are fortunate that the majority of their community and parents have quality Internet access at home. Marisa’s school piloted every phase of the implementation and involved parents, students, and community members during the change process to continue developing and increasing the buy-in process.

**Geoffrey**

Geoffrey is a superintendent of a virtual school. He is in his twelfth year and has a master’s degree in educational leadership as well as a law degree. Geoffrey was able to share unique perspectives because he leads a virtual school—an online-only school. Because of Geoffrey’s school’s successes, he and his team now visit public brick and mortar schools to assist them with pedagogical changes. He credits his innovative and knowledgeable staff for many of the school’s successes. Geoffrey added, “I am surrounded by people who have a good knowledge base of technology, and they’re very forward thinkers, so I lean on them a lot” (personal communication with Geoffrey, December, 2015). Geoffrey submitted that a leader should surround himself with many intelligent people so he does not have to be an expert in every area; because they are a virtual school, he looks for team members who can connect with students in a special, online-only environment.

**Richard**

Richard is the CEO of a school system and has a master’s degree in education and a master’s degree in theology. He has been in his current position for 15 years. Richard runs one of the most successful school systems that has implemented a student-centered, technology-driven
pedagogy. It was one of the first school systems to implement a completely blended learning approach, and is annually visited by education leaders from across the United States. Richard was invaluable in this process by submitting many challenges that hinder schools from implementing more student-centered academic programs. He listed the major challenges as state and federal control, technology and infrastructure, support, professional development, and developing the correct change culture so the stakeholder buy-in is instrumental in the change process. Richard firmly believes that “my job is to empower and inspire others to move in a direction, and oversee my team leaders who oversee other leaders and inspire and provide them with the resources in order to continue in that direction” (personal communication with Richard, November, 2015).

Mike

Mike is a principal at a high school and has been employed there for 15 years. Mike has a master’s degree in education and a doctorate in educational leadership. Mike believes that teachers are not given enough quality professional development activities because what they are being asked to do “is so much different than their background, and the colleges and universities they graduated from are not necessarily training teachers for tomorrow. Teachers must be up to speed on the trends with instructional technology” (personal communication with Mike, December, 2015). Mike is thankful for the amount of overall resources and time that his school allocates for infrastructure and support. He submitted that his school studied a well-known change management expert and used some of the expert’s tips when implementing large-scale change. Like others, Mike frequently mentioned the importance of quality team members and added, “You can’t be an expert in every area. You have to surround yourself with people that know and are experts in all the given areas that are needed for an initiative like this to be
successful” (personal communication with Mike, December, 2015).

Scottie

A director at a large school district, Scottie was a huge help to this project. Scottie is in his eighth year at his district and has a master’s degree in instructional technology and a doctorate in curriculum and instruction. Like Richard’s school system, Scottie’s district is one of the leaders in the blended learning movement. Scottie was instrumental to this study in submitting valuable data for understanding the effect of culture, the speed at which culture can shift, and the importance of stakeholder buy-in. Scottie added, “Getting teachers to give up some of their control and being able to adopt and adapt in this environment is really paramount. It changes the role of the teacher from the sage on stage to the guide on the side” (personal communication with Scottie, December, 2015). He believes that leaders must have knowledge regarding change and stated that long before they implemented technology, they focused on change. He also believes that understanding the culture and creating buy-in with the stakeholders are perhaps the greatest challenges that produce the most valuable dividends if they are carefully and strategically implemented.

William

William is the head of a private school and has been there 27 years. William has a master’s degree in education leadership. William initially struggled to create the proper buy-in needed to implement change, mainly because of past successes. William added, “If a school has been able to achieve high standardized tests scores, then you ask your teachers to change their instructional methods to include technology, the motivation is challenging for them” (personal communication with William, December, 2015). He added that his own personal skills and research helped create the knowledge needed to lead the implementation, but also added that he
did not spend enough time learning about change management. He spent time researching pedagogy, technology, software, and hardware, but added that “I didn’t really spend much time on understanding or researching how to change the culture of a school” (personal communication with William, December, 2015).

**Results**

The process of bracketing and identifying themes followed the data collection and analysis obtained from the 10 participants using (a) a questionnaire, (b) one-on-one interviews, (c) analysis of artifacts used in change leadership and in the implementation of alternative models, and (d) focus group. Data were exported, transcribed, and reviewed for accuracy. In following the data analysis structure by Schutz (1967) and Moustakas (1994), the first step was the overall disconnection from the researcher’s preconceived meaning of the research and phenomenon being studied which is referred in literature as epoché (Moustakas, 1994). In Moustakas’s Seven Steps structure to analyze research data, the data from each source was read completely several times before beginning the process of horizontalization. Horizontalization occurs when themes or “significant statements relevant to the topic” are identified (Creswell, 2013, p. 284). Significant statements were noted and then repeatedly analyzed and organized to maintain relevancy to the topic and themes that would later emerge. After I listed my preliminary grouping, I began removing any overlapping, repetitive, or nonessential statements that would not contribute to the overall data clusters. After this process, statements that had been noted and comments that had been inserted were read again and coded to identify common phrases that would form the integral components essential to the phenomenon being observed (Moustakas, 1994). Throughout the entire data analysis process, open-codes were continually revised and examined. Smaller codes were then combined into larger categories and in the end, five themes
emerged from the analysis of the 10 participants regarding the change leadership practices needed to implement alternative breakthrough models in education. Table 1 lists the enumeration of open-code appearance across the data sets as well as their corresponding themes.

Table 1

*Enumeration of Horizons of Open-Codes for Emerging Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Codes</th>
<th>Enumeration of open-code appearance across data sets</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective, transformational leaders possess the innate ability to galvanize stakeholder support</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Quality leadership skills are needed to design and effectively implement change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change leadership requires that the leader carefully, capably, purposely, and strategically transform and shift the organizational culture</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change leadership requires that leaders have skills such as patience, flexibility, confidence, innovation, vision, creativity, passion, and motivation</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders must have knowledge about the change process and the reason for the change</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is imperative that the leader's team develop relationships with all stakeholders and especially have a heart and passion for students</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>The leader must be surrounded by creative, intelligent, and knowledgeable team members to effectively implement change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The leader must surround himself/herself with others who are knowledgeable, collaborators, lifelong learners, and who complement the leader’s skill set</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team must be detail-oriented but also able to see the big picture (vision)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Score</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders/team members are groomed from within</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders/team members are selected from the outside</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The change implementation was handled in-house, and our team researched and studied aspects of change management</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The change implementation was handled in-house, and our team did not research or study aspects of change management or utilize any outside resources/consultants</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The change implementation was handled in-house, and our organization brought in several consultants to help guide the process</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders are not being adequately prepared with change knowledge or expertise to operate technology-driven schools in formal graduate training or administrative credentialing programs</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication with all stakeholders is required</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy-in with all stakeholders is paramount</td>
<td>49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective change takes time. Stakeholders must be given time to adopt to the change and adjust to the culture shift. There will be resistance to change.</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective change requires quality professional development</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilized a pilot phase</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing expectations and understanding the dynamics of change</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure support/preparedness</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The five themes were as follows: (a) Effective leadership skills are needed to design and implement change; (b) To effectively implement change, the leader must be surrounded by creative, intelligent, and knowledgeable team members; (c) The change implementation process can be strategically structured in various ways to effectively implement change; (d) Stakeholder buy-in, support, and quality communication are paramount to effectively implement change; and (e) A quality implementation structure and overall infrastructure support are needed to effectively implement change. The following section provides a more detailed description of the five themes and their related subthemes. In addition, data specific to the central research question and subquestions are included in this chapter as well.

**Quality Leadership Skills Are Needed to Design and Effectively Implement Change**

This first theme was fairly visible early on in the analysis process. The participants submitted content detailing their experiences and opinions about the importance of an effective, skillful leader in the change implementation process. Leading a digital conversion initiative will require transformation of all elements of the organization. In relation to the theoretical framework, the transformational leadership theory is very much a part of this theme. Four main clusters were centralized to support this initial theme. The participants were clear that the ability to create and centralize stakeholder support is not only important but also paramount, and leaders implementing change must realize the importance of this area in the change process. Christopher added, “Transformational leaders must possess the innate ability to galvanize stakeholder support, communicate and inspire vision, challenge the process, and enable others to act while encouraging the heart” (personal communication with Christopher, November, 2015).

All of the participants stated the importance of a specifically skilled leader in the change process. Walter stated, “A leader must have a very clear vision and articulate that vision, in
multiple times and ways, so that people are clear of the way the organization is going. Without the vision, the people will get caught up in fear” (personal communication with Walter, December, 2015). A leader must know where the biggest challenges lie. A leader must know what fears the stakeholders have, support and join the process, and create the stakeholder buy-in. Change is not valid if it is fad driven. While a clear vision is important, the leader must articulate the clear purpose behind the vision. That takes time, so thrusting the change upon the stakeholders without proper foundation is a violation of change leadership techniques and strategies (personal communication with Jace, January, 2016). The leader’s vision, the purpose of the vision, and the messaging behind the vision are highly important aspects in the change implementation process (personal communication with Richard, January, 2016).

In regard to the effective leader’s skills, participants referred to many popular leadership experts, but the majority mentioned the work of Kouzes and Posner (2007), well-known leadership experts who have conducted much research and written many books on leadership. Kouzes and Posner stated that the five practices of exemplary leadership are (a) model the way, (b) inspire a shared vision, (c) challenge the process, (d) enable others to act, and (e) encourage the heart. While important, leadership is not only about a leader’s skills or personality. The leader must enable others and inspire a share mission. The relationship between the leader and followers and the quality of those relationships are important. Cloud (2010) added that leaders, especially change leaders, must have three essential qualities to enact meaningful change: (a) Successful leaders listen more than they talk; (b) effective leaders do not view themselves as the boss, but more the first among equals that invite collaboration and inspire others to act; (c) quality leaders are motivated to serve more than they lead; (d) change leaders clearly articulate the vision and needed change and then inspire the stakeholders to help with the implementation;
(e) effective leaders are highly skilled in emotional intelligence and are highly motivated, self-disciplined, and caring; and (f) change leaders are confident, gentle and kind, powerful but respectful. Kouzes and Posner (2007) added, “Leadership is not a gene and it’s not an inheritance. Leadership is an identifiable set of skills and abilities that are available to all of us” (p. 23). Christopher (2015) added:

We have had some leaders in our district that were very charismatic, but very charismatic from the standpoint that they were able to really paint the picture of where we wanted to be. It is really a unique quality or ability to provide a nurturing environment for teachers and students to feel it is okay to fail and take risks, but while also applying gentle, sustained pressure. (personal communication with Christopher, December, 2015)

Effective leaders have the ability to build upon relationships that enable others to support the leader’s objective and vision.

The Leader Must Be Surrounded by Creative, Intelligent, and Knowledgeable Team Members to Effectively Implement Change

When implementing major change, a leader must develop relationships with not only all major decision makers, but also the leader’s team. A leader must surround himself with others who complement his skill set. Richard added, “I need a team that has various skills such as caring, serving, the ability to create, inspire and sustain culture, agility, and basic people skills” (personal communication with Richard, November, 2015). Many participants submitted that in today’s culture and with the type of educational model they follow, they need teachers who relate well to people, especially their students. Mike stated, “I am looking for teachers that build appropriate relationships with their students and who invite collaboration with their colleagues” (personal communication with Mike, December, 2015).
The participants from virtual schools expressed that the connection with students may be the most important quality of a teacher. Mike added, “I sought online teachers who I felt had a personality and would be able to connect with students in an online environment. I believe that is the biggest challenge for online teachers – connecting to their students” (personal communication with Mike, December, 2015). The participants submitted many times the value of people skills, and that loving people and kids is perhaps the one quality that stands out as a requirement in the blended learning model. Mike added,

I think what has really changed the culture is being more student-centered in what we do, as opposed to being teacher-centered. This model helps us to more fully build relationships with students versus the traditional model that is primarily lecture. (personal communication with Mike, December, 2015)

In *17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork*, one of the laws that John Maxwell (2001) submitted is the *Law of the Bench*. To summarize, Maxwell spoke of the role that bench players play in the success of the team. He added that starters are the spotlight personnel who add value to the organization and directly influence its course. Bench players support the starters and add indirect value. While the starters may often get the spotlight, many times the decisions by the starters are ineffective if the bench is overlooked or neglected. Maxwell added, “Any starter who minimizes the contribution of the bench is self-centered, underestimates what it takes for a team to be a success, and doesn’t understand that great teams have great depth” (p. 164). Jace added, “We look for team members that have an understanding of culture and student relationships. We want someone that cares about kids, cares about adults, and can handle this dynamic environment” (personal communication with Jace, December, 2015).

