

Attributes of Successful School Improvement Teams:
Participants' Perspective

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Attributes of Successful of School Improvement Teams:
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An abstract of a Dissertation
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The Problem:

In light of the current political and economic pressure being placed on school districts, it is imperative for school leaders to implement initiatives which will contribute to the school improvement process. Better utilization of administrators and faculty is key to the efficient and effective implementation of school improvement efforts. Teams have been identified in a wide range of research successfully implemented by business/industry and schools. The purpose of this research was to study the attributes or behaviors of individual team members, as viewed by their fellow team members. These attributes or behaviors were coded to determine whether they helped the school improvement team succeed.

Procedures:

A qualitative collective case study was utilized to gain insight into the perceptions of team members as they reflected on traits they viewed in other members of their school improvement team. Semi-structured interviews, observations, and historical documents were used to gather data from four moderately sized school districts in Iowa. This was a multi-case study in which the interviewees were randomly selected.

Findings:

The interviews uncovered eight main attributes. The five main attributes were: bringing something positive to the team, being a team player, life-long learning, clearly defined roles on the team/ground rules, and longevity working together. Important, yet secondary, attributes were identified as: approachability, strong communication skills, and having a vision of the future.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

During the 1990s many school districts across Iowa developed mission statements, philosophical statements, district-wide goals and broad program goals. As part of this process some school districts developed a team approach to accomplish tasks in their school improvement efforts. The roots for this process can be traced as far back as the original *Nation at Risk* report published in 1983.

Since that time the call for concrete standards, state-wide assessments, continuous school improvement, and more rigorous teacher training has increased the demands on school leaders to efficiently and effectively institute school improvement. With the passage of *Public Law 107-110- An Act To Close The Achievement Gap With Accountability, Flexibility, And Choice, So That No Child Is Left Behind*, simply known as *No Child Left Behind* (2002), states, districts, and schools were charged with developing research-based policies, programs, and practices that would result in quantifiable improvements in instruction and student achievement (Johnson, 2008).

Many of the school improvement ideas were framed around work done by researchers and authors such as Boyer (1995), Dufour (2004), Fullan (1998), Glasser (1992), Glickman (1998), Marzano (2005), Senge (1990), Sergiovanni (1996), Wagner (2008) and others. For the most part, their work was focused on the gestalt of school improvement and was not focused on the actual workings within the larger organization.

During this same period of time, business and industry entities were also going through major changes. Work done by authors such as Buckingham and Coffman (1999), Collins (2003), Gardner et al. (2001), Gharajedaghi (1999), Hackman (2002),

Lencioni (2002), and Yukl (1998), for the most part, applied to organizational improvements in business and industry. There were some interesting factors and components of the business/industry type model that could possibly be replicated in school improvement teams. That connection helped lay a ground work for this study.

Throughout the 1990s many schools struggled to sustain their school improvement focus. New initiatives, mandates, school board members, administrators, state leaders, and national leaders diverted school improvement efforts and fractured those efforts as schools were asked to cover increasing numbers of mandates without an increase in manpower or funding. Despite the same hurdles being placed in the way of every public school in Iowa, some school improvement teams flourished and prospered while others struggled, and yet others withered and died. Why did some flourish despite dealing with the same requirements as neighboring school districts?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to add to study the attributes or behaviors of individual team members of successful school improvement teams, as viewed by their fellow team members. The study attempted to identify key factors that led to the success of school improvement teams in Iowa public schools over an extended period of time. Districts with successful school improvement teams were identified by outside educational entities. The identification process is discussed in Chapter 3 p. 34. By studying successful teams, the assumption was that the information could be used in the structuring or re-ordering of teams in other school districts in an attempt to yield greater productivity and effectiveness. If the study yielded such results, the replication would benefit the school improvement process in a broader population of school districts. This

study was based on research in which members of successful school improvement teams were interviewed and asked to assess their fellow team members using open-ended questions to seek their perceptions on what traits their team members had that contributed to the overall success of the team.

Justification For the Study

In the current political atmosphere of school improvement accountability and the economic stressors on all public entities, it is important to understand what allowed certain school improvement teams to be successful while others withered and became ineffective in their school improvement efforts. Such results can benefit school districts as they design teams within the current structures of the school. If learning how to develop those attributes and traits becomes obvious on successful teams, leaders will be able to seek individuals within their existing school personnel in designing such teams. Such results can benefit school districts as they implement programs to answer the challenges set forth in both state and federal legislation. More importantly, the potential of more effective leadership teams may enable the district to deal with local issues in a proactive manner.

There has been a great deal of research regarding successful teams in industry and the impact those teams have had on productivity and efficiency. Initially it was thought that executives and other decision makers would make teams work if team members only understood the compelling arguments for why teams made a difference to performance. It became obvious the challenge was more difficult than simply helping people understand why teams were important (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993).

