

ONWARD AND UPWARD: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF SCHOOL LEADERS  
AS THEY PREPARE TO LEAD AND MANAGE CHANGE

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of school leaders as they develop their capacity to lead and manage change. The central research question that guided this study is: What are the experiences of school leaders in Virginia as they develop their capacity to lead and manage change? The theoretical framework that guided this study was Mezirow's theory of transformative learning as it applies to how school leaders incorporate new learning about how to lead and manage change with their own experiences and understandings. The design was a transcendental phenomenological study of school leaders in Virginia who have completed a state-approved program in administration and supervision and hold an endorsement in administration and supervision. Data were collected through rich interviews with participants, letters of advice, and focus groups. Responses were coded and analyzed to generate themes from the data and identify common experiences. Twelve themes emerged from the data: (a) knowability, (b) leadership, (c) practical value, (d) experience, (e) mindset, (f) mentors, (g) professional development, (h) communication, (i) trust, (j) clarity, (k) competency, and (l) feedback. The themes fell into three categories: perceptions about ASPs, training, and effective behaviors. The study findings are discussed, along with limitations of the study, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

*Keywords:* change management, school leaders, leadership preparation, theory of transformative learning

**Copyright Page**

## Dedication

This manuscript is dedicated to my precious family. To Dan, you are my rock. Without you, I could not have done this. Thank you for leading our family and for being behind me and beside me every step of the way. I love you. To JJ and Katie, you are my joy. I'm looking forward to more hikes, more movies, and more games. Thank you for your endurance of the many hours I have spent in research and writing. Don't be afraid of challenges. You have the strength, perseverance, and grit to take it on.

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“For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever,  
and his faithfulness to all generations.” Psalm 100:5 (ESV)

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### **List of Abbreviations**

Administration and Supervision Program (ASP)

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)

Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement (ADKAR)

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

Institut Aminuddin Baki (IAB)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Interstate Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC)

Master of Business Administration (MBA)

National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA)

Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL)

School Leaders Licensure Assessment (SLLA)

School Leadership Competency Model (SLCM)

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

Change is part of any organization, and leading change can be a challenge. Schools face external change factors such as new legislation, trends in technology, and changes in best practices in response to ongoing research. Schools also face internal change factors such as fluctuations in budgets, changes in personnel, and shifts in stakeholder expectations. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of school leaders as they develop their capacity to lead and manage change. The study is significant and holds empirical, practical, and theoretical implications, and will offer insight into the experiences of school leaders and how they have prepared to lead change. Training is a key element in increasing organizational capacity for change (Jurisch, Ikas, Wolf, & Krcmar, 2014). Impactful research and best practices for change management training specifically for school leaders are not widely implemented in school leader preparation programs. Lambrechts, Verhulst, and Rymenams (2017) recommended that school leaders must first increase their awareness of change processes before they can acquire the resources and tools needed to implement change effectively. The chapter provides a background of the problem and the context for the study. It describes the problem and purpose of the study along with the significance of the study. The chapter presents the research questions that frame the study and concludes with definitions relevant to the study.

### **Background**

Organizations are human systems, and the success of change “lies in the willingness of its members to support the changes” (Hechanova, Caringal-Go, & Magsaysay, 2018, p. 915). Leaders must change the way they think, believe, and behave in order for organizations to be

able to change in meaningful ways (Jones & Van de Ven, 2016). Often, change presents challenges and difficulties to those planning and implementing change as well as to those experiencing change. Obstacles to change include lack of communication, previous experiences of the change recipients, natural resistance to change, a lack of trust between leaders and employees, and a lack of preparation on the part of the leader (Blanca & Ramona, 2016; Dashborough, Lamb, & Suseno, 2015). The training of the change leader is one of the most significant aspects of change management to minimize resistance to change (Jurisch et al., 2014). The most significant deficiency in the current literature is the lack of application to education. Most of the studies regarding change management have been in the context of business organizations. Magsaysay and Hechanova (2017) recommended that parallel studies on change management could be conducted in nonbusiness organizations, anticipating that many of the principles would translate.

### **Historical Context**

Change leadership has been studied extensively in the business world, but to a lesser degree in the context of education (Fullan, 2016; Kin & Kareem, 2018a; Moore, 2009). Barrett, Gaskins, and Haug (2019) suggested successful models of change would translate to similar positive outcomes in education. Since 1947 and the emergence of Lewin's three-step model of change, change management literature has expanded, offering multiple models of change management. Kotter (1996) is a current leader in the field whose eight-step model was built upon Lewin's work. Al-Haddad and Kotnour (2015) examined six approaches to change, including Lewin's model, the Judson method, the Jick Kanter method, Kotter's method, Luecke's method, and the insurrection methods. They concluded that the specific approach used is less important than the fact that *an* approach is used. Any of the approaches could be used

depending on the context and needs of the organization. As long as organizations were intentional about planning for change and had a strategy for accommodating potential problems throughout the change process and minimizing barriers to change, the specific change strategy was not a significant factor in the overall success. This finding suggests that change management models could be easily adapted to other fields, such as education.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2009) held that education is entirely about change and acknowledged the great difficulties associated with leading change. In the field of education, leaders must also contend with ever-evolving reforms and initiatives brought about through legislation and frequent teacher burnout, which compounds the difficulties of change.

### **Social Context**

Lambrechts et al. (2017) discovered as school leaders become more aware of change processes, they are able to develop a greater capacity for leading change. School leaders preparing to lead change efforts must consider school culture (Valoyes-Chaves, 2019). Change recipients who appear to be resistant may be seeking to find meaning in their role rather than actually resisting the change itself. Leaders must also ensure that a relationship built on trust is established and cultivated (Blanca & Ramona, 2016). The success of change initiatives is inextricably linked to the training and preparation of the leader to manage such endeavors.

### **Theoretical Context**

Wetzel and Van Gorp (2014) suggested that most models of change management literature focus on cognitive, learning, discursive, and neo-institutional theories and that most organizational change research struggles with transforming organizational theory into specific applications. Leaders who understand various models of change management can select a model or a process that is compatible with their organization or unique culture.

Lewin (1947) described change as “unfreezing the present, moving to the new level and freezing group life on the new level” (p. 330). Lewin’s model, in conjunction with his work on group dynamics, provided a long-used, if somewhat narrow, approach to change processes and is often considered the seminal work on change theory. Lippitt’s phases of change (Lippitt, Watson, & Westley, 1958) is an extension of Lewin’s three-step model. Lippitt focused on the practical application of change theory. The focus on the change agent dovetails suitably with the focus on school leaders as change agents and their necessary preparation to implement change effectively. Kotter (1996) built upon existing change management theory to become one of the most prominent voices in the field. Kotter emphasized the importance of a strategic change model and the necessity of leadership. Kotter’s model is as much about leadership as it is about a model of change. Since change is a human process, high-quality leadership is essential for its success.

Mezirow’s (1997) theory of transformative learning focuses on changing the frame of reference, “the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences” (p. 5). A frame of reference involves cognitive, conative, and emotional aspects, and—once it is set—it can be difficult to allow ideas that do not fit one’s preconception. Mezirow (1997) applied his theory of transformative learning specifically to adult learning. New information should be incorporated by learners into their frame of reference by examining the new learning and challenging previously held assumptions, all through the lens of their own experiences.

### **Situation to Self**

Like most people, I have experienced change initiatives in several different contexts. I have been the recipient of change in a role that has little say or contribution to the change process, other than to experience it. I have also participated in change initiatives and have had a

voice in the process. Even if I could not influence the change itself, I could shape the manner in which it was implemented. I have also initiated and led change efforts. In all of those roles, I have seen change initiatives that have been implemented well and those that have not. I have resisted change at times and embraced it at other times. After every change effort, I learned more about what to do and what not to do. In my own experience, I have learned that communicating why change is occurring is equally, if not more important than how it will occur. I have learned many of these lessons through my own experiences and observing the experiences of others. Experience can be a painful teacher, and I wanted a better way to implement change more intentionally and strategically. My goal is to bring attention to the process of change management and to prompt more discussion and research for this important concept in a way that applies specifically to school leaders.

During my Master of Business Administration (MBA) program, I took a course in Leading Organizational Change. I also took courses in communication and understanding how people engage with organizations and one another. I found myself, as a school administrator, drawing on these courses more than the courses I took in my administration and supervision program (ASP). When I found books to read about change processes, they were classified as business books. Why could I not find similar content for school leaders? Why did change management seem to be overlooked in education? Even though many schools may not have the same autonomy as businesses to initiate change efforts, school leaders are certainly responsible for implementing and shaping change initiatives. I saw this as an area that would benefit from further study. Change management is intertwined with general leadership principles like clarity and communication, but because it is so important and so vital to the overall success of an

organization, change management should have its own individual focus and should be specifically addressed within the context of education.

Most recently, this topic became even more relevant to me, and to many other school leaders, during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Many schools shut down virtually overnight and our team shifted from residential learning to distance learning in a matter of days. Implementing a huge transition like that was unlike anything I have experienced during my career in education. We launched programs, built infrastructure, trained teachers, and communicated with stakeholders in an unbelievably short amount of time. Schools all over the United States had varying responses and varying degrees of success with their school solutions. Although this modification was truly a crisis change, the principles of effective change management remained the same. The pandemic revealed the need for school leaders to be prepared with effective models and systems. School leaders must be prepared to lead and manage change before a crisis occurs to lead effectively during a crisis.

I bring my own philosophical assumptions to my study, which influence my motivation for and approach to research. My ontological assumptions that reality can be viewed through multiple perspectives influenced my research approach since a transcendental phenomenological approach considers multiple viewpoints. My epistemological assumptions influence the way that I verify knowledge, particularly the data from my participants. By coding and looking for themes, I will be able to identify elements that transcend individual experiences or opinions. My axiological assumptions influence my motivation for research, which is to equip school leaders to be more effective, and ultimately to improve student success. Because I believe in the inherent value of people, my study is specifically intended to help and support school leaders,

teachers, students, and families. My methodological assumptions impact my research process and give greater importance to ethical considerations.

The paradigm that will guide the study is social constructivism. Social constructivism is an interpretative framework in which “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” and develop meaning from their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 24). Meanings are formed through discussions interaction with others, which is appropriate for my study since the data collection methods feature engagement and interaction. Social constructivism provides a framework for the researcher to interpret the meanings of the experiences of others.

### **Problem Statement**

Every industry experiences change. Bridges (2004) described America as having a “change-dependent economy and a culture that celebrates creativity and innovation” (p. 79). Organizational change initiatives have limited success, with an estimated 70% of all change initiatives failing or falling short of meeting expectations (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015; Kotter, 2017; Page & Schoder, 2019; Washington & Hacker, 2005). Leaders who are considered to be change novices have a significantly low rate of success in change initiatives (IBM Institute for Business Value, 2014). Schools experience similar challenges in relation to change initiatives that other organizations do and face many of the same obstacles to successful change initiatives, such as poor communication, unclear goals, change fatigue, and a lack of training (Aleixo, Leal, & Azeiteriro, 2016; Barrett et al., 2019; Hargreaves, 2009). The success of change initiatives is closely tied to the experience and capacity of the leader.

Change initiatives fail for a variety of reasons. Blanca and Ramona (2016) consider organizational cynicism, or negative attitudes toward the organization, damaging to change

initiatives. Organizational cynicism is often the result of a lack of trust between the employee and the organization. Attaran (2000) attributed the failure of change initiatives to a lack of proper training and the failure to cope with people's resistance to change. Choi (2011) concluded the causes of many organizations' failures with change initiatives were implementation failures, rather than innate flaws in the change initiative itself. Kotter (1996), a leader in change management research and practice, suggested that most organizations can significantly improve at an acceptable cost, but leaders often make mistakes in leading change because they are not prepared for the challenge. Leaders struggle to manage change effectively, impacting the success of new programs and initiatives, which impedes the overall success of the organization. The problem that this study sought to investigate is to learn why school leaders have difficulty in leading and managing change effectively.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of school leaders in Virginia as they develop their capacity to lead and manage change. Change management will be generally defined as a structured and strategic approach to implementing change initiatives successfully. The theory that guided the study was Mezirow's (1997) theory of transformative learning as it applies to how school leaders incorporate new learning about how to lead and manage change with their own experiences and understandings. In the context of adult learning, "aha moments" of insight and realization are more likely to occur when learners are more actively engaged in content they see as specifically relevant to their needs.

## **Significance of the Study**

This transcendental phenomenological study was significant because it had empirical, practical, and theoretical implications. The study will add to the literature and support the efforts of K-12 school leaders and the universities that prepare them.

### **Empirical Significance**

This study had empirical significance in that other studies have not examined the preparation of K-12 school leaders through their state-approved ASP to lead and implement change. More and more, principals are the primary change agents in implementing initiatives from federal, state, and local levels; however, many school leaders are not prepared to lead change effectively (Fullan, 2016; Hall & Hord, 2001; Kin & Kareem, 2018a; Pettigrew, Woodman, & Cameron, 2001). Most school leaders come up through the ranks as teachers and lead teachers before becoming principals (Devi & Fernandes, 2019). The experiences leaders have during their careers shape and influence their ideas about leading change, but this does not provide sufficient preparation for managing change effectively. Most ASP do not include explicit training in leading change. One of the primary reasons for failure in change efforts is a lack of training (Jurisch et al., 2014; Kotter, 1996; Lambrechts et al., 2017). This study can inform training efforts for school leaders in the area of change management. If school leaders do not receive training in change management through their ASP, then individual schools, districts, or other organizations can use the information in this study to create professional development opportunities for school leaders.

### **Practical Significance**

The study also held practical significance. The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) (2015), a group of prominent professional organizations committed to

school leadership, established the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL). The PSEL standards were updated in 2015 and were formerly known as the Interstate Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards. The PSEL performance expectations provide the foundation of the School Leaders Licensure Assessment (SLLA), which is required for an administration and supervision endorsement in Virginia. The performance expectations include the most important skills and concepts for school leaders, such as mission, goals, collaboration, and ethics. Leading change is not explicitly included in the standards, yet all administrators play a role in the change process and would benefit from strategic preparation in change management. By understanding the experiences of school leaders in their preparation to lead change, universities are better able to incorporate learning experiences that will support change management understanding. As school leaders think more about their preparation programs and their current needs as change leaders, they can begin to identify strategies that work and areas that present opportunities for growth.

The Institut Aminuddin Baki (IAB) (2012), the leading body in designing courses for principals in Malaysia, developed the School Leadership Competency Model (SLCM), which is comparable to the ISLLC (now PSEL) standards in the United States. The SLCM has 26 competencies categorized into six dimensions: policy and direction, instructional and achievement, managing change and innovation, resources and operation, people and relationships, and personal effectiveness. Managing change is specifically included as a standard in the SLCM, but not in the PSEL standards, although the concept is critical in all counties and educational systems. Malaysia has taken change leadership even further. In addition to including managing change in the SLCM, they also established the National Professional Qualification for Educational Leaders to prepare school leaders to lead school change effectively

“instead of just implementing system policies and rules, school leaders [in Malaysia] were now being trained towards supporting and developing the organization’s capacity for change and continuous improvement” (Kin & Kareem, 2018b, p. 4). In Australia, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) developed standards for school leaders explicitly including leading and managing change (Fullan, 2016). All school leaders will be involved in change efforts and would benefit from training to develop their understanding of the change process and the skills necessary to implement success change initiatives.

### **Theoretical Significance**

Finally, the study had theoretical implications as well. Current change management literature is based upon the work of Lewin (1947) and his three-step model of freezing, unfreezing, and refreezing. Kotter (1996) built upon this work by developing an eight-step model for change leaders to follow. The study can further extend their work by applying it to a new context of education. The study can also validate the theoretical work of Mezirow (1997) and transformative learning. School leaders in administration and supervision programs are adult learners and learn most effectively through active engagement in relevant content which results in moments of insight and realization.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of school leaders in Virginia as they develop their capacity to lead and manage change effectively. One overarching central research question and three sub-questions directed the study. The central research question is as follows:

**Central Research Question**

What are the experiences of school leaders in Virginia as they develop their capacity to lead and manage change?

Change is difficult in every industry and people have a natural resistance to change (Barrett et al., 2019). Change initiatives are often unsuccessful (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015). Organizations that give consideration to the process of change are better able to implement change (Kotter, 1996). Because licensed school leaders in Virginia complete a state-approved preparation program and complete the SLLA, there is some consistency among how school leaders are prepared in Virginia, providing an ideal setting to study their experiences as they develop their capacity for change management.

**Sub-Question One**

What are school leaders' perceptions about what they learned in their administration and supervision programs to prepare them to lead and manage change?

Kotter (1996), a prominent leader in change management theory, suggested that leaders often make mistakes in change management because they are not adequately prepared. Change leadership is not explicitly included in the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (NPBEA, 2015) that guide much of school leadership preparation. School leaders may be able to draw conclusions about strategies and behaviors, but they would benefit from greater strategic preparation. In order to understand fully the experiences of school leaders in developing their capacity to manage change, it must be understood how school leaders are currently prepared.

**Sub-Question Two**

Since school leaders are likely to refine their perspectives as they gain experience and their assumptions are challenged, how do they describe their training to lead and manage change?

Mezirow's (1997) theory of transformative learning calls a frame of reference "the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences" (p. 5). School leaders would have interpreted their learning about change management in one way during their preparation program, but frames of reference can be changed and developed as assumptions are challenged and experiences change. Once school leaders have experience in leadership, they are likely to view change management learning differently than they did during their program. Looking backwards with a greater understanding of what they needed to be prepared for, do school leaders feel they were adequately prepared to lead and manage change?

**Sub-Question Three**

What kinds of behaviors have supported their efforts to lead and manage change more effectively?

The behavior of the leader has a significant impact on the success of the change effort (Kotter, 1996; Vos & Rupert, 2018). School leaders can improve their success in change initiatives by continuing to develop their leadership capacity and behavioral integrity. Simons, Leory, Collewaert, and Masschelein (2015) described behavioral integrity as a sense of wholeness and congruence between leaders' words and deeds, or at least of the perception of such. Behavioral integrity builds trust and can help overcome resistance to change. Because the school setting is a different context than what is most often studied in the literature, understanding specific behaviors that build trust can lead to strategies that best support change

efforts. Identifying these behaviors can also help to fill the gap in the research by illuminating possible differences or similarities between the business world and the school setting.

### **Definitions**

In order to facilitate understanding for the reader, definitions used throughout the study are provided:

1. *Administration and Supervision Program* – In Virginia and many other states, school leaders must complete a state-approved administration and supervision program as one requirement in gaining licensure for school leadership (Licensure Regulations for School Personnel, § 8VAC20-23-620, 2018).
2. *Change Management* – Structured and strategic approach to implementing change initiatives successfully. Change management involves the “application of knowledge, resources, and tools that can be used to leverage the benefits of change” (Al-Ali, Singh, Al-Nahyan, & Sohal, 2017, p. 727).
3. *Transformative Learning* – Mezirow’s (1997) theory of transformative learning focuses on the “structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences” (p. 5). The theory of transformative learning describes adult learning and the process of actively incorporating new information into an established frame of reference through discovery learning.

### **Summary**

Schools, like all other organizations, experience the challenges of managing change. By better understanding change processes, school leaders can increase their skills and abilities in implementing change effectively. This study sought to understand the experiences of school leaders as they develop their capacity to lead and manage change. In chapter one, the problem

and purpose statement were explained. The guiding theory for the study was Mezirow's (1997) theory transformative learning. The chapter gave a brief overview of the literature, demonstrating the necessity for all leaders to be prepared for change management and the importance of an organizational emphasis on change management (Kotter, 1996). The central research question and the sub-questions were described. By understanding the current experiences of school leaders, the leaders, and the universities that prepare them, can bridge the gap between the wealth of change management research and the needs of school leaders to implement change more effectively.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

A thorough review of the research was conducted to identify studies that explore change management and its role within K-12 school leadership preparation programs. This chapter will provide a background on the existing literature as it pertains to change management and leadership preparation. The first section will explore the selected theories as a framework for interpreting change management literature. The second section will synthesize the recent literature related to change management. Finally, the review will consider change management within the context of K-12 education and school leadership preparation programs. After reviewing the literature, a gap will emerge. A specific area of need for additional research in change management research for this study will become evident.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Several models of change have influenced change theory and have shaped the way change management has been implemented. Although current change models have been revised and expanded since their inception, the influence of the foundational models and theorists is still evident. Lewin (1947) and Lippitt et al. (1958) laid the foundation for change theory as some of the early researchers. Kotter (1996) continues to be a leader in the field of change management. The application of change management theory to the field of education can best be viewed through the lens of Mezirow's (1997) theory of transformational learning. School leaders do not begin leading change in a vacuum, but rather build upon previous experiences and previous learning. Mezirow's (1997) theory underpins the preparation of school leaders as they learn to lead and manage change.

## Foundational Theories

Lewin's three-step model of change has influenced change theory since he first wrote about his theory in 1947. Lewin (1947) described the change as "unfreezing the present, moving to the new level and freezing group life on the new level" (p. 330). Lewin's model, in conjunction with his work on group dynamics, provides a long-used, if somewhat narrow, approach to change processes and is often considered the seminal work on change theory. Much of the current literature is built upon Lewin's model, either confirming it, contradicting it, or expanding upon it (Kin, Kareem, Nordin, & Bing, 2018; Page & Schoder, 2019). Lewin's model applies to individuals and teams. Hayes (2002) supported Lewin's model and described the "balance of driving forces and restraining forces that impact change. Leaders can work to increase or decrease these forces to move change in the right direction" (p. 96). The model works through the willingness, acceptance, or anticipation of change, the actual change, and then the settling as equilibrium is achieved again. Deutschman (2007) created a similar model that builds on Lewin's work. Deutschman held that transition always reveals the same three phases—relate, repeat, and reframe, which require new hope, new skills, and new thinking.

Lippitt's phases of change are an extension of Lewin's three-step model. In Lewin's (1947) model, the primary focus was the change itself while Lippitt shifts the focus to the change agent. The capacity of the change agent becomes significant in the change process. Lippitt et al. (1958) expanded the process of change: (a) diagnose the problem; (b) assess the motivation and capacity for change; (c) assess the motivation and resources of the change agent; (d) develop action plans; (e) create clear roles for change agents; (f) maintain communication, feedback, and coordination; and (g) withdraw the change agent over time. Lippitt et al. (1958) wrote, "It is the role of the change agent who offers help in the areas of human relations or problem solving to act

as both a resource and a catalyst” (p. 63). Lippitt et al. (1958) focused on the practical application of theory and developed the phases of change theory to improve the practical application of change theory. The focus on the change agent dovetails suitably with the focus on school leaders as change agents and their necessary preparation to implement change effectively.

Kotter (1996) built upon existing change management theory to become one of the most prominent voices in the field. Kotter (1996) described useful change as that which is “associated with a multi-step process that creates power and motivation sufficient to overwhelm all the sources of inertia” (p. 22). Kotter also maintained that the success of change management is inextricably linked to high-quality leadership. Kotter’s model is an eight-stage process of creating change: (a) establishing a sense of urgency, (b) creating the guiding coalition, (c) developing a vision and strategy, (d) communicating the vision, (e) empowering broad-based action, (f) generating short-term wins, (g) consolidating gains and producing more change, and (h) anchoring new approaches in the culture. Smaller change projects may be contained within the larger change initiative and may go through small scale processes of Kotter’s model. Overall, each step, in order, is important for the success of the change initiative. Kotter emphasized the importance of understanding the change model and the necessity of leadership. Kotter’s model is as much about leadership as it is about a model of change. Kotter’s model developed the tension between “doing things right” and “doing the right things” (Hayes, 2002, p. 108). Leaders must decide what needs to be done, help people develop the capacity to do it, and ensure that it is done (Hayes, 2002). Since change is such a human process, high quality leadership is essential for an effective process.

## **Transformative Learning**

Mezirow (2005) developed his theory of transformative learning in the late 1970s, building on ideas from Freire, Kuhn, and Gould. He also incorporated concepts of philosophers Habermas, Siegal, and Fingerette, and of key figures from the women's movement. Mezirow's own observations of adults returning to college informed his theory. Mezirow's (1997) theory of transformative learning focuses on changing the frame of reference, "the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences" (p. 5). A frame of reference involves cognitive, conative, and emotional aspects and—once it is set—it can be difficult to allow ideas that do not fit one's preconceptions. Mezirow clarifies that frames of reference are less about points of view than habits of mind. Points of view are more easily changed based on the content or processes that are needed to modify assumptions. Mezirow (1997) explained how transformation occurs:

We transform our frames of reference through critical reflection on the assumptions upon which our interpretations, beliefs, and habits of mind or points of view are based. We can become critically reflective of the assumption we or others make when we learn to solve problems instrumentally or when we are involved in communicative learning. (p. 7)

The goal of transformative learning is to transform frames of reference to be more "inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change" so that beliefs and opinions that guide actions become more justified and more refined (Mezirow, 2005, p. 26). Transformative learning is "a metacognitive epistemology of evidential (instrumental) and dialogical (communicative) reasoning" (Mezirow, 2005, p. 27). Using reason and dialogue can change the way adults come to conclusions about how they think about what they know. Transformations can be sudden major reorientations, often the result of a life crisis or specific event, or they can

be more cumulative in nature, “a progressive sequence of insights resulting in changes in point of view and leading to a transformation in habit of mind” (Mezirow, 2005, p. 28). Regardless of the cause of transformations, the process is relatively similar.