In his interview, Geoffrey stated, “I think you have to have team members with a unique
ability to connect with kids virtually. It takes team members who can connect with kids” (personal communication with Geoffrey, December, 2015). Many participants, especially those in virtual schools, believed their teachers had much more of a parental support role than is typical. These participants added that these students are not being held accountable at home, and many do not have the support that would be available in most situations. Geoffrey stated, “I would guess 70-75% don’t have good parental support at home, so forming that connection is really important for that mentor. When those kids come in, that mentor is the one that is holding those kids accountable” (personal communication with Geoffrey, November, 2015).

Not only do educational leaders believe in the importance of team members who form relationships with stakeholders, but participants added that the leader must surround himself with those who are knowledgeable, collaborators, life-long learners, and who complement the leader’s skill set. Some participants stated that the fact that their educational setting was finally in a position to hire the best teachers to facilitate the learning has made a huge difference in their school. Additionally, participants added that the teachers did not necessarily have to be gifted in technology, but they did have to be willing to learn, adapt, and be forward thinkers. Marisa added, “Growth mindset is really important. Technology expertise is not needed, but being tech-willing is” (personal communication with Marisa, December, 2015). Geoffrey added, “I think we have developed a culture as a team to where we can have really good back and forth, sometimes very spirited but respectful, and it helps us when we are researching changes we need to make” (personal communication with Geoffrey, December, 2015). Marshall commented, “As a leader, the best thing you can do is surround yourself with people who are smart and accept the fact that you do not have to be the expert in the room on all topics” (personal communication with Marshall, December, 2015).
On this particular point of team, most participants were very clear about having strong team members and the leader utilizing a team approach. This team approach cannot be obtained unless the leader delegates responsibility and authority. Mike and Richard submitted comments similar to Marshall’s. Mike added, “You need to surround yourself with the right people. You can’t be the expert in every area. The key is surround yourself with people that are experts in all the given areas needed for the change initiative to be successful” (personal communication with Mike, December, 2015). Richard agreed and stated, “I rely on skills and knowledge of other people, the experts in the area that are my team members. That allows us to go out and find what’s working and not working, and to implement at a more team-based and knowledgeable level” (personal communication with Richard, December, 2015).

Richard had a grasp on this area, understood his role as leader, and submitted valuable data concerning team members. He provided a great concluding statement:

When it comes to leaders, we need people who will love their people and not just tell them things. We need leaders that will care for them, consider them their responsibility, and not just be their employers. When this is done, individuals will want to work with that leader. When you are then in a position to hire the best people and experts in their area, then it is much easier to delegate responsibility and authority in areas that many leaders are too insecure to release. The transformational leader is a team-based approach built on teamwork, inspiration, and vision. (personal communication with Richard, December, 2015)

While many aspects of the change implementation process must be present, perhaps none involves as many people as this area, and certainly the more the leader can delegate and empower others, the more supporters he will have. It has been stated that leadership is never
about the position or the power a title may bring. Leadership is simply influence. It is the ability to model the vision, inspire others, and encourage and empower others to enable change.

**The Change Implementation Process Can Be Strategically Structured in Various Ways to Effectively Implement Change**

One of the most important decisions in implementing change is deciding on the implementation structure. While some organizations may not plan for the implementation, the time, research, and resources spent on analyzing the basic tenets of change implementation will be invaluable for the organization and the success of the change implementation. Kotter (1995) believed creating a sense of urgency is paramount to the change process. Kotter (1995) added, “At least 75% of managers must believe the status quo is more dangerous than the unknown” (Kotter, 1995, p. 4). Many well-intentioned leaders waste valuable resources and time with inefficient planning, and this creates a barrier to implementing change. Internal and external factors outside the control of the leader will always exist, and implementing change without these barriers becoming a negative force is nearly impossible.

Because change implementation is so important, much content was submitted in Chapter Three detailing the popular change management theories and other successful implementation structures that have been successful. If there is not a proper foundation of research to determine the best plan to enable the change, then “no amount of implementation know-how will help the organization achieve its goals” (Jick, 1991, p. 4). Many times, people resist change because they may lack the skills, knowledge, or are uncomfortable with certain elements of the change process (Egan & Fjermestad, 2005). The majority of the participants in this study implemented similar aspects of change, although the actual structure of the change implementation process varied across each organization. Some of the participants brought in consultants and experts to assist
with the implementation, but for the most part, the organization’s team members researched and implemented the change in-house.

To prepare for the change implementation, some participants and their team studied aspects of change management, while others did not research popular change management structures. Christopher added that his educational setting made it clear that each member of the team must read and discuss the suggested book that was given to everyone to help implement the superintendent’s vision for change. He submitted that leadership was “handled in-house by developing administrative leadership teams, teacher leadership teams, and parent-community leadership teams” (personal communication with Christopher, November, 2015). Once change implementation was completed and early successes identified, Christopher’s organization identified pilot schools and strategically placed effective leaders at these schools to further create buy-in and momentum in the early stages of the organization’s transformation. In reviewing the successes of each participant’s change implementation, all of the participants submitted data stating what was successful, what they would have done differently, and other changes to the structure that could have insured a more successful outcome. Each participant stated that the following areas were an integral part of this process: creating partnerships, building stakeholder buy-in, communicating in a high-quality manner. Many stated failures that hindered the implementation involved forced inclusion too early in the process, focusing too much on the technology and not the educational paradigm change, lack of quality communication, and failure to include others.

**Stakeholder Buy-In, Support, and Quality Communication Are Paramount to Effectively Implement Change**

Each theme certainly maintains its place as an integral part of the theme-development
phase of this study. Stakeholder buy-in and communication was a topic that was submitted as much as any other discovered theme in the study. In addition to reviewing the submitted data obtained from the interviews, questionnaire, and focus group, as well as various artifacts from the research locations that included emails, flyers, policy manuals, and other forms of communication, each participant understood the importance of this theme. Geoffrey added, “The thing I believe we did the best was to keep all of our stakeholders informed and request participation and buy-in from our parents, students, teachers, and other school leaders” (personal communication with Geoffrey, November, 2015).

An effective leader must be able to anticipate and expect some turbulence, but a leader can stay the course and manage that turbulence. A leader must manage the expectations so that everyone understands the vision and the reason for the change, the expected challenges, the change in educational pedagogy, and the changes in the learning process for students. Scottie stated, “Stakeholder adoption is such an integral part of implementing any change. Getting that culture shift, but then getting stakeholders, and especially teachers, to adopt this new way of thinking and adapting to this ever-changing environment” (personal communication with Scottie, December, 2015). Christopher added, “The change leader must manage expectations, and for the end users, the teachers, parents, students, and other community stakeholders, you really have to manage the expectations of what the change is going to look like” (personal communication with Christopher, December, 2015). Geoffrey stated, “The thing I believe we did best was to keep everyone informed, and we constantly communicated the vision surrounding the school mission, vision, and strategies to all interested stakeholders” (personal communication with Geoffrey, December, 2015).

It was evident that the participants felt that valuable and frequent communication with the
stakeholders was paramount in the implementation process. Richard added, “Communication was the key throughout the change. We communicated the vision and welcomed all voices, not just administration. However, building relationships and equipping people for success was an integral part of the buy-in process as well” (personal communication with Richard, December, 2015). One participant stated that to increase the buy-in from the stakeholders, his school held frequent community forums and gave stakeholders a method to voice concerns, state ideas, and increase the cooperation with the school. One participant even utilized students in the change implementation. Marisa added:

> During the pilot program, we heavily involved the students and their views in the change implementation of the school. We, of course, utilized parents and interested individuals in the community, but having the students a forum to voice concerns was beneficial. (personal communication with Marisa, November, 2015)

Mike reinforced this idea and stated:

> It is imperative, as with any change implementation, but especially when dealing with students and education, that we implemented a method to gain feedback from all of our stakeholders. We had to make sure that we were in constant communication with parents, students, and teachers and getting feedback from them on a regular basis. We wanted to hear what they thought was working, and if they had any questions to submit them, and we would be open and honest with them as far as transparency, what we were doing about their issue, and our future plans to address their concerns and ideas. (personal communication with Mike, December, 2015)

Creating stakeholder buy-in and support cannot be obtained unless the organization has built a solid structure for communicating that vision to the stakeholders. Jace was a big believer
in the importance of quality leadership in this process. He added, “Teacher and community buy-in takes time, and it takes the right leadership. Having stability at the highest levels of leadership and producing quality results increases the buy-in factor” (personal communication with Jace, November, 2015). Several questions asked in the focus group dealt with the value of quality leaders and the integral role they play in this process. The focus group participants stated that the leader must articulate the vision, manage expectations, and expect turbulence.

One participant added that the leader must have a clear vision and must be able to articulate it multiple times and in multiple ways so that people get it and are inspired by it. It is natural for people to resist change, so the leader must strategically involve key individuals to create and build momentum for buy-in for those involved. Another participant added that it will be easier to create buy-in as opposed to the leader trying to communicate his vision and dictating changes without having members of the team feel involved in the implementation. One of the participants from a public school system stated that his superintendent was really the evangelist in selling the change. He said the superintendent met with key individuals, requested their feedback, and communicated with them about what was being done. He met with parents, teachers, students, local businesses, chamber of commerce, and truly took it upon himself to sell the change to every possible stakeholder in that district’s area.

Participants stated many times that effective change takes time as stakeholders are adjusting to changes in the overall culture shift. Quality implementation cannot be rushed. Mike added, “You’ve got to have time. You’ve got to plan more time than you think you need to put together a strong team, the resources, and the support structure that partners with individuals in curriculum, instruction, facilities, technology, and finance” (personal communication with Mike, December, 2015). William added:
There are significant change factors that take time and energy. The propensity of your faculty, whether or not they have the knowledge and training to implement the change, and then also understanding the value of why or how this particular change implementation is superior to the traditional methods that may have been used for years.

(personal communication with William, December, 2015)

Agreeing with William, Richard submitted, “A transition like we did is not something that you add to an existing program. It’s a pedagogical shift. It requires training, resources, thought, planning, and vast amounts of time” (personal communication with Richard, December, 2015).

Not only does the implementation take time, but there must be time given to assist the stakeholders to adopt to the change and adjust to the culture shift.

Scottie added:

I really believe that the hardest thing to do is deal with the culture shift and deal with personnel. Not that it’s insurmountable, but that is the biggest challenge. Dealing with systems or computers or online resources or whatever, those are all logistical things that you can deal with. But dealing with people and their feelings and their thoughts and attitudes about changing the way that we do instruction and students learn, that is definitely the most challenging opportunity that we faced in our implementation.

(personal communication with Scottie, December, 2015)

In one of his interviews, Walter added that not only the leaders, but also the teachers had such an integral role in helping with the culture shift. In the end, the leader must help create the vision, articulate it to all the stakeholders, invite them into the change process, communicate with everyone, and create the buy-in that will be needed for a smoother transition toward the intended goal (personal communication with Walter, December, 2015).
A Quality Implementation Structure and Overall Support Are Needed to Effectively Implement Change

As the section title states, a quality implementation structure and various levels of support are needed to effectively implement change. According to Darrow, Friend, and Powell (2013), the six main areas of support that are needed to implement change, especially as it relates to implementing an alternative method of education, include (a) leadership, (b) professional development, (c) teaching, (d) operations, (e) content, and (f) technology. While Chapter Three covered the majority of these six, in relation to the participants, this section primarily covers the support and infrastructure that was submitted by the participants. Educational leaders must not have the wrong goal or focus and must be unified in their purpose. Richard stated:

Perhaps one of the most difficult tasks was forming a vision, casting it, and getting everyone on the same page. It is almost becoming more and more challenging to find natural leaders who genuinely care about people. There are those that lead for reasons of power or control, and then those who lead to accomplish a shared vision and goal. It is vitally important for each team member to not only have the right goal and focus, but must be unified in this process. Showing a unified front is paramount. (personal communication with Richard, December, 2015)

Marisa agreed with Richard and added, “Early on, we focused too much of our communication on the technology, on the devices, on why this platform was better. We quickly found out that our team did not have the same goal, and we were not unified” (personal communication with Marisa, November, 2015).

The participants also stated the importance of quality, continual professional development for the leadership and the faculty. Mike added, “I think one of the biggest
challenges we faced was having the time, plan, and funds to provide our faculty with quality professional development to make sure they were prepared to teach and instruct in this learning environment” (personal communication with Mike, December, 2015). On a similar note, Christopher stated:

I think the biggest challenge for a district that’s in more of a blended structure or one-to-one model is the professional development piece of teachers understanding that it’s not about the device; it’s about the individualized options these platforms offer students.