Due to the political pressure and economic demands being applied to the public school system in Iowa, school leaders must maximize limited resources available to create the changes in school structure, dynamics, strategies, assessments, and curriculum that have the greatest impact on improving student achievement for all learners. Federal *No Child Left Behind* legislation and requirements (Pub.L.107-110 Stat. 1425, 2002) , the implementation of Iowa Core Curriculum (Senate File 2216, 2008) essential concepts and skills for grades Kindergarten through grade 12, across the board state-wide budget cuts, declining enrollments, changing demographics, and higher teacher and administrative standards have all placed heavy burdens on an already stretched public school system. With these pressures comes the need for school leaders to study organizations outside of education and how they have maximized human and capital resources to tackle their challenges.

There is research available to help school leaders organize in such a way as to meet the new demands placed upon them and their organizations. Katzenbach and Smith (1993) pointed out “...top management is turning increasingly to teams for three compelling reasons. First, teams strengthen the performance capabilities of individuals, hierarchies, and management processes....Second, teams are practical....And, third, of course, teams get results”(p. 255-256). Most people, particularly business executives, already recognized the value of teams. Long-standing habits, demanding schedules, and unwarranted assumptions, however, seemed to prevent them from taking full advantage of team opportunities (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993).

It is imperative for educators to heed Katzenbach and Smith’s warnings and at the same time weigh the compelling benefits and need for successful teams as part of twenty-

first century school improvement efforts. Cloke and Goldsmith (2003), in their book *The Art of Waking People Up: Cultivating Awareness and Authenticity at Work*, emphasized that “Teams provide us with ways to feel satisfied and useful on the job, have fun with one another, and fulfill our responsibilities” (p. 268). Cloke and Goldsmith (2003) went on to point out that one of the benefits of teams was to give team members a chance to see the system holistically rather than viewing themselves as simply “cogs in a grinding machine” (p. 268).

While a great deal of previous work was done holistically regarding teams, there needed to be further study into personal reflections on the specific attributes and traits team members needed to be contributing members of a successful school improvement team. To accomplish that study, the researcher sought insight from school improvement team members from moderately-sized school districts in Iowa.

Enrollment data from the Iowa Department of Education for the 2008-2009 school year revealed there were 362 public school districts in Iowa. Of that total roughly 55% of those districts had an enrollment that fell between 300 and 999 students (Annual Condition of Education Report, 2009). Utilizing that enrollment range, 188 school districts comprised the pool of moderately-sized schools (see Appendix G). By centering the study’s focus on the moderately-sized school districts in Iowa and by utilizing the Iowa Department of Education school improvement consultants, Area Education Agency Educational Services directors, School Administrators of Iowa, and the Iowa Association of School Boards, a list of moderately-sized school districts in Iowa that had consistently, over time, made progress on their school improvement goals. Four districts were chosen from the pool using random numbers. Four members from each selected

district's school improvement team were identified. Those team members selected from the district pool were interviewed regarding their perspectives as to the traits and attributes of team members who contributed to the success of the team over time. The resulting interviews, coupled with documents such as meeting agendas, action plans, and meeting minutes, gave the researcher insight as to the inner workings of successful school improvement teams in these school districts.

Research Question

If, as researchers such as Bass (1990), Fullan (2003), Gharajedaghi (1999), Katzenbach and Smith (1993), LaFasto and Larson (1989), Marzano et al. (2005), Sergiovanni (2004), and Yukl (1998) have suggested, teams are vital to the improvement process then the structure of teams and positive characteristics of team members are critically important to understanding the interactions and reactions as team members work together. The intent of this study was to identify those characteristics.

The research question was: What are the key attributes school improvement team members perceive in other school improvement team members which have contributed to the success of the school improvement team over an extended period of time? The researcher theorized that members of successful school improvement teams could identify key traits their team members demonstrated which contributed to their on-going success in the implementation of school improvement initiatives. The researcher theorized leaders of school districts would have greater success if they structure teams using the identified characteristics as a template for their team design.

Definition of Terms

Area Education Agency Educational Services Division: “Iowa Area Education Agencies (AEAs) are regional service agencies which provide school improvement services for students, families, administrators and their communities....AEAs serve as intermediate units that provide educational services to local schools” (Iowa Area Education Agencies, 2010, front page). Within the structure of the Area Education Agency are departments or divisions. The Educational Services division provides “assistance to districts in planning and facilitation for comprehensive school improvement” (Iowa Area Education Agencies, 2010, front page).

Culture/climate: The researcher defined culture/climate as the acceptable way to act and be within the confines of the system, herein identified as the school. This pertained to the way people treated each other regardless of experience or position within the district/building. Culture/climate also deals with how members of the organization conducted themselves and how members did business within the structure of the organization. The way districts celebrated and valued diversity of thought, ethnicity, religious background, and socio-economic status also impacted the culture/climate of the system.

Extended period of time: In reference to the length of time used as a qualifier for this study, a minimum period of four school years was used as the benchmark. To be part of the study, Area Education Agency Educational Services Division personnel, a Iowa Department of Education School Improvement consultant, an employee of School Administrators of Iowa, and/or an employee of the Iowa Association of School Boards recommended the sample district (moderately-sized) that had shown continued positive

movement toward improving student achievement scores, successfully implementing school improvement initiatives, and/or improving the culture/climate of the district/building.

Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB): IASB is an organization of elected school board members dedicated to assisting school boards in training, setting goals, legal advice, and financial consultation (Iowa Association of School Boards, 2009).

Moderately-sized school district: One hundred eighty-eight of Iowa's 362 public school districts had a student population between 300 students and 999 students. These districts served roughly 55% percent of all Iowa students (Annual Condition of Education Report, 2009).

School Administrators of Iowa (SAI): SAI is a statewide organization founded in 1987, representing more than 2000 Iowa educational administrators (principals, superintendents, curriculum directors, area education agency administrators, and general administration areas) (School Administrators of Iowa, n.d.).

School Improvement Teams: The name may vary by district-to-district in the study, but the phrase "school improvement team" refers to the group that meets on a regular basis and consists of administrators and teachers/support staff/students/members of the public. The school improvement team helps design the district's staff development plan, assesses student achievement results, and makes recommendations for district-wide or building-level goals aimed at increasing student achievement and/or the culture/climate of the building or district.

Success: The perception of the participants that they are having a positive impact on the school district's efforts to improve student achievement and/or the culture/climate of the building or district.

Traits: Characteristics the participant on the school improvement team views as having contributed to the success of the team.

Chapter 2

Brief Overview of the Study

Despite only being one component of the entire educational system, the school improvement team can have a huge impact on the school improvement process. The school improvement team is the type of consistent structure Malone (2009) referenced in his book *The Future Arrived Yesterday: The Rise of the Protean Corporation and What it Means For You*. Malone (2009) pointed out, “Real, human-based organizations need some kind of structure” (p. 120). The researcher explored the “real, human-based” aspect of school improvement teams.

The study was from the perspective of participants on school improvement teams in moderately-sized school districts in Iowa. The study reflected on the role teams play in schools. An overview of the literature reflects a combination of business/industry references as well as educational documentation. The researcher anticipated there was an overlap of findings in the literature regarding key components which contribute to team success. Nonetheless, the study took a look, not as an outsider, but rather through the lens of participants and how they viewed the traits that led to each team’s success, where they saw those traits in their teammates and how those traits contributed to the team’s success over an extended period of time.

Background and Review of Discourses

Charlie Chaplin’s silent movie *Modern Times* was a classic parody of the “Old World” of blue-collar work. In the film, Chaplin portrayed an assembly-line worker who was constantly getting into trouble with his bosses and ended up getting caught up in the cogs of the machine. The analogy was that Chaplin’s character had simply become

another replacement part in the machinery of business and industry (Wagner, 2008). Cloke and Goldsmith (2003) also made reference to employees feeling like cogs in the machinery of the organization. Chaplin was part of a process. He was on an assembly line and eventually became part of the very machinery he was charged with operating. In conducting this study the researcher chose to go beyond traditional journals and research in an attempt to seek a deeper understanding of the human aspect of teams and perceptions of team members, thus venturing beyond the assembly-line and more into the inner workings of teams, while at the same time avoiding becoming caught up in the gears that may stifle the team's work.

In traditional research studies the document would reflect a "review of literature." This portion of the document would give an overview of the relevant academic/scholarly literature anchored in formal/theoretical work. In a qualitative study, Garman and Piantanida (1999) wrote that it is important to include thoughts from "various stakeholder groups (e.g. practitioners, consumers, policyholder) and in the media" (p. 99). For that reason, the researcher has titled this portion of the document "Background and Review of Discourses."

Tangentially Related References

The 21st century needs different kinds of work done by a different type of worker. According to Wagner (2008), "While we will always need assembly-line-type workers, the workers which will be successful in the flat global economy" will be those who can team with others to "continuously reinvent the machine as well as the products and the services it creates" (p. 41). In his book, *The World Is Flat*, Friedman (2005) stated, "In the flat world, one person's economic liberation could be another's unemployment" (p.

205). In the flat world, more and more business will be done through collaborations within and between companies (Friedman, 2005). President Obama re-emphasized the fact that the world was entering a new era when he stated on February 24, 2009, “In a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity --- it is a pre-requisite. The countries that out-teach us today will out-compete us tomorrow” (United States Department of Education, 2009).

In a white paper titled *Jobs and the Skills Gap* (2010), Director of the International Center for Leadership in Education Director Daggett wrote, “If the United States wants to remain competitive in a global marketplace where the majority of workers earn a fraction of the salaries paid in this country, we must have the most competent and innovative work force possible” (p. 1). Daggett (2010) went on to warn that more workers are retiring than entering the labor market each year, thus the country “will need every person of working age able to contribute to the economy” if the United States wants to maintain its economic and political status in the world (p. 4).

President Obama, Friedman and Daggett are correct. The world is changing at an amazing rate. A person born around the start of the 20th century may have helped his/her family plow a field behind a horse. Yet, that same person could have lived long enough to see a man set foot on the moon, the overwhelming presence of the Internet, cable television, and life expectancy that increased from only 47 years to 77 years. The rate of change during his/her lifetime was amazing yet today the rate of change will likely be many times faster and more impactful. As