Mezirow (1997) described four processes of learning: (a) to elaborate an existing point of view, (b) to establish new points of view, (c) to transform our point of view, and (d) to become aware and reflective of our own biases. In order to become critically reflective on one’s own assumptions, one must have autonomy, which refers to the understanding, skills, and disposition needed. Employees must be able to “think as an autonomous agent in a collaborative context rather than to uncritically act on the received ideas and judgments of others. Workers will have to become autonomous, socially responsible thinkers” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 8). When employees can advocate for themselves, they are more likely to become more engaged and play a bigger role in the process of change.

Mezirow (1997) applied his theory of transformational learning specifically to adult learning. New information should be incorporated by learners into their frames of reference. The process of incorporating new information is active and involves thought and feelings and occurs through discovery. Mezirow recommended that facilitators promote discovery learning through group projects, case studies, and simulations to engage learners actively in the process of incorporating new information. Action research projects and participation in discourse are key ways adult learners can examine and challenge assumptions. Fullan (2009) suggested that teachers learn from peers, calling for the “wisdom of the crowd” to use the best ideas wherever they can be found. Fullan calls this approach lateral capacity-building. Mezirow’s theory can also be described as the “aha moments” that learners often have. With adult learning, those aha

moments of insight and realization are more likely to occur when learners are more actively engaged in content they see as specifically relevant to their needs.

As change leaders are taught more about change processes and strategies for leading change, they consider these concepts within the framework of their own experiences. Using Mezirow's theory, change leaders can shift their frames of reference and incorporate their new understandings into their experience and what they have previously learned. Hayes (2002) described this process, that "we develop our own conceptual models to guide the kind of information that we attend to; interpret what we see; and decide how to act" (p. 72). Hiatt (2006) affirmed the need for direct application in order for adults to internalize what they have learned: "If they cannot connect the knowledge offered during the transition to an immediate problem, then both attention to the subject and retention of knowledge can decline" (p. 106). Mezirow's theory also establishes relevancy for school leader preparation programs. Prospective principals and other school leaders bring their own experiences to their programs and are most open to learning when it is relevant and directly relates to needs they have or anticipate having. Because many school leaders come up through the ranks and have already experienced change in education in some capacity, tremendous opportunities exist for learning within the context of Mezirow's theory.

### **Related Literature**

Mezirow's work has significant implications as leaders develop skills, specifically as they build their competency to lead and manage change. In addition, current literature in the area of change management contributes to the knowledge of school leaders as they develop their skills to lead and manage change effectively. Although the literature in change management is limited in its direct context of education, applications can be drawn.

## **Change Management**

Change management is the process of facilitating the complex and difficult process of change (ProSci, n.d.). Effective change does not simply happen or occur naturally but must be strategically directed: “Change management is a systematic approach that includes the application of knowledge, resources, and tools that can be used to leverage the benefits of change” (Al-Ali et al., 2017, p. 727). Ultimately, effective change management is dependent upon the attitudes and beliefs that shape the actions of both change agents and change participants. People are central to organizational change (Choi, 2011). Some of the “people issues” involved in managing change include power, leadership, and stakeholder management; training and development; motivating others to change; and support for others to help them manage their personal transitions (Hayes, 2002). Organizations are human systems and the success of change “lies in the willingness of its members to support the changes” (Hechanova et al., 2018, p. 915). The attitudes and commitment of the employees significantly impact the effectiveness of organizational change (Ling, Guo, & Chen, 2018; van der Voet, 2016). Unless employees change the way they think, believe, and behave, organizations cannot change in meaningful ways (Jones & Van de Ven, 2016). Some of the factors that influence employees’ attitudes toward change include previous change experience, emotional intelligence, and how change is managed by the organization (Hechanova et al., 2018). Leaders must consider these factors when planning for change.

Change-specific attitudes about commitment to change and cynicism about change are better predictors for support or resistance to change than are general attitudes toward the organization (Choi, 2011). Fugate, Prussia, and Kinicki (2012) cautioned that although change is a strategic imperative for employers, ultimately, the success lies with the employees and their

reactions and that negative reactions can significantly slow or deter change efforts; therefore, it is “essential for organizations implementing change to better understand employees’ negative reactions to change in order to manage outcomes more effectively” (p. 891). Organizations can facilitate effective change management by considering the human aspect of their employees and related change processes.

Another way that change leaders can facilitate effective change management is by looking for what Heath and Heath (2010) call “bright spots” or areas where change is going well. Leaders should consider what they are doing to make the change effective and if any of those elements or strategies can be replicated in other areas: “What’s working and how can we do more of it? That’s the bright spot philosophy in a single question” (Heath & Heath, 2010, p. 41). By studying successful change initiatives, change leaders can create a model of best practices and examples.

**Organizational culture and change leadership.** The success of organizational change is largely dependent upon effective leadership and the ability of leaders to bring about employees’ commitment to change (Ling et al., 2018). Effective change management requires control and consistency (Al-Ali et al., 2017). Al-Ali et al. (2017) suggested that a hierarchical culture in an organization (as opposed to a clan or adhocracy) had the most significant positive results on emergent and planned change management. Trust in leaders is a major factor in effective change management (Amarantoue, Kazakopoulou, Chatzoudes, & Chatzoglou, 2018; Blanca & Ramona, 2016). Change leaders build trust when they demonstrate competence, benevolence, and integrity (Blanca & Ramona, 2016). A culture of trust is necessary for effective change management. Another important factor is the involvement and empowerment of employees to generate new ideas and increase employee engagement. When employees feel like they are part

of the process, they are more likely to behave in ways that support and facilitate change. Pock, Ottolini, et al. (2015) estimated that a “supportive core of 20-30% represents the critical mass needed to implement a major organizational change” (p. 159). Communication and participation are two key elements to facilitate a positive commitment to change (van der Voet, 2016).

Leaders can build commitment to change by improving the quality of information available to change recipients. Change leadership is important to the change process. Because change management involves many people, all who may have different perceptions and experiences, leadership is what unites the many parts of an organization into a force that can effectively drive successful change.

***Leadership development.*** Leadership development has a positive impact on leadership effectiveness (Barrett et al., 2019). Principles that have been proven in business world could potentially hold key applications for school leaders as well (Barrett et al., 2019). Ideal change leaders have five primary traits and behaviors, including strategic and technical competencies, execution competencies, social competencies, character, and resilience (Magsaysay & Hechanova, 2017). The greater the congruence between the ideal leader and the actual leader, the greater the perceived effectiveness of the leader in regard to change management (Magsaysay & Hechanova, 2017). Increased behavioral integrity can also improve the alignment between the ideal leader and the actual leader. Change leaders should note that these dispositions must be cultivated on an ongoing basis before change begins. Leaders cannot wait until change processes begin to develop the skills necessary for effective change or to cultivate a culture of trust within the organization. The congruence of behavioral integrity between the ideal leader and the actual leader will be based upon behaviors and actions taken prior to the change processes. Change processes will merely illuminate cultures and dispositions that already exist.

***Behavioral integrity.*** Most of the research in change management focuses on the perceptions of either the change agent or the change recipient; however, the perspectives of both are critical, especially given the interdependent nature of the relationship (Vos & Rupert, 2018). The behavior of the leader has a significant impact on the success of the change (Kotter, 1996; Vos & Rupert, 2018). Vos and Rupert (2018) studied the relationship between change leaders and change recipients and found that change leaders perceive a higher level of recipient resistance than the change recipients do. Likely, many change leaders expect resistance and are more sensitive to resistance. Change leaders also underestimate the impact of their behavior in reducing resistance. Change recipients were more open to change when leaders engaged in behaviors that increased their capacity and contribution to the change initiative.

Simons et al. (2015) described behavioral integrity as the congruence between leaders' words and deeds or the extent to which they are perceived as keeping their word. Behavioral integrity is critical for developing trust and building organizational commitment and employee satisfaction. Strong behavioral integrity is imperative for facilitating a context that is conducive to effective change management. Change leaders can demonstrate behavioral integrity not only through a commitment to fundamental principles but also in smaller examples, such as starting meetings on time (Simons et al., 2015). Behavioral integrity is directly connected to future reliability, which plays a role in change management.

Yang (2016) concluded, "Personnel who experience leadership trust feel increased job satisfaction" (p. 156). If employees can trust the leader throughout the change process, the natural trepidation and resistance to change employees may feel may be mitigated. Leaders can build trust by involving employees in the process of change and treating them with respect and consideration (Fugate et al., 2012; Page & Schoder, 2019). It is not necessary or realistic for

leaders to treat all employees equally, but they must treat them fairly and consistently in order to build trust (Fugate et al., 2012). Van den Bos and Lind (2004) observed that “fairness and justice are especially important in times of turmoil” (p. 266). Leaders should note that Fugate et al. (2012) identified two different types of fairness: distributive fairness and procedural fairness. Distributive fairness refers to the outcomes of changes, while procedural fairness refers to the manner in which change is planned and implemented. Leaders who intentionally consider their employees in both types of fairness communicate respect for their employees.

Heath and Heath (2010) recommended that during a change process, leaders take on a relationship with their employees that resembles that of a coach and less like a scorekeeper. The qualities of a coach to guide change allows room for the learning process. Everything looks like failure in the middle. Making failure a regular and normal part of the change process allows failure to be part of change. When failure is not feared, it becomes part of the process and teams can gather valuable feedback to learn from failure.

**Resistance to change.** Resistance to culture change is “part of a healthy phase of skepticism,” and leaders who recognize this “will be ready to manage through to a higher phase of organizational culture transformation and its associated benefits” (Barrett et al., 2019, p. 167). Employees’ perceptions can shape their emotional responses toward organizational change (Dashborough et al., 2015). When employees have a perception of control, it can alleviate the uncertainty associated with change (Fugate et al., 2012). Employees may have little actual control, but by encouraging them to exert control over their own spheres of influence, employers can foster the feelings of control.

Not all employees respond to change in the same way (Jones & Van de Ven, 2016; Shockley, Rosen, & Rios, 2016). Dashborough et al. (2015) found that participants fell into

three categories: those who believe change is an opportunity to look forward to, those who believe change is a potential threat that needs to be managed carefully, and those who saw change as inevitable and view themselves as separate from change. Lamm, Sapp, and Lamm (2108) concluded that “individuals who are effective at leading change also understand how and why people react differently to change” (p. 123). The training of the change leader is one of the most significant aspects of change management in order to minimize resistance to change (Jurisch et al., 2014). Change leaders who believe they play a role in resistance are more likely to minimize the overall resistance level (Vos & Rupert, 2018). Resistance to change is likely to increase over time, and change leaders benefit from early intervention to resistance (Jones & Van de Ven, 2016). Resistance often occurs after change participants have the opportunity to reflect on the change, the impact it could have, and the ways in which it will affect the individual (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017). Issah (2018) recommended that leaders acknowledge the concerns of individual members, using their emotional intelligence “to convince those who seem reluctant to participate in the change efforts” (p. 4). Even if leaders cannot remove all obstacles, acknowledging the resistance and engaging in dialogue can reduce the overall feelings of resistance on the part of the employee.

Amarantou et al. (2018) proposed a three-component construct to study resistance to change. The construct identifies the antecedents of resistance to change, the mediating effects of the three factors (disposition toward change, attitude towards change, and anticipated impact of change), and the reason for using a complex definition of resistance. Amarantou et al. concluded that resistance to change is most affected by employee empowerment and positive employee-management relationship. Leaders can build commitment to change with emotional cohesiveness, shared interests, and a sense of job outcome (Yang, 2016). Furthermore, leaders

should ensure that employees have clarity about what the change is and why it is occurring. Heath and Heath (2010) concluded “what looks like resistance is often a lack of clarity” (p. 15). Bringing people together to work toward a common goal with a purpose and effectiveness increased their commitment to the organization and specifically to the change initiative. Involving employees is a key way that leaders can reduce resistance to change.

Hiatt (2006) concluded that the top five reasons employees resist change are that employees were not aware of the underlying need for change, layoffs were feared, employees perceived the need for new skills they currently lacked, an effort to maintain the personal rewards or sense of accomplishment and fulfillment provided by the current state, and employees believed they were being required to do more with less, or more for the same pay. Dean Ornish puts it more simply “people don’t resist change, they resist being changed” (Deutschman, 2007, p. 94). Change does not only change the circumstances, but it also changes what the employee does or how they should behave. These internal changes can be difficult. Bridges (2004) takes it a step further, “Not coincidentally, it is also transition rather than change that people notoriously resist” (p. 83). In a transition, the endings always come first, which can be difficult for people. (Bridges, 2004). The process of the transitions associated with change make it difficult for employees.

Occasionally, the resistance to change is not to the change itself but to the leadership, demonstrating organizational cynicism, which doubts the competence or sincerity of the leader or the reason for change (Blanca & Ramona, 2018). Resistance to the leadership is more likely when there is limited behavioral integrity or a lack of trust within the organization between leaders and employees. Ng and Lucianetti (2015) argued, “When employees have increasing trust in their organizations, they feel increasingly confident about promoting innovation because

they believe that their organizations will value, rather than reject, such attempts” (p. 15).

Organizational cynicism can be overcome with trust, greater employee satisfaction, and increased involvement from employees and other stakeholders.

Teachers are not immune to change resistance. When school leaders create a strategic, flexible, and rich professional environment, “it is far less likely that the teachers will harbor deep-seated resistance. Although nil resistance might be an improbably ideal, any reduction in teacher resistance is a valuable and beneficial outcome for the educational change leader” (Lamb & Branson, 2015, p. 1023). When teachers feel appreciated, supported, encouraged, and affirmed by the principal, the natural tendency for resistance is minimized (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017; Lamb & Branson, 2015). School leaders can also overcome resistance to change by “tapping into teachers’ feelings of duty to determine and act on what was best for their students” (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017, p. 155). Another way to overcome resistance is to share information strategically from internal and external sources to help teachers develop dissatisfaction with the status quo, which encourages teachers to own their change process (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017).

**Emotional intelligence and self-efficacy.** Emotional intelligence cannot be overlooked in the change leadership process. Effective leadership, including school leadership, cannot only be task driven, it must be emotionally compelling (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017; Kin & Kareem, 2018a). Moore (2009) described emotions as being “intense, disruptive, de-motivating, motivating, exhilarating, positive, and negative, and they can challenge the leadership abilities of any person. Those who are skillful in dealing with emotions are referred to as having high emotional intelligence” (p. 21). Leaders must have an awareness of how others experience the change process and are attuned to the thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and reactions of their people

(Lamm et al., 2018; Moore, 2009). Change can be difficult for those involved because their comfort is disrupted by uncertainty (Issah, 2018). The change in status always elicits a response and effective change leaders are able to understand and consider responses from their employees. Perkins concluded that leaders must be process smart and people smart. Process smart means they make good decisions and can see far down the road, and people smart means they can foster good collaboration (Fullan, 2016). A high level of emotional intelligence can allow leaders to “build trust and cooperation, display empathy to employees, display social awareness, develop collaboration, understand the loss that people experience during the change process and display skill in addressing issues and solving problems” (Moore, 2009, p. 21). Leaders who listen to change participants and seriously consider their concerns were more likely to view the change initiative as a positive experience, whereas leaders who did not fully listen were more likely to experience both failed change attempts and damaged relationships (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017). Leaders should treat employees “with respect, encourage them to think independently, allow them to make decision, and make them feel connected to an important effort” (Deutschman, 2007, p. 107). When leaders treat their employees well and involve them in the process, they build trust.

Self-efficacy refers to the belief of individuals in their own capacity to perform the behaviors necessary to bring about specific achievements and reflects confidence in their ability to control their own motivation and behavior (Bandura, 1977). Ling et al. (2018) applied the concept of self-efficacy to change: “Change self-efficacy refers to an employee’s belief that he or she can handle the challenges and demands involved in a specific organizational change” (p. 85). The locus of control can be either internal or external and reflects the degree to which people believe what happens to them is a function of their own behavior. Internals are those who

attribute outcomes to their own efforts, while externals attribute outcomes to other factors over which they have no control (Hayes, 2002). Individuals with low self-efficacy see themselves as a product of their environment or circumstance, while those with strong self-efficacy are more likely to believe they have control in change situations (Fugate et al., 2012). Furthermore, “employees with a high degree of change self-efficacy tend to follow positive actions, understand good ideas, and carry out change initiative and are likely to develop affective commitment to change” (Ling et al., 2018, p. 86; Ng & Lucianetti, 2015). Employees who think they cannot influence what happens to them “are less likely to adopt a proactive approach to the management of change than those who have a more internal view about the locus of control” (Hayes, 2002, p. 20). Effective change leaders develop strong relationships with those involved in change processes (Issah, 2018). Through these strong relationships, change leaders can encourage the growth of self-efficacy in their employees.

A collective identity can have a positive impact on the self-efficacy of the group. When the group develops an identity that “we are a group who...” this understanding can create greater employee buy in through the commitment to the group. Fullan (2016) called collective efficacy the group’s belief in what can be done and referred to group norms as having a strong impact on change processes. Hayes (2002) concluded that groups will exert a strong influence on whether an individual will accept or resist a change because “the behavior, attitudes, beliefs and values of individuals are all based in the groups to which they belong” (p. 177). Large organizational change must take place first at the individual level—in order for organizations to be changed, individuals must be changed (Hall & Hord, 2015). Heath and Heath (2010) recommended the development of collective identities

because identities are central to the way people make decisions, any change effort that violates someone's identity is likely doomed to failure...so the question is this: How can you make your change a matter of identity rather than a matter of consequences? (p. 154)

Strong leaders cast a vision for the collective identity and should continually reinforce those ideas.

Deutschman (2007) encouraged change leaders to let their actions lead their development of self-efficacy. Even if they may not feel that they have a strong capacity, they should act in such a way that they do and the feelings will follow: "How we act influences what we believe and what we feel" (Deutschman, 2007, p. 78). David Myers said, "Inner faith and outer action likewise feed each other" (Deutschman, 2007, p. 78). The act of a trait ultimately instills the emotion of a trait. Furthermore, leaders and employees should continue to practice change in order to maintain their ability to change (Deutschman, 2007). By intentionally being aware of how and when change occurs, leaders and employees can become more engaged in the process.

### **Models of Change Management**

Al-Haddad and Kotnour (2015) found that organizational change initiatives have limited success, with an estimated success rate of less than 30%. They examined six approaches to change, including Lewin's model, the Judson method, Jick Kanter method, Leading Change (Kotter's) method, Luecke's method, and the insurrection methods. They concluded that the specific approach used is less important than the fact that *an* approach is used. Any of the approaches could be used depending on the context and needs of the organization. As long as organizations were intentional about planning for change and had a strategy for accommodating potential problems throughout the change process and minimizing barriers to change, the specific change strategy was not a significant factor in the overall success. The ideal model for change

management often depends upon the organizational culture or the change situation (Page & Schoder, 2019). Wetzel and Van Gorp (2014) discovered that most models of change management literature focused on cognitive, learning, discursive, and neo-institutional theories and that most organizational change research struggles with transforming organizational theory into specific applications. Dumas and Beinecke (2017) concluded that each model essentially involved “a process of identifying the need, creating a vision, planning and exploring options for action, mobilizing stakeholders, designing and implementing actions, and, in a continuous feedback loop, providing evaluation and feedback” (p. 873). The change strategies that are most successful are those that are internally consistent and compatible with key situational variables (Hayes, 2002). Almost 80% of research is carried out with only a few common theories (Wetzel & Van Gorp, 2014). Leaders who understand various models of change management can select a model or a process that is compatible with their organization or unique culture.

**Planned change.** Planned change, regardless of the specific model, typically involves identifying the programs and the obstacles, attacking the obstacles head on with maximum effort and then systematically dismantling the obstacles as efficiently as possible (Chia, 2014). Most organizations in the United States take a planned change approach, which reflects a desire for control and stability. Change management requires both control and consistency, both of which can be achieved through planned change (Al-Ali et al., 2017). Most models of change theory involve planned change; however, the models can be applied to emergent change or crisis change as well. Hayes (2002) recommends that when planning change, organizations decide to act incrementally and take small steps to build upon the experienced gained. This approach is most effective because

it improves the quality of information used in key decisions; helps overcome the personal and political pressures resisting change; copes with the variety of lead-times and sequencing problems associated with change; and builds the overall awareness, understanding and commitment required to ensure implementation. (Hayes, 2002, p. 37)

Some may argue that broad sweeping changes are best done all at once to have a significant change impact. Whether incremental changes or broad changes are most appropriate largely depends on the specific changes and the context of the change. Leaders should consider their employees and their resistance to change as well as the change itself and the necessary timeline for change. Some changes are so critical an organization cannot wait to build them incrementally. When possible, a scaffolded approach can reduce employee resistance to change.

Training, or capacity building, is a critical element of planned change. A training-needs analysis “starts with system-level review to determine how the proposed change will affect organizational goals, objectives and task demands” (Hayes, 2002, p. 123). When leaders plan training, they must consider the kind of competencies that the training is intended to develop (Hayes, 2002).

Jones and Van de Ven (2016) suggested that resistance to change has an increasingly negative impact to employee-manager relationships over time, as well as the employees’ commitment to the organization. Organizational fairness is most crucial at the beginning stages of planned change, while supportive leadership becomes more important over time. In the planned change process, early resistance and obstacles to change can increase if not attended to (Jones & Van de Ven, 2016). Most change leadership research is process-oriented and focuses on the actions of leaders during the implementation of planned change (Dumas & Beinecke,

2017). Leaders must be engaged at every step of the change process in order to perceive and identify resistance to change.

One often overlooked element in planned organization change is the role of individual emotions (Rosenbaum, More, & Steane, 2017). Organizations may tend to believe that because planned change has a clear plan, employees will have few objections. Organizational leaders can better implement planned change by using a change management framework, most of which were built upon the work of Lewin, to capture the emotions and competencies of their employees effectively. Change leaders can also benefit from Kotter's model and emphasis on the change model itself and the importance of leadership to implement the change model effectively.

***ProSci model of change.*** One influential organization in change management is ProSci, which uses research-based best practices that focus on the human element of change. ProSci is a change management consulting firm that has contracted with 80% of Fortune 500 companies and currently maintains a global network of trained change management professionals. Hiatt, the founder of ProSci, developed the ADKAR model, which is “a results-oriented model that provides a framework for how change management tactics and techniques (including communications, sponsorship, readiness assessments, coaching, training and resistance management) come together to produce change” (Hiatt, 2006, p. 60). The ADKAR involves five phases of change—(a) awareness, (b) desire, (c) knowledge, (d) ability, and (e) reinforcement—which allow “leaders and change management teams to focus their activities on what will collectively drive individual change and produce organizational results” (ProSci, n.d., p. 4). Closer examination reveals similarities between the ProSci model of change and the models by Lippitt et al. (1958) and Kotter (1996). All three models involve an assessment of capacity, communication, and follow up. The ProSci model focuses on beginning with the individual,

while Lippitt and Kotter begin with the organization. The individual is central to ProSci's (n.d.) approach:

For a group or organization to change, all the individuals within that group or organization must change. This means to affect change in our organizations, businesses, and communities, we must first understand how to affect change one person at a time. (p. 4)

Deutschman (2007) echoes the sentiment, "After all, a company is no more than a bunch of people united by common practices, beliefs, and frames" (p. 163). Fullan (2005) suggested that it is difficult to bring about group change without individual change. This systematic focus on the individual helps to ensure that change efforts are thoroughly implemented.

Heath and Heath (2010) described change as a process rather than an event. The ADKAR model works through that process: "The people who change have clear direction, ample motivation, and a supportive environment" (Heath & Heath, 2010, p. 253). The ADKAR model provides all three elements. The first step is to make employees aware of the need for change. Deutschman (2007) describes this concept of establishing a need to create desire, "A satisfied need is not a motivator of behavior" (p. 103). Many leaders "assume that by building awareness of the need for change they have also created desire. Resistance to change from employees takes them by surprise and they find themselves unprepared to manage this resistance" (Hiatt, 2006, p. 18). Employee buy-in and desire to participate is critical to the change process. Employees are "motivated by knowing that they can enjoy and improve their lives right now...not because it can make your life or organization better at some distant time in the future" (Deutschman, 2007, p. 204). The knowledge and ability phases ensure that employees have the capacity to be able to change. Hiatt (2006) recommends that because the knowledge gap can be a barrier to change,

leaders must be sure their employees have the education and training necessary to overcome that barrier. In order to overcome the knowledge gap, leaders should consider the current knowledge base, the capability of the person to learn, the resources available for education and training, and the access to the required knowledge. Reinforcement, the final phase, is one of the most critical for sustainable change. Without reinforcement, the team “may perceive that the effort expended during the transition was not valued” (Hiatt, 2006, p. 40). Reinforcement sustains the change and ensures that people do not slip back into old behaviors; it builds momentum which is especially helpful when the change process includes multiple changes, and it creates a history of trust for employees to remember the next time a change comes. The reinforcement phase requires leaders to have a clear view of the destination and to reinforce the bright spot behaviors as they happen (Heath & Heath, 2010).

**Emergent change.** Most of the literature devoted to change management focuses on planned change; however emergent change requires some attention as well (Chia, 2014). Emergent change involves the acknowledgment that change is not something to be controlled, but rather allowed to realize its end. Chia (2014) argued that a planned change approach is not the most effective and the negatives outweigh the positives. If change is what happens to something and an outside process that naturally occurs, organizations can incorporate a more organic approach to change by discerning differences and applying small consistent changes that can mitigate the jarring sensations that can thwart change efforts. Al-Ali et al. (2017) found that a hierarchical culture positively impacts emergent change as well as planned change. Although emergent change is less common, leaders should look for opportunities to develop emergent change and foster opportunities for employees to initiate change. Related to emergent change is crisis change or change that occurs as the result of unexpected circumstances outside of the

control of the organization. Crisis change can occur immediately or within a very short timeframe while emergent change typically occurs over time.