(personal communication with Christopher, December, 2015)

Mike went a step further regarding the professional development and added, “One thing that helped us as a district is that we began differentiating the professional development provided for teachers just as we expect them to differentiate for the different learning styles and different learners they have in their classrooms” (personal communication with Mike, December, 2015).

Marisa submitted that finding the right type of professional development was a challenge. She added, “We have a project-based environment in blended form, and there were not many opportunities for us as far as professional development. The market has thankfully caught up, but early on, we did a lot of this on our own” (personal communication with Marisa, November, 2015). Scottie stated that his district was one of the first districts to implement alternative models of education in a blended model and they did not always know what teachers needed to be successful. Early on, their professional development focused on the technological devices and platform and not around the pedagogical method. After a series of trial and error, Scottie added, “We took a step back, readjusted, started listening to our teachers’ needs a little more, and changed what professional development we offered. This was probably our largest mistake in the early days of implementation” (personal communication with Scottie, December, 2015).
Mike felt that professional development was paramount in this method of education because schools of education in most colleges and universities are not preparing teachers for these types of educational environments. Mike added:

Probably the biggest challenge we faced, and I think others likely faced, is making sure teachers are prepared to teach, instruct, and even learn in this model. It is so much different than how they were taught, and even how they were taught in the various colleges and universities these teachers attended. It is not the normal yet to have a teaching and learning environment that relies on digital content and a technological platform, so the biggest obstacle to us was meeting the teachers where they are, and providing quality professional development for the teachers. (personal communication with Mike, December, 2015)

Participants were clear that the professional development cannot be solely about the device, and it is not simply about handing students a laptop or tablet and assuming that is what revolutionizes how the students learn or how the teachers will teach. Many of them also stated that professional development was found to be most effective when it was led by in-house faculty or staff members who knew how to model useful instructional tools and could immediately be knowledgeable on the implementation into instruction for positive student-growth results. Christopher stated:

So I think the biggest instructional piece is that professional development must communicate how instruction is different, how the transformation will take place, and what the classroom will physically look like, and then the instruction from the teacher in the classroom morphs into a blended learning model where it is no longer the teacher being the sole bearer of knowledge in the classroom. (personal communication with
Christopher, December, 2015)

Scottie added:

We have one day a month for professional development where our students go home at noon, and our teachers attend professional development the rest of the day. We build it into our calendar so it is really important to us. (personal communication with Scottie, November, 2015)

Time is a major factor in the availability of quality professional development, and it must be scheduled. Each participant agreed on the value and benefits to the educational process when proper attention and resources are given to quality professional development.

A third area the participants stated were needed to effectively implement change was in utilizing a pilot phase for an area to be transformed. Not all participants mentioned that they took advantage of a pilot phase, but enough did that it warranted its place in this study. In relation to the pilot phase, Christopher submitted that the majority of the pilot structure was created and managed in-house. Christopher then added, “We identified pilot schools and strategically placed effective leaders in those schools to create buy-in and momentum in the early stages of transformation” (personal communication with Christopher, December, 2015). Mike agreed and stated, “We had a team at the high school, and we did a pilot with the laptops the semester before we officially implemented a one-to-one model. So we had a lot of positive input and data that assisted us before the official implementation (personal communication with Mike, December, 2015). Marshall stated:

We piloted here in a couple of schools, really to work out the infrastructure kinks, and we really noticed early on that there were some areas that we could adjust or address going into that second year, that second phase. (personal communication with Marshall,
Richard joined into this conversation and stated:

We really liked the smaller approach and after researching various methods, we really like the pilot program. Because in a pilot, you can learn so much about how it’s going to look full-scale. We learned much about our infrastructure, we learned that our wireless system was not robust enough, and we learned what areas of the platform worked, and what the teachers liked. I think if you can do it the way we did where we phase it out and utilize a pilot program, you will likely have more success. (personal communication with Richard, December, 2015)

A final area that the participants felt was an integral part of implementing effective change is a proper infrastructure support and preparedness for the change. In one of his interviews, Christopher mentioned that proper infrastructure should be of ultimate importance. Many of the participants felt their school had an existing infrastructure that could handle the needs of a personalized learning system and quickly learned they had inefficient and low-quality bandwidth, security, equipment, and support. Plans must be made for professional development support, financial backing, support roles, technology support, equipment purchases, and the many other areas needed for models that utilize a technology platform in the learning process. In a questionnaire, Marisa agreed with this and added, “I think one of the biggest challenges we faced was having quality infrastructure in place to handle all the support and instruction needed to implement our change” (personal communication with Marisa, November, 2015). To adequately be prepared to support a paradigm shift in education, educational leaders must consider factors such as: (a) institutional planning, (b) technology planning, (c) marketing, (d) instructor support, (e) quality assurance, (f) learner support, (g) funding, and many other areas
In Jace’s interview, although he mentioned that professional development must be a priority, he was even more adamant that the support for professional development must be the priority. The implementation must be thoughtfully and strategically planned. In speaking about preparedness, William mentioned several areas that must be considered: (a) understanding the purpose in moving to an alternative paradigm, (b) providing the educators frequent and quality professional development as well as time with the support personnel, (c) providing a method for parents and educators to experience the platform and model from the students’ point of view (personal communication with Jace, December, 2015). Because the educational technology market is still growing, products and costs should improve as competition and demand grows. Several participants mentioned how valuable many of the official implementation guides were, but specifically mentioned two: A Roadmap for Implementation of Blended Learning at the School Level by Darrow et al. (2013), and the Blended Learning Implementation Guide by Bailey et al. (2013).

Research Questions Results

The research questions were answered through one or more of the five themes that were discovered in this study. The five themes discovered in the data analysis process were (a) Quality leadership skills are needed to design and effectively implement change; (b) the leader must be surrounded by creative, intelligent, and knowledgeable team members to effectively implement change; (c) the change implementation can be strategically structured in various ways to effectively implement change; (d) stakeholder buy-in, support, and quality communication are paramount to effectively implement change; and (e) a quality implementation structure and overall infrastructure support are needed to effectively implement change.
Central question. The central question was answered throughout the entire data collection and analysis process. The participants’ own experiences differed slightly because of their environment and experiences with various change implementations, as well as the successes or failures of the various implementations. Each participant, even while submitting similar data, had various views on the questions that were asked in the different data collection instruments. In relation to the central question, the participants seemed comfortable that their experiences were directly related to challenges and successes—in essence, what worked and what did not work.

The lived experiences of the participants produced many successes. The vast majority of the participants are leaders at their educational setting. Most of the participants detailed the joy they experienced in watching members from the leadership team, and even faculty members, assume larger roles and take on more responsibility when the school initiated large-scale changes and transitioned to an alternative learning model. Geoffrey stated:

I am fortunate to be surrounded by people who have a good knowledge base of change and technology and they are very forward thinking, so I am not at all ashamed to say that I lean on them a lot. (personal communication with Geoffrey, December, 2015)

Jace added, “I think that we have developed a culture as a leadership team to where we can have really good back and forth, sometimes very spirited, but respectful, and it helps us when discussing major change” (personal communication with Jace, December, 2015).

The participants also submitted educational successes that included seeing their faculty repurposed, as well as seeing more students take additional ownership in their learning. William added:

While it took a little time, my teachers have a new lease on life. They have bought into this new educational paradigm and enjoy helping the students that truly need it, while
seeing students that can work on their own. (personal communication with William, December, 2015)

At Marshall’s educational setting, the successes that have been experienced are invaluable. In relation to the students, Marshall stated, “Our students seem to relate to education that is enhanced by technology. Having an adaptive platform that guides each student is an invaluable part of our educational plan in educating the 21st century student” (personal communication with Marshall, December, 2015). While expected, hearing about the participants’ experiences and their view of successes and challenges proved vital to this study.

While there is a sufficient amount of literature on change leadership, change management theories, and alternative models of education like blended and online learning, there is minimal research, if any, on the actual successes and lived experiences of participants that have implemented alternative models of education like blended and online learning. It was the goal of this study to fill the gaps in these areas. Literature that is available does not necessarily answer the research questions, and while there were challenges that participants faced at their educational settings during various change implementation, the data submitted by these participants was overwhelmingly positive. Successes included areas such as (a) an overall improved educational product, (b) implementing an educational paradigm personalized for each student’s needs, (c) seeing team members assume larger roles, (d) developing a culture that leaned on partnership, and (e) the increased communication, buy-in, and support from the stakeholders.

**Subquestion one.** The first subquestion identified the challenges that leaders face when implementing alternative breakthrough models in blended and online learning. As mentioned previously, the challenges focused primarily on (a) not determining early on how important
stakeholder buy-in, support, and communication would be; (b) not effectively communicating a vision or enabling others to help lead the process; (c) not involving and enabling a creative and knowledgeable team of parents, faculty, and other stakeholders; (d) not making enough resources available for continual and quality professional development; and (e) not developing a quality and efficient infrastructure and support system to enable new models of learning. Mento, Jones, and Dirndorfer (2002) added, “It is important as the starting point of a change effort to highlight the idea for what needs to be changed or what new product should be introduced or what particular innovation might bring a significant lead over competitors” (p. 49). Since this subquestion was coincidentally presented to the participants as question four in the first part of the interview, much data was presented for this subquestion. One participant thought the major challenges were properly creating buy-in with stakeholders and setting up quality infrastructure and support.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, without proper support from vital stakeholders, the change implementation will likely face many obstacles. Another participant felt one of the largest challenges that leaders must overcome is incorrect focus. This participant felt that many times there is not a unifying vision for the change, and that presents an open door for other leaders to develop goals and other areas of focus that are not congruent with the overall vision of the leader. Jace felt the focus is many times on the technology or the actual device, and not the educational paradigm change, or the professional development and proper support needed to implement the change. Jace added, “In my opinion, the biggest challenge is the incorrect focus. Many times, the focus is on the device or the technology and not on the transformation needed to implement an educational paradigm shift” (personal communication with Jace, December, 2015).

Several of the participants not only led change implementation in the overall educational
pedagogy shift at their own educational setting, but because of their many success, have been asked to consult and lead the changes at other educational settings and even overall school districts. William added, “Veteran teachers who do not have the experience with technology will many times be fearful of the change or even cause issues during the implementation. Involve them early and often. There is always an uneasiness with change” (personal communication with William, December, 2015). Marshall added, “We have faculty members that are successful, and now we are asking them to support a new paradigm, a new pedagogy, that is completely different than what they learned and what they’ve been successful at” (personal communication with Marshall, November, 2015). Richard felt the excessive federal and state policies end up clouding the public’s view regarding educational experimentation and innovation. Because people are afraid of change, he thinks the climate of excessive accountability and fear is a major challenge. In reference to actual area of change leadership that was studied, Richard also felt that technology itself is a challenge. There are still limitations to the various technological platforms; access to technology; lack of knowledge on the part of parents, students, and teachers; and an overall lack of a structured plan on how to properly use technology (personal communication with Richard, December, 2015).

The data that was submitted by the participants adequately answered this subquestion. The vast majority of the data submitted by the 10 participants felt that stakeholder buy-in and support, maintaining frequent communication, quality implementation structure, and overall infrastructure support were the largest challenges when implementing alternative breakthrough models in education. There is research that details the importance of each of these challenges, and some of this content is available in the review of literature. However, there is minimal research that relates these challenges to implementing various models of alternative educational
methods. It was the goal of this study fill the gaps in these areas, and add to the body of literature in the related areas.

**Subquestion two.** Subquestion two deals with the role that leader preparation plays in developing the skills and knowledge necessary to design and implement various change implementations. This particular subquestion garnered different results based on the participants’ actual lived experiences. This subquestion and the data from the participants basically covered three aspects of leader preparation: (a) the innate abilities formed at conception, (b) the knowledge obtained through formal training, and (c) the learned experiences that are obtained throughout one’s life. Many of the participants submitted that there are many innate abilities that must be present for the leader to implement change at the highest level that include (a) patience, (b) flexibility, (c) delegation, (d) communication, (e) confidence, (f) innovation, (g) vision, (h) creativity, (i) passion, (j) inspiration, (k) ability to analyze issues and solve problems, (l) results-oriented, (m) strategic perspective, and (n) motivation. Many of the participants submitted data referencing various types of leadership. Christopher added:

> I think from a leadership standpoint, having that transformational leadership component is crucial. We have some leaders that were charismatic, and then had some that were able to transform an environment for teachers, parents, and students with gentle, sustained pressure. (personal communication with Christopher, December, 2015)

Jace added, “Transformational leaders possess the innate ability to galvanize stakeholder support, communicate and inspire vision, challenge the process, and enable others to act while encouraging the heart” (personal communication with Jace, December, 2015).