**Crisis change.** While most changes tend to be planned or emerge over time, occasionally unforeseen events require immediate and unexpected change. In crisis change scenarios, school leaders should still follow their preferred change model to the extent possible. Communication and trust are critical to the success of change efforts in a crisis. Hiatt (2006) reminded leaders that “people weigh the message against the backdrop of the organization’s track record with change” (p. 12). If an organization or a leader has a strong track record, greater trust exists and people are more likely to be open to change. The credibility of the sender “directly impacts how an individual will internalize that information. Depending on the level of trust and respect for the sender, recipients of the message will view the sender either as a credible source or someone not to be believed” (Hiatt, 2006, p. 12).

During a crisis, clear communication is essential to provide direction. In healthy organizations with established trust, employees are often willing to have “all hands on deck” and to do what needs to be done, despite challenges. Through his research, Deutschman (2007) concluded that “most people didn’t necessarily dislike work—depending on the situation, work could feel satisfying rather than punishing” (p. 103). In a crisis, many will rise to the occasion and go above and beyond what is needed—if employees feel supported. If there is resistance to change, it tends to come later, once the change has settled and the initial adrenaline tempers. Effective leaders can support sustainable change by continuing to take care of their employees and exercising their emotional intelligence. Hiatt (2006) addressed this concept, “managing the people side of change is about realizing change faster, with greater engagement (participation levels) and higher proficiency (performance) by all individuals affected by the change” (p. 47).

By considering the needs of employees, leaders can better navigate their organizations through a crisis.

### **Application to Education**

Change is critical to the ongoing effectiveness and sustainability of educational institutions. Significant change efforts in education began in the 1960s and have continued ever since. Most of these efforts, however, have not been implemented effectively because most districts and schools lacked the capacity to implement the changes (Fullan, 2016). Obstacles to change include “lack of commitment, initiative and participation, lack of time, wrong conceptualization of the sustainability concept, vertical and fragmented organizational structure, lack of instruments for sustainability, and resistance to change” (Aleixo et al., 2016, p. 1669). Putting ideas into practice “was a far more complex process than people realized” (Fullan, 2016, p. 5). ProSci (2019) described change management as a fairly new concept in education, despite the fact that change is not new. Institutions must be able to encounter and manage change in order to serve students and families effectively.

Public sector industries, including education, face different considerations and challenges. Leadership in the public sector has recently emerged as a distinct field and is significantly less studied than the business world (Orazi, Turrini, & Valotti, 2013). Orazi et al. (2013) observed that “leadership and management in the public sector are no longer seen as opposing concepts” and that both elements are needed for effective change management (p. 490). Van der Voet (2016) argued that the “environmental and structural characteristics [of public sector organizations] further increase the difficulties that are associated with implementing organizational change” (p. 660). In public sector industries, high levels of bureaucracy and red tape, whether they are real or perceived, can severely limit the participation of change recipients,

impeding change initiatives (Van der Voet, 2016). Public sector leadership styles should be relationship-oriented (Dumas & Beinecke, 2017). Effective leadership and change management strategies become even more critical in these environments.

**K-12 education.** Change leadership has been studied extensively in the business world, but to a lesser degree in education. Barrett et al. (2019) concluded that “decades-old, widely used business models for leadership development would translate to similar positive outcomes” in education (p. 165). Magsaysay and Hechanova (2017) recommended that parallel studies on change management could be conducted in nonbusiness organizations, such as educational settings, anticipating that many of the principles would translate from the business world to another context. Hechanova et al. (2018) concluded that the relationship between implicit change leadership is a predictor of change management in both the business world and in academic institutions. In business institutions, execution was the significant predictor of change management, while among academic institutions, strategic and social competencies were among the significant predictors of change management.

Darling-Hammond (2009) observed that in educational settings, change efforts fall into four categories—bureaucratic, professional, market, and democratic. Bureaucratic change is top-down, where change is planned and given with the expectation that everyone will respond in the same way. Professional change invests in knowledgeable practitioners to identify and implement change. Market change looks to school choice and competition to drive change efforts. Democratic change involves stakeholders and schools who are responsive to student needs. Most change in schools has historically fallen into bureaucratic or market change (van der Voet, 2016), but professional and democratic approaches are most effective (Darling-Hammond, 2009). Professional change is most compatible with the ProSci model of change which focuses

on people and human relationships and emotional intelligence. Fullan (2009) recommended that schools implement change through a focus on instruction, use of data, developing capacity, fostering leadership, building learning communities, and linking to results. These strategies are reflective of a mindset of change that stems from top-down, bureaucratic methods of change that do not account for the individual human element that is supported in more recent literature.

Moore (2009) acknowledged the difficulties of leading change in educational settings, concluding that

years of documented futile attempts of restructuring and redesigning our schools may be a strong indication that many of our school leaders may not be skilled enough to deal with the stress, anxiety, anger, frustration, role strain, and conflicts associated with school reform or to be effective change agents. Learning about the change process is inferior to developing the skills to lead change. (p. 24)

Currently, a gap exists in emotional intelligence and change efforts within an educational setting.

In addition to individual school-based initiatives, schools also experience change initiatives that come from the federal, state, and local level. Chang, Chen, and Chou (2017) described educational change as one of the most crucial components for better performance in schools, which in turn requires innovative leadership to “fit the fast-paced change to achieve better learning results for students” (p. 144). The expectations of principals have shifted as they have to “exert more influence in leadership for changing the school culture” (Chang et al., 2017, p. 152; Kin & Kareem, 2018a). Principals are relied upon more and more to function as change leaders, for both their own change initiatives and those that come from the district, state, or national level.

Change in schools is not always implemented effectively. The underlying issue of many unsuccessful change attempts in school is the failure of leadership to lead change (Fullan, 2016; Hall & Hord, 2001; Kin & Kareem, 2018a; Pettigrew, Woodman, & Cameron, 2001). Not unlike other organizations, the future success of schools depends on the capacity of school leaders to manage change effectively (Bush, 2007; Issah, 2018; Kin & Kareem, 2018a; Leithwood et al., 2004; Murphy & Datnow, 2002). The process of change is significant in an educational setting. Change efforts should not solely focus on the outcomes and achievement of goals. Leaders must also ensure that those involved in the change process are equipped and prepared to meet their obligations and responsibilities more effectively (Lamb & Branson, 2015). Issah (2018) found that over the years “efforts to reform schools have been futile, and one reason is the leaders’ lack of emotional intelligence to overcome challenges associated with reform” (p. 1). In an environment of constant change, often initiated by outside organizations or people, school leaders must have the skills to lead and manage change effectively. Too often, the wrong drivers for change are used—heavy handed external accountability, individual teacher and leadership quality, technology, and fragmented strategies. Instead, the right drivers for change must be used—capacity for building results, collaborative work, pedagogy, and systemness or ownership.

School leaders can generate support for change through department chairs and teacher-leaders. Developing and growing leaders within a school creates a coalition of leaders who are prepared to support change efforts. Gaubatz and Ensminger (2017) found that “given the movement toward distributed leadership within schools and the role department chairs have within the structure of schools, department chairs are in a prime locus to facilitate top-down and promote bottom-up change in schools” (p. 142). The National Academy for Educational

Research (2016) discovered that building teachers' professional development has become a key element of reform initiatives. Building leadership skills and increasing their capacity for change should be part of those professional development efforts. Van der Voet (2016) recommended involving direct supervisors, such as department chairs, as change managers to encourage employees to participate in change efforts, not just as passive recipients, as a way to increase their commitment to change. Fullan (2016) emphasized the importance of employee commitment to change, "Effective change processes shape and reshape good ideas, as they build capacity and ownership among participants" (p. 41). School leaders should encourage department chairs and other teachers within the school to be part of the process to shape and reshape good ideas.

**School leader preparation program.** The success of change in organizations is dependent upon the employees' attitudes toward change, which can be influenced by a variety of factors including prior change experience, emotional intelligence, and how the organization manages the change (Blanca & Ramona, 2016; Hechanova et al., 2018). Principals play a critical role in the change process: "The principal is in the middle of the relationship between teachers and external ideas and people. As in most human triangles, there are constant conflicts and dilemmas" (Fullan, 2016, p. 123). School leaders can best prepare to foster positive attitudes toward change through careful preparation. As school leaders become more aware of change and change processes, they are then able to develop greater capacity for leading change and acquire the resources and tools needed to implement change effectively (Lambrechts et al., 2017). Training and communication are two key elements in increasing organizational capacity for change (Jurisch et al., 2014). School leaders have key experiences that prepare them to manage change. Much of this preparation comes from their own situations and experiences.

Devi and Fernandes (2019) observed that principals most often come up through the ranks as teachers and lead teachers. These experiences as recipients of change shape their actions as change leaders. While attitudes toward change are critical, Chang et al. (2017) described “principal’s change leadership competencies are more influential than teachers’ self-influence in enhancing teacher attitudes toward change. Therefore, concerted effort may be given to prioritize the continuous development of principal’s change leadership in effective change management” (p. 152). The better prepared principals are to lead change, the more effective their change efforts will be.

Most school leaders intentionally prepare for leadership through their school leadership preparation program. Educational leadership preparation was not widely present in higher education until the mid-twentieth century (McCarthy, 2015). Most principal and school leader preparation belong to universities and course offerings have been consistent across institutions (McCarthy, 2015). Few programs, however, focus on administrators as change agents. School leadership preparation programs could provide essential training for school leaders in how to further develop their leadership and facilitate a process of change. Fullan (2016) concluded that “[school] leaders are not prepared to lead change” (p. 250). These programs must meet the current needs of school leaders and equip them to implement and manage change effectively.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2016) published resources to help school leaders. The resources include references to topics such as leadership responsibilities, developing skills for leaderships, prioritizing, and communicating; however, none of the topics directly and explicitly mention leading change. Change leaders must establish a shared understanding between leaders and recipients (Vos & Rupert, 2018). Communication, for example, is a key element of leading change, but it is not the only skill necessary.

Another consideration in preparing school leaders to lead change is the understanding and consideration of school culture (Valoyes-Chaves, 2019). Professional development efforts “usually ignore not only rituals and practices within the local school culture with all the contradictions and possibilities for transformation; they also disregard teachers’ social and cultural experiences” (Valoyes-Chaves, 2019, p. 189). While there are consistent principles of leading change, specific strategies in implementing change can vary from school to school and what is effective in one school may be less effective in another. School leaders who work within the established culture may encounter less resistance, especially if the school culture is healthy.

Change recipients who appear to be resistant may be seeking to find meaning in their role rather than actually resisting the change itself. If resistance is ignored, the impact on culture and employee effectiveness is likely to be impacted negatively (Jones & Van de Ven, 2016). School leader preparation programs must include strategies for school leaders to identify and manage resistance in order for the change initiative to be successful. Ling et al. (2018) recommended that training programs include the management of change self-efficacy and collective identity. Moore (2009) recommended that preparation programs must include emotional intelligence training so school leaders can develop these skills in order to “deal with the emotions associated with school reform” (p. 24) and observed that “many principals do not have the skills required to support, coach, listen, and to balance patience and persistence during such a transformation (p. 25). Kotter (1996), a leader in change theory, held that most organizations can significantly improve at an acceptable cost, but leaders often make mistakes because they are not prepared for the challenges. School leadership preparation programs prepare school leaders in so many other areas; therefore, they ought to be prepared in an area that all leaders will encounter. School

leadership development on leading change is an area that must be developed in order to facilitate effective leadership that makes a difference (Kin & Kareem, 2018b; Moore, 2009).

### **Summary**

Change is an inevitable element of any organization. Change can be planned or emerge naturally, and it can be top-down, originating from administration and leadership, or it can come about more organically. Regardless of the catalyst, change can be difficult, and employees have a natural resistance to change. Organizations that give consideration to the process of change are better able to implement planned change or respond to emergent change. In K-12 schools, the effectiveness of change management is often dependent upon the integrity and capacity of the leader coordinating the change. Many leaders have never received training in how to lead change effectively, contributing to the large failure rate of many change initiatives. In contrast, most Master of Business Administration (MBA) or leadership programs include courses about leading change, but few administrator preparation programs include such classes. Exploring the experiences of school leaders as they lead change could shape administrator preparation programs and further develop the capacity of school leaders to implement change effectively.

A gap in the literature exists. Most of the change management literature has been in the context of the business world; however, some applications have been made to education, primarily higher education. Although change management has not been heavily considered in the context of K-12 education, many of the change principles can be applied. This study seeks to explore the current understandings of K-12 administrators who lead change, how change is typically implemented in K-12 education, and how school leaders are prepared to lead change. Research exists in the areas of emotional intelligence for school leaders, but additional research should bridge the gap and make the connection between emotional intelligence and leading

change. School districts and administrative preparation programs would benefit from a more thorough understanding of how change is currently implemented and what opportunities exist to expand administrators' capacity for leading change.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of school leaders in Virginia as they develop their capacity to lead and manage change. This study used Mezirow's (1997) theory of transformative learning as it applies to adult learning. This chapter describes the design, setting, participants, procedures, and data analysis that was used for this study.

### **Design**

This was a qualitative study. A qualitative study was appropriate for this research study because it examined the experiences of school leaders as they develop their capacity to lead and manage change. The focus of the study began with the specific phenomenon of change management and then sought to explore how school leaders engage with the phenomenon in their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The research design was phenomenology. Phenomenology seeks to describe the common meaning of lived experiences of individuals who experienced the same phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, phenomenology focuses on what participants experienced and how they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). A transcendental approach was used. Transcendental phenomenology describes the experiences of others, which allow researchers to identify themes that emerge from the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A transcendental study brackets the researcher's own experience and assumptions from the study in order to identify what exists in the data. Data were collected using multiple sources, such as interviews, letters of advice, and focus groups. Once the data were collected, I analyzed the data for themes through horizontalization and clusters of meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

## Research Questions

The central research question guided the study: What are the experiences of school leaders in Virginia as they develop their capacity to lead and manage change?

The sub-research questions were as follows:

1. What are school leaders' perceptions about what they learned in their administration and supervision programs to prepare them to lead and manage change?
2. Since school leaders are likely to refine their perspectives as they gain experience and their assumptions are challenged, how do they describe their training to lead and manage change?
3. What kinds of behaviors have supported their efforts to lead and manage change more effectively?

## Setting

The setting for this study was Virginia K-12 schools. In order to be eligible for a Virginia endorsement in Administration and Supervision, school leaders must first complete a state-approved administration and supervision program (ASP) and take the School Leaders Licensure Assessment (SLLA) (Virginia Department of Education, 2018). The setting included leaders from any Virginia public or accredited private school at any level, elementary, middle, or high school. The setting also extended to central office leaders, provided they hold the administration and supervision endorsement. Limiting the setting to one state ensures some continuity among ASPs so that participants have experienced the phenomenon. Furthermore, by not limiting the setting to a specific district or graduates of one university, participants are more likely to bring a variety of experiences, resulting in rich data to glean from their interviews.

Schools in Virginia are organized by cities and counties, with each led by a local school board responsible for decision making regarding the day-to-day implementation of specific policies and programs but are subject to the policies and leadership of the state board of education (Virginia Department of Education, 2019b). Accredited private schools in Virginia are included as well, since they follow the same requirements for licensure of their teachers and leadership, even though individual school practices may vary (Virginia Department of Education, 2018).

### **Participants**

The sample for this study was a purposeful sample that allowed the researcher to select participants “because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 158). For a phenomenological study, Creswell and Poth recommended between 5 and 25 participants. The study included 12 participants, and participants were continued added to the study until data saturation is achieved (O’Reilly & Parker, 2012). A snowball sampling technique was also used to identify additional participants for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Demographic information, such as age, ethnicity, or gender, was not relevant to this study except to provide maximum variation. Creswell and Poth described how maximum variation at the beginning of the study can increase the likelihood of different perspectives in the findings.

The selection criteria focused on the following characteristics: participants were school leaders who (a) obtained a Virginia endorsement in administration and supervision in 2005 or later, (b) have taken the SLLA, (c) have a minimum of three years of experience as a school leader, and (d) currently serve as a school leader in a Virginia public or accredited private school. Since the purpose of the study was to focus on their experiences as they develop their capacity to lead and manage change, a major way that they prepare for leadership is through their ASP.

McCarthy (2015) discovered that “administrative licensure candidates in 35 states must pass examinations” (p. 421). The test used in most states is the SLLA developed by the Educational Testing Service and based on the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) standards. Participants should have taken the SLLA because it offers another measure of their readiness and indicates some consistency in the preparation of the leaders, which facilitates the common experiences this study seeks to explore. Furthermore, participants should have gained licensure in administration and supervision after 2005 when the SLLA became a requirement for licensure (Virginia Department of Education, 2018). A minimum of three years is required for eligibility to ensure that participants have enough experiences to provide rich feedback. Potential participants completed an online survey created by me, as the researcher, in order to identify eligible participants (Patton, 2002). The survey was reviewed by my chair and committee member to review the questions. This expert review ensured the questions are clear and will help elicit rich data. The survey questions addressed the selection criteria, demographic information, and further contact information. The selection criteria questions were used to determine eligible participants. Demographic information was used only to provide context of maximum variation but not to determine eligibility for the study. Contact information of the participants was used to schedule future interviews. Table 1 displays a demographic breakdown of the participants, containing their pseudonyms, position, total years in education, total years in administration, division level, location of school, and gender.

Table 1

*Participant Overview*

Pseudonym	Position	Years in Education	Years in Administration	Division Level	Location of School	Gender
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Danielle	Assistant Principal	24	4	High School	Suburban	Female
David	Principal	15	9	Middle School	Urban	Male
Denise	Assistant Principal	20	7	Elementary School	Urban	Female
Jenna	Assistant Principal	15	10	Middle School	Suburban	Female
Jessica	Central Office	19	8	District Wide	Suburban	Female
Joshua	Principal	10	5	Middle School	Rural	Male
Kelly	Assistant Principal	12	5	Combined Middle and High School	Rural	Female
Kimberly	Principal	26	11	Elementary School	Suburban	Female
Michael	Principal	16	11	Middle School	Suburban	Male
Natalie	Assistant Principal	19	4	Elementary School	Suburban	Female
Steven	Principal	16	8	High School	Rural	Male
Tom	Principal	13	11	Elementary School	Suburban	Male

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### **Procedures**

The initial step was to secure Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. I waited to recruit participants and begin data collection until I received IRB approval (Appendix A). I also requested permission to recruit through social media (Appendix C and Appendix D). I used the IRB templates as provided.

To recruit participants, I provided a recruitment letter (Appendix B) which explained the purpose of this study and was linked to a screening survey (Appendix E) with the requested demographic and contact information, and the selection criteria questions to ensure participants are eligible for the study. I sent the recruitment letter to local school leaders and posted this on several social media groups (Appendix C and Appendix D) for school leaders.

Once I reviewed the selection criteria and confirmed that potential participants meet the criteria for my study, I sent an email to eligible participants to schedule an interview with them. I continued this process until I had at least 12 participants and the data were saturated. O'Reilly and Parker (2012) defined saturation when the themes begin to become repetitive and no new patterns emerge. Following the interviews, I asked participants to write a letter of advice to future school leaders about how to lead and manage change effectively. Participants emailed their letter back to me. I then scheduled a time for participants to engage in focus groups to gather further data. Kitzinger and Barbour (2011) described the optimal number of focus group participants as between five and eight to allow for enough participants to gather rich data but not so many that discussion is cumbersome and difficult. I hosted three focus groups with four participants in each group.

After recording the interviews and focus groups, I transcribed them so that I could identify and analyze the themes that emerge from the data. I used pseudonyms for individual names as well as for any sites or settings. I also maintained my audio files of interviews, transcribed interviews, letters of advice, audio files of focus groups, and transcribed focus groups gathered on a password protected computer in order to protect participant confidentiality and security.

### **The Researcher's Role**

Phenomenology relies on the researcher as the human instrument for collecting data through a variety of means, including interviews, observations, document analysis, focus groups, and journaling (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I currently serve as an administrator in a large, K-12 accredited private school in Virginia. Because I am also a school leader who engages in change initiatives, I am likely to have experienced some of the same phenomena as my participants. I do

not hold any type of position of influence over my participants. This particular study is transcendental phenomenology; therefore, I must set aside my own experiences and assumptions and bracket them out of the study in order to focus on the lived experiences of the participants and better understand the phenomenon from their perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Moustakas (1994) described the process of bracketing, or epoche, whereby researchers set aside “prejudgments and open the research interview with an unbiased, receptive presence” (p. 180).

By disclosing my own understandings and experiences that are brought to the study, the dark matter is illuminated and provides insight into the researcher’s lens, so the perspective is disclosed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My experiences may intersect with those of my participants, but the purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of my participants. Although this study is a transcendental phenomenological study and my own experiences are bracketed out of the study, I, like all researchers, bring my own philosophical assumptions to my research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These assumptions influence my approach in the research methods, the analysis of themes, and the application to practice. Because of my ontological assumptions that reality can be seen through many views, I selected a phenomenological approach that considers multiple viewpoints. My epistemological assumptions include the belief that it is important to close the distance between myself and others; therefore, I engaged in interviews with participants that yield deep rich data that yields greater understanding. My axiological assumptions, specifically my value of the importance of people, influenced my research in that the purpose of this study was to manage change more effectively so that people can be more successful. My methodological assumptions influenced the way I approached my study, looking for themes to emerge from the data, rather than fitting the data into my own preconceived ideas.

## **Data Collection**

As the human instrument in my study, I collected the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I secured IRB approval and signed informed consent forms before collecting any data. Interviews, letters of advice, and focus groups allowed me to gather rich data. One of the hallmarks of transformative learning is the focus on evidential and dialogical reasoning (Mezirow, 2005, p. 27). Asking school leaders to reflect through these three avenues helped to clarify and solidify their ideas about change and how they prepared to lead the process of change. Because participation in discourse is fundamental to the way in which adult learners examine and challenge assumptions, the focus groups provided an opportunity to deeply explore the assumptions school leaders held.

## **Interviews**

In-depth interviews were conducted with each participant in order to gain rich data and insight into how they each developed their capacity to lead and manage change. Creswell and Poth (2018) found the phenomenological studies typically involve in-depth interviews and the task is to “describe the meaning of the phenomenon for a small number of individuals who have experienced it” (p. 161). The interviews were semi-structured with an interview guide to direct the questions, but the questions and interview were open-ended enough to allow the participants to pursue their lines of thought. The time of the interviews were determined by the convenience of the participants. The interviews were conducted either face to face or through Microsoft Teams. As a result of the restrictions implemented because of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), in-person contact is limited, so electronic means were used as much as possible for interviews and all communication.

The questions were grounded in the literature of the topic of change management and Mezirow's (1997) theory of transformative learning. The interviews began with general background questions and flowed into topics that addressed my specific research questions. The questions were intended to explore the lived experiences of school leaders as it relates to the phenomenon of change management (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions (Appendix H):

### **General Background Questions**

1. How would you introduce yourself?
2. When and where did you go to school?
3. How long have you been in education?
4. How long have you been an administrator?
5. Why did you choose the field of education?
6. Why did you want to be a school leader?

### **Experiences in Learning about Change Questions**

7. What kinds of classes did you take in your administration and supervision program?
8. Describe the classes you took related to change management, if any.
9. What is the difference, as you understand it, between leading change and managing change?
10. Change management is not explicitly one of the PSEL standards on the SLLA; however, some of the standards encompass related skills. What skills would you consider necessary to implement change successfully?
11. Please describe how you learned these skills?

12. How did your administration and supervision program address those skills in any way?

### **Experiences in Implementing Change Questions**

13. Tell me about your experiences in implementing change initiatives.
14. How do you plan for a change initiative?
15. How do you communicate change initiatives to stakeholders?
16. How do you evaluate change initiatives?
17. What is your role in most change initiatives in your school?

### **Congruence between Preparation and Experience Questions**

18. Based on your experiences leading change, do you believe you were prepared to lead change? Please explain why or why not.
19. How well did your administration and supervision program prepare you to implement change effectively? What did your ASP do to prepare you?
20. What do you know now that you wish you had learned in your program?

Before the interviews, an expert review by my chair and committee member was conducted to evaluate the interview questions, gain feedback, and revise the questions to make them more relevant, clear, and maximize the richness of data. The questions were also piloted with a school administrator to evaluate the questions for flow and time.

Questions one through six were general questions intended to help the participant feel at ease with the researcher and to gather basic knowledge about the participant (Patton, 2002).

Asking general questions can develop a rapport between the researcher and participant. Fullan (2016) concluded that most school leaders are not prepared to lead and manage change. Asking questions about their preparation programs can help school leaders reflect on their prior learning

experiences. McCarthy (2015) found that few preparation programs focus on administrators as change agents. Questions seven through nine were intended to gather information about the participant's ASP and the extent to which the participant was prepared for change management through the program.

Questions 10 and 11 were intended to determine the skills necessary to lead change. Since the participants are administrators currently serving in leadership roles, they should have an understanding from their own experience of what skills are needed. Effective change implementation does not happen by accident. Leaders must be strategic in how they implement change. Page and Schoder (2019) described the qualities needed for a leader for effective change. Leaders with strong emotional intelligence and self-efficacy who are more aware of the skills they need are more likely to continue to develop those skills (Fullan, 2009; Hayes, 2002; Ling, et al., 2018). Deutschman (2007) emphasized the importance of the ongoing practice of change to continue to develop the skills that are needed. When leaders can assess what they have been taught and what they need to know, they will be better prepared to fill in any skill gaps that exist. Question 12 was intended to identify the congruence of the skills needed to lead change management and what participants learned in their APP.

Questions 13 through 17 were intended to identify the behaviors that support leadership efforts to lead and manage change effectively in order to compare the behaviors to what has been identified in the literature. Page and Schoder (2019) described the importance of transparency, trust, and relationships in bringing about effective change. Hiatt (2006) created the ADKAR model for leaders to focus on the behaviors and activities that would drive change and produce results. The ADKAR model is based on awareness, desire, knowledge, ability, and reinforcement. Deeper analysis of the behaviors needed to lead change effectively can facilitate

an understanding of how leaders prepare to manage change, and specifically, how well their ASP prepared them. Questions 18 through 20 gained insight from the participants to assist in the analysis.

### **Letter of Advice**

Although interviews are typically the most common method of data collection in phenomenology, Creswell and Poth (2018) also recommended that researchers include more creative forms of data collection. Following the interviews, participants were asked to complete a letter of advice to gain insight into what they recommend for future school leaders in the area of managing change. Participants were able to complete their letters on their own and returned them by email after several days. The letters were also used to confirm the information gathered in the interviews. By eliciting information from participants in a different place and time, richer data can be gathered.

Letter of Advice Prompt (Appendix I):

Write a letter of advice to a future school leader about how to lead change effectively.

Consider the following questions in your letter: What do future school leaders need to know about leading and managing change? What are the skills and behaviors that are most needed and how can they develop these? What advice do you have for leaders who are preparing to lead change efforts?

### **Focus Group**

Three focus groups comprised of four participants each, were conducted in order to prompt more engagement from participants. Three groups were held so that all participants may take part. Focus groups are ideal for exploring the experiences and ideas of a group (Greenbaum, 2011). While individual interviews may be able to better assess and describe the

specific views held by participants, focus groups are “better for exploring how points of view are constructed and expressed... [and] are particularly suited to the study of attitudes and experiences around specific topics” (Kitzinger & Barbour, 2011, p. 6). Because this study focused on the experiences of school leaders as they prepare to lead and manage change, a focus group was able to elicit better information. Furthermore, understanding the ideas school leaders have about leading change and how those ideas have developed over time is a key element of Mezirow’s theory, that learning experiences provide opportunities to shape and reframe previously held ideas. As leaders hear from other leaders, it prompted additional comments that would not have been shared in an individual interview, resulting in richer data.

#### Semi-Standardized Open-Ended Focus Group Questions (Appendix J):

1. Do you have a plan for implementing change or do you follow a specific model? Where did you learn this?
2. What characteristics or behaviors have helped you implement change effectively?
3. How do you handle crisis change? What, if anything, do you do differently for crisis change than planned change?
4. How do you cultivate a willingness to change on the part of your staff?
5. How do you continually grow yourself professionally?
6. How do you increase your own capacity for change?

A variety of change models can be found in the literature, with compelling justifications for each. Al-Haddad and Kotnour (2015) concluded that it is less important which specific model is used and more that a model is used. Page and Schoder (2019) acknowledged that specific models may be appropriate for various situations and recommended that leaders use the model most appropriate for the specific context. Question one sought to describe any models that

leaders may be using or familiar with. This question also addressed the understanding school leaders have of various change models and where they learned this.

Hayes (2002), Moore (2009), and Page and Schoder (2019) described the characteristics, qualities, and behaviors that could help leaders to facilitate change effectively. Question two allowed participants to hear from one another about necessary traits and prompted additional ideas they had not previously shared. Heath and Heath (2010) focused on change as a process rather than an event; however, change in a crisis may feel more like an event. Question three was even more relevant as many school leaders have had to lead their schools through unexpected changes related to COVID-19. With all Virginia schools closing in-person instruction from March 2020 through the end of the academic year, and re-opening in August 2020 in varying capacities, these changes were on a bigger scale than what many leaders had ever previously experienced (Exec. Order No. 53, p. 2020).

Emotional intelligence plays a critical role in the ability of school leaders to implement and carry out change efforts effectively (Choi, 2011; Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017; Issah, 2018). Lamb and Branson (2015) found that teachers who feel appreciated are more open and willing to change. Question four provided an opportunity for school leaders to articulate how they build consensus and minimize resistance to change.

Questions five and six addressed the heart of the research questions and explored how school leaders learn and prepare to lead and manage change. Leading change is not a significant part of administrator preparation programs, yet it is critical for success as a school leader (Fullan, 2009; McCarthy, 2015). If school leaders are not learning these skills as part of their program, this question helped to answer how they acquire the necessary skills they need.

All interviews and letters were kept secure on a password protected computer using secure cloud storage to guard against unforeseen events. Pseudonyms and the removal of private information was used to protect confidentiality (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Data Analysis**

I used Moustakas' (1994) procedure for analyzing data in phenomenological studies. The first step recommended by Moustakas is *epoche*, which is the process of bracketing, where the researcher sets aside presuppositions and re-encounters the situation, looking with fresh eyes to see the phenomena itself. I maintained a reflexive journal (Appendix L) to record my biases and presuppositions in order to intentionally identify and bracket them. The second step is the transcendental-phenomenological reduction, which is the process of describing an experience using textural descriptions, the thoughts, ideas, and feelings that make up an experience. Horizontalization requires that every perception, or horizon, matters because it contributes to the whole of the experience. As horizons are identified, they are treated equally. Upon further reflection, irrelevant or repetitive statements are removed. Horizons are then clustered into themes and organized. Moustakas recommends the third step of imaginative variation, which is the process of creating structural meaning from the textural descriptions in order to grasp the essence and experience what others do. Finally, the last step according to Moustakas is to synthesize the meanings and essences and to identify what is common or universal.

Creswell and Poth (2019) also offered a data analysis procedure that blends well with Moustakas' approach to data analysis. The "data analysis spiral" works through the process from data collection to the account of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 186). The first step of the data analysis spiral was to manage and organize the data. The next step was to read

and memo emergent ideas. Next, I described and classified the codes into themes, then I developed and assessed interpretations. The final step was to represent and visualize the data.

Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasized the importance of organization from the outset and careful consideration of how the data should be organized for the current study as well as future endeavors. Creswell and Poth also gave additional guidance to the coding systems that should be used in a qualitative study, specifically recommending lean coding that begins with five or six codes and ends with 25-30 rather than hundreds. Lean coding helps researchers to describe themes more easily and helps them not to get lost in the volume of data. Some researchers recommend using preexisting or a priori codes, while other researchers prefer to use codes that naturally emerge from the data. I used codes as they emerged from the data.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is important in any type of study, regardless of the research design. I established the validation of my study in several different ways. Lincoln and Guba (1985) established trustworthiness in the sense of credibility, dependability and confirmability, and transferability.

### **Credibility**

One of the most significant ways to build credibility into my study is through the use of multiple data sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using multiple and different sources to provide triangulation affirmed the confidence in my findings. In the data collection process, I used interviews to gather thick, rich data, along with a letter of advice and a focus group. The variety of data points added to the credibility of my findings by corroborating the evidence I uncovered. Member checking is another key factor in establishing credibility. I confirmed the accuracy of the data by having the participants review the data I collected from them. Creswell and Poth

posited member checking is one of the most important things researchers can do to establish credibility.

### **Dependability and Confirmability**

Rather than reliability and objectivity, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested focusing on dependability and confirmability. Creswell and Poth (2018) described this idea: “Rather than reliability, one seeks dependability that the results will be subject to change and instability. The naturalistic researcher looks for confirmability rather than objectivity in establish the value of the data” (p. 256). Dependability and confirmability will be established through the auditing of the research process. A reflexive journal (Appendix L) was kept that provided insight into the research process. While the audit trail provided transparency at a physical level, the reflexive journal provided transparency at an intellectual level (Carcary, 2020). The reflexive journal supports critical thinking, analysis, and creative connections while enabling the examination of personal assumptions. Two strategies for validation that can support dependability and confirmability are expert review or peer review and discovering disconfirming evidence. Having a peer or an expert who is not connected to the study review the data collection methods can give helpful insight into the dependability and confirmability of the results. An expert or peer reviewer should ask difficult questions to keep the researcher from narrowing the perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is common to discover some disconfirming evidence at some point during the data collection process. By including this data and addressing the findings that both support and challenge my overall study, a more realistic assessment is achieved. Not all of the data will fit into the themes and patterns. Creswell and Poth (2018) held that these can become key points of discussion and are important to include in a study.

## **Transferability**

Depth of descriptions can aid in transferability because the rich descriptions allow the reader greater detail in which to decide what information can be used, or transferred (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Identifying common and relevant experiences can be done through detailed descriptions of the participants' experiences and how those experiences connect with other research literature or experiences of other participants. In addition to describing what my participants have said, including contextual descriptions about the overall interview was helpful. I also kept an audit trail (Appendix K) of the activities associated with my study in order to help other researchers recreate the study. Carcary (2020) found "the research audit trail has proven a useful strategy for demonstrating the trustworthiness and transparency of qualitative inquiry" (p. 175). Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended using audit trail categories of raw data, data analysis, data synthesis, process notes, and notes relating to dispositions, and information related to instrument development.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical research practices should be considered carefully during any type of research process. My role as the human instrument of the study is a weighty one that should not be taken lightly. There are several steps that I took to ensure my data are collected and analyzed in an ethical manner. The IRB approval is an important part of the process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). I completed the IRB application carefully and included all necessary documents and support materials. I waited for IRB approval (Appendix A) before I began my data collection. All of my participants completed an informed consent form (Appendix G) to ensure and document their willingness to participate. Confidentiality is another ethical consideration (Moustakas, 1994). To maintain confidentiality, I used pseudonyms for my

participants and their sites immediately after the interviews were conducted. I also maintained files securely in a password protected computer so the raw data could be accessed by anyone other than myself. One final consideration for the ethical conduct of my study is an accurate representation of data. When I interviewed my participants and reorganized and coded their responses, it is critical that their ideas were represented accurately and not taken out of context. This consideration is respectful to my participants and demonstrated credibility of my research study. In addition to taking care to represent accurately my interpretation of their ideas, I also engaged participants in the data analysis process through member checking, by having them review the data I collected from them to ensure I accurately represented their ideas (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Involving my participants in this manner ensured that my data accurately reflected their intended meaning and not my own experiences or assumptions, which are bracketed out of this study.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of school leaders in Virginia as they develop their capacity to lead and manage change. Since all school leaders in Virginia must complete a state-approved program, I wanted to explore how these programs prepared, or failed to prepare, school leaders to lead and manage change. In Chapter Three, I provided an overview of the research design and the data collection procedures that were used. I also described how I analyzed my data and measures that I took throughout my study to ensure my study was trustworthy and was conducted in an ethical manner.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the unique experiences of school leaders as they develop their capacity to lead and manage change. The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of the study and to answer the research questions described in Chapter One. This chapter provides a summary of the participants, the results of the study that includes a discussion of the themes developed from the data, and the responses to the research questions, and concludes with a chapter summary.

### **Participants**

The participants involved in this study included 12 school leaders. Six of the leaders are principals, five are assistant principals, and one serves in leadership at the district level. The participants consisted of seven females and five males. Three participants lead schools that would be classified as rural, seven lead schools in suburban areas, and two lead schools in urban areas. Four leaders currently work in a private school, and eight currently work in the public-school setting. Pseudonyms were used to protect and maintain confidentiality.

### **Danielle**

Danielle is an assistant high school principal and serves as the Dean of Women in a large, private Christian school. She described herself as “a proud mother of three.” She has earned a bachelor’s, master’s, and Education Specialist degree and is a current doctoral student. She has been in education for 24 years and has been in administration for four years. Danielle did not set out to be a teacher or a school leader but rather felt as if she “fell into” both. She considered her opportunities when she first graduated from college, and those decisions led her to teach. Similarly, she never aspired to become a school leader but wanted to change the world and had a

deep love and desire for justice. Her passion for education, learning, and students continued to grow. She was presented with an opportunity to become a school leader and entered an administration and supervision program (ASP).

### **David**

David is a principal at a large public middle school in an urban area but previously served as an elementary school principal. He introduced himself as “a husband first, the father of four beautiful kids, and then finally as an educator, lead learner, and school leader.” David has been in education for 15 years and has served as a school administrator for nine years. He holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees and is currently a doctoral student. David also had the unique experience of working in a fully accredited school and then in a school in the bottom 5% of Virginia schools. He entered teaching because he felt he had a calling to make a difference and impact lives. The summer schedule for teachers appealed to him because it offered opportunities for travel and service that might not exist in another profession. As he began to look for further opportunities, he enrolled in a master’s program. During that time, he had what he described as an “aha moment” that as a teacher, he could work with students and families for just one year, but as an administrator, he could work with students and families for six years, which “multiplied the impact that you have.” Throughout his interview, David maintained a strong focus on students and families.

### **Denise**

Denise is an assistant principal at a public elementary school in an urban area. She described herself as a mother of two and a wife. She has been in education for 20 years and has served as a school leader for seven years. During her first 17 years in education, she started as a long-term substitute, then became a classroom teacher, and then an instructional specialist, all at

the same school. She holds bachelor's, master's, and Education Specialist degrees. Denise wanted to work with children ever since she was a little girl. At various times, she wanted to be a child psychologist, a daycare provider, and a teacher. She described her love for teaching and the classroom. Denise enjoyed working as part of the support staff as an instructional specialist at the school; however, an unexpected resignation created an opportunity in school leadership. Upon the advice and encouragement of her principal, she applied, interviewed, and was offered the position of assistant principal. She said, "I was always the, you know, the classroom teacher...but when I got into administration, I really started to fall in love with it." Throughout Denise's interview, and even in the focus group, she often focused on providing support for teachers.

### **Jenna**

Jenna is a middle school assistant principal at a large private Christian school in a suburban area. She is a wife and a mother of two little girls. She has been in education for 15 years and in administration for 10 years. She has bachelor's and master's degrees and is a current doctoral student. She always wanted to be a teacher and has a passion for students to learn to the best of their ability. A former mentor and principal of hers encouraged her to pursue school administration because of her strong qualities in organization, leadership, and care for students and families. Throughout the interview, Jenna continually referenced her desire to support her teachers and focused on trust and relationships as a key part of effective leadership.

### **Jessica**

Jessica is currently a school leader at the division level of a large suburban county. As a Title I Coordinator, she works with schools with high poverty rates. She has been in education for 19 years and has been in administration for eight years. She has a bachelor's degree and two

master's degrees, with endorsements in Reading Specialist and Administration and Supervision. She originally planned on being a business major in college, but an overwhelming calling to be a teacher caused her to switch her major. She reflected on that experience and her time in business classes as preparation for her current position. Jessica did not specifically intend to move into administration but followed opportunities from the classroom to become an instructional coach and then a coordinator. Jessica described these positions as natural steps, and it was during this time that she returned to school to earn her administrative endorsement. She wanted to "prove my legitimacy as a leader, that I had done the work to be an administrator, that [being a building principal] just hasn't necessarily been my path." Jessica's experiences at the division level brought unique insights and diversity among participants.

### **Joshua**

Joshua is the principal at a public middle school in a rural area. He had previously served as an assistant principal, a high school social studies teacher, instructional facilitator, and a middle school teacher. He has been in education for 10 years and in administration for five years. He holds bachelor's and master's degrees. Joshua described his unique high school experience as the catalyst for his decision to become a teacher. "Education, particularly public education for me, is really kind of a saving grace for a lot of kids when you have good teachers." He reflected on the influence of his teachers, who helped him "navigate some of the tougher parts of childhood" and showed him "how much of a life-changing impact an educator could have." He described his skill set as organized, planned, and prepared, which he believed fit well with education. As he began his preparation for a career in education, he "wound up loving everything about it and fell deeply in love with the content." His high school experience was transformational in his desire to become a school leader. Joshua attended a very large high

school that “was in a rougher part of town that had become increasingly rough over time” but was awarded a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to support a 10-year transformation. Students had the opportunity to serve on committees and leadership teams and had “this wildly unique experience of seeing how much impact one person could have by the way that they led.” Joshua has a great appreciation for instruction and innovation.

### **Kelly**

Kelly is an assistant principal at a rural public school in a combined middle and high school. She works primarily with the middle school. She has bachelor’s and master’s degrees. Kelly has been in education for 12 years and has been an administrator for five years. As a former special education teacher, she brings unique skills to her role. Kelly’s dad was in the military while she was growing up, and she moved 10 times before graduating from high school. School and her teachers provided consistency and stability for her amid so much transition. Her experiences inspired her to provide the same kind of positive impact on other children, which led her to become a teacher. Kelly became a school leader to expand her reach and impact. She described public education as a mission field where she can have a positive impact on others. As an administrator, she believes she can impact and support even more students and teachers.

### **Kimberly**

Kimberly is the principal at a suburban public elementary school. She is currently the principal at a Title I school. Her husband is also a school administrator, and they have college-age children. Kimberly began her career as a music teacher before becoming a principal. She has a bachelor’s degree and two master’s degrees, one in music education and the other in school administration. Kimberly has been in education for 26 years and an administrator for 11 years. She described her life experiences as what led her to teach and then to administration. She did

not necessarily plan on becoming a principal but was highly encouraged by the associate superintendent in her division. She enjoys the expanded impact of working with students and families more than she was able to as a music teacher. “It’s the greatest job in the world. I get the chance to impact the lives of every child in my school every single day and hopefully now their families too.” Her goal is to provide a safe environment at school and a safe place within the community.

### **Michael**

Michael is the middle school principal at a Christian school in a suburban area, although he has served as the assistant principal in a public elementary and high school as well. He and his wife have three children, one of whom is also studying to become a teacher. Michael started working with students as a youth pastor, which he did for nine years after graduating from college. He has also coached basketball throughout his career. He has a bachelor’s degree in psychology, two master’s degrees in special education and administration, and an Education Specialist degree. He has been in education for 16 years and in administration for 11. He became a teacher and coach to have a different impact on students than he had as a youth pastor. He did not have specific goals to become an administrator, but his long-time interest in leadership propelled him into an administration and supervision program. He then became a principal upon the request of his superintendent.

### **Natalie**

Natalie is the elementary assistant principal at a suburban Christian school. She has experience in Christian, private, and public education in multiple states and localities. She has a bachelor’s degree, a master’s degree, and is currently enrolled in an Education Specialist program. She has been in education for 19 years, all at the elementary level, and in

administration for four years. Natalie always enjoyed being around children and engaging with them. She always loved school herself, so it felt like a natural step to become a teacher. She wanted to become a school leader because of the influence and mentorship of an assistant principal that she worked with previously. She enjoyed working with the curriculum and wanted to have the opportunity to shape and direct curriculum and instruction at her school. She appreciates the assistant principal role and considers “what the teachers need and want and how to support them.” Throughout her interview, she had a strong focus on communication and collaboration.

### **Steven**

Steven is the principal at a public high school in a rural area. He has bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees. Steven has been in education for 16 years and has been in administration for eight years. He started his career in education out of a desire to coach. The more time that he spent in the classroom, the more he enjoyed it. Steven became an administrator because he believed he could make a difference and that he had the skill set to do it. He described the importance of good leaders and mentors in his life that encouraged him to pursue administration.

### **Tom**

Tom is the principal at a suburban public elementary school. He started his career as a guidance counselor in several different states before becoming an assistant principal. He has bachelor’s and master’s degrees. Tom has been in education for 13 years and has been in administration for 11 years. He knew from the time he was in middle school that he wanted to help people. Tom mentioned, “A lot of people don’t necessarily need solutions; they just need someone to listen.” His desire to listen led him into school counseling, and he enjoyed the

opportunity to work with students and guide them socially, personally, and academically. He did not have intentions of becoming an administrator but had mentors and people in his life who encouraged him to pursue those opportunities. Tom views being a principal as “not running a building—it’s building a culture.” Throughout his interview, he regularly mentioned the importance of culture in a school.

## **Results**

The design of this study was a qualitative transcendental phenomenological study that focused on the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Because these school leaders are the ones who are implementing change initiatives, their perceptions are essential to understanding how they develop their capacity to lead change. The literature indicates that many school leaders are not adequately prepared to lead change and that many change initiatives are not successful (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015; Kotter, 2017; Page & Schoder, 2019; Washington & Hacker, 2005). The central research question and sub-questions focus on the perceptions of how school leaders prepare for change and what behaviors are most important in the process of leading change. These research questions are considered within the context and framework of Mezirow’s (1997) theory of transformative learning.

### **Theme Development**

The data collection process began with semi-structured interviews with each of the 12 participants. The individual interviews included 20 questions that were grounded in the literature. The first six questions were general background questions to establish rapport with the participants and to provide some basic context of the participants’ experiences. The next six questions related to the participants’ experiences in learning about change. Five questions helped to explore the participants’ experiences in implementing change. The final three

questions assessed the congruence between the participants' preparation and experience. Nine of the interviews were conducted virtually through Microsoft Teams, and three interviews were conducted in person. The interviews lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. I recorded all the interviews and transcribed them soon after the interview. I provided each participant a copy of the transcript for member checking. None of the participants found errors or had changes.

The second phase of data collection was a letter of advice each participant wrote to a future school leader about leading change effectively. The participants had the opportunity to ponder the questions and develop their answers in written form. The letters varied in length, but all addressed the given prompts.

Data collection concluded with the focus groups. I scheduled three focus groups virtually through Microsoft Teams and invited participants to select their preferred time. Each focus group had four participants and lasted approximately 30 minutes each. I asked six questions about leading change that were all grounded in the literature. The focus groups resembled a conversation rather than simply a list of questions. Participants expounded upon other participant's comments and furthered the discussion. I recorded and transcribed the focus groups and then sent the completed transcription to participants for member checking.

I used NVivo software to code my data. I used an open coding method. The coding process was iterative, and I continued to go back to my data as I developed codes. After identifying all of my codes, I added the number of participants that mentioned that code and the number of references to generate a total number. I examined them as a whole and then began to group and classify the codes through horizontalization and clusters of meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). I considered the rankings of the codes based on the total number of references and participants. During the grouping process, themes began to emerge. I classified

the themes into three categories according to my research questions, perceptions about ASP, training, and effective behaviors (Table 2). As themes are discussed, unless otherwise noted, the rich data presented for each theme was primarily derived from the interviews with the participants.

Table 2

*Theme Development from Codes*

Research Questions	Theme	Codes	# of Leaders Commenting	# of Unique References	Total	Overall Ranking
Perceptions about ASP	Knowability	Implementing Change	17	42	59	5
		Preparation for Change	13	25	38	11 (tied)
		Models of Change	11	21	32	15
		Bureaucracy	8	19	27	17
		No Change Classes	10	11	21	21 (tied)
	Leadership	Training	7	21	28	16
		Listening	8	13	21	21 (tied)
		Ownership	8	12	20	22
		Leadership	3	7	10	29
	Practical Value	Program	14	38	52	7 (tied)
Training	Experience	Skills	13	60	73	2 (tied)
		Experience	14	45	58	6
		Process of Change	14	38	52	7 (tied)
		Drivers for Change	17	34	51	8
		Crisis Change	10	28	38	11 (tied)
		Time	13	25	38	11 (tied)
		Self-Efficacy	11	26	37	12 (tied)
		Emergent Change	9	13	22	20 (tied)
		Planned Change	7	14	21	21 (tied)
		Flexibility	5	9	14	27 (tied)
		Self-Aware	3	6	9	30
		Reflection	3	5	8	31 (tied)
		Adaptability	3	3	6	33
	Mindset	Growth Mindset	6	9	15	26
		Resiliency	8	10	18	23 (tied)
	Mentors	Mentors	14	31	45	9
Professional Development	Transformative Learning	13	24	37	12 (tied)	

Effective Behaviors	Communication	Communication	19	68	87	1
		Influencers	5	21	26	18
	Trust	Trust	16	45	61	4
		Emotional Intelligence	14	38	52	7 (tied)
		Human Process	15	29	44	10 (tied)
		Community	14	23	37	12 (tied)
		Culture	11	25	36	13
		People-Centered	11	22	33	14
		Change				
		Relationships	8	16	24	19
		Transparency	6	11	17	24
		Collective Identity	8	8	16	25 (tied)
	Support	7	9	16	25 (tied)	
	Clarity	Buy-in	18	55	73	2 (tied)
		Big Picture	14	30	44	10 (tied)
		Clarity	15	23	38	11 (tied)
		Vision	7	11	18	23 (tied)
	Competency	Capacity for Change	14	49	63	3 (tied)
		Lifelong-Learner	6	8	14	27 (tied)
		Competency	5	6	11	28
		Research-Based	4	4	8	31 (tied)
		Organized	3	4	7	32
	Detailed	1	1	2	34	
	Feedback	Data and Feedback	18	45	63	(3 tied)
		Reinforcement	9	13	22	20 (tied)

**Perceptions about ASP.** The Administration and Supervision program is a crucial component of gaining an administrative endorsement in Virginia. The participants represented five different ASPs throughout Virginia. Some of the programs featured a cohort model and were completely in-person, some were completely online, and some featured a hybrid of online and in-person courses. Participants reported many similarities in the programs, in terms of courses and focus of study. Since all school leaders must successfully pass the School Leaders Licensure Assessment (SLLA) to gain an administrative endorsement, the programs featured topics and skills relevant to the licensure exam.