> Being in an environment conducive to building leadership skills and learning from others is extremely important. Leaders have to have patience, flexibility, innovation, creativity, and
drive (personal communication with Richard, December, 2015). Geoffrey added, “The best thing you can do as a leader is surround yourself with people that are intelligent, and as the leader, accept the fact that you do not have to be the expert on everything” (personal communication with Geoffrey, December, 2015). Geoffrey leans on his team and feels that most leaders think that leadership is more about the position and power.

The majority of participants also stated that formal leadership training is needed to truly understand the educational landscape and possess the necessary tools to lead, manage, and implement change. Perhaps more noticeable was the fact that the majority of participants felt that leaders are being inadequately prepared to implement change and lack knowledge about blended and online learning and current trends in education. In reference to the knowledge and formal training, the participants felt that life experience is extremely important, but a leader is much more valuable and ready for the challenge with quality formal training. Scottie added, “You cannot replace formal training in leadership. Many leaders may have skills, or some may have just training, but when you are able to find someone that can combine skills and formal training, you have a special situation” (personal communication with Scottie, December, 2015).

While the participants submitted that formal training is a necessity, they were clear that there is not enough training in change leadership, nor are the schools of education at most universities training faculty members and administrators much on educational technology or alternative models of education that utilize technology. Mike added, “Most universities realize there is a shift and they need to address the changing landscape, but many do not know where to start. They are not where they need to be, but I think many universities are making strides” (personal communication with Mike, December, 2015). Along this same line of thinking, Richard added:
Universities have not caught up with the changing landscape of education. What it looks like. How they need to deliver curriculum and train teachers. We have had many universities, college faculty members, and deans of education visit our campus to discover the benefits of personalized learning. I am glad it is being considered and universities are actually making the shift to truly develop education leaders who understand personalized learning environments. (personal communication with Richard, November, 2015)

The data that was submitted by the participants adequately answered this subquestion. Because this subquestion is specific, there is no submitted content in this study’s review of literature specifically related to this subquestion. It was the goal of this study to analyze current literature, strategically formulate research questions, collect and analyze data, fill gaps in the literature related to this study, and add additional content to the body of literature in this field. The participants were clear that not only is formal training in educational leadership and change implementation a needed part in today’s leadership training, but also training in relation to personalized learning, as well as the benefits of leveraging the best aspects of technology as a tool in this process. They majority of the participants also submitted data the leaders are not being prepared properly with change knowledge or expertise to operate technology-driven schools in formal graduate training or administrative credentialing programs. Implementing some level of this type of training in these learning areas may assist future leaders that may be interested in implementing large-scale change.

**Subquestion three.** Subquestion three asks, “How did procedures and policies shape leaders’ experiences when implementing alternative breakthrough models such as blended and online learning?” Each participant submitted that various implementation procedures and
policies were either purposely in place when the implementation began, or policies and procedures that were learned during the lived experiences of the educational leadership evolved with the change. For Christopher, one important step they implemented before any pedagogical method was altered was to first set up a structure in which all major changes were first run through a pilot phase. Christopher added, “For us, utilizing a pilot phase was instrumental to the success of our other schools’ implementation within the district” (personal communication with Christopher, December, 2015). At Mike’s educational setting, they also utilized a pilot phase and he added, “We really like the smaller approach. You learn about the change and see how it is going to scale. If you can implement change this way and phase it in sections, it is much more efficient and successful” (personal communication with Christopher, December, 2015).

While this somewhat coincides with earlier data, the participants submitted much data on the importance of policies that will benefit the change implementation and the quality of instruction. This can cover areas such as communication stakeholder buy-in, professional development, responsible-use policies, and overall procedures that required a high-quality infrastructure to support changes that involved technology. Jace added, “The policies we established that led to increased communication, school forums, new faculty and leadership teams, really enabled us to chart the course, lay out the vision, and give the reasons of why we are implementing change” (personal communication with Jace, December, 2015). The participants were insistent that quality professional development was a cornerstone piece, not only in a high-level educational setting, but even more so when schools are implementing large changes in their educational program. Geoffrey added:

The key is professional development with the focus on instruction. When the focus is on the device, the central element of why professional development is even being offered
has been lost. Professional development must be high quality and it must be continual. (personal communication with Geoffrey, November, 2015)

The data that was submitted by the participants adequately answered this subquestion. In regard to institutional policies, all of the participants that worked in public schools stated that much of the data submitted in regard to the changes they implemented must follow the policies and procedures set forth by that state’s educational policies. Because this subquestion is specific, there is no submitted content in this study’s review of literature specifically related to this subquestion. It was the goal of this study to fill the gaps in these areas, and add to the body of literature in related areas.

Summary

The purpose of Chapter Four was to describe the findings of the 10 participants who participated in this study and who have been intensely involved with implementing change at schools that utilize alternative methods of education like blended or online learning and leverage the best aspects of technology in this process. A questionnaire, one-on-one semi-structured interviews, analysis of artifacts used in implementation, and a focus group were all utilized to discover the known lived experiences of the 10 participants regarding the phenomenon. Five themes emerged when utilizing Moustakas’s Seven Steps approach to analyzing research data. The themes were: (a) Quality leadership skills are needed to design and effectively implement change, (b) the leader must be surrounded by creative, intelligent, and knowledgeable team members to effectively implement change, (c) the change implementation process can be strategically structured in various ways to effectively implement change, (d) stakeholder buy-in, support, and quality communication are paramount to effectively implement change, and (e) a quality implementation structure and overall infrastructure support are needed to effectively
implement change.

While the data that was discovered may not have provided new information when viewed as a single theme, the process did confirm that when the five themes are present, large-scale change implementation involving alternative breakthrough models of education may have a more successful implementation. What was specific and could add to the body of literature are the five themes that were discovered from the data from the 10 study participants. Because this study had a specific research question and corresponding subquestions, much of the submitted content in literature review did not specifically relate to the study’s questions. As mentioned in an earlier reference, there is much research on change leadership, change management, and various change management theories used when implementing change. There is a growing base of literature on alternative models of education like blended and online learning. However, there is minimal research available on change leadership and change management theories and their relation to implementing alternative models in education. It was the goal of this study to analyze current literature, strategically formulate research questions, collect and analyze data, fill gaps in the literature related to this study, and add additional content to the body of literature in this field.

As previously mentioned, the challenges focused primarily on (a) not determining early on how important stakeholder buy-in, support, and communication would be; (b) making sure that effective leaders properly communicated a vision and enabled others to help lead the process; (c) involving and enabling a creative and knowledgeable team of parents, faculty, and other stakeholders; (d) that quality and continual professional development was offered; and (e) the lack of quality and efficient infrastructure and support to enable the new models of learning. Even though some of the data presented showed challenges during the change implement, the data submitted by these participants was overwhelmingly positive. Successes included areas such
as (a) an overall improved educational product, (b) implementing an educational paradigm personalized for each student’s needs, (c) seeing team members assume larger roles, (d) developing a culture that leaned on partnership, and (e) the increased communication, buy-in, and support from the stakeholders. The leader must have experience, training, and skills to effectively implement change. The leader cannot implement change unless there is a knowledgeable, creative team working together toward a common goal. Once there is a common goal and a plan has been created, creating quality and frequent communication as well as buy-in from stakeholders is vastly important. As previously mentioned, utilizing parents, teachers, and other community leaders in the implementation process will only help with the efficiency and success of the implementation. In the end, the participants’ data, while similar in the overall theme, differed slightly, likely due to differences in worldview, culture, training, and work experience.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover what change leadership practices are utilized by educational leaders at selected K-12 schools when alternative breakthrough models in blended and online education are implemented. The change leadership practices needed to implement alternative methods of content delivery were explored at three public schools, two private schools, two charter schools, and two virtual schools. For this study, it is important to utilize a methodology that best fits the research questions and enables me, as the researcher, to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of the participants who have experienced the phenomena being studied.

Qualitative research is most suitable for inductive research in which data is gathered to build theories and explain phenomena rather than deductively testing a hypothesis (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative methods support research that is detailed and well-suited to investigate a contemporary phenomenon as well as provide the details of context and rich description of data (Patton, 2002). The strength of qualitative research is its “ability to provide complex textural descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. It provides information about the ‘human’ side of an issue—that is, the often contradictory behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals” (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005, p. 1).

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover what change leadership practices are utilized by educational leaders at selected K-12 schools when alternative breakthrough models in blended and online education are implemented. The data was collected from 10 participants using the following data collection instruments: (a) questionnaire, (b) one-
on-one interviews, (c) analysis of artifacts used in change leadership and in the implementation of alternative models, and (d) focus group. To assist with data analysis, I used Moustakas’s Seven Steps as a tool to analyze the data, while the overall data analysis framework followed Schutz’s (1967) phenomenological reductionism; the reality of the data was neither confirmed nor denied initially. It is the bracketing of all opinion about the culture and perceived nature of the phenomenon under exploration as perceived by the participants (Schutz, 1967). The research questions were as follows:

- **Central Question**—What are the lived experiences of K-12 educational leaders who are implementing alternative breakthrough models of blended and online learning?
- **Subquestion 1**—What challenges do educational leaders face when implementing alternative breakthrough models such as blended and online learning?
- **Subquestion 2**—What role does leader preparation play in developing the skills and knowledge necessary to design and implement alternative breakthrough models such as blended and online learning?
- **Subquestion 3**—How did procedures and policies shape leaders’ experiences when implementing alternative breakthrough models such as blended and online learning?

The five themes discovered in the data analysis process were (a) Quality leadership skills are needed to design and effectively implement change; (b) the leader must be surrounded by creative, intelligent, and knowledgeable team members to effectively implement change; (c) the change implementation can be strategically structured in various ways to effectively implement change; (d) stakeholder buy-in, support, and quality communication are paramount to effectively implement change; and (e) a quality implementation structure and overall infrastructure support are needed to effectively implement change.
The central question asked about the lived experiences of K-12 educational leaders who implemented alternative breakthrough models of blended and online learning. Because the central question was purposely structured as a broad question covering various aspects of the participants’ lived experiences, the data submitted throughout the entire data collection process was directly or indirectly related to the central question. The participants’ own experiences differed slightly because of their environment and experiences with various change implementations, as well as the successes or failures of their experience during the change implementations. Growing pains and failures from this process are to be expected with any level of change implementation. However, each participant’s submitted data expressed many more successes than failures. Successes included areas such as (a) an overall improved educational product, (b) implementing an educational paradigm personalized for each student’s needs, (c) seeing team members assume larger roles, (d) developing a culture that leaned on partnership, and (e) the increased communication and buy-in from the stakeholders. Even though the participants submitted similar data, they had various views on the questions asked in the various data collection instruments. As a result, the data they submitted was specific to their experiences with change, communication, stakeholder buy-in, successes, and failures.

The first subquestion identified the challenges that leaders face when implementing alternative breakthrough models in blended and online learning. Most of the challenges that resulted from implementing alternative models of education were also directly related to the central question, as the majority of the data was filtered through the lived experiences of the participants. The challenges focused primarily on (a) not determining early on how important stakeholder buy-in, support, and communication would be; (b) not effectively communicating a vision or enabling others to help lead the process; (c) not involving and enabling a creative and
knowledgeable team of parents, faculty, and other stakeholders; (d) not making enough resources available for continual and quality professional development; and (e) not developing a quality and efficient infrastructure and support system to enable new models of learning.

One of the most visible challenges submitted by the participants involved managing and understanding the value of stakeholder buy-in. Stakeholders are generally categorized as internal and external. External stakeholders at these educational settings refer to parents, students, and individuals in the community. Internal stakeholders refer to the administration, faculty, and other employees at the organization. Engaging the stakeholders early and often is paramount to the change implementation process. Christopher stated:

In the beginning, creating buy-in, not only with community stakeholders, but also teachers, students, families, and really setting a vision as a leader in a school district is paramount. The leader must make sure that there is a consistent vision, and that there is a single goal everyone is working toward. Without the leadership realizing the importance of stakeholder buy-in, and without the understanding that stakeholder support is vital in any change implementation process, the matter that is being changed may actually fail (personal communication with Christopher, December, 2015).

Additionally, managing and realizing the importance of quality communication with stakeholders was an initial challenge in many of the participants’ educational settings. Communication with the stakeholders is imperative, and participants added that while they planned to solicit input from others, they did not realize how effective stakeholder buy-in and quality communication with these individuals would be to the change implementation process. Scottie pointed out, “Communication and collaborating with stakeholders and utilizing their critical thinking and creativity are foundational elements of what drives us, and certainly the
characteristics we lean on when implementing change” (personal communication with Scottie, December, 2015). Along the same line, Mike added, “Gaining feedback from our stakeholders is paramount. We are constantly communicating with parents and getting feedback from them on a regular basis. We wish to know what they think is working and not working. This takes continual and quality communication” (personal communication with Mike, December, 2015).