**Knowability.** One key element that brought different ideas was the knowability of change management. Only David and Steven remembered learning specifically about change management in their programs. David cited Kotter and Steven remembered Marzano's work on

change. These were the only two models of change that were mentioned. Tom did not think a model would be helpful, “because everything is unique...I don’t think there’s something that’s written in stone.” Other participants perceived that change management is something one can only learn experientially. In her interview, Denise said, “I just think the world that we live in—there’s not a program in the world that would ever prepare you for the day-to-day changes that you’re going to face.” Tom said, “there’s just some things we can’t practice.” Some participants felt limited in their ability to prepare for change or to learn about change in an academic setting. Jessica mentioned in her interview the limitations of the program to prepare administrators, “it can only prepare you but so much for the real-world experience.” In her letter of advice, Jessica cautioned, “Change *will* occur and there may not be a guidebook provided for ‘5 Steps to Navigating this Change;’ in fact, there may be no direction given at all.” When talking about his program, Joshua said, “How do you prepare yourself for stuff like that? And I don’t know what the answer is.” In reflecting on her program, Kelly said:

I think they were limited in how well they could prepare for leading change because I do think that there’s a practical side that you just kind of have to jump in and experience it to be able to do it well. And so I think that has had to come just from my experience and not from my preparation degree program.

Kimberly echoed this idea, “You get a tip of the iceberg and you have no idea what it’s really going to be like until you’re in the middle of it.” Similarly, Danielle shared “Preparation is necessary and needed, but I do think there are some experiences that you’re thrown into and you just have to do the best you can to make it through with whatever skills you’ve already been given.” During the focus group, Tom focused on the experiential component of learning change management, “I wouldn’t look in a textbook and say, ‘How do I change?’ I mean, there’s

millions of books out there on how to do it, but really, that's all irrelevant." Although there were some different ideas on the knowability of change management, the participants' perceptions were that change management is not something that can be learned in a program or prepared for apart from the change itself.

**Leadership.** Although participants had different ideas about the knowability of change management specifically, a theme emerged that the best way to prepare for change was to develop general leadership skills. In Jessica's letter of advice, she recommended that although there is no manual for navigating crisis change, "the fact is that in any given year, a host of changes may require a leader's management skills." She continued, "for change management, the future school leader may want to spend time developing a firm identity as a leader." When discussing the skills necessary for change management, participants cited specific skills as well as general ideas about leadership. They believed that effective leaders would naturally be effective change leaders. In his interview, Joshua described the most beneficial part of his program in preparing for change:

It's the classes that were more open-ended in nature. I can't remember the number of it, but the one class that was—foundations of leadership or principles of leadership, something along those lines—where we just discussed a lot and we were posed with a lot of open-ended scenario-based questions. I feel like those are the ones where I learned the most and kind of gained the most.

Most participants communicated that being intentional about developing their leadership capacity would also develop their capacity to lead and manage change.

**Practical Value.** All participants reported the practical elements of their programs were the most helpful. Steven summarized this idea, "The courses that helped me were the ones that

had practical value.” The participants who were in cohort programs found their ASP particularly beneficial. Michael shared, “It was really great to be part of the cohort and to work through a lot of change and all kinds of things.” David mentioned in his interview that his program “emphasized a lot on applying what was on paper...and then we had a number of opportunities to discuss that with my colleagues. There were hypothetical situations, there were real situations.” Tom described his program, saying, “What I really loved about it is, while they were classes, everything was practical, or everything was made practical to come to life.” Danielle found her program helpful:

What I didn't realize is that what I would learn in a class environment gave words to the things that I was trying and hoping was going well and in a context that so they actually worked well together. I finally had the technical term to explain why I was doing the thing that I was doing.

Not all participants found their programs to be as helpful. Kelly noted that although her program was very good, “it leaned a little heavy on theoretical rather than practical...I guess maybe the assumption was you get the practical things through your internship and mentoring opportunities.” Jessica echoed a similar idea, observing that her program was also heavy on the theoretical side of leadership and education. Steven expressed concerns that “if colleges and universities don't continue to stay very close to schools and what our students need, they're going to be at risk of not preparing.” Participants noted there were limits to how well their programs prepared them. In her interview, Denise observed, “I think in theory a lot of the theoretical practices that I've learned—about communicating, about school law, were a big help in implementing change, but I think just the human side of things—I've just had to learn on my own.”

**Training.** School leaders do not only learn about change in an ASP; they also learn how to lead and manage change throughout their careers, through various experiences, the influence of mentors, and timely professional development. Several participants referenced the cumulative nature of learning how to lead change. Kimberly mentioned that by practicing small changes every day, “when we need to make these bigger moves, we’re prepared to do those.”

Participants described their ongoing training and efforts to increase their capacity to change.

**Experience.** All participants acknowledged the value of experience in preparing to lead and manage change. Danielle said in her interview that she uses “current experience to develop and foster better ways to accomplish things.” David shared that “the nature of being a principal, you’re constantly dealing with change and staff and students and instructional directives from a division, being nine years in, I feel much more equipped than I was a couple of years in.” Joshua affirmed this idea in one of the focus groups, pointing out, “the nature of our job exposes all of us to constant change anyway. I feel like every day there’s so much unpredictability to what I’m going to do. I’m kind of forced to live in change.” Denise discussed how she has grown through her experiences:

When you’re leading change, you are in the process. You are navigating, you are feeling the pains, you are experiencing the victories, you are in it knee-deep. No matter how good or bad it is, you are experiencing it right along beside your staff.

Through those experiences of pain and victories, she used those experiences to inspire herself to become better.

Every instance I’ve had for change, I’ve learned something new about how to make implementing change a little bit smoother, how to monitor the change, how to provide

support in the change. Each instance I've had with implementing change, I've had a good takeaway. I've even taken the negative takeaways and turned them into positives. In his interview, Tom also talked about experiences in other areas of life and how those could also help. He specifically mentioned how becoming a parent helped him to develop more patience at school as a leader. Years of experiences provided participants opportunities to learn and practice leadership and change skills. With experience, school leaders become more attuned to the impact of their decision making.

***Mindset.*** Participants repeatedly discussed the importance of mindset in maximizing the impact of their experiences. A growth mindset allowed participants to learn from their experiences and their mistakes to make better decisions for the future. Participants with a growth mindset believed that they had the capacity to improve and become better leaders.

During her interview, Denise emphasized the importance of learning from experience:

Trial-and-error and lots of mistakes. Um, they were hard. Those mistakes were hard to accept at first because I felt like I was failing, but after going through it and getting muddy and having to brush myself off and trying it again and things working out better, it was easier to accept the failure than the first time.

Joshua, Kelly, and Steven all echoed the trial-and-error approach. After leading an initial change, Jenna "gained more insight to know how to lead the next change." Kimberly said, "Sometimes you learn by doing the wrong thing . . . it's safe to fail forward. We're going to make mistakes. I'm going to make mistakes. You're going to make mistakes." Reflection was an important part of the process for participants. They wanted the freedom to make mistakes in the process, but it was also important for them to reflect on those mistakes so they could make changes. Tom observed that "no one likes to fail, but I think if you don't learn from those

mistakes or try to get better, that's the travesty when you don't learn from those things.”

Participants described their ability to be resilient and overcome failures when they viewed those mistakes as learning opportunities. Tom believed it was important for leaders to “get comfortable being uncomfortable.” Jenna and Danielle discussed the importance of a continual growth process.

***Mentors.*** During one of the focus groups, Joshua mentioned how he has benefitted from the collaboration with other leaders and the ability to ask for advice. Kelly and Jenna also spoke about the role of mentors. Kelly said, “For me to talk to other people who are going through the same thing, who are maybe, one step ahead of things—that has been helpful, and to have that professional camaraderie and collaboration.” Jenna agreed, “I think taking advantage of listening to those mentors in your life and seeing those people who have helped encourage you through your leadership skills.” In her individual interview, Jessica discussed the impact that other leaders had on her, both positively and negatively:

You learn things to do, and you learn things not to do . . . . I've seen some things where people have done really, really well, and things people have done not so well and lived through long-term implications and changes that haven't been brought about real well.

Jessica believed that observing leaders, both effective and ineffective is what prepared her more than anything else. All of the participants included references of mentors they had and the influence of other leaders. David acknowledged this in the focus group, “I think everybody's in their position as well, in large part, because of someone that they see as a mentor or someone that they've trusted along the way.” Participants saw mentors as a resource while preparing for change and amid change as well.

***Professional Development.*** Professional development was one way that school leaders prepared themselves to lead change. Participants readily acknowledged that their perceptions were influenced by their training and professional development opportunities. David described this concept:

I think if I were to go through the program with the lens that I have now and like, re-entered it, I'd probably see everything that I wish I saw with my teaching eyes lens and what I mean by that is...I focused on different things because I was going at it from a teacher lens because that was my experience.

David experienced his ASP differently because of the role and perspective he held at that point in time; his perspective has changed due to the new role he currently holds. Tom emphasized the importance of relevant professional development:

Professional knowledge is key, as long as it's applicable and practical. You know, I think theory versus application are two different things, and you can read all you in leadership magazines, and that's all great, but I think you have to be able to equip yourself with the tools necessary to change.

Mezirow's theory of transformative learning is grounded in this idea of relevant learning. David suggested including a colleague in the learning process when attending a conference or doing a book study. Having a colleague "to help digest the process with has been really beneficial in my experience." Tom recommended that leaders maximize those "aha" moments in formal learning through their openness. He said, "If you go in with an open mindset, a growth mindset, to learn, then any program should be beneficial...I truly think that you get in what you put in, or you get out what you put in." Other participants also referred to informal learning opportunities as a

helpful way to prepare for change. Jessica recommended that leaders begin with the needs of their school community and let those needs drive areas of continual development.

**Effective behaviors.** Through their ASPs and their experiences, school leaders have learned which key behaviors are necessary to support effective change processes. Although most participants' ASPs did not specifically address change management, their programs did address behaviors that are important to change management and leadership.

**Communication.** Communication emerged as a central theme and had the most coding references. Jessica said, "Communication would be at the top of the list," and Kelly said, "Communicate, communicate, and communicate again." Denise talked about communication as the key to buy-in among staff and families because "they thrive on communication and they thrive on transparency." This is a way for stakeholders to know their leaders have their best interests in mind. Jenna found that "without clear communication and organization, change can become chaotic and cause individuals to doubt the process." Jessica summarized the importance of communication within the change management process, "Leaders who, ultimately, are responsible for not only navigating the changes, but interpreting, assimilating, applying, implementing, and communicating each new piece of information to a host of audiences ranging from students to school board members." Steven also emphasized the importance of communication, saying, "If I don't communicate the message, then they're going to form their own message and it's going to probably be the wrong message, so I think communication is critical."

Communication often involves disseminating information. Participants used emails, newsletters, signage, their school's website, social media, videos, phone calls, and face-to-face meetings. With recent restrictions related to Covid-19, participants described how they

innovated new ways to continue to share information. During her interview, Jessica described communicating with stakeholders as a way of serving the community. She said, “Engaging your stakeholders isn’t just a key element to embed in your SLLA responses; it really does matter.” Kelly echoed the idea that communication is not simply a cliché: “I think when we hear some of the hot button words of ‘collaboration with all stakeholders’ and that kind of thing; it sounds really good when we say it, but I think as we lead change that IS important.” Michael described how he tries to anticipate the reception to a change and tries to do the groundwork of building consensus: “You have to state your case as to why it’s necessary, and you may have to change some hearts and minds.” Danielle explained how she tries to give information as early as possible so her teachers “are not surprised or they don’t have to experience anxiety and long wait periods, which breed mistrust.” Other participants concurred, saying that sometimes, they will communicate even if they do not have all the information so that their teachers feel included and part of the process. Kelly takes advantage of every opportunity she can to answer questions and to explain decisions, because:

You don’t always have time or it’s not always appropriate to tell them why. But if you’ve taken opportunities when you can to share that with them, then they do have that trust and buy-in to know there is a method to the madness.

Listening is a significant aspect of communication. In the focus group, Natalie described weekly Facebook Lives as a way to communicate with parents:

The opportunity to talk and to ask questions big and small...it gave us the information we needed and helped our teachers and parents so much to know that there were open lines of communication and that no matter what their situation was that we would hear them and make adjustments as needed.

Joshua found what helped him manage change better was when he understood how previous changes impacted everyone. He found that some of the best lessons he learned came “from people who just gave me very honest feedback...sometimes those things are frustrating, or hard to hear, and I’ve had to learn to sometimes just to keep my mouth shut and listen.” He also described how he tries to listen to groups that sometimes no one listens to: “Like your paraprofessionals, and your office staff, because you will get ideas from people that you would never come up with yourself, and you’d get ideas for things that you didn’t even know weren’t working very well.” In her interview, Kimberly described how she always leaves time for questions and answers during her faculty meetings:

Good, better, ugly—sometimes it’s not great. But I’m trying to teach them to be comfortable with the uncomfortable subjects because change is hard...being able to talk about those pieces and teachers to feel like they have a voice. And that seems to help change go better.

Tom also discussed the importance of listening and understanding his community: “If people stop coming and talking to me, then I better be scared. My door is always open and that’s purposeful because I want people to understand that I’m here for them, I’m here for kids.”

Another important aspect of communication involves the collaboration and inclusion of multiple voices in the planning process. Participants regularly referred to influencers, or the teachers in their building to who they could bring changes first. Steven calls his team the “Solutions Team.” Kimberly found that by including key influencers within her school in the change process, she was able to empower them to become change agents and communicate change within her school. She stated, “Sometimes the best for it to come from is not from me...it gives me the opportunity to grow some leadership there.” David and Kelly both

described similar processes, communicating first with a small group of leaders and then expanding communication to the larger school community. They both used the analogy of ripples in the water that start small and expand their impact. In her interview, Jessica said she likes to begin change with a “coalition of the willing.” Several participants mentioned that they intentionally look to include influencers who are not always in agreement. Influencers who tend to resist change are valuable to the process because they bring additional questions and ensure change initiatives are well-thought-out. Kimberly described how she first brings ideas to a core group of people that are just natural leaders in our building to get excited about it or pique their curiosity—even my naysayers. If I can just open the door a little bit, get the door cracked, then that’s the only opportunity I need to be able to, you know, get it through the entire building.

Participants discussed how they identify the influencers. Sometimes they intentionally seek out people to provide leadership, and other times, individuals with influence simply emerge.

**Trust.** Trust was another significant theme that emerged from the data. There was consensus among participants that even though they had not received specific training in change management, they believed their general leadership skills allowed them to lead change effectively. Trust and relationships went hand in hand and were recurring themes throughout the data collection. Tom alluded to this in one of the focus groups, saying that it starts with how they lead on day one. “And you know, if you lead your staff in such a way and your team in such a way that they believe in what you do, and trust in what you do, that’s 90% of it.” David was intentional about building relationships based on trust so that teachers perceived him as a co-laborer in their work. Jessica followed up this idea, saying that much of work in leading change “happens before it ever happens because you’re going to get so much further along if you’ve got

good relationships, trust, and a track record of transparency.” Kimberly found that she could make changes further into the year because she has had “a lot of building trust since August and September and every month in being there.” Kelly wrote in her letter of advice:

First, build a foundation of trust within your team and with your external stakeholders. Trust, and its quiet partner, respect, create an environment in which change can be embraced. When your team trusts you and your vision, they will be more willing to support needed change.

Trust allows for leaders to manage the human aspect of change. Denise observed that “anytime you’re implementing change, there is going to be hiccups because we’re dealing with people, especially in education.” Tom agreed:

When you deal with the human element of change, I mean it’s hard anyway...what works better, what doesn’t, it’s understanding your clientele and stakeholders in terms of the needs and wants, and the relationships you’ve built upon.

Danielle built trust with her teachers by modeling her expectations and being a servant leader. She said, “I just practice that I’m never going to ask them to do anything that I’m not willing to do myself.” Tom shared a similar sentiment, “Over time you build trust in your daily actions, not just because you’ve done one or two things, but because, again, I practice what I preach and that I wouldn’t ask anyone to do anything that I wouldn’t do.” In her interview, Jenna advised a new school leader that the most important thing leaders can do to lead change effectively is to develop relationships with colleagues. Jenna further described how she had built relationships, largely through being real and authentic. Michael wrote in his letter of advice that leaders must have the integrity to build trust. Tom wanted his community to be able to trust him because “he’s a man of his word, if he says something, he’s going to go forward.” Kimberly

described her current school as having a lack of trust and teamwork. When she became the principal the previous year, her only goal was to bring people together and her first priority “was to create a level of safety in the building, being visible, being available, doing what I told people I was going to do, and following through, and being approachable and having a door that was open.” She believed that nothing of importance could be accomplished without trust and relationships. Joshua described trust as being reciprocal in nature. As important as it is for his teachers to trust him, he must also trust them. “I kind of learned over time that when I had staff members with really great ideas, who perhaps I didn’t let run with those ideas because of my own fears, I would see the repercussions of that.” Steven found that visibility was an effective way to build trust, when people could see him and knew where he was, they felt supported.

Transparency is a key element of building trust. Kimberly discussed the importance of transparency:

I find that when the truth is conveyed about, ‘this is hard,’ let’s speak trust into the reality of what we’re living. ‘This is hard. It’s going to be different. We’re not sure how it’s going to work, but we’re asking us to give it our best effort. And let’s see what we can do.’ I find value in that, and I find value and buy-in in that as well. People are willing to go with you if they can trust where you’re leading them.

Kelly described how she draws upon trust, transparency, and relationships with teachers who may be resistant to change:

To gain that trust, and to be open with them, to be honest with them, to let them know that, ‘Hey, you may be resistant to change, and you are totally justified in that, whatever that change, but this is what I need you to do and this is why I need you to do it.’

Steven also emphasized the importance of transparency. He found that people will often feel frustrated during change because change can be difficult. Although it may be easier to avoid change, he encouraged his staff to push through change processes by being transparent about what they were doing and why.

Not all situations allow for a coalition or constituent involvement. Trust is a critical component in crisis change, or when leaders cannot disclose information or involve teachers. Tom drew on these experiences when he had to make executive decisions, that because of the trust he had built with his teachers, his change initiatives were still successful. Jenna had similar experiences and shared when incidents occurred where changes had to be made immediately or in an emergency crisis, when teachers knew they were supported. Jenna stated, “I have seen them implement change throughout and it has been effective.” Steven advised new leaders to “earn the trust of your staff by managing the building well and supporting teachers in their daily efforts to educate students. Once you have earned their trust, you will have gained permission to lead them to uncharted territory.” Kimberly added that leaders are not always able to build relationships before implementing change, “that’s where you might offset that with some transparency and just say, ‘Look, here’s where we are, here’s where we’ve got to be. This is what I need from you.’ Be willing to step out and make those decisions.”

Participants found that trust is crucial with students, families, and the community as well. Steven found that if parents do not see sincerity or believe the leaders have their child’s best interests in mind, there is a lack of trust, which makes change very difficult. In his interview, Tom shared that his first goal was to build trust with his staff, students, and community, because “if there’s no trust, there’s no relationships.” Jessica addressed the importance of relationships with families and the community as well, advising leaders to end each day “knowing you did

what you could do to serve yours well and ultimately your Maker who entrusted their care to you in the first place.”

*Clarity.* Another theme from the data is clarity. Participants consistently described the importance of clarity in how they manage change with words like vision, clarity, big-picture, buy-in, and the “why.” Participants found the reason and motivation for a change were essential to the initiative’s success and effectiveness. Steven discussed in his interview the importance of core values within his school, “I guess you start with the things that you can all agree are important and valuable, and then you build from that framework. So, no matter what you do, you don’t get away from the important core values.” Jessica also discussed the necessity of alignment between core values and change in her interview: “You really need to take a step back and figure out if this change is really necessary.” Denise advised future leaders to remain committed to the work they have been called to do.

In her letter of advice, Kelly advised future school leaders to clearly understand the purpose for change, “Be as knowledgeable as possible on both the objective and the implementation of the plan.” Tom also discussed the purpose of change in his interview, “If we make a big decision that might be difficult to understand, I want them to understand why I’m doing it.” Joshua and Tom both said the motivation for all change must be what is best for students. David said, “What I always try to keep in the forefront is the why behind the change.” Steven advised, “If you want to successfully navigate change, build a shared vision of success and stay the course when circumstances get difficult.” During change initiatives, Denise communicated to her teachers, “We’re going to work through it together, and this is why we’re doing it. We’re not doing it because it’s my way; we’re doing it because it’s what’s best for children.” Tom described how, as a leader, he takes ownership of change implementation and

establishes significance. “I’m not like, ‘well, the county says we have to do this, or the state says...’ No one’s buying into that. I say, ‘This is what we need to do and here’s why.’” Change can be difficult; therefore, Tom’s goal was to generate buy-in from teachers by creating meaning beyond simply fulfilling a given task but into something that impacts students. In the focus group, Michael discussed the importance of buy-in and bringing teachers on board with the change. “It’s hard to hammer things through when it’s 50/50. You’re not doing that in a school. You really want more buy-in than 50% of the people who are affected by it, so it’s hard work.” Jessica described a new leadership role in which she slowly built vision and support with her team: “making sure that they were on track with that and our vision of serve and support as opposed to external policing, which is what I think it came down to prior.”

Several participants mentioned the importance of data-driven decisions that use current research and best practices to bring clarity and purpose to change. Denise found that her teachers “want to know what the data says.” Joshua recommended to future leaders, “When you have strong, definitive data and research to back up your ideas for change, it will make it easier to get everyone on board.” Steven started a change initiative by presenting data and research. Kelly and Jenna also discussed the role of research in creating buy-in. Another way to facilitate buy-in was to help teachers have ownership in the change process. Kelly attributed some of the success of previous change initiatives to ownership and that teachers were more engaged in the process when they were part of the change.

Clarity can look both backward and forward. Participants discussed the idea of having clarity surrounding the motivations for change, the reasons that prompted the change, as well as clarity surrounding the way forward. In her interview, Jenna said, “You have to have vision to know where you want to go.” Steven talked about the need to have a long-term vision and the

ability to see all the necessary steps to make progress towards that vision. He went on to describe the big-picture planning and the immediate execution as balancing leadership and management. Both are important and must occur in balance to be effective. Kimberly echoed this idea: “When you lead change, you’re thinking about what’s happening next, what is your overall arching goal, what is your purpose in doing it, and who are you bringing along with you to do it, versus sending someone else.” David believed the first step in leading change was to establish a clear vision. Jessica likened change leadership to lesson design, in that leaders need to consider “what is it going to take to go from where you are to where you want to be in a reasonable amount of time for whatever change you’re trying to implement.”

**Competency.** Through the data collection process, participants discussed the importance of competencies and technical skills for effective change leaders. Change initiatives are implemented more effectively when leaders are organized and detailed. Natalie mentioned that she felt pulled in many directions, so staying organized helped her to focus on changes that would meet the needs of her school. Jenna found that without organization, changes can become chaotic, which leads to resistance. Steven described how leaders ought to be able to troubleshoot and problem solve the day-to-day issues: “I think that leaders need to be good managers if they’re going to demonstrate competency towards leadership.”

Participants believed content competencies were important in the change process. David observed that an important part of making data-driven decisions is understanding the cycle of instruction and knowing the curriculum. Jessica advised future leaders to “know what you don’t know and seek to fill the gap...which will, in turn, make leading and managing change an easier task to tackle.” Michael emphasized competence in his letter of advice: “People need to see that you know what you are doing.” In a focus group, David described how he developed his

competence by serving on different committees or being involved in areas that are outside of his standard expertise. David noted, “I think going outside of your own wheelhouse a little bit will help stretch and grow you.” Tom expressed a similar idea, saying that it was important for him to “get comfortable being uncomfortable.”

Another competency the participants discussed was that of a growth mindset, or being a life-long learner. Tom applied his advice to students to his faculty and staff as well: “I tell students every day they can make mistakes, and I tell them these are teachable moments. There’s also teachable moments for us as staff, and it’s that growth mindset piece.” Steven observed that “it’s the job of a leader to lead the learning, not necessarily have all the answers.” Danielle described how she seeks opportunities to learn and to “remind myself that change is really just growth and that inevitably we’re designed in many ways to become. There is this belief that you know, you reach a certain level, and you coast from there... I don’t see it; that’s not how we’re made.” She emphasized that learning is a continual process, not simply a linear process with a clear ending goal.

**Feedback.** Feedback emerged as an important discipline in change management and can refer to different stages of the change process. Feedback can come during the initial data gathering phase as part of the planning process, or throughout the process, as leaders engage with stakeholders. Feedback can also be present during the reinforcement phase of change initiatives.

Feedback can help to initiate change by illuminating areas that require change. Steven described how he begins the change process using feedback. “We certainly want to start with the data. We look at our school quality indicators and our school report card, and then we identify areas in weakness, and then we set goals and then we identify action steps.” Kimberly concurred, observing that her school improvement plan guides all her decisions. Jessica thought

that effective leaders needed to be able to “synthesize knowledge from various avenues so that you’re looking at data, at qualitative and quantitative data, and you’re looking at what your stakeholders have to say; you’re looking at the state and what your school board has to say.”

Gathering feedback throughout a change process is essential. Joshua learned through experience that a major flaw in change initiatives is that

We can come up with good ideas and we can implement them really well, but inevitably, not everything is going to work perfect, and if we have not planned and very intentionally put in some accountability measures, we may not think to come back together as a team.

Kelly described in her interview how she gathers feedback from her faculty and staff with formal meetings as well as through informal methods like walking the halls and “making it a point to continually go out and check the pulse on initiatives.” Michael discussed gathering feedback throughout a change process, to see if he attained the goal. He noted, “If you do, great, and if you don’t, either you throw it out or you say, ‘Hey, this is worth sticking with and let’s keep pushing until we get where we want to go.’” Participants gathered feedback through surveys, interviews, discussions, and hard data like test scores or attendance rates.

Participants recognized reinforcement as an important part of the feedback process. Jenna said in her interview, “You have to have it clear, concise, and keep them involved along the process. You can’t just communicate one time and expect it to happen overnight.” In her letter, Kelly advised future school leaders to follow up and provide “frequent feedback and necessary support.” Participants celebrated the efforts of faculty and staff to support the change initiatives by reinforcing what they were doing and why they were doing it.