The second subquestion involved the role that leader preparation plays in developing the skills and knowledge necessary to design and implement alternative breakthrough models such as blended and online learning. The vast majority of the participants’ data dealt with two areas: (a) the innate abilities that are formed at conception, and (b) the knowledge, formal training, and experience that are obtained throughout one’s life. The various abilities that participants submitted are available in Chapter Four. The requirement of formal training can often produce adverse opinions. I was surprised that all of the participants stated that formal training is not only important, but it is required for a leader to truly be effective. I have experienced that those without formal training may overemphasize the importance of experience, perhaps thinking that those with education, for some reason, do not have experience as well. Many times, individuals who overemphasize experience have been involved with negative experiences and would not be privy to the tools that formal training may add to the leader’s arsenal. All 10 of the participants have earned at least a master’s degree in some level of leadership, and many of them have earned doctoral degrees. With this said, perhaps the data that was submitted showing their views of formal training should not be a surprise.

Chapter Four detailed the importance that participants placed on formal training, and many of them felt that current schools of education and other leadership degree programs were not properly training leaders in change leadership, and certainly not in trends, issues, or
implementing alternative models of education. A leader must possess certain skills that will enable him to have a more successful chance at implementing change. In the theoretical framework section, I submitted two areas of leadership that are directly related to this study, and certainly to this subquestion. Transformational leadership is a necessity if a leader wishes to galvanize stakeholder support, cast a vision, and enable others to act on his behalf.

The final subquestion asked, “How did procedures and policies shape leaders’ experiences when implementing alternative breakthrough models such as blended and online learning?” This subquestion has two views: (a) the procedures and policies that some schools must adhere to as educational leaders in their school district, and (b) the procedures and policies that schools utilized when implementing alternative breakthrough models of education. Depending on where the participant worked, many submitted data about how difficult it was to adhere to the district or state policies, especially for the schools that were passionate about different models of education. Participants who had the autonomy to freely implement change submitted data (see Chapter Four) that detailed the procedures and policies that assisted with their change implementation. Many of the participants utilized a pilot structure when implementing large-scale change. Testing the structure and the actual change implementation proved valuable as the participants stated they were able to observe which procedures were successful and which ones failed. Mike noted, “We really like the smaller approach. You learn about the change and see how it is going to scale. If you can implement change this way and phase it in sections, it is much more efficient and successful” (personal communication with Mike, December, 2015). The participants also added that continual, quality professional development was an integral part of the change process. Many of the participants added that the professional development must not focus on a technological device or the structure, but must
focus on the instruction and the need for the change to an alternative breakthrough educational model.

**Discussion**

As leaders, the participants were tasked with submitting data in relation to their lived experiences with change leadership and the implementation of an alternative breakthrough model of education such as blended or online learning. The 10 participants in this study were members of the leadership teams from three public schools, two private schools, two charter schools, and two virtual schools consisting of heads of school, district superintendents, or department heads who were instrumental in these implementations. The process of bracketing and identifying themes followed the data collection and analysis obtained from the 10 participants using (a) a questionnaire, (b) one-on-one interviews, (c) analysis of artifacts used in change leadership and in the implementation of alternative models, and (d) focus group.

After I collected the data, I exported the questionnaire data and transcribed the interviews and focus group discussions. Before implementing any analysis techniques, I thoroughly read the transcribed data. I began with Moustakas’s (1994) Seven Steps to analyze the data, and I followed Schutz’s (1967) idea of phenomenological reductionism for the overall analysis framework. After I listed my preliminary grouping, I began removing any overlapping, repetitive, or nonessential statements that would not contribute to the overall data clusters. I read the submitted data many times and began to identify common phrases, words, and overall thoughts that formed introductory codes. Throughout the analysis process, I repeatedly edited, revised, and combined these codes into larger categories. Organized by the overall thought of each category, this larger combination of data helped form the study’s themes. In the end, five major themes emerged from the lived experiences of the 10 study participants. The five themes
were as follows: (a) Effective leadership skills are needed to design and implement change, (b) to effectively implement change, the leader must be surrounded by creative, intelligent, and knowledgeable team members, (c) the change implementation process can be strategically structured in various ways to effectively implement change, (d) stakeholder buy-in, support, and quality communication are paramount to effectively implement change, and (e) a quality implementation structure and overall infrastructure support are needed to effectively implement change.

The data submitted by these participants was overwhelmingly positive. Successes included areas such as (a) an overall improved educational product, (b) implementing an educational paradigm personalized for each student’s needs, (c) seeing team members assume larger roles, (d) developing a culture that leaned on partnership, and (e) the increased communication, buy-in, and support from the stakeholders. The participants were clear that not only is formal training in educational leadership and change implementation a needed part of today’s leadership training, but also training in relation to personalized learning, as well as the benefits of leveraging the best aspects of technology as a tool in this process. The majority of the participants also submitted that leaders are not being properly prepared with change knowledge or expertise to operate technology-driven schools in formal graduate training or administrative credentialing programs. Implementing some level of this type of training in these learning areas may assist future leaders that may be interested in implementing large-scale change.

Transformational leadership cares less about positional power and more about influential power (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). A transformational leader adapts and effectively works in changing environments while responding to the challenges that may confront the leader and his followers (Bass, 1993). The leader must be flexible and knowledgeable about the change
process. Not only will a complete educational paradigm shift occur, but also a uniquely different skill set is required of leaders who are implementing change. Change leadership requires that the leader move the organization that encompasses the final goal, the background and abilities of the team, the stakeholder support, and many other factors. Transformational leaders are adaptive leaders who effectively work in changing environments while responding to the challenges that may confront them and their followers (Bass, 1993). Transformational leadership embraces levels of change to benefit both the relationship and the resources of those involved.

Transformational leaders focus restructuring efforts on improving work conditions and employee morale (Gardiner, 2006), while asking followers to transcend their own views and self-interests for the good of the organization (Burns, 1978). A leader who does not have the full support of the faculty, parents, and students will encounter many barriers that hinder successful change.

The leader must be able to move the organizational culture carefully, capably, purposefully, and strategically. The leader must have patience, flexibility, innovation, vision, creativity, passion, and motivation. In referencing a research project with over 168 higher-education professionals, Cloud (2010) submitted six competencies that change leaders need:

- An effective change leader must be skilled in organizational strategy.
- A quality change leader must manage resources well and must “equitably and ethically sustain people and processes as well as institutional assets to fulfill the mission, vision, and goals of the [organization]” (p. 77).
- A change leader must be an effective communicator, open to dialogue at all levels, and comfortably able to promote the vision to the stakeholders.
- A quality leader must be a collaborator. Leaders must develop and maintain relationships that nurture diversity but reflect cooperation.
• A change leader must competently advocate for his organization. Cloud added, “The leader understand, commits to, and advocates for the mission, vision, and goals of the [organization]” (p. 77).

• A capable change leader is professional and sets a high standard for self and others.

As mentioned, transcendental leadership varies slightly from the aforementioned transformational leadership. This model has no desire to manipulate others and transcendental leadership “addresses the weakness of transformational/charismatic leadership by providing motives behind the leaders’ practices, that is, altruistic love, a sense of wholeness, harmony and well-being produced through care, concern, appreciation of both self and others” (Liu, 2007, p. 4). While there must be an element of specific leadership skills such as vision, innovation, decisiveness, and other skills generally found in a transformational leadership structure, today’s workers want to feel empowered and have a chance to be part of the change process and solution (Liu, 2007). Viewing the 10 participants through the data submitted in the four data collection instruments, those with strong leadership skills leaned more on wording that would encompass the transformational leadership framework. Some of these leaders were still very cognizant of the fact that it takes a team to initiate change.

Because transcendental leadership has a spiritual element to it, many of the participants submitted content that referred to their internal faith and its guiding effect on their decisions and leadership style. Transformational leadership does not necessarily lean on faith and most certainly relies more on skills, authority, charisma, and other character values. Liu (2007) added, “Nothing in the transformational leadership model says leaders should serve followers for the good of followers” (p. 4). On the contrary, the very foundation of transcendental leadership can be portrayed as a spiritual relational process in the postmodern spiritual workplace (Biberman &
Thankfully, the 10 participants in this study represented many styles of leadership. In order for the participants to recognize their true value and have the most impact, they must lean on their innate strengths and experiences and delegate areas of weaknesses to others who are more capable in those areas. While there was no mention of the basic tenets of transformational or transcendental leadership models, it is apparent by the way these participants led others, that they utilized major foundational tenets of these models. In addition to the transformational and transcendental leadership models, the cognitivism learning theory and connectivism learning theory join the transformational and transcendental leadership theories to round out the theoretical framework used in this study. These learning theories were utilized as not only a framework for how students learn in an alternative model like blended and online learning, but also as a guide for how school leaders would implement these models.

Cognitivism’s main emphasis is the active mental processing and building of schema on the part of the learner (Nagowah & Nagowah, 2009). Cognitivism is a shift from behaviorism by considering “how the information is received, organized, stored, and retrieved by the mind” (Ertmer & Newby, 1993). In the cognitivism learning theory, learners actively rely on problem solving, concept formation, and information processing (Snelbecker, 1974), which are naturally elements of blended and online learning. The primary goal of cognitivism for learners and leaders is to help develop higher-order thinking skills by “engaging them in a process of either investigating an issue or formulating and testing a hypothesis in order to find solutions to a problem” (Yilmaz, 2011, p. 209). As stated earlier, even though the data collection and analysis did not necessarily focus on the cognitive learning theory or connectivism learning theory, the participants’ answers to various data collection instruments relied on these learning theories.
This was noticed mainly in the interview and focus group where informal conversation showed the participants’ knowledge in these areas, as well as their internal inclination that leaned on various strategies that encompass the two leadership theories as well as the two learning theories.

While there is a sufficient amount of literature on change leadership, change management theories, and alternative models of education like blended and online learning, there is minimal research, if any, on the actual successes and lived experiences of participants who have implemented alternative models of education like blended and online learning. Literature that is available does not necessarily answer the research questions because of the specificity of the questions. It was the goal of this study to fill the gaps in these areas and add to the body of literature in related areas.

**Implications**

The implications presented in the following pages are based on this study’s findings, results, and conclusions. Recommendations are provided for leaders who will implement large-scale changes at their organization and express interest in various change leadership practices. This section is also valuable for educational leaders who are implementing alternative breakthrough models of learning. Implications in this study have been categorized and structured into two sections: (a) theoretical implications, and (b) practical implications.

**Theoretical Implications**

This study was built upon four theoretical foundations: (a) Transformational Leadership Theory, (b) Transcendental Leadership Theory, (c) Cognitivism Learning Theory, and (d) Connectivism Learning Theory. The basis of the Transformational Leadership Theory (1987) is that leadership cares less about positional power and more about influential power (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). Transformational leadership originates in the personal values and beliefs of
leaders, not necessarily in an exchange of commodities between leaders and followers as in transactional leadership. Transformational leaders lead best when they can model the example to others (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). With transcendental leadership, more importance is placed on attitudes, vision-casting, and enabling others. The concept of transcendental leadership was first submitted by Cardona (2000), who viewed transcendental leadership as combining aspects of transactional and transformational leadership to form a contribution-based exchange relationship (Sanders, Hopkins, & Geroy, 2003). Cardona “views the transcendental leader as developing followers’ transcendent motivation . . . the development of followers’ intrinsic motivation, so that their needs are aligned with the needs of the leader” (p. 22).

The Cognitivism Learning Theory’s main emphasis is the active mental processing and building of schema on the part of the learner (Nagowah & Nagowah, 2009). With roots in the 1900s, this theory includes tenets from Piaget’s theory of individual cognitive development, Bruner’s cognitive constructivist learning theory, Festinger’s cognitive dissonance theory, Spiro’s cognitive flexibility theory, Sweller’s cognitive load theory, Vygotsky’s theory of social cognitive growth, and Tolman’s theory of sign learning (Nagowah & Nagowah, 2009). The premise of cognitivism is that new knowledge is built upon existing knowledge (Nagowah & Nagowah, 2009).

The final theory used in this study is the Connectivism Learning Theory. This newer learning theory is similar to Vygotsky’s social learning theory that helped form cognitivism but includes aspects of networking for the digital age (Duke, Harper, & Johnston, 2010). Developed by Siemens (2004) and Downes (2004), Duke et al. (2010) added, “Connectivism is characterized as a reflection of our society that is changing rapidly. Society is more complex, connected socially, globally, and mediated by increasing advancements in technology” (p. 6).
The aforementioned theories were selected to form the theoretical framework because of the overall assumption that the two leadership theories were needed to guide the leadership side of the study, as well as the two learning theories were needed for the specific research questions and overall theme of this study. The Transformational Leadership Theory was visible in various sources of the participants’ submitted data. In various sections that discussed the essential skills that a leader must possess when implementing change, many of the participants submitted that leaders must have a transformational leadership aspect in their skillset. Jace added, “Transformational leaders possess the innate ability to galvanize stakeholder support, communicate and inspire vision, challenge the process, and enable others to act while encouraging the heart” (personal communication with Jace, December, 2015). Perhaps one of the major reasons that transformational leadership is directly related to educational settings is the “focus on how administrators and teachers improve teaching. Transformational leaders focus on restructuring the school by improving school conditions” (Stewart, 2006, p. 4). Educational leaders must have a transformational aspect to their leadership that is able to be aware of the surroundings, calculate risks, cast vision, and enable followers to act toward a unified purpose (Gardiner, 2006). Transformational leaders are not simply effective managers or change agents. McKnight (2013) added, “For leaders to become transformational, they must have the ability to create a collective vision, act in a sense of oneness, be more authentic and engaged, and loosen authority and control” (p. 104). As stated, the participants clearly were cognizant of this style of leadership. Christopher added, “Transformational leaders must possess the innate ability to galvanize stakeholder support, communicate and inspire vision, challenge the process, and enable others to act while encouraging the heart” (personal communication with Christopher, November, 2015). The participants of this study are educational leaders, and it was apparent that
change likely would not have been as successful if these participants did not have abilities in transformational leadership.

The participants communicated many times that being a transformational leader, while extremely important, is not the only skill needed to effectively implement change. In the current culture, intrinsic motivation and enabling and empowering others to act is a large segment of the abilities an effective leader needs to enact change. Transcendental leadership “places considerable premium on the management of human relations and interactions in an organizational context. It has several variants and is at times referred to as visionary leadership” (Okomo-Okello, 2011, p. 2). Because the participants submitted data on the power of enabling others to act, empowering them, and casting vision, there were many tenets of transformational leadership, especially transcendental leadership, in each of their experiences dealing with change implementation, even when these leaders may not have realized this. When asked questions along this subject in the questionnaire, interview, or focus group, the participants generally submitted data that the best leadership style aligns with newer models of leadership such as transformational and transcendental leadership, which leans less on positional power and authority, and more on influence and enabling others to act. As the researcher in this study, I feel privileged that many of the participants were knowledgeable about various types of leadership style, and realize the benefits that these frameworks have with the landscape and culture of today’s workplace.

In considering the various aspects of this study, I felt that two theoretical frameworks dealing with leadership were needed. Change leadership is not easy, and because I was aware of many of the leadership abilities and skills of the participants and their locations, I knew that transformational and transcendental leadership theories were most aligned with this study. For
learning theories, depending on which aspect of the learning process is focused on, I could have applied many learning theories to this study. I chose the Cognitive Learning Theory and Connectivism Learning Theory to finalize the theoretical framework of this study. Cognitivism is built upon several theories that rely on the schema and the ability of an individual to reconstruct data and facts upon each other (Yilmaz, 2011). Cognitivism’s main emphasis is the active mental processing and building of schema on the part of the learner (Nagowah & Nagowah, 2009).

Cognitivism is a shift from behaviorism by considering “how the information is received, organized, stored, and retrieved by the mind” (Ertmer & Newby, 1993). In the cognitivism theory, learners actively rely on problem solving, concept formation, and information processing (Snelbecker, 1974), which are naturally elements of blended and online learning. Although researchers like Bonk and Graham (2006) and Nocols (2003) believe there is not a clearly defined theoretical model for blended learning, other researchers feel the blended learning model has matured and more clearly fits into previous and proven theoretical models. Hadjerrouit (2008) added, “If learners are able to understand the connections between concepts, break down information, and rebuild it with logical connections, then their understanding will increase” (p. 186). An alternative breakthrough educational model changes the learning process, and the overall educational paradigm relies on students taking more ownership of learning. A learning theory in which learning schema is stacked upon previous blocks of learning, as well as the information processing that is needed in breakthrough models like blended or online learning, is a learning theory that aligns with this study.

According to Bell (2010), the Connectivism Learning Theory is a theory for the networked and digital age. Even though the Connectivism Learning Theory includes tenets of behaviorism, constructivism, and cognitivism, this theory recognizes the paradigm shift in which
learners are more responsible for their own learning and when technological platforms are implemented into the learning process (Kop & Hill, 2008). Part of the Connectivism Learning Theory is relying on learning communities and their stored knowledge, and the aspect that “knowledge is distributed across an information network and can be stored in a variety of digital formats” (Kop & Hill, 2008, p. 2). In recognizing the value that technology, online adaptive platforms, and learning models like blended learning provide the students, the ability of the learners to connect to a network and find and share new information is a valuable part of the modern-day educational paradigm. Kop and Hill (2008) added, “One’s personal learning network is formed on the basis of how one’s connection to learning communities is organized by a learner” (p. 2).

Traversing through various learning networks will benefit the learner and, hopefully, the quality of the learning. The participants’ submitted data leaned on major aspects of this learning theory, and while unbeknownst to them, many have implemented models and educational paradigms that would add to the literature and credibility of this learning theory. There were no organized questions that the participants were asked that covered specific aspects of the theoretical models guiding this study. I would believe this is typical in many studies because unless the theoretical model is something that has recently been reviewed, it is not an area of knowledge most participants would be aware of. However, the participants were clearly working from foundational elements of transformational and transcendental leadership models.

What are the theoretical implications of this study? Is it possible for individuals to implement large-scale change with leaders ignoring popular change models, or without following certain elements of a leadership theoretical framework, or without utilizing the five themes discovered in this study? There is no special formula for a one-size-fits-all model; however, after
reviewing many implementations that followed the most popular change models, and reading and analyzing projects that are slightly similar to this study, there is much benefit in realizing a successful implementation when using strategies that have been proven to work by those that have implemented large-scale change. While there is a sufficient amount of literature on change leadership, change management theories, and alternative models of education like blended and online learning, there is minimal research, if any, on the actual successes and lived experiences of participants that have implemented alternative models of education like blended and online learning. Literature that is available does not necessarily answer the research questions because of the specificity of the questions. It was the goal of this study to analyze current literature, strategically formulate research questions, collect and analyze data, fill gaps in the literature related to this study, and add additional content to the body of literature in this field.

**Practical Implications**

The recommendations presented in the following pages are based on this study’s findings, results, and conclusions. Recommendations are provided for leaders who will act as change agents and will implement large-scale changes at their organization. Recommendations are also valuable for educational leaders who are implementing large-scale changes in the overall educational program or certainly for those educational leaders that are implementing alternative breakthrough models of learning like blended and online learning.

**The value of quality leadership.** Perhaps more than at any other time, quality leadership is paramount for the needs of today’s ever-changing culture. On the other hand, there seems to be a shortage of effective leaders. Experts suggest there is no shortage of talented, qualified leaders. Noted leadership experts, Kouzes and Posner (2016), added, “The shortage is a result of three primary factors: demographic shifts, insufficient training and experiences, and the prevailing
mindsets that discourage people from learning to lead” (Location No. 383). Information has been added to this study that details the many qualities needed for effective leadership. Additionally, the participants in this study added that formal training in leadership is needed to lead an organization effectively and to more successfully implement change. Many individuals in leadership positions are not being prepared properly with change knowledge or implementation. Because it is typically less expensive and less of a transition in leadership culture to develop in-house leadership, it is recommended that leaders develop leadership from within. Many experts recommend creating leadership development programs that may potentially help determine which individuals possess innate leadership abilities. Cloud (2010) added, “Leadership development is a formal and informal process that is intended to maximize institutional and individual effectiveness” (p. 74.) These individuals can be challenged with extra responsibility and given additional authority as their leadership skills mature.

Successful leaders identify common goals and then articulate the vision, communicate, and empower others to reach that goal. Darrow, Friend, and Powell (2013) added, “Leadership needs to occur at every level of an organization for successful implementation and adoption” (p. 19). Kouzes and Posner (2016) added, “Leadership is essential because it makes a significant difference in people’s levels of engagement, commitment, and performance. Developing your leadership capabilities will help you improve the way people around you feel about their workplace and promote more productive organizations” (Location No. 536). Smart leaders hire qualified people who are passionate about what they do. Today’s leader must be transformational and must have the innate ability to galvanize stakeholder support. An effective leader carefully, capably, purposefully, and strategically transforms and shifts the organizational culture. A successful leader leans on his strengths and delegates his weaknesses. Most of this study’s
participants stated that the leader does not have to be the expert in every area. Successful leaders are confident and not intimidated by team members who are creative, intelligent, and knowledgeable. Although content was submitted in Chapter Two detailing the many qualities of an effective leader, quality leaders should ultimately model the way, inspire and communicate the vision, and enable and empower others to assist with the leader’s overall vision and mission.

**Recommendations for enabling change.** Successful implementation of large-scale change demands strong, consistent, systematic, visible, and committed leadership throughout the implementation process. An effective leader “anticipates change, analyzes the internal and external environments, acts on the basis of appropriate and timely data and the strengths of team members, and affirms institutional actions with the goal of continuous organization development” (Cloud, 2010, p. 74). To initiate changes, leaders must be familiar with and knowledgeable about what is changed as well as how it is changed. Michael Fullan added, “Good ideas with no ideas on how to implement them are wasted ideas” (as cited in Scott, 2003, p. 66). Scott (2003) further stated that simply having a good idea regarding improving education will not itself make the change happen.

Quality change leadership principles must be utilized. If large-scale change is being implemented, many of the steps listed throughout this study would assist the organization in more successfully implementing change. The leaders must have knowledge about whatever change they are leading. Depending upon the size of the change, a popular change management structure may need to be studied and followed. Listed in this study are many of the popular change models, and organizations implement successful change by using these already-proven frameworks. Much research has been compiled on the effectiveness of using a proven model. After reviewing the main change models and the success that has been written by change agents
that have used these models, it is highly recommended that a change model be utilized when implementing major change.

Additionally, Kotter’s *Accelerate 8-Step Process for Leading Change* is the recommended change model to install into the implementation process as it encompasses many of the steps that relate to current organizational behavior. The eight steps are (a) create a sense of urgency, (b) build a guiding coalition, (c) form strategic vision and initiatives, (d) enlist a volunteer army, (e) enable action by removing barriers, (f) generate short-term wins, (g) sustain acceleration, and (h) institute change. While this may be overkill for the vast majority of organizations, some of these principles can be applied and taken from each of these eight steps to guide the change process, as well as provide some level of systematic and organized plan to keep all team members on the same page.

According to Connelly (2015), benefits of following a change model include: (a) forecasting, (b) measured results, (c) accountability, (d) increased confidence, (e) reduce resistance, (f) return on investment, (g) role clarification, and a (h) shared approach. Also, depending upon the complexity of the implementation, the participants stated the value that utilizing a pilot phase had in their change implementation process. Mike reinforced this idea and stated:

It is imperative, as with any change implementation, but especially when dealing with students and education, that we implemented a method to gain feedback from all of our stakeholders. We had to make sure that we were in constant communication with parents, students, and teachers and getting feedback from them on a regular basis. We wanted to hear what they thought was working, and if they had any questions to submit them and we would be open and honest with them as far as transparency, what we were doing
about their issue, and our future plans to address their concerns and ideas. (personal communication with Mike, November, 2015)

**The importance of stakeholder buy-in and support.** If a theme were integrated on some level into every participant’s submitted data, it would be that stakeholder buy-in, support, and quality communication are paramount to effectively implement change. Christopher added, “The buy-in piece is so important, that once it picks up momentum, stakeholders become more supportive, student attendance increases, student engagement increases, discipline issues are reduced, and a lot of those factors are seen only when the buy-in increases” (personal communication with Christopher, December, 2015). A vital component of the stakeholder process is engagement. Engagement and quality communication between all the internal and external stakeholders is paramount to the change process.

Another important aspect to enhance stakeholder buy-in is involvement. Stakeholders will always assume more interest and ownership in the change if they are given a chance to be involved in the implementation. While many lists state the main steps to implement stakeholder buy-in, included below are the steps to begin and increase stakeholder buy-in: (a) Identify all possible stakeholders, (b) organize the stakeholder list by their influence, (c) involve the stakeholders early in the project, (d) establish expectations for participation, and (e) communicate often the good as well as any bad (Battilana & Casciaro, 2012). Because engagement is such a key component of stakeholder buy-in, it is paramount that open communication among all stakeholders be a major part of the implementation process. Engaging with stakeholders increases the rate at which change is accepted and provides opportunities for new opinions and ideas to be submitted.
Recommendations for establishing alternative breakthrough models in education.