## Research Question Responses

The interviews, letters of advice, and focus groups were the data collection methods used to answer the research questions. The rich, textural descriptions gathered from participants provided a full understanding of the experiences of school leaders. Although the participants have had different experiences and lead in different contexts, they had some shared experiences. These shared experiences led to the development of the themes that answered the research questions.

**Central Research Question.** What are the experiences of school leaders in Virginia as they develop their capacity to lead and manage change?

**Sub-Question One.** What are school leaders' perceptions about what they learned in their administration and supervision programs to prepare them to lead and manage change?

Three primary themes emerged from the data to describe the perceptions of school leaders about their ASPs: the knowability of change management, the development of leadership skills, and the practicality of their program. The most notable perception of school leaders concerned the knowability of change management. Most participants felt limited in their ability to study change management and prepare for change initiatives. Generally, participants did not find that their programs prepared them for change management, but they also did not believe their programs could prepare them. Consistently, the data reflected the idea that change management was something one could only learn by doing. While experience is absolutely a valuable part of becoming an effective change leader, it is possible to learn how to lead and manage change through a program.

School leaders in this study did not perceive that their ASP explicitly prepared them to lead change; they felt their programs helped to develop them as leaders. Participants recognized

the leadership skills that facilitated effective change management and believed their programs developed those skills. Communication is a critical skill in leading change efforts. Likewise, communication with stakeholders is an essential element of the SLLA, and participants felt fully prepared in this area. Although ASPs may not include change management as part of their curriculum, they do address leadership skills, which can help to facilitate change management. Most school leaders did not recognize the need for explicit training in change management.

Participants described varying levels of practicality in their programs, but all recognized the need to apply what they learned in their classes. Programs that included practical elements were perceived as helpful and effective. School leaders described discussions on current topics or scenario-based instruction as having the greatest impact on their capabilities as school leaders. Interestingly, participants recognized the need for research-based best practices and did not want less theoretical learning or research. However, they believed it was only as helpful to the extent that learning could be applied to the real work of being a school administrator. Classes where there was little application were less desirable, or at worst, a waste of time.

***Sub-Question Two.*** Since school leaders are likely to refine their perspectives as they gain experience and their assumptions are challenged, how do they describe their training to lead and manage change?

The ongoing professional development in change management mirrored the initial learning in the ASPs, in that participants reported very little explicit instruction in how to lead change. Participants still described their ongoing professional development as offering them leadership development, which indirectly supported their efforts in change management. A few participants reported exposure to John Kotter, a leader in change management, but most had little to no training in change management. However, all participants felt more equipped to lead

change because of their experiences. A growth mindset was essential in the ability to learn from experience. Kimberly mentioned several times that it was important for leaders to fail forward and to view mistakes as learning opportunities. David described the difference between his teaching eyes and his administrator's eyes, which perfectly described Mezirow's theory of transformative learning. David recognized that he was probably taught several things about change management that did not resonate at the time since he was learning as a teacher. However, as an administrator, he believed he would be more open to some of the things he learned in the class.

Because the natural progression for school leaders is to come up through the ranks as teachers, they have many opportunities to learn from other leaders. All participants mentioned leaders who mentored them in some capacity. Some leaders mentored directly, offering guidance and support for participants. Participants mentioned calling their mentors for advice at various points in change initiatives. Other leaders indirectly provided mentorship, functioning as exceptional models that participants wanted to emulate. Several participants mentioned how they learned to lead, communicate effectively, or build relationships by watching other leaders. Still, other leaders provided an example of what not to do. These leaders served as cautionary tales for participants, who were intentional about not leading change in the same way they had observed.

***Sub-Question Three.*** What kinds of behaviors have supported their efforts to lead and manage change more effectively?

Participants offered 24 different codes related to the skills and behaviors that supported their efforts to lead and manage change. These 24 codes were sorted and grouped together with similar codes. The codes were reduced to five primary behaviors—communication, trust, clarity,

competency, and feedback. During the data collection and analysis, it became apparent that the behaviors supported one another and had a hierarchal relationship.

Communication is the foundation that all other skills rest upon. Without communication, leaders cannot build relationships or develop trust; they cannot share vision, and they cannot give or receive feedback. Communication provides a basis for all other behaviors to grow. Trust is the next essential behavior for change management. Change initiatives are more effective and can be implemented more efficiently when there is trust among leaders and change recipients. When leaders communicate, they can build a shared vision, establish a clear “why” for change initiatives, and establish how change initiatives will be implemented and drive results. These efforts help leaders create buy-in from their constituents, which leads to a more effective change process. Competency is the next tier of behavior. Research, best practices, and organization are important to effective change management processes. School leaders must develop their technical and content competencies to implement change effectively. The specific skills needed often vary with the type of change that is being implemented, but skill and knowledge are always necessary components in leading change. While data, reflection, and reinforcement are important elements for change leaders, they can only make a significant impact if communication, trust, clarity, and competency are already in place. School leaders should also note the timing of behaviors. Clarity, competency, and feedback may be specific to the change initiative, but the practices of communication and trust must be in place before the change initiative begins, although they can certainly be reinforced during change.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the results of the data collection and analysis. The data collection was triangulated using individual interviews, letters of advice, and focus groups. Participant

responses were coded and analyzed. As codes were categorized and sorted, themes emerged.

The research questions were answered using the themes that emerged from the data. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of school leaders as they prepared to lead and manage change. The themes were organized into three categories supported by the research questions: perceptions about ASPs, training, and behaviors. The following themes emerged from the data: (a) knowability, (b) leadership, (c) practical value, (d) experience, (e) mindset, (f) mentors, (g) professional development, (h) communication, (i) trust, (j) clarity, (k) competency, and (l) feedback. The themes that described the behaviors that support change efforts were organized into a hierarchical framework to understand the phenomenon.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

### Overview

Change is a constant for school leaders. Bridges (2004) described America as having a “change-dependent economy and a culture that celebrates creativity and innovation” (p. 79). This culture extends to the field of education as well. Although change is common, it is not always successful. Organizational change initiatives have limited success, with an estimated 70% of all change initiatives failing or falling short of meeting expectations (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015; Kotter, 2017; Page & Schoder, 2019; Washington & Hacker, 2005). Change leadership has been studied extensively in the business world, but to a lesser degree in the context of education (Fullan, 2016; Kin & Kareem, 2018a; Moore, 2009).

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of school leaders in Virginia as they develop their capacity to lead and manage change. The theory that guided the study was Mezirow’s (1997) theory of transformative learning as it applies to how school leaders incorporate new learning about how to lead and manage change with their own experiences and understandings.

A qualitative study was used because it examined the experiences of school leaders as they develop their capacity to lead and manage change. A transcendental phenomenological study was conducted to describe the common meaning of lived experiences of individuals who experienced the same phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018), focusing on what participants experienced and how they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). Data were collected through individual interviews, letters of advice, and focus groups. The data were then analyzed for themes through horizontalization (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). This chapter will

present a summary of the findings, discussion of the findings, implications, delimitations and limitations, and recommendations for future research.

### **Summary of Findings**

The findings of this study helped to understand the phenomenon of how school leaders develop their capacity to lead and manage change. The data were coded, analyzed, and developed into themes: (a) knowability, (b) leadership, (c) practical value, (d) experience, (e) mindset, (f) mentors, (g) professional development, (h) communication, (i) trust, (j) clarity, (k) competency, and (l) feedback. The themes can be categorized into three categories: perceptions about administration and supervision program (ASP), training, and effective behaviors. Data were collected through interviews, letters of advice, and focus groups. Twelve school leaders participated in the study. One central research question and three sub-questions guided the study. The central research question was “What are the experiences of school leaders in Virginia as they develop their capacity to lead and manage change?” Participants primarily believed they learned how to lead and manage change through reflecting on their own experiences and learning from their mistakes, with support from their ASP, professional development, and mentors.

The first sub-question was “What are school leaders’ perceptions about what they learned in their administration and supervision programs to prepare them to lead and manage change?” Mezirow’s (1997) theory of transformative learning focused on changing the frame of reference, “the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences” (p. 5). A frame of reference involves cognitive, conative, and emotional aspects and—once it is set—it can be difficult to allow ideas that do not fit one’s preconceptions. In general, participants did not believe that they could prepare for change. Only two participants mentioned change management as a consideration in their ASP; the other ten believed it was something they could

only learn experientially. Denise said, “I just think the world that we live in—there’s not a program in the world that would ever prepare you for the day-to-day changes that you’re going to face.” Tom said, “There’s just some things we can’t practice.” Other participants felt limited in their ability to prepare for change or to learn about change in an academic setting. Jessica mentioned the limitations of programs to prepare administrators: “It can only prepare you but so much for the real-world experience.” Although the literature indicates that leaders can prepare to lead change management, participants tended to disagree. The change management consulting firm ProSci (2019), during a partnership with the University of Virginia, described change management as a new concept in education, which could account for the difference in the frames of reference of the participants from the literature at large.

Kotter (1996) became a leader in the field of education and emphasized the importance of a strategic change model and the necessity of leadership. Kotter maintained that the success of change management is closely tied to high-quality leadership. The participants echoed this idea. When asked about skills that facilitated effective change management, they offered specific skills, but they also referred to leadership in general. Participants conveyed that effective leaders would naturally be effective change leaders. In Jessica’s letter of advice, she wrote that “a host of changes may require a leader’s management skills” and that “for change management, the future school leader may want to spend time developing a firm identity as a leader.” Ling et al. (2018) found that the success of change depends on effective leadership and the ability of leaders to bring about employees’ commitment to change. Effective change management skills are rooted in effective leadership skills.

Participants found their most impactful classes in their ASPs as the ones that “had practical value” as Steven described it. David mentioned that his program “emphasized a lot on

applying what was on paper...and then we had a number of opportunities to discuss that with my colleagues.” This experience reflects Mezirow’s (1997) theory of transformative learning, which emphasizes reflection, an important part of preparation programs. Mezirow recommended that facilitators promote discovery learning through group projects, case studies, and simulations to engage learners actively in the process of incorporating new information. The new information must be timely and relevant to be truly helpful. Fullan (2009) recommended lateral capacity-building, which involves peers learning from peers. Lateral capacity-building is one of the activities David found so valuable in his program. Hiatt (2006) affirmed the need for direct application for adult learners; otherwise “both attention to the subject and retention of knowledge can decline” (p. 106). Mezirow affirms the need for application in learning programs. Because many school leaders already experienced change in education in some capacity and have a basic framework of school change, tremendous opportunities exist for learning within the context of Mezirow’s theory. Steven expressed concerns about ASPs, saying “if colleges and universities don’t continue to stay very close to schools and what our students need, they’re going to be at risk of not preparing.”

The second sub-question was “Since school leaders are likely to refine their perspectives as they gain experience and their assumptions are challenged, how do they describe their training to lead and manage change?” School leaders have experiences that prepare them to manage change. Much of this preparation comes from their own situations and experiences. Mezirow (1997) posited that as learners have new experiences, they incorporate those new learnings into their existing framework. Participants described the phenomena of how they adjusted their perspectives as they gained experiences. Danielle described that she used “current experience to develop and foster better ways to accomplish things.” Denise reflected, “Every instance I’ve had

for change, I've learned something new about how to make implementing change a little bit smoother, how to monitor the change, how to provide support in the change." Joshua, Kelly, and Steven all echoed the trial-and-error approach. After leading an initial change, Jenna "gained more insight to know how to lead the next change." Kotter (1996) attributed most mistakes in leading change to a lack of preparation by the leader. Although learning from mistakes is commendable and beneficial, ideally leaders can better prepare for change initiatives and avoid the mistakes.

A growth mindset is an essential element in the learning process. Dweck (2006) has led research in growth mindset, or the belief that intelligence, competence, or achievement is malleable rather than fixed:

This growth mindset is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts, your strategies, and help from others. Although people may differ in every which way—everyone can change and grow through application and experience (p. 6).

Participants described the importance of learning from mistakes and growing from the challenging experiences to improve future change efforts. Kimberly said, "Sometimes you learn by doing the wrong thing...it's safe to fail forward." She models this process for her faculty by taking risks and reflecting on the outcomes. Dweck (2006) found that organizations function more effectively when leaders and managers create "a growth-mindset environment in which people can thrive" (p. 140). School leaders ought to have a growth mindset themselves, but should also cultivate that mindset in others. Tom described how he encourages a growth mindset with students by using teachable moments. He went on to say, "There's also teachable moments for us as a staff, and it's that growth mindset [that increases capacity to change]." Elliot, Dweck,

and Yeager (2017) have continued to extend the research to motivation, competence, and the workplace with a focus on real-world contexts. The belief that participants could increase their capacity for change is a powerful component and motivating factor for additional training in change management strategies.

Not all training that school leaders experience is formal or intentional. Many participants described the experience of observing other leaders as a key element of training and preparation to lead change. Devi and Fernandes (2019) observed that most principals were once teachers and lead teachers, which afforded them experiences as recipients of change, therefore shaping their actions as change leaders. Jessica described the impact of observing other leaders:

You learn things to do, and you learn things not to do...I've seen some things where people have done really, really well, and things people have done not so well and lived through long-term implications and changes that haven't been brought about real well.

In most cases that participants described, mentors were a positive resource while preparing for change and during change processes. Kelly, Jenna, and David all described circumstances where they leaned on the expertise and encouragement of mentors during change initiatives.

Professional development is one way that school leaders continue their training regarding change management. The National Academy for Educational Research (2016), an agency of the Ministry of Education of Taiwan, discovered that building teachers' professional development has become a key element of reform initiatives. All of the participants engaged in professional development activities, but only one participant, participated in a professional development specifically related to change management. Lambrecht, et al. (2017) discovered as school leaders became more aware of change processes, they can develop a greater capacity for leading change. Professional development efforts must first begin with establishing the need for change

management preparation. Mezirow's (1997) theory of transformative learning means that professional development is ideal because they can use ideas immediately and learning is relevant to the situation. David described this concept, that if he were to go through a program again, he would have had a different learning experience: "I focused on different things because I was going at it from a teacher lens because that was my experience." The expectations of principals have shifted as they must "exert more influence in leadership for changing the school culture" (Chang et al., 2017, p. 152; Kin & Kareem, 2018a). Therefore, it becomes even more imperative for principals to learn how to implement change effectively. Fullan (2009) recommended that schools implement change by focusing on instruction, using data, developing capacity, fostering leadership, building learning communities, and linking to results. These strategies reflect a mindset of change that stems from top-down, bureaucratic methods of change that do not account for the individual human element that is supported in more recent literature. The ProSci model of change, for example, focuses on people, human relationships, and emotional intelligence. Professional development in all of these areas can equip principals for effective change management.

The third sub-question was "What kinds of behaviors have supported their efforts to lead and manage change more effectively?" The leader's behavior has a significant impact on the success of the change effort (Kotter, 1996; Vos & Rupert, 2018). Effective behaviors have a sequential nature and can be described in a hierarchy. I created Figure 1 based on the rich data from this study and to provide a visual for the relationship of change management behaviors. Each behavior must be securely in place before the next one can be implemented successfully. Communication is the foundation of all the effective behaviors and no other behavior can occur without clear communication. Next, trust addresses the human element of change and creates an

environment for successful change. Change can be difficult, but relationships and transparency create trust, which help change recipients to persevere. The next step is clarity. Leaders must help their organizations have a clear understanding of the “why” behind the change to create buy-in and a willingness to change. Furthermore, they should cast a clear vision of how change will occur. Uncertainty and fear undermine change initiatives, but clarity, built on a foundation of trust and communication, can mitigate those factors. The next step in the hierarchy is competency. A leader may have research and best practices related to the change initiative, but those cannot be implemented effectively without the previous levels. Research is worthless without communication and clarity. Best practices can be maximized if they are implemented within a context of trust and transparency. Communication, trust, and clarity create a framework for the application of a leader’s competency. Once all of the other levels are in place, leaders can effectively gather, analyze, and use feedback to improve change implementation.



*Figure 1.* Hierarchy of Change Management Behaviors.

Communication emerged as the central theme from participants and had the most coding references. Communication serves as the foundation of the behaviors. Jessica said, “Communication would be at the top of the list,” and Kelly said, “Communicate, communicate, and communicate again.” Communication is of primary importance in change initiatives (Jurisch et al., 2014; van der Voet, 2016) and involves both listening and disseminating information. Leaders should include multiple voices in the change process. Participants regularly referred to influencers, or the teachers in their buildings they could communicate with first. Steven called this team his “solutions team.” Jessica called this a “coalition of the willing.” Kelly and David both used the analogy of ripples in the water that start small and expand their impact to describe how they began with their core group of faculty and then enlarged the circles of communication. Pock et al. (2015) estimated that a “supportive core of 20-30% represents the critical mass needed to implement a major organizational change” (p. 159). Regular communication lays a foundation on which to build.

Trust is the next level of the change management behavior hierarchy. Trust can mitigate resistance to change and is a major factor in effective change management (Amarantoue, Kazakopoulou, Chatzoudes, & Chatzoglou, 2018; Blanca & Ramona, 2016). Trust and relationships worked in tandem and were recurring themes throughout the data. Tom addressed the importance of trust: “If you lead your staff in such a way and your team in such a way that they believe in what you do, and trust in what you do, that’s 90% of it.” Jessica said that much of the work in leading change “happens before it ever happens because you’re going to get so much further along if you’ve got good relationships, trust, and a track record of transparency.” When Jessica became the principal, her priority was “to create a level of safety in the building, being visible, being available, doing what I told people I was going to do, and following through,

and being approachable and having a door that was open.” She believed her goals could not be accomplished without trust and relationships. Leaders can build trust by involving employees in the process of change and treating them with respect and consideration (Fugate et al., 2012; Page & Schoder, 2019). The human element of change can be difficult to manage (Fullan, 2016; Hiatt, 2006; Lippitt et al., 1958). Denise observed that “anytime you’re implementing change, there is going to be hiccups because we’re dealing with people, especially in education.” Trust allows for leaders to manage the human aspect of change.

The next level of the hierarchy is clarity. Participants found the reason and motivation for change were essential to the success and effectiveness of the change initiative. Clarity can help to overcome resistance to change. Heath and Heath (2010) concluded “what looks like resistance is often a lack of clarity” (p. 15). Leaders should have clarity regarding the drivers for change and the change process, as well as clarity regarding the organization’s mission and the roles of those involved. Participants described this clarity as the “why.” School leaders can overcome resistance to change by “tapping into teachers’ feelings of duty to determine and act on what was best for their students” (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017, p. 155). A collective identity can also overcome resistance to change and create greater employee buy-in through the commitment to the group. Fullan (2016) called collective efficacy the group’s belief in what can be done and referred to group norms as having a strong impact on change processes. Steven advised, “If you want to successfully navigate change, build a shared vision of success and stay the course when circumstances get difficult.” Strong leaders cast a vision for the collective identity and should continually reinforce those ideas.

Once leaders have established effective communication, built trust, and developed clarity surrounding the change, they can focus on specific competencies. Participants demonstrated

content and technical competencies through data-driven decisions, understanding curriculum and instruction, and exhibiting strong organizational skills. Participants also noted that school leaders must be able to balance leadership and managerial skills. Orazi et al. (2013) observed that “leadership and management in the public sector are no longer seen as opposing concepts” and that both elements are needed for effective change management (p. 490). Perkins concluded that leaders must be process smart and people smart (Fullan, 2016). They need to make good decisions and see far down the road. They also need to foster collaboration and develop good relationships. A growth mindset is vital to developing competencies. Steven observed that “it’s the job of a leader to lead the learning, not necessarily have all the answers.” Danielle described how she seeks opportunities to learn:

“I remind myself that change is really just growth and that inevitably we’re designed in many ways to become. There is this belief that you know, you reach a certain level and you coast from there...I don’t see it, that’s not how we’re made.”

She emphasized that learning is a continual process, not simply a linear progression with one clear ending goal.

Feedback is the final level of the change management hierarchy. Participants described feedback in different stages of the change process. Feedback can come during the initial data gathering phase as part of the planning process, or throughout the process, as leaders engage with stakeholders. Feedback can be present during the reinforcement phase of change initiatives as well. The first step is to make employees aware of the need for change. Deutschman (2007) described a need to create the desire for change, “A satisfied need is not a motivator of behavior” (p. 103). Many leaders “assume that by building awareness of the need for change they have also created desire. Resistance to change from employees takes them by surprise and they find

themselves unprepared to manage this resistance” (Hiatt, 2006, p. 18). Steven described how he begins the change process using feedback: “We certainly want to start with the data. We look at our school quality indicators and our school report card and then we identify areas in weakness and then we set goals and then we identify action steps.” Denise mentioned that she has many theoretical teachers who want to know what the data and the research says. Reinforcement is one of the most critical steps for sustainable change and also relies on feedback. Without reinforcement, the team “may perceive that the effort expended during the transition was not valued” (Hiatt, 2006, p. 40). Reinforcement sustains the change and ensures that people do not slip back into old behaviors; it builds momentum which is especially helpful when the change process includes multiple changes. It also creates a history of trust for employees to remember the next time a change comes. Reinforcement requires leaders to have a clear view of the destination and to reinforce the bright spot behaviors as they happen (Heath & Heath, 2010). Jenna described this concept in practice: “You have to have it clear, concise, and keep them involved along the process. You can’t just communicate one time and expect it to happen overnight.” Gathering and providing feedback ensure the success and sustainability of the change.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study should be analyzed and considered in light of current literature. Some of the findings corroborated current research, while other findings brought additional questions and the need for further research. The primary contribution of this study is to extend the work of change management into the field of education. The hierarchy of behaviors that support change management provide school leaders with an actionable model based on the literature and the findings of this study.

### **Empirical Literature**

When reflecting on their ASP, most participants mentioned the practical value of their program, or the lack thereof. Programs that seemed to have the greatest impact were the ones that placed a heavy emphasis on scenarios and real-world contexts. This finding affirmed current literature that calls for direct application and reflection for effective adult learning (Hiatt, 2006; Fullan, 2009; Mezirow, 1997). A significant contribution of this study is to highlight the need for explicit training in change management among school leaders. One participant mentioned the need for colleges and universities to stay close to schools and those in the field in order to maintain relevance and to develop programs that effectively prepare leaders.

### **Theoretical Literature**

One of the most interesting findings of this study was the perception of participants that they could not actually prepare for change, but rather had to learn solely from experiencing change as it occurred. While this was not a view held by all participants, it was the predominant view. This idea is a striking contrast to change management literature in general, which focuses on the preparation of leaders to manage change. Within the context of education, however, this view is more understandable, since change management is a newer concept in education (ProSci, 2019). The perception that change management can only be learned through experience, despite evidence to the contrary, validates Mezirow's (1997) theory of transformative learning. Mezirow referred to frames of reference, the structures of assumption through which experiences are understood, as difficult to change. Once they are set, it can be difficult to process ideas that do not fit one's preconceptions.

Another area in which the findings confirm and extend the literature is in the area of growth mindset. Growth mindset was not originally included in the literature review and was not

anticipated to have direct applications to change management. The findings of this study, however, indicate that growth mindset plays a significant role in developing effective change management skills. Participants regularly discussed ideas of learning as a continual, iterative process rather than a linear one. This idea confirms Dweck's (2006) research with growth mindset and the role it plays in developing competencies.

Strong connections exist between change management theory and leadership theory in general (Kotter, 1996). The findings of this study affirm those connections. In fact, many participants who were successful in change initiatives could attribute their success to their leadership skills, even if they had not had training in change management. This idea confirms the literature, but also presents an opportunity to extend the literature. Change management and leadership are closely connected and clearly related, but they are distinct and each should be studied and explored. Leadership training cannot be a substitute for change management preparation.

### **Implications**

This study held empirical, practical, and theoretical implications. Principals are the primary change agents in implementing initiatives from federal, state, and local levels; however, many school leaders are not prepared to lead change effectively (Fullan, 2016; Hall & Hord, 2001; Kin & Kareem, 2018a; Pettigrew, Woodman, & Cameron, 2001). The experiences leaders have during their careers shape and influence their ideas about leading change, but this does not provide sufficient preparation for managing change effectively.

#### **Empirical Implications**

This study holds empirical implications. Most ASPs do not include explicit training in leading change. The experiences of the participants affirmed this finding. Only two participants

reported studying change management to any extent and only one participant reported professional development that supported leading change. One of the primary reasons for failure in change efforts is a lack of training (Jurisch et al., 2014; Kotter, 1996; Lambrechts et al., 2017). Participants described how they have learned to lead change from previous change efforts and their successes and missteps. While reflective practice is important, and learning from mistakes is admirable, better training could avoid some of those mistakes prior to the change initiative.

### **Practical Implications**

There are also practical implications of this study. The knowability of change management was a significant theme in the data. Most participants did not believe it was possible to prepare individuals to lead and manage change, the only way to learn how to do this was through experiential learning. Rymenams (2017) recommended that the first step of a good change process is to increase awareness. Leading change is not explicitly included in the SLLA standards, yet all administrators play a role in the change process and would benefit from strategic preparation in change management. If change management were included to some degree in ASPs or professional developments, school leaders could emerge with a basic framework for leading change as they enter leadership roles. The Virginia Administrative Code provides regulations governing the review and approval of education programs in Virginia. One of the general competencies expected is to know, understand, and apply concepts of leadership, including change theory (8 Va. Admin. Code, 2018). Explicit instruction in change management would support the existing regulation. Using Mezirow's theory of transformative learning, universities could incorporate practical learning experiences to support change management understanding. These practical learning experiences can include case studies, reflections,

scenarios, and discussions to learn from peers. As school leaders think more about their needs as change leaders, they can begin identifying effective strategies.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Lastly, this study also has theoretical implications. The study further extended the work of change management experts, such as Lewin, Lippitt, and Kotter, by exploring change management in the context of education. The study also reinforced the work of Mezirow (1997) and his theory of transformative learning. School leaders are adult learners who learn most effectively through active engagement in relevant content, resulting in moments of insight and reflection. The experiences of the participants affirmed the importance of these types of learning experiences.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

The study was delimited by only including leaders in Virginia, who completed the same basic requirements for school leadership roles. This study only included those who had at least three years of experience and had earned their administrative endorsement in 2005 or later. These parameters brought some continuity to the experiences of school leaders and established baselines of experience allowing for richness of data. School leaders outside of these parameters may have different experiences because they did not have the same requirements to become a school leader. School leaders of less than three years of tenure likely do not have enough experiences to draw from.

Limitations of the study include a lack of diversity in school systems and programs. The twelve participants represented programs from five universities and seven different districts. Participants from additional universities or districts would likely add experiences and richness of data. Another limitation of the study was the leadership roles held by the participants. Six

participants were building principals, five were assistant principals, and only one served as a district office leader. No superintendents or assistant superintendents were represented.

Findings may not be generalizable to other sample populations.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings of this study prompted recommendations for future research in several areas. Most of the participants had limited career experiences outside of the field of education. The experiences of career-switchers could bring additional insight to the research since they likely gained leadership and change experiences in their previous careers. A qualitative study with a phenomenological approach could provide rich data to fully describe their experiences. Future research could also explore barriers to change and how leaders can best overcome those barriers. Participants often discussed the mistakes they had learned from in change management and that they learned much of what not to do from watching other school leaders. Further research into these concepts to identify errors in change processes could generate recommendations for avoiding such errors. A qualitative phenomenological study could be used to further research regarding barriers to change. Another recommendation for further research would be a study similar to this one, but with a population of school leaders from a different state, or a population who experienced a focus on change management in their ASP. Additional research could be conducted on the effectiveness of change management training for school leaders. A quantitative study with a quasi-experimental design could measure the impact of change management training on the preparedness of a school leader. A qualitative study could further investigate the types of training that are most effective in preparing school leaders to lead and manage change. This type of study could provide rich data and thick descriptions of

effective trainings, which could be implemented as part of an administrator preparation program or as ongoing professional development for leaders.

### **Summary**

Change initiatives have limited success (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015; Kotter, 2017; Page & Schoder, 2019; Washington & Hacker, 2005). Effective change leadership is not accidental but must be implemented intentionally. The field of education regularly experiences change from the federal, state, and local levels. The success of change initiatives depends on the capacity of school leaders to manage change effectively (Bush, 2007; Issah, 2018; Kin & Kareem, 2018a; Leithwood et al., 2004; Murphy & Datnow, 2002). The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of school leaders in Virginia as they develop their capacity to lead and manage change. The theory that guided this study was Mezirow's (1997) theory of transformative learning. This theory focuses on how learners, particularly adult learners change their frames of reference, or "the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences" (p. 5). The central research question that guided the study was "What are the experiences of school leaders in Virginia as they develop their capacity to lead and manage change?" The sub-questions were as follows: (a) What are school leaders' perceptions about what they learned in their administration and supervision programs to prepare them to lead and manage change? (b) Since school leaders are likely to refine their perspectives as they gain experience and their assumptions are challenged, how do they describe their training to lead and manage change? (c) What kinds of behaviors have supported their efforts to lead and manage change more effectively? The data collection methods consisted of interviews, letters of advice, and focus groups. The data analysis process was developed by Moustakas (1994) and Creswell and Poth (2018). Once the data were

collected and coded, the data were analyzed and categorized into 12 themes: (a) knowability, (b) leadership, (c) practical value, (d) experience, (e) mindset, (f) mentors, (g) professional development, (h) communication, (i) trust, (j) clarity, (k) competency, and (l) feedback. The themes fell into three categories: perceptions about ASPs, training, and effective behaviors. The themes addressed the research questions and provided insight into school leaders' experiences as they develop their capacity to lead and manage change. This chapter presented a summary of the findings, a discussion of the findings, implications of the study, delimitations and limitations, and recommendations for future research.

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**APPENDIX A: IRB Approval Letter**

Subject: IRB-FY20-21-155 - Initial: Initial - Exempt

**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY**  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

November 25, 2020

Amy Love  
Samuel Smith

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-155 A Phenomenological Study of School Leaders as they Prepare to Lead and Manage Change

Dear Amy Love, Samuel Smith:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

## APPENDIX B: Recruitment Letter

Dear School Leader:

As a doctoral student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. in education. The purpose of my study is to better understand how school leaders prepare to lead and manage change, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be a school leader who obtained a Virginia endorsement in administration and supervision in 2005 or later, has taken the SLLA, has a minimum of three years of experience as a school leader, and who currently serves as a school leader in a Virginia public or accredited private school.

Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in an individual interview, write a letter of advice, and participate in a focus group. Participants will have the opportunity to review the data I have collected from them for accuracy. The individual interview should last approximately one hour, the letter should take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete, and the focus group interviews should last approximately 45 minutes. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential and pseudonyms will be used in the study.

In order to participate, please complete the [REDACTED]. A consent form is provided as part of the screening questionnaire. The consent form contains additional information about my research. After you have read the consent form, please click the next button to proceed to the survey. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the study. I will contact you to schedule a date and time for your interview.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you know of anyone else who may be a qualified candidate and who would be interested in participating, please provide them with this information.

Sincerely,

Amy Love  
Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University  
[REDACTED]

## APPENDIX C: Social Media Flyer

# CALLING SCHOOL LEADERS

Seeking participants to take part in a research study to explore how school leaders prepare to lead and manage change.

## ELIGIBILITY

- obtained a Virginia endorsement in Administration & Supervision in 2005 or later
- have taken the SLLA
- have 3 years of experience as a school leader
- currently serve as a school leader in a Virginia public or accredited private school or district



## PARTICIPATION

- participate in an individual interview
- write a letter of advice
- possible focus group interview
- responses will be kept confidential

## NEXT STEPS

- complete the screening survey
- please share this study information with other qualified candidates



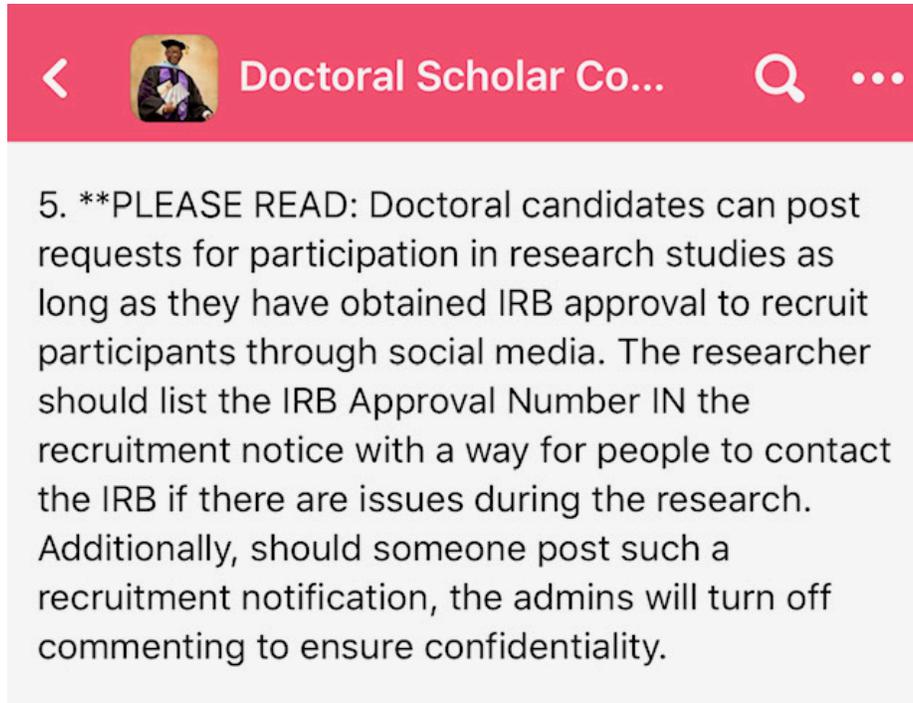
Use your mobile phone to scan the QR code and access the screening survey



## THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

For more information, please contact Amy Love, a doctoral student in the School of Education at Liberty University, at [REDACTED]

## APPENDIX D: Social Media Approval Process



## APPENDIX E: Screening Survey

(This survey will be sent electronically as a Google Form)



### How School Leaders Prepare to Lead and Manage Change: Participant Screening Survey

As a doctoral student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. in education. The purpose of my study is to better understand how school leaders prepare to lead and manage change. I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

Next

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in an interview about your experiences in how you lead and manage change. The interview is estimated to take between 45-60 minutes and will be recorded for later transcription.
2. Complete a letter of advice. Detailed instructions will be sent to each participant via email. The participant may reply via email. This should take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete.
3. Participate in a focus group interview. The focus group interview should last approximately 45 minutes and will be recorded for later transcription.
4. Review the data I collected from you as part of member checking in order to ensure that it is accurately represented. Participants will check their own individual interview transcripts and will review the focus group transcripts, providing feedback for only their own individual comments.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants may benefit from engaging in a collaborative conversation with other school leaders in the focus group interview.

Benefits to the field of education include a greater understanding of how school leaders effectively lead and manage change.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then deleted. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in the focus group setting. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside the group.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Does the researcher have any conflicts of interest?

To limit potential conflicts and to minimize the risks while preserving the benefits, the researcher will bracket herself from the study. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Amy Love. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Samuel Smith at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

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., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study. Please type your name as an electronic signature. \*

Your answer

---

The researcher has my permission to audio-record or video-record me as part of my participation in this study. \*

Yes

No

Are you willing to participate in the following activities? (Check all that apply)

Personal Interview (about 45-60 minutes)

Letter of Advice (about 30 minutes)

Focus Group (about 45 minutes)

Back

Next



## How School Leaders Prepare to Lead and Manage Change: Participant Screening Survey

\* Required

### Screening Questions

Did you obtain a Virginia endorsement in administration and supervision in 2005 or later? \*

Yes

No

Have you taken the School Leaders Licensure Assessment (SLLA)? \*

Yes

No

Which college or university did you attend for your administration and supervision program?

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have at least three years of experience as a school leader? \*

Yes

No

Do you currently serve as a school leader in a Virginia public or accredited private school? \*

Yes

No

What is your current school leadership role? \*

Director or Supervisor

Principal

Assistant Principal

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Back

Next



## How School Leaders Prepare to Lead and Manage Change: Participant Screening Survey

\* Required

### Contact Information

What is your first and last name? (Names and identifying information will remain confidential). \*

Your answer

What is your email address? \*

Your answer

What is your phone number? \*

Your answer

Back

Submit

## APPENDIX F: Emails for Completing the Screening Survey

Name,

Thank you for your interest in my study How School Leaders Prepare to Lead and Manage Change and for completing the screening survey. You have met all of the eligibility requirements for participation and you have indicated you are willing to participate in the following ways:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to schedule an interview with you that will take approximately 45-60 minutes. The interview can be conducted via Microsoft Teams or WebEx. Please select your preference for a day and time:

- (Several options will be available here for participants to choose from.)
- 
- 

Once we schedule a time, I will send you a calendar invitation for our appointment. I look forward to speaking with you. In addition, if you know of someone else who meets the requirements, please feel free to forward the link to the screening survey.

I appreciate your time and your willingness to participate in my study.

Amy Love  
 Doctoral Candidate  
 Liberty University

Name,

Thank you for your interest in my study How School Leaders Prepare to Lead and Manage Change and for completing the screening survey. You have not met all of the eligibility requirements for participation; however, if you know of someone who does meet the requirements, please feel free to forward the link to the screening survey.

I appreciate your time and your willingness to participate in my study.

Amy Love  
 Doctoral Candidate  
 Liberty University

## APPENDIX G: Consent Form

### CONSENT FORM (INTERVIEWS, LETTERS, AND FOCUS GROUP)

#### A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF SCHOOL LEADERS AS THEY PREPARE TO LEAD AND MANAGE CHANGE

#### Consent

**Title of the Project:** A Phenomenological Study of School Leaders as they Prepare to Lead and Manage Change

**Principal Investigator:** Amy Love, M.B.A., Ed.S., Liberty University, School of Education

#### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must have obtained a Virginia endorsement in Administration and Supervision in 2005 or later, have taken the SLLA, have a minimum of three years of experience as a school leader, and currently serve as a school leader in a Virginia public or accredited private school or district. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

#### What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of school leaders in Virginia who hold an endorsement in administration and supervision as they develop their capacity to lead and manage change. For this study, change management will be generally defined as a structured and strategic approach to implementing change initiatives successfully.

#### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in an interview about your experiences in how you lead and manage change. The interview is estimated to take between 45-60 minutes and will be recorded for later transcription.
2. Complete a letter of advice. Detailed instructions will be sent to each participant via email. The participant may reply via email. This should take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete.
3. Participate in a focus group interview. The focus group interview should last approximately 45 minutes and will be recorded for later transcription.
4. Review the data I collected from you as part of member checking in order to ensure that it is accurately represented. Participants will check their own individual interview transcripts and will review the focus group transcripts, providing feedback for only their own individual comments.

### **How could you or others benefit from this study?**

Participants may benefit from engaging in a collaborative conversation with other school leaders in the focus group interview.

Benefits to the field of education include a greater understanding of how school leaders effectively lead and manage change.

### **What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

### **How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then deleted. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in the focus group setting. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside the group.

### **How will you be compensated for being part of the study?**

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

### **Does the researcher have any conflicts of interest?**

To limit potential conflicts and to minimize the risks while preserving the benefits, the researcher will bracket herself from the study. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study.

### **Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

**What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Amy Love. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Samuel Smith at [REDACTED].

**Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

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., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu)

**Your Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Subject Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature & Date

## **APPENDIX H: Interview Questions**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

#### **General Background Questions**

1. How would you introduce yourself?
2. When and where did you go to school?
3. How long have you been in education?
4. How long have you been an administrator?
5. Why did you choose the field of education?
6. Why did you want to be a school leader?

#### **Experiences in Learning about Change Questions**

7. What kinds of classes did you take in your administration and supervision program?
8. Describe the classes you took related to change management, if any.
9. What is the difference, as you understand it, between leading change and managing change?
10. Change management is not explicitly one of the PSEL standards on the SLLA; however, some of the standards encompass related skills. What skills would you consider necessary to successfully implement change?
11. Please describe how you learned these skills?
12. How did your administration and supervision program address those skills in any way?

#### **Experiences in Implementing Change Questions**

13. Tell me about your experiences in implementing change initiatives.
14. How do you plan for a change initiative?

15. How do you communicate change initiatives to stakeholders?
16. How do you evaluate change initiatives?
17. What is your role in most change initiatives in your school?

**Congruence between Preparation and Experience Questions**

18. Based on your experiences leading change, do you believe you were prepared to lead change? Please explain why or why not.
19. How well did your administration and supervision program prepare you to implement change effectively? What did your ASP do to prepare you?
20. What do you know now that you wish you had learned in your program?

**APPENDIX I: Letter of Advice**

Write a letter of advice to a future school leader about how to lead change effectively. Consider the following questions in your letter: What do future school leaders need to know about leading and managing change? What are the skills and behaviors that are most needed and how can they develop these? What advice do you have for leaders who are preparing to lead change efforts?

## **APPENDIX J: Focus Group Questions**

### FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Do you have a plan for implementing change or do you follow a specific model? Where did you learn this?
2. What characteristics or behaviors have helped you implement change effectively?
3. How do you handle crisis change? What, if anything, do you do differently for crisis change than planned change?
4. How do you cultivate a willingness to change on the part of your staff?
5. How do you continue to grow yourself professionally?
6. How do you increase your own capacity for change?

### APPENDIX K: Audit Trail

Research problem identification	Why school leaders have difficulty in leading and managing change effectively.
Research problem development	Research proposal to explore the experiences of school leaders as they learn to lead and manage change.
Literature review	Systematic literature review conducted on the foundational theories of change management, current practices in change management, and related areas.
Conceptual/theoretical framework	Theory of transformative learning where new learning is incorporated into an existing frame of reference.
Methodology	A qualitative transcendental phenomenological study to explore the experiences of school leaders in Virginia as they develop their capacity to lead and manage change.
Interview protocol development	Interviews, letter of advice, and focus groups. Questions were developed and examined by an expert review.
Participant selection	Purposeful and snowball sampling. Participants were school leaders who (a) obtained a Virginia endorsement in administration and supervision in 2005 or later, (b) have taken the SLLA, (c) have a minimum of three years of experience as a school leader, and (d) currently serve as a school leader in a Virginia public or accredited private school.
Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and oversight	IRB approval was obtained and included in the appendices.
Data collection and storage	12 participants provided in-depth, semi-structured interviews; letters of advice; and 3 focus groups. Recordings, transcripts, and analyzed data stored in computer files.
Raw data	Recorded interviews and focus groups, letters.
Partially processed data	Coded interview transcripts.
Coding scheme	Open coding in an iterative process. All coding was done manually using NVivo coding software. After the codes were generated, the codes were grouped and classified through horizontalization and clusters of meaning.
Trustworthiness techniques	Triangulation of data collection, member checking, expert review, reflexive journal, audit trail.
Summaries	Summaries of participants, answers to research questions, and thick descriptions of themes.
Research report	Relevant literature, descriptions of context, methodology, research design, data collection, data analysis, answers to research questions, graphic displays including tables and figures, recommendations for future research, references, and appendices.

### APPENDIX L: Reflexive Journal

12/7/2020	Today I had my first interview with participant Michael. I have worked closely with this participant so that was a different experience for me. And with this being my first interview, I don't know if that made it easier or more difficult.
12/9/2020	Today I interviewed Danielle and Denise. Both are assistant principals, and both are women of color. One is at the elementary level and the other is in a high school. One is in a Title I school and the other is in a private school. One is in a very urban environment and the other is more suburban. I'm very grateful for the diversity that my participants can bring to my study.
12/10/2020	Today I interviewed Joshua. He seems to be a very detailed and organized person. It's interesting to me how different personalities can be, but still be effective and even focus on some of the same things. Joshua has a completely opposite personality of Michael, for example, but both really seem to care about their teachers and want to support them.
12/11/2020	Today I interviewed Kelly. She talked a lot about what she learned from observing leaders—both in the positive and negative. She was a special education teacher before she became an administrator, which brought a unique perspective. I appreciate the different perspectives that my participants bring to the table.
12/11/2020	Today I interviewed Jenna. She had a significant emphasis on supporting teachers and building trust with teachers. For her, everything came back to that. How to support them and help them to do what is best for students.
12/31/2020	Today I interviewed Jessica. I worked with her at one point years ago, although we taught different grade levels. As I was analyzing her data and coding it, it is interesting to me to separate what I already know about her with what she has actually said.
1/14/2021	Today I interviewed Steven. I was very impressed with him as a leader. One of the things he continually went back to is that it's not about how we feel about things, but it's what the data tells us. This was a good reminder to me as a school leader, but also as a researcher. I appreciated his insight and experience.
1/19/2021	Today I interviewed David. One of the things that struck me about this interview is that he provided a few, very specific, very targeted nuggets that fit exactly with my research. This is a very positive thing, but I also have to be intentional to not only highlight and tag the data that affirms my research, but also data that may take a different direction. For example, several of my administrators feel that their experiences have been more valuable than their programs. I recognize that, but also feel that it's a missed opportunity in the programs. I have to be careful though, to not let my own bias and my own ideas color the data of what my participants are saying. Or, another option is to lean in to that and use it to ask clarifying questions of my participants and pull them into my process. Instead of removing my bias and preconceptions, make them transparent, so my thinking, values, and assumptions are visible, both to myself and to the reader.

1/20/2021	Today I interviewed Natalie. She gave a lot of specific examples of things, which was helpful to see some of the concepts in practice and not just in theory.
1/22/2021	Today I interviewed participant Tom. This was a very good interview but had some hard things. I was struck by how different some things were from previous participants. Steven said we cannot rely on our feelings to evaluate change, but that we need to gather facts and information. Tom said that hard data is good, but there's a vibe or a feeling in a building, and that's important that it's a positive one filled with love. They both are successful administrators and lead well, but I found it interesting how different they are.
1/28/2021	Today I had my interview with participant Kimberly. Something she said struck me about how administrators must have trust first, before being able to adequately implement change, like Maslow's hierarchy of needs. It made me think that this might be a theoretical framework for my results and my analysis. It could be a good model, although I might put communication at the bottom, this would include listening, before trust. I might also include things like capacity and resiliency. This was my last interview. I have been collecting letters along the way, so I still have some that are outstanding, but I've received some. I am ready to schedule my focus groups and I've struggled with the logistics of how best to do that and get everyone on board at the same time. My data collection process is wrapping up, which is beyond exciting. I am looking forward to my focus groups, because I'm ready to shift away from my individual interview questions. My data is reaching saturation, but so am I. I am ready to step into a new vein of questioning.
2/1/2021	In coding these interviews, I'm seeing some additional elements emerge, such as the importance of mentorship and learning from other administrators. The participants have not placed too much emphasis on their preparation program. It almost seems like they did not expect to learn about change management there. Knowing what I know about the classes found in MBA programs and the significant body of work related to change management, this seems like such a missed opportunity to me. Almost all of these school leaders have made comments along the lines of change being something you can only learn from experience, or that you are limited in learning about it ahead of time. While experience is important for sure, there is great value in learning more about the process in advance, before change happens. I am trying to reconcile the data that I'm gathering in my interviews with what I've gathered from the research. The difference in their perception about preparing for change management and what I have seen in the research is a divide that I'm not sure how to bridge. Are they mistaken? Is the research wrong? In most all other places, their experiences affirm the literature, except in this case.
2/4/2021	Today was my first Focus Group. What I really liked about the focus group setting is the way that my participants built off of one another's comments. It felt more like a conversation with multiple contributions.
2/9/2021	Today was the second Focus Group. Once again, the conversation was more organic in nature. It was also nice to see some of the similarities and differences

	between those in elementary and secondary, or those who were principals or assistant principals.
2/10/2021	Today was my third and final Focus Group! I have almost finished my data collection. I need to still collect 5 more letters, but I am coding and wrapping up this process. I am still thinking through my potential model. I think I may need to conclude my data collection fully before I can move further. As of now, all I have are impressions and perceptions of my data, but I need to go back through my coding.
2/12/2021	As I continue to code, I am finding the need to go back through interviews and code in cycles. As I have added nodes, I remember comments and elements that I would like to add to those specific nodes, but I didn't identify it at the time. Coding and identifying themes is definitely an iterative process and requires many passes through the data. It also helps me to work through my own perceptions and biases, so that I'm not just looking for specific data to back up conclusions that I've already thought of.
2/13/2021	In coding my final focus groups, the data is beginning to take shape. I do find that I need to go back to my original research questions to ensure that my thoughts are directed in such a way as to fully answer them. I'm finding such interesting pieces of information that I need to remain focused. So much of what I'm discovering from these school leaders about change is really about leadership. I also find it interesting that what best prepares them to manage change is consistently people-centered. All school leaders were once teachers, and perhaps it is because teaching is such a helping profession, but specific competencies are assumed, while these leaders regularly discuss and emphasize listening, building relationships, and doing what's right.
2/16/2021	Today I spent some time trying to categorize and separate my data into the research questions that they answer. There is some overlap in answering those questions, or places where the same data applies. It was a good opportunity for me to take a wholistic look at my data and results. I used a large white board to sort and organize my data. I began to see where I could combine terms or group ideas together. I also added the number of references that I had for my codes, which gave me some insight into how critical some of these elements are. For example, I had 68 references for communication, so that absolutely must be foundational. I think I may have a basic model for one of my research questions.
2/19/2021	It was very helpful to let my data rest for a few days. I was able to come back to it and look again with fresh eyes. I made some adjustments to my previous categories and I continued trying to group my ideas into a few primary themes. That was very exciting because my results are taking shape. There are a few elements like flexibility and adaptability that are important skills, but they really didn't fall into any particular categories, and I don't know if it's significant enough to be its own category. This is an example of where I really have to stop and think and evaluate my own bias and ideas. Is it not significant because of my own ideas and what I've seen in the research, or is it not significant because of what my data really says? It's very difficult not to look at

	<p>this with eyes that have already seen the literature. Those two skills are important and certainly helpful to change management, but I don't think they are necessary in and of themselves. When I go back and review the context of flexible or adaptable, what I really see isn't just being flexible—that could also be considered apathetic. What I really see is supportive, listening, and adjusting based on feedback. Those are ideas and concepts that fall easily into some of my categories.</p>
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**APPENDIX M: Sample Interview**

AMY: First of all, if you could just, how would you introduce yourself?

STEVEN [Pseudonym]: My name is XXXX, I'm the principal at XXXX in XXXX.

AMY: And when and where did you go to school?

STEVEN: My undergrad was actually at XXXX. I got a degree in social Sciences and a certificate in education then also got my Masters in Administration and Supervision from XXXX and then my doctorate is in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies from XXXX.

AMY: OK, wonderful. How long have you been in education total?

STEVEN: This is my 16<sup>th</sup> year. 16. Yeah, I started in January 2006.

AMY: How long have you been in administrator?

STEVEN: This is my 8th year.

AMY: Wonderful. What made you choose the field of education?

STEVEN: You know this is not a popular answer among educators, but I really wanted to coach. Yeah, I thought the way to do it was to be a teacher. So, I thought if I could coach if I got a degree in teaching. And, of course, once I got into it, I really enjoyed it and had different perspectives. But I mean just being honest. That's my answer.

AMY: Do you coach basketball? I see the hoop back there.

STEVEN: Yeah, basketball and baseball. There's a baseball hat there too.

AMY: OK, wonderful, wonderful. And then what made you want to be a school leader?

STEVEN: You know, it's I think it's a combination of just thinking I could make a difference and possibly have the skill set to do it, but at the same time I just had really good people, good leaders in in my life that encouraged me to do so, and so I like to say there's a lot of people that said it would be a good leader, but there's not many that I believed, and I certainly appreciate those that took time to do that.

AMY: Great, this first set of questions here. Or next set, I guess, deal with your experiences in in learning about change. What kinds of classes did you take in your administration and supervision program?

STEVEN: There's a lot of them that I remember. Instructional leadership, school law, community relations, school finance. There was a general course in leadership which was more, maybe philosophical, and just leadership in general. And then you had school administration, which was a very similar course, but specific to school administration. There's a little bit of

educational psychology in there, and so they're kind of specialized courses towards that degree. And of course, you have the curriculum and instruction courses which anyone who gets a master's in education would get. And some of the more basic courses like that.

AMY: OK, thank you. Did you take any classes related to change management?

STEVEN: Not specifically, I do remember the topic coming up. I remember learning a lot about Marzano and 1st and 2nd order change, but those are typically a part of school leadership or school administration courses.

AMY: OK, great and then how would you describe the difference between leading change and managing change?

STEVEN: Oh sure, management is really about the day today and that is putting out a fire trying to troubleshoot working to solve a problem. That has a sense of urgency either today or this week or so on, and so it's really that is important, and I think I think that leaders need to be good managers if they're going to demonstrate competency towards leadership. But when I think about change, was it leadership? Is that the words you used? Yeah, to me, that's more about projecting a vision for the future in talking about where we want to go and really keeping people focused on the long-term vision for the school, for the organization. A good leader spends time in both and what I found is if you start to get out of balance where you spend too much time in management, you kind of get caught off guard and you spend your time spinning your wheels, putting out fires. But at the same time, if you're too much about the future, things get swept under the rug or they get left behind or whatever that is, and then it becomes kind of chaotic and you really don't earn the privilege of the right to lead people because they begin to see you as incompetent or they just don't feel supported, so there's got to be a balance of both.

AMY: That's great. Thank you. Change management is not explicitly one of the PSEL standards on the SLLA, but some of those standards encompass some related skills. What skills do you think are necessary to successfully implement change?

STEVEN: I think probably the most important is communication. One of the things that I've learned is that frequent and ongoing communication is critical so that that's not only articulating a vision and expressing where you want to go and identifying goals and strategies to meet those goals. It's also listening. I guess I would put listening under communication because people need to know that they are supported by seeing you, by knowing that they have a place to go, talk to or at least have an avenue to express their concerns, and so communication is huge. And if there is an absence of communication in articulating that vision, then if I don't, in other words, communicate the message, then they're going to form their own message and it's going to probably be the wrong message. So I think communication is critical. I think probably the other part of it is just, you know, having a good skill set in good, clear communication for where people should go and who are those that have the skills to help you. OK, so if we go a little more, I think I think transparency is important. Again, when you have changed, people are frustrated and it's hard, and there's a reason why people don't like to change because it is really difficult. There's a reason why leaders don't always want to do that. It's easier to stay the same. And when things get difficult, it's easy for staff and for everyone to kind of get together and talk and form

their own message. And it's important that they understand what you're doing and why you're doing it and being transparent along the way. It sounds kind of simple, but I think visibility is really important. I think that letting people see you and knowing where you are, and I think they feel supported that way, just knowing that they're going to kind of be able to interact as you listen to their concerns and communicate your ideals and really know how to support them—I think goes along way.

AMY: Thank you. How did you learn those skills?

STEVEN: Probably just by doing, to be honest, I can't say that anybody didn't talk about communication in my preparation as an administrator. I think when you when you get into it, probably the biggest thing I've learned is, we do an admin survey, every year we survey the staff about our leadership and consistently the feedback was “Well, he listens to me. He listens to my concerns, he responds.” And so I kind of, I guess it was reinforced and then I've learned to be more intentional about it over time and to be more proactive. And you know, the other thing is just being well organized because it's one thing to say, OK, “I understand your concern, I'd like to help you with this.” It's another thing you've got to think about how to schedule your time and manage your data actually address those concerns. So, I think organization matters, but you know, I like I said, it's probably just more experience—kind of trial by fire and then you know every year you go through something new. We went through sort of crisis last year where there were some alleged threats made against our school in the community, the staff was scared and really traumatic and stressful. And what I learned is in that moment was that my number one priority was to communicate and lead that process. And be really visible because again, if I don't communicate that message, they're going to develop their own message. It's probably not the one I want.

AMY: Did your administration and supervision program address those skills in anyway? I know you said maybe not explicitly, but you know some of that may have been reinforced.

STEVEN: Yeah, I remember reading books about, you know, change leadership and vision and saying the mission. I'll never forget—I remember seeing a chart about Marzano's 1st and 2nd order change and just talking about all the different factors that make for good leadership and when you go through change, morale typically drops. People perceive that they are not supported, and there's some coaching there and how you manage that and make that process better for those involved in the change process.

AMY: Thank you, can you tell me about some of your experiences in implementing change initiatives?

STEVEN: Sure, my first principalship was as an assistant principal and essentially, we walked into a school that had a lot of change in administration. And our scores were very low, so we were in school improvement and so we essentially had to walk in and rethink how instruction was delivered and talk about differentiation and data driven instruction and all those good strategies that just weren't happening, and so that was the first part of it. My next was at an elementary school in very similar, except for it was worse. We were denied accreditation and so not only was our scores low, morale is very low. Student behavior appeared to be out of control

and so, well, you know we had to address those in both of those situations. What we found is you really got to address your school climate first and you've got to get the students to believe that they can learn. You've got to get teachers to understand what you're doing and why you're doing it. So again, very clear in your expectations and what accountability is, but also really thinking along the lines of what do you need and how can I support you as we go through this. Once you do that, I think that the next part is thinking about getting to know and listening your staff, your school, their strengths and weaknesses, and how can I systematically implement change so the change isn't about me and my skills, but it's about putting people in the right position to be successful. And then when a problem comes, it's being able to put that problem through the process that it needs to be solved effectively by the people that are knowledgeable about how to do so.

AMY: That's very good. Thank you. How do you plan for change initiatives?

STEVEN: Yeah, I think the first thing is you've got to get buy-in. I think it cannot be top down driven. It's got to be from the bottom up and so what I mean is most change happens organically in my experience, so you might find a teacher or a group of teachers doing things that are really effective. And then what you have to do is you have to identify the real movers and shakers on that staff and you get them on board and then you let people see that it's working and then you give them the opportunity to ask questions and to get feedback and so on. So something that would probably answer last question—one of the big, big changes that we went through when I was in elementary schools—we adopted a new reading curriculum Success For All, and this was a curriculum that was a huge change. This is not where I'm asking you to tweak your lesson plans, or I'd like you to spend 5 minutes in your class on this skill. It completely wiped out everything that had been done with reading instruction and changed it and so I had a staff that was very resistant to doing something like that. So what we did was we went to other schools in each staff was given a chance to go visit another school that did it and so they work with those teachers and those administrators who are knowledgeable. We brought in staff within our division who were also using this curriculum and they had the chance to ask questions and interview. We looked at data, we brought in representatives from the program that was going to help us implement. And basically gave them every opportunity to ask questions and then I went ahead and survey the staff and I did say this is not a vote, you know, this is my decision, but I still want to know where you are and I knew in my mind if it was if it was split or if it was overwhelmingly against that it was not going to be an effective change. I just am not one that believes that that you can force change on other. Sometimes you just have to, but it's got to be a little bit more than that. There's got to be that buy-in and once you can get that, buy-in with communication, transparency, letting them ask those questions, then you've got a better chance of being successful. I read recently that leadership is basically making people uncomfortable at a rate they can absorb, so pushing them out of their comfort zone but not so much you lose them and so that's kind of something you have to keep in mind. Once we once we did that, the buy-in was there and then when it became challenging, which we knew it was going to be, implementing the curriculum, we were able to get through that and persevere because we believe that it was worthwhile and everyone had to say in what was happening.

AMY: That's excellent, thank you. And how do you communicate those initiatives to your stakeholders?

STEVEN: Yeah, and I think that's important too, because sometimes we just communicate with maybe our inner circle or even within our school and we forget there's a lot of people involved in making a school go. You have your families, and your community who again, they need to hear from you. They need to know what you're doing and why you're doing it and why. This is good for their child and if they don't see that value and if they don't see that sincerity and there's not that trust change becomes very, very difficult. And you spend your day, you know, talking to angry parents and building those bridges. So there's got to be an effort to go out into the community, not wait for them to come to you. You also, one of the things I've learned is you've got to include those that are stakeholders in mental health and so that that very clearly involves people like your school counseling team, your psychologist, your social workers. They have a big role to play in terms of knowing where our students are with their mental health and knowing where our staff is at their mental health and they and they can help manage that part of it. And then the other thing is just talked to those students and again getting them to believe in what you're doing and why you're doing it because if it changes isn't working for the adults, it's going to trickle down to those students and so there needs to be a shared understanding of vision of what's happening and why it's happening.

AMY: That's very good. Thank you. How do you evaluate change initiatives? You talked a little bit about your survey, you know, in launching that. What are some other things that you do?

STEVEN: Yeah, that's a good point. We're actually going through that now with the program we started at the high school. I think there needs to be an agreed upon set a standard for success, because what we cannot do is base our success on our feelings or perceptions. Those are important, and perceptions do matter, and so there's a whole host of research to talk about why it does, but, at the same time, we all know it's not going to feel good and you're not going to feel supported and you're not going to be necessarily excited to come to work. So, if we agree on the benchmarks and what the goal post is then then we can use that data that we've agreed we're going to collect to measure our success, and so a lot of times that needs to be aside from student scores. Ultimately, that is our ultimate destination is student success, and we want that. But maybe early on, it's something different. Maybe it's, you know, attendance at school or something along those lines, or number of discipline referrals to the office as an indicator that things might be improving. So, I guess to answer your question, you really need to understand and agree on what are the standards for success before we before we get into this. So we have something to hang onto—that Success For All program—we went an entire quarter, which was nine weeks in Bedford County, very, very difficult or frustrated, didn't quite understand it. Every day was hard, but then we got to do our quarterly assessments to judge their reading level, the data showed what we were doing was working, and then the by and started so. But again, we had that data to go back to and say, hang in there, it's working, you're going to get better. Just understand that this is working for our kids.

AMY: That's very good. And then for you specifically, what is your role in most change initiatives in your school?

STEVEN: Yeah, I think it's interesting that every level is different. The smaller the school, you're probably more hands on. In my particular role in high school, it's got to be more big-picture, so we talk about management versus leadership. For me, I am more in the leadership visionary part and I have assistants for the management. They are an extension of my vision. Ultimately I depend on them to take care of some of the day-to-day fires like maybe student discipline or special education, IEP meetings, or you know, scheduling, there's a lot of details that I keep, you know, I keep involved in. I keep informed about and I weigh in on but when it comes to a lot of the legwork, just roll up your sleeves and doing it—other people do that and I have to move on to the next thing. So for me, it's setting the tone, setting that vision, trying to create a climate where staff are empowered to do what they, what they are experts, and what they're good at doing to solve certain problems.

AMY: Thank you. This next set here looks at the congruence between your preparation and your experiences in leading change. Do you believe that you were prepared to lead change?

STEVEN: Yeah, oh boy, um I think so. I feel pretty good about my training and I think like anything else, it comes down to the quality of the instructor or the teacher, I remember having some pretty dynamic instructors in the courses that would have helped. For example, my school finance class probably didn't help me a lot with school change. It just didn't. It doesn't mean it's not valuable, but my school leadership in school administration courses where we looked at scenarios and we looked at different philosophies on leadership. And the courses that helped me were the ones that had practical value. Some of my doctoral classes, we had a few professors that were very clear about, we want to have practical value. And so we found instead of a textbook with research, which again is critical—you've got to have research, but sometimes you need to know how that research is applied. We would pull an article, or we do sort of an interview or a qualitative type study and we would just have discussions about scenarios. And then we were given assignments that said, identify a problem and institute a solution, you know, or a change and let's report back and talk about it. So yeah, I would say I felt prepared for that. I think I think that if colleges and universities don't continue to stay very close to schools and what our student needs, they're going to be at risk of not preparing. There are things that I, I think, that our kids are changing rapidly with the technology they have access to, with the way they learn, with the way they behaved with the mental health needs. They're going to have to stay on it because I feel like even the training I got—and I graduated with my master's in 2010—that's almost obsolete. If it was the exact same way today, I probably wouldn't be prepared, so change needs to be at all levels.

AMY: Can I ask a follow up question about your program when you talked about those scenarios that you had and you know kind of walking through and some of those discussions—was that in person? Was it more like a cohort program?

STEVEN: Yeah, my master's was not. It was mostly online. We had to take, I believe it was three intensives, so I took onsite at 9 hours, for a week so that was definitely not a cohort and the rest was online through Blackboard. But then my doctoral was it was a cohort, so it's the same people in every class for 2 1/2 years of course works so that made a difference. I will say that made a big difference.

AMY: Yeah, I can definitely see how it would lend to some of those types of things. And so we've talked about this a little bit, but I'll ask the question just in case you have anything else to add is how well did your administration and supervision program prepare you to implement change affectively?

STEVEN: Yeah, I mean I think probably I would say, well, I think anymore, you almost need a course focused on that or a significant time. I think we could have spent more time on that because as I said, these students are changing so much and you're not going to be in a career in education for whatever, 30, 40, 50 years without experiencing significant change. And so everybody is going to go through it. And so you may as well be prepared and every administrative if you're going to stay in it for any amount of time, and quite honestly, I mean it's, I just think about how different the world is today than it was five years ago, and what we tell our teachers—if you are the same teacher teaching the same way that you did five years ago, even the best teachers five years ago are now, they're already behind and probably below average. You've got to continue to change, so I think I think it's important it needs to be probably the more important.

AMY: Thank you, and then my last question, what do you know now that you wish you had learned in your program?

STEVEN: I don't know, I just think you make a lot of assumptions. I think what if I could just go back and tell myself or a young administrator, you know, what's the number one thing that you can do is quite honestly, get quiet and listen. Put your ear to the ground, get a feel for what's going on. Identify those movers and shakers you need to know in your building who has influence and who's willing to change and adapt. And you need to know who doesn't, and if you can get those influencers and those movers and shakers on board, not by selling your vision, but by listening to them and then forming a vision based on that input, you're going to be a lot better place.

AMY: That's great. Thank you so much. This has been tremendously helpful.

## APPENDIX N: Sample Letter

February 1, 2021

Dear Future Administrator,

I'm not sure who deserves the credit, but a wise individual once said that the only constant in this world is change. That has been true of education since the days of the one-room schoolhouse, and perhaps most strikingly so this past year as leaders across the globe have navigated the changes precipitated by Covid-19. Policies, practices, and regulations have been turned upside down in a matter of moments and then changed in the very next as new information has been made available, rapid-fire style, to leaders at every level of education. Leaders who, ultimately, are responsible for not only navigating the changes, but interpreting, assimilating, applying, implementing and communicating each new piece of information to a host of audiences ranging from students to school board members. To say that change has impacted school administrators this year is almost laughable; terms like "pivot" and "awaiting guidance" have become tired and overused clichés that no longer distract the broad range of audiences from the fact that some changes can be managed better than others. I would imagine that for most school leaders, there has been no manual for how to navigate the management of this change. And while the timely example of Covid-19 education serves as an outlier – at least, we hope! - of the type of change a leader may need to navigate during their tenure as a school administrator, the fact is that in any given year, a host of changes may require a leader's management skills. Some may be large-scale turn-the-building-upside-down kinds of changes, and others may be incremental in size and impact. Some may stem from an external force outside the leader's control, and some may generate internally and organically due to necessity or in the name of continuous improvement. Whatever the size, cause, impact, timeline, or audience; change *will* occur and there may not be a guidebook provided for "5 Steps to Navigating this Change;" in fact, there may be no direction given at all. I'm certainly not an expert on change management, but in the absence of a perfectly foolproof system/process/cycle/guide/wish-and-a-prayer for change management, the future school leader may want to spend time developing a firm identity as a leader. As I have observed various leaders navigate various changes - some better than others - I've observed that those who tend to navigate these challenges most seamlessly, and coincidentally (or not!) inspire the greatest levels of confidence in those they lead, are the leaders who have a strong internal compass made up of foundational beliefs, core values, and philosophies that guide their leadership practices. While beneficial at all moments of leadership, these seem to be particularly useful during the (often) stressful times of managing, directing, and/or implementing change. Here are a few to consider ~

1. **Know *who* you are.** Who you are as an individual, who you are as a leader, who you are as an educator. What made you choose this profession and why do you stay? TED Talk aficionados would tell you to know and remember your *Why* and use it as a touchpoint to return to, like true north on a compass. What are your strengths, and how do those play out in times of stress or change? What are your weaknesses or where are you less apt to shine and who do you have surrounding you to help offset those areas? Where do you fit in the lines of communication and decision making for your particular role and

organization? What actions are within your realm of control, which are within your realm of influence? These won't all be static throughout your leadership life, nor will they necessarily be consistent with others in a similar role as you. Just as you grow and change, your roles, responsibilities, and influence will change as well – so reflect often – and don't allow the dynamics of your role to change the core of who you are.\* [*\*Unless you're a jerk. In which case – find another profession – and then change. There's no room, or time for that matter, here.*]

2. **Know whose you are.** We all belong to some team, organization, group, school, division, state agency, and so on; none of us lead within a vacuum. Often as leaders we are the face of the organization, whether we signed up knowingly for that particular role or not. Make sure the group you represent is one you can stand behind, beside, and in front of without losing yourself and your compass points. Does that vision align with yours? If not, are you willing to give yours up for the larger vision and mission of the group or do you have the skill, time, influence, and work ethic to change the entire organization (which depending on your role might be near to impossible)? Thinking it won't matter is like assuming that latest update to your navigational system won't matter *all that much*. And perhaps it won't – at first. But the longer you're there, the more it's going to matter and the further you're going to travel in a different direction, at a different speed, on a different route than you'd intended. Knowing the organization you belong to is also key in knowing your own areas of control and influence. What are the strengths of the organization and its leaders above you? What are their expectations of you in leading, developing, and managing change? Do you have a seat at the decision-making table or are you expected to implement changes and decisions made for you? What are the means for providing input, accessing information, participating in problem-solving and receiving clarification and feedback? What model of leadership is espoused? Which is followed? What does your organization say it believes in and how does that play out in the day-to-day? It is a brand you can stand behind and legitimately defend when needed? While we all can lead in some way wherever we are, part of being a strong leader is knowing where you fit in the larger map of the organization and navigating the challenges and opportunities that provides.
3. **Know who you serve.** Who do you lead, and who do you follow, because as a leader *you are a servant to all*. Students, families, teachers, bosses, staff, school boards, the broader community – each with their own needs, expectations, and agendas – *and you serve them all* (redundancy intended). “Engaging your stakeholders” isn't just a key element to embed in your SLLA responses; it really does matter. And not just so you can say that you did. Knowing, getting to know, and building and fostering relationships with each group with its various needs will ease multiple challenges faced while implementing change, regardless of whether or not you were the initial facilitator of it. How are you going to gather input and put that into action? What modes of communication are in place for a two-way dialogue that engages each group as an essential partner? What does each group need from you and how are you positioned to advocate for them? Constantly remind yourself that it's not about you. Yes, you're a leader. But if your agenda replaces that of those you serve, your compass simply won't work well and you most certainly will not leave a legacy of strong leadership that fosters the growth of other leaders. Determine in your deep-down soul that your job is to lay your pillow on your bed each

night knowing you did what you could to serve yours well and ultimately your Maker who entrusted their care to you in the first place. That doesn't mean you won't toss and turn with the heavy weight of need or responsibility. It doesn't mean that situations won't ever break your heart or keep you awake at night. And it doesn't mean that all of the people will be happy with you all of the time. Nor does it mean that you're always or ever in the spotlight. On the long days, or the anonymous days, or the never-want-to-do-*that*-again days, refer to #1 and remember who you are and why you do what you do.

4. **Know what you don't know** ~ and seek to fill the gap. No, you can't really know all that you don't know, but being humble enough to admit that you don't know it all goes a long way to building your own skills as a leader which in turn will make leading and managing change an easier task to tackle. Know who and where to find people and resources to help you. Build your library of professional resources, leadership hacks, and personal observations of the leaders around you. Ask questions. Accept feedback. Assimilate what you've learned and what you're learning into your own unique blend of leadership and be okay with it looking different from those around you who might not know what you know or serve who you serve.

I wish that there really were foolproof ways to effectively manage the numerous changes across the lifetime of a leader, but those are really as infinite and diverse as the leaders we have in the world and the groups that are led. None of us are going to do it in exactly the same way with the exact same outcomes. Know yourself, and those you serve, and be humble enough to foster your own skills, particularly those of listening, learning, reflecting, communicating, and adapting to an ever-changing landscape, and at the end of your leading you'll find that in the process of serving all, you've also led well, and along the way multiplied the leaders around you.

Sincerely,

Jessica [Pseudonym]

## APPENDIX O: Excerpt from Focus Group

Amy: One of the things in the interviews with all of my participants—one common thread that emerged was the idea of influencers or those key people in your building that you go to change with first, and then they helped to carry it through your building? So could you speak to how do those people emerge? Do you select them? Do they emerge? Do they just kind of come along? What does that look like?

Kimberly: You know, as we're sitting here looking at our new data, something's got to change. The results of what we have going on right now are not working, and they're not what's best for kids. We have to come up with a better plan than just having kids in front of us two days a week. With that, I had a teacher who happened to stop by my office yesterday. It is somebody that is able to be a change agent for the right things. In my conversation with her, I said, "Hey, I've got the schedule up here, I want you to look at it, tell me what you think. Let's talk about it for a few minutes." Being able to find the right people in our school to share little messages. Now, I do the same thing with the naysayers. Last night she just happened to reach out to me and said, "Hey, you know what? You got a minute? Let's chat. Here's another idea that I have that's been brought to me across the division, or in some other school systems, data is supporting a change to this type of model. What do you think about it?" Giving them that chance to talk it through, to have those "Now why would we do this?" people that are resistant to change and then get them excited about it. Because when we can get those folks, everyone else will typically follow along, or at least that's what I've seen here. Steven, Danielle, I'm not sure if you have something different to add to that.

Steven: We had a meeting this morning with my leadership team. We actually call it our Solutions Team and had that talk about, you have 80% that are going to generally do what you want to do. And then there's that 20%--I don't know, I feel like that number is bigger this year than maybe normally, but especially you need those key influencers. I mean, of all years, there are so many unprecedented problems. In a normal year, I might be able to say, "OK, here's how we used to handle this" or "Here's how we did handle it." I think that's why we're all so exhausted, if I could maybe make an assumption, it's because every problem is new and it's like I'm learning to ride that bike all over again. It's the job of a leader to lead that learning, not necessarily have all the answers. I think if you can accept that and lean on other people for supporting ideas, you're going to do really well. And I think you've got a better chance of coming through change because you've got a variety of people giving you ideas, and I think they're better for it when more people have a say.

Amy: That's great, thank you both for that. You mentioned sometimes the naysayers are a key part of those influencers—that was something that came up as well.

Danielle: Influencers emerge sometimes by intentional design or sometimes out of a specific need. Sometimes you need representation from a certain group in your building and that personality can stand to support or challenge every need. Tapping into the potential is the key for influence to be positive and using all of those talents.

Amy: So that is that's very helpful. Thank you. I also have Michael that joined us as well. So Michael, I have Danielle, I have Steven and Kimberly in here too. So welcome. Thank you for making the time. My next question—Steven, that's a great segue. How do you handle crisis change? And what, if anything, do you do differently for crisis change then for plan change?

Steven: Yeah, that's a good question. One of the things that we—again, we had leadership this morning—we really had a conversation about, with all the changes we've had, we're not sure what's going to happen next year. But you know, if nothing else, it's an opportunity to really revisit the way we do things. We need to have an agreement on our core values and what are the things that will not change and should not change. And so I guess you start with the things that you can all agree are important and valuable, and then you build from that framework. So, no matter what you do, you don't get away from the important core values.

Amy: Does the process kind of look the same whether it's planned or unexpected?

Steven: I don't know. Probably not. I mean, I don't know. I think you think you go through that regardless, you might need to focus on some more than others, but I don't see a lot of change in the process. You know, it starts with reality, not perception. It's reality. This is where we are now. What can we do about it?

Kimberly: You know, maybe that sense of urgency changes, right? That when we're looking at school improvement goals and we're writing a school improvement plan, we know what we're thinking longevity. Where, if it's something that urgent, you need to be able to adjust to in the moment. Today, our middle school and high school started back in person. So that meant that our buses now are not all here, right at the end, so that that was a little bit of a change. OK, now we're going to change some patterns and some routines in the building to adjust for transportation issues. I think that maybe how quickly you react, of course, would be that piece that would change in a crisis situation, Amy. Some things we have to turn around a little quicker than others. Sometimes you're able to put more thought, you're able to gather more people, more input. If it's a crisis, you probably aren't going to get quite as much feedback as we might normally rather have.