The majority of this study has dealt with studying the change leadership practices when large-scale change was implemented. The actual change that was utilized in this scenario was the schools that implemented breakthrough models of education like blended or online learning. A section in Chapter Three provides introductory information regarding the current best practices when implementing an alternative educational model. Before any type of implementation begins, many decisions must be made including the academic goals, funding, strategy and timeline, support, instructional models, platform and content selection, devices, staffing and development, data analytics, integration, professional development, tech support, assessment, communication, and many more (Digital Learning Now, 2013).

Oliver and Stallings (2014) added that educators wishing to implement blended learning models must address at least three broad considerations: (a) contextual considerations, (b) instructional strategy and teaching considerations, and (c) technology considerations. At the center of any alternative model is the flexibility that technology brings, allowing a student to depart from a one-size-fits-all approach to a more personalized approach (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). To strategize for this culture of change needed for implementing breakthrough models of education, it is imperative to research change leadership and to know which change models are most beneficial when implementing alternative models of education such as blended and online learning (iNACOL, 2013). Leadership must cast a vision for these changes, answer the questions of why, and present the need for the overall paradigm shift (Goodwin, Leveine, Marks, & Matsuoka, 2013). The leadership must carefully lay out the main elements for the planning and implementation of any new alternative breakthrough models in education and define specific areas such as: (a) leadership, (b) professional development, (c) teaching, (d) operations, (e)
content, and (f) technology (Darrow et al., 2013). There is minimal chance at a successful implementation unless proper leadership is in place.

Limitations

Limitations of this study refer to aspects that may impact the study’s results in a way that would affect the ability to generalize the study’s findings to a different and larger population beyond this study’s participants and research sites. Before and during this study, all possible delimitations and limitations of such a study were considered and addressed, especially during the data collection and data analysis process. Because of this understanding, the limitations of this study have been held to a minimum. While there are general limitations that exist with change leadership or with an alternative educational model like blended learning, specific limitations include: (a) the participants’ lack of familiarity and knowledge of general change leadership and change management principles, (b) the small number of participants, (c) the dependency on the extent and authenticity of the participants’ submitted data, (d) the uniqueness of the participants’ role, (e) the lack of research in what change leadership policies are needed to implement alternative models of education.

In the Participant Questionnaire, the vast majority of participants submitted data stating their overall lack of knowledge of change leadership and change management. The majority of participants seemed to have skills that would utilize the basic tenets that change leadership would encompass, but most were not familiar with the popular change management theories that are typically used when an organized change management process is implemented. A participant’s knowledge in this area would certainly impact the data submitted on the various data collection instruments that were related to change leadership and change management.

Although utilizing 10 participants is the accepted minimum for a phenomenological study
(Creswell, 2013), it is likely that using a greater number of participants would have enhanced the study. Because the participants’ geographical locations, job positions, and formal educational training were considered, many issues that generally stem from gender diversity, as well as small and large research sites, were considered before starting the research. However, additional participants may have increased the diversity of training and experience and could potentially have produced some level of variations in the submitted data.

In qualitative research, the researcher is the key instrument (Creswell, 2013). However, to a certain extent, the success of the study depends entirely upon the degree and the authenticity of the participants’ submitted data. None of the participants worked at the same location, so there were no internal employee-related factors that would have hindered the transparency of the data submitted. When utilizing qualitative research, the researcher must trust the participants and the data they submit, but on the other hand, the participants must trust that the researcher accurately depicts their stated information. To address confirmability, I utilized a technique called member checking. The participants completed a debriefing form detailing their approval or disapproval of the conclusions. Thankfully, the participants agreed that the final themes accurately depicted their submitted data.

A final limitation of this study is the lack of research in what change leadership policies are needed to implement alternative models of education. Compared to the numerous studies of blended learning within higher education communities, very little research exists on the effects of and issues related to alternative learning (Oliver & Stallings, 2014), as well on the leadership practices needed for K-12 schools to implement alternative breakthrough models of education. A third minor limitation is that it is still too early to know the impact of alternative models of education on the social lives of students, or to know if alternative models of education foster a
student’s desire for lifelong learning.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Implementing change requires knowledgeable, capable leaders who can successfully develop a plan to initiate the change. The following are some recommendations for future research on what change leadership practices are needed to implement alternative breakthrough models of education:

- Develop a study on the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of implementing change by researching the organizations that utilized a popular change model versus those that followed no organized structure for implementing change.
- Develop a study on the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of implementing change by researching the organizations that have hired professional change agents versus those that have handled the change leadership in-house.
- Develop a study comparing the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of implementing change in the following types of K-12 schools: public schools, private schools, charter schools, and virtual schools.
- Develop a study researching various schools of education and the importance they place on formally training students on change leadership.
- Develop a study researching various schools of education and the importance they place on formally training students on the advantages of personalized learning and alternative breakthrough models of education like blended and online learning.
- Develop a study to measure the effects that a leader’s experience and formal training have in successfully implementing large-scale change.
Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover what change leadership practices are utilized by educational leaders at selected K-12 schools when alternative breakthrough models in blended and online education are implemented. The data was collected from 10 participants using the following data collection instruments: (a) questionnaire, (b) one-on-one interviews, (c) analysis of artifacts used in change leadership and in the implementation of alternative models, and (d) focus group. To assist with data analysis, I used Moustakas’s Seven Steps as a tool to analyze the data, while the overall data analysis framework followed Schutz’s (1967) phenomenological reductionism; the reality of the data was neither confirmed nor denied initially. It is the bracketing of all opinion about the culture and perceived nature of the phenomenon under exploration as perceived by the participants (Schutz, 1967). The research questions were as follows:

- Central Question–What are the lived experiences of K-12 educational leaders who are implementing alternative breakthrough models of blended and online learning?
- Subquestion 1–What challenges do educational leaders face when implementing alternative breakthrough models such as blended and online learning?
- Subquestion 2–What role does leader preparation play in developing the skills and knowledge necessary to design and implement alternative breakthrough models such as blended and online learning?
- Subquestion 3–How did procedures and policies shape leaders’ experiences when implementing alternative breakthrough models such as blended and online learning?

The five themes discovered in the data analysis process were (a) Quality leadership skills are needed to design and effectively implement change; (b) the leader must be surrounded by
creative, intelligent, and knowledgeable team members to effectively implement change; (c) the change implementation can be strategically structured in various ways to effectively implement change; (d) stakeholder buy-in, support, and quality communication are paramount to effectively implement change; and (e) a quality implementation structure and overall infrastructure support are needed to effectively implement change. While the data that was discovered may not have provided new information when viewing a single theme, the process did confirm that when the five themes are present, large-scale change implementation involving alternative breakthrough models of education may have a more successful implementation if these themes are present. The leader must have experience, training, and skills to effectively implement change. The leader cannot implement change unless there is a knowledgeable, creative team working toward a common goal. Once a common goal and a plan are in place, creating quality and frequent communication as well as buy-in from stakeholders is vastly important. If blended education or any other alternative method enhances learning, if pedagogical standards are upheld, and if technology can provide some personalization and flexibility to enable students to learn at a higher level, then the possibilities of alternative models of education are limitless. To implement these alternative changes, sound change leadership practices must be utilized.
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A – Kotter’s Eight-Stage Accelerate Process for Leading Change

APPENDIX B – Jick’s 10-Step Tactical Model of Implementing Change

1. Analyze the organization and its need for change
2. Create a shared vision and common direction
3. Separate from the past
4. Create a sense of urgency
5. Support a strong leader role
6. Line up political sponsorships
7. Craft an implementation plan
8. Develop enabling structures
9. Communicate, involve people, and be honest
10. Reinforce and institutionalize the change

APPENDIX C – Lewin’s Three-Step Approach to Change Management

1. Step 1: Unfreezing - Lewin believed that the stability of human behavior was based on a quasi-stationary equilibrium supported by a complex field of driving and restraining forces. He argued that the equilibrium needs to be destabilized (unfrozen) before old behavior can be discarded (unlearned) and new behavior successfully adopted.

2. Step 2: Moving - Unfreezing is not an end in itself; it creates motivation to learn but does not necessarily control or predict the direction. This view that any attempt to predict or identify a specific outcome from planned change is very difficult because of the complexity of the forces concerned. Instead, one should seek to take into account all the forces at work and identify and evaluate, on a trial and error basis, all available options.

3. Step 3: Refreezing - This is the final step in the 3-Step model. Refreezing seeks to stabilize the group at a new quasi-stationary equilibrium in order to ensure that the new behaviors are relatively safe from regression. The main point about refreezing is that new behavior must be, to some degree, congruent with the rest of the behavior, personality and environment of the learner or it will simply lead to a new round of disconfirmation (Schein, 1996).

APPENDIX D – Bridges’s Transition Model

1. Step 1: Ending, Losing, and Letting Go
2. The Neutral Zone
3. The New Beginning

APPENDIX E – Liberty University IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

October 27, 2015

Jason Haas
IRB Approval 2235.102715: Change Leadership Practices for Effective Implementation of Alternative Breakthrough Models in Blended and Online Learning at Select K-12 Schools: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Jason,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

[Name]

The Graduate School

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APPENDIX F – Research Location Approval Letters

Liberty University
Institutional Review Board
1971 University Blvd
Lynchburg, VA 24515

Liberty University IRB:

[Redacted] leadership grants permission for [Redacted] to participate in the doctoral study conducted by Jason Haas as his fulfillment to earn a Doctor of Education at Liberty University.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me via telephone or email as indicated below.

Sincerely,

[Redacted]
Liberty University
Institutional Review Board
1971 University Blvd
Lynchburg, VA 24515

Liberty University IRB:

[Redacted] grants permission for [Redacted] to participate in the doctoral study conducted by Jason Haas as part of his fulfillment to earn a Doctor of Education at Liberty University.

Please let me know if I can assist further.

Sincerely,

[Redacted]
Liberty University
Institutional Review Board
1971 University Blvd
Lynchburg, VA 24515

Liberty University IRB:
[Redacted] leadership grants permission for [Redacted] to participate in the doctoral study conducted by Jason Haas as his fulfillment to earn a Doctor of Education at Liberty University.

Please let me know if I can assist further.

Sincerely,
[Redacted]
Liberty University
Institutional Review Board
1971 University Blvd
Lynchburg, VA 24515

Liberty University IRB:

...leadership grants permission to... and any other... leadership that choose to participate in the doctoral study conducted by Jason Haas as his fulfillment to earn a Doctor of Education at Liberty University.

Please let me know if we can assist further.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

[Name]
Liberty University
Institutional Review Board
1971 University Blvd
Lynchburg, VA 24515

October 21, 2015

Liberty University IRB:

[Redacted] grants permission for [Redacted] to participate in the doctoral study conducted by Jason Haas as part of his fulfillment to earn a Doctor of Education at Liberty University.

Please let me know if I can assist further.

Sincerely,
Liberty University
Institutional Review Board
1971 University Blvd
Lynchburg, VA 24515

Liberty University IRB:

[Name] grants permission for [Name] to participate in the doctoral study conducted by Jason Haas as part of his fulfillment to earn a Doctor of Education at Liberty University.

Please let me know if I can assist further.

Sincerely,
October 14, 2015

Liberty University
Institutional Review Board
1971 University Blvd
Lynchburg, VA 24515

Liberty University IRB:

The leadership of [Redacted] grants permission for [Redacted] to participate in the doctoral study conducted by Jason Haas as his fulfillment to earn a Doctor of Education at Liberty University.

Please let me know if I can assist further.

Serving Christ,

[Redacted]

Head of School
APPENDIX G – Participant Invitation Letter

To ______:

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study to discover what change leadership practices are utilized by educational leaders at selected K-12 schools when alternative breakthrough models in blended and online education are implemented. This study is being conducted as part of my Doctorate Degree in Educational Leadership and Management at Liberty University and will serve to fulfill my dissertation requirement.

You are invited to participate in this research study because several leaders in the change leadership and alternative learning field have recommended you and/or your school. They acknowledged the leadership you possess at your school as well as the experience you have in utilizing various change leadership practices when implementing alternative breakthrough models of K-12 education.

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire and participate in an interview with the researcher at a predetermined time. The questionnaire consists of 24 questions that cover areas related to the central research question as well as the subquestions. The questionnaire will utilize Survey Monkey® and will take approximately 25-35 minutes to complete.

The interview will focus on your feelings about and experiences with alternative models of education, especially as it relates to the implementation and the leadership practices that are
needed for this implementation. Your identity will be protected, as will the responses to your interview questions. The interviews will take place using web-conferencing software such as Skype for Business™. Each interview will last between 30-40 minutes. In case the interview takes longer than the proposed length, two interview sessions will be scheduled.

After the initial questionnaire and one-on-one interviews are administered, key leaders from each institution will be invited to participate in a focus group. The purpose is to gather a variety of perspectives and to increase the confidence and accuracy of the data on whatever themes may emerge. Both the interviews and the focus group will be conducted using web-conferencing technology.

In addition, the researcher will also need to review artifacts such as relevant documents that pertain to each school’s implementation of alternative models of education, as well as the training materials provided to principals and teachers. Analyzing the records, documents, artifacts, and any archived documents will present a rich source of information for the study.

Please note that participation in this study is completely voluntary and that all participants and their data will remain anonymous. There are no perceived risks involved with this study. There is no monetary compensation for participating in this study. The intrinsic benefits of participating in this study are the improvement of blended education programs and the determination of the change leadership practices needed to implement alternative breakthrough models of education.
If you have any questions, please contact me. **If you are interested in participating in this study, please complete the participant contact information intake form that is located here** by Tuesday, July 28. The interested individuals who complete the form will be sent a Participant Consent Form by August 5. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jason Haas
APPENDIX H – Participant Consent Form

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 10/27/15 to 10/26/16
Protocol # 2235.102715

Participant Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study to discover what change leadership practices are utilized by educational leaders at selected K-12 schools when alternative breakthrough models in blended and online education are implemented. This study is being conducted as part of my Doctorate Degree in Educational Leadership and Management at Liberty University and will serve to fulfill my dissertation requirement. In this study, the researcher will explore the change leadership practices that are used to implement alternative breakthrough models of K-12 education.

You are invited to participate in this research study because several leaders in the change leadership and alternative learning field have recommended you and/or your school. They acknowledged the leadership you possess at your school as well as the experience you have in utilizing various change leadership practices when implementing alternative breakthrough models of K-12 education.

Title of Study: Change Leadership Practices for Effective Implementation of Alternative Breakthrough Models in Blended and Online Learning at Select K-12 Schools: A Phenomenological Study

Principal Investigator’s Name: Jason S. Haas

Background Information: You are invited to participate in a qualitative study examining the change leadership practices utilized at selected K-12 schools when alternative breakthrough models in blended and online learning were effectively implemented.

This research is being conducted by Jason Haas, a doctoral candidate at the School of Education of Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact Mr. Haas at [contact information]

Research Procedures: As a participant in this study, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire and participate in an interview with the researcher at a predetermined time. The questionnaire consists of 24 questions that cover areas related to the central research question as well as the subquestions. The questionnaire will utilize Survey Monkey® and will take approximately 20-25 minutes to complete.

The interview will focus on your feelings about and experiences with alternative models of education, especially as it relates to the implementation and the leadership practices that are needed for this implementation. Your identity will be protected, as will the responses to your interview questions. The interviews will take place using web-conferencing software such as Skype for Business™. Each participant will be sent an invitation link to join the Skype for Business™ interview session. Each interview will last between 30-40 minutes. Each session will be recorded to allow the researcher to analyze the data. In case the interview takes longer than the proposed length, two interview sessions will be scheduled.

After the initial questionnaire and the one-on-one interviews are administered, key leaders from each institution will be invited to participate in a focus group. The purpose is to gather a variety of perspectives and to increase the confidence and accuracy of the data on whatever themes may emerge. The focus group will take place using web conferencing software such as Skype for Business™. Each participant will be sent an invitation link to join the Skype for Business™ interview session. The session will be recorded to allow the researcher to analyze the data. The focus group will last between 30-45 minutes.
Risks and Benefits of Participating in the Study: The risks involved are considered minimal risks, which is no more than one would encounter when going about everyday activities. The participants are not expected to receive a direct benefit.

Compensation: There is no monetary compensation for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: All participant data and information will be kept completely confidential, and all participants will be listed in the study using pseudonyms. This confidentiality ensures that all participant information is protected and that each participant will be given the freedom to share data concerning the lived experiences of the shared phenomenon being studied.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. You should be aware that you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with Liberty University or the researcher.

How to Withdraw from the Study: Although your participation in this study is extremely valuable to the researcher, there may be circumstances that would prevent you from continuing in this study. Please email your request to withdraw to [email protected], and I will respond within 24 hours with confirmation that your participation data has been deleted from the data repository.

If you have any questions about this study, please email me at [email protected]. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Russell Yocum, at [email protected].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [email protected].

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understand the procedures of this study. I hereby give my consent to participate in this study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Participant Name: ____________________________ Date: ______________
APPENDIX I – Questionnaire

Questionnaire Questions

Central Question - What are the lived experiences of K-12 educational leaders who are implementing alternative breakthrough models of blended and online learning?

Kotter (2012b) added that change leadership is the “style of leadership in which the leader identifies the needed change, creates the vision to guide through inspiration, and executes the change with the commitment of the members of the group” (p. 1).

Questions Regarding Change Leadership

1) Please describe any experiences or training you have had with change leadership.

2) What are the particular skills and knowledge leaders have had to rely on or develop in order to design and implement alternative models such as blended learning?

3) Did your school hire the services of a change management expert when implementing alternative models, or did the leadership handle this change in-house?
   a. If you handled the change management in-house, who was on the team and what was their position in the school?

4) Did the administration research popular change management theories?
   a. If so, which ones?
   b. If so, were any of these utilized in the implementation process?
5) What are the main change leadership practices that you feel were successful in your implementation of your alternative models of education?

6) What practices do you feel were unsuccessful?

7) Are there any areas of training that you feel could help you and/or your school’s staff to improve your school’s effectiveness?

8) What, if any, outside support and resources have you relied on to overcome the barriers you have encountered?
   a. In what ways did these resources help you?

9) What are the biggest challenges leaders have faced when implementing alternative breakthrough models such as blended and online learning?

10) Head of School or Department Principals Only – When hiring assistant principals and teachers, what particular skills and knowledge do leaders seek, and how do these desired qualifications differ from traditional public or private school leaders/teachers?

Questions Regarding Alternative Models of Education (Blended/Online Learning)

11) How long has this school been utilizing a blended learning model?

12) What initiated this school’s desire to research other models of education that leverage technology?

13) Do any of the school leaders or teachers have previous experience at a blended learning school?

14) In your opinion, how has the teaching process changed?

15) How has the role of the teacher changed?

16) Has there been any reluctance from the students, parents, or teachers?

17) How has the classroom setup changed to support the blended learning models?
18) Where have you obtained the funds to incorporate the blended learning models?

19) What tools and professional development have been made available to teachers?

20) Were any marketing materials used in communicating this change to the parents and students?

21) How is teaching observed and evaluated?

22) What learning management system platform does your school utilize?

23) How well do you think your school will be able to leverage new technologies in the future? What, if any, shortcomings do you anticipate?

24) What additional resources do administrators state are needed to most effectively implement blended and online learning?
APPENDIX J – Open-Ended Interview Questions – Part I

Semi-Structured Open-Ended Interview Questions

Section 1 Related to subquestion 1

*What challenges do educational leaders face when implementing alternative breakthrough models such as blended and online learning?*

Section 2 Related to subquestion 2

*What role does leader preparation play in developing the skills and knowledge necessary to design and implement alternative breakthrough models such as blended and online learning?*

Introduction Information

1) Please state your full name and your position at your school/organization.

2) How long have you been employed at your school/organization?

3) Please describe all of your formal education as well as other experience and training opportunities specific to your work.

Section 1 Questions:

4) In general, what are the biggest challenges educational leaders have experienced when implementing alternative breakthrough models such as blended and online learning?

5) What have been the biggest challenges related to using instructional technology?

Section 2 Questions:

6) What leadership skills and knowledge have you and other leaders relied on most heavily when implementing alternative models such as blended and online learning?
7) In what areas did you and other leaders feel inadequately prepared when implementing these alternative models such as blended and online learning?

8) What is your current role in overseeing the continued success of these alternative breakthrough models at your school?
APPENDIX K – Open-Ended Interview Questions – Part II

Section 3 Related to subquestion 3

*How did procedures and policies shape leaders’ experiences when implementing alternative breakthrough models such as blended and online learning?*

*Section 3 Questions:*

9) What implementation procedures and policies do K-12 educational leaders discover were most effective when implementing alternative breakthrough models such as blended and online learning?

10) What kinds of skills and backgrounds does the school seek when it hires its leaders?

11) How difficult is it for the school to find qualified individuals to fulfill the school’s leadership roles? How does the school go about recruiting its educational leaders?

12) How well do you think educational leadership training and administrative credentialing programs are preparing future school leaders to start and operate technology-driven and student-centered schools like yours?

13) Does your school use any internal or external professional development activities to train your teachers and staff on how to best leverage instructional technology? If so, what are the main topics covered?

14) What resources do you feel are most important for educational leaders to most effectively implement as well as successfully continue alternative breakthrough models such as blended and online learning?
15) Is there anything else about blended or online learning, or any part regarding leadership and implementation that you’d like to mention that is specific to your location that I have not asked?
APPENDIX L – Focus Group Discussion Prompts

1. Discussion Prompt 1 – What are the main ways that educational leaders overcome challenges when designing and implementing large change initiatives such as blended and online learning?

2. Discussion Prompt 2 - What role do leadership preparation and change knowledge play in developing the skills and expertise necessary to execute the change needed to design and implement alternative breakthrough models such as blended and online learning?

3. Discussion Prompt 3 - Have you ever had to implement significant change in a scenario in which the stakeholder buy-in was non-existent or minimal and the only tool was to sell/evangelize the change? How did you approach the situation? What did you learn as a result?

4. Discussion Prompt 4 - In leading major change initiatives, how have you overcome the natural tendency of most people to resist change?
APPENDIX M – Debriefing Statement for Member Checking

Thank you for participating in this study regarding the change leadership practices needed to effectively implement alternative breakthrough models in blended and online learning. This debriefing document serves to share with you the major results of the study. For this purpose, the results from the participants’ data will be given in the form of themes and codes. Additionally, this debriefing document serves to increase the trustworthiness of this research by allowing you the opportunity to review the codes and final themes of this study and indicate your level of agreement with these conclusions.

The next several statements will summarize the themes and open codes that were identified from the combined data of each participant during the data analysis. For each statement, please indicate your level of agreement with the validity of the identified theme. You may also use the space provided to make any notes about each identified theme.

1. Theme - Quality leadership skills are needed to design and effectively implement change
   a. Effective, transformational leaders possess the innate ability to galvanize stakeholder support
   b. Change leadership requires that the leader carefully, capably, purposely, and strategically transform and move the organizational culture
   c. Change leadership requires that leaders have skills such as patience, flexibility, innovation, vision, creativity, passion, and motivation
   d. Leaders must have knowledge about whatever change they are changing/leading
I agree that this theme and its corresponding codes are a sensible conclusion, considering my knowledge of the research topic.

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My comments about the theme and its corresponding codes, if any:

2. Theme – The leader must be surrounded by creative, intelligent, and knowledgeable team members to effectively implement change
   a. It is imperative that the leader's team develops relationships with all stakeholders and especially have a heart and passion for kids
   b. The leader must surround himself/herself with others who are knowledgeable, collaborators, lifelong learners, and who complement the leader’s skill set
   c. Team must be detailed-oriented but also able to see the big picture (vision)
   d. Leaders/team members are groomed from within
   e. Leaders/team members are selected from the outside
I agree that this theme and its corresponding codes are a sensible conclusion, considering my knowledge of the research topic.

Strongly Agree  Agree   Disagree  Strongly Disagree

My comments about the theme and its corresponding codes, if any:

3. Theme – The change implementation process can be strategically structured in various ways to effectively implement change
   a. The change implementation was handled in-house, and our team researched and studied aspects of change management
   b. The change implementation was handled in-house, and our team did not research or study aspects of change management or utilize any outside resources/consultants
   c. The change implementation was handled in-house, and our organization brought in several consultants to help guide the process
d. Leaders are not being prepared properly with change knowledge or expertise to operate technology-driven schools in formal graduate training or administrative credentialing programs

I agree that this theme and its corresponding codes are a sensible conclusion, considering my knowledge of the research topic.

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My comments about the theme and its corresponding codes, if any:

4. Theme – Stakeholder buy-in, support, and quality communication are paramount to effectively implement change
   
a. Communication with all stakeholders is required
   
b. Buy-in with all stakeholders is paramount
   
c. Effective change takes time. Stakeholders must be given time to adopt to the change and adjust to the culture shift. There will be resistance to change.
I agree that this theme and its corresponding codes are a sensible conclusion, considering my knowledge of the research topic.

**Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree**

My comments about the theme and its corresponding codes, if any:

5. Theme – A quality implementation structure and overall infrastructure support are needed to effectively implement change
   a. Effective change requires quality professional development
   b. Utilized a pilot phase
   c. Manage expectations and understand the dynamics of change
   d. Stakeholders must be given time to adopt the change. There will be resistance to change. Must have an understanding of the culture
   e. Infrastructure support/preparedness
   f. Administrators and team leaders must not have the wrong goal or wrong focus
I agree that this theme and its corresponding codes are a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

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My comments about the theme and its corresponding codes, if any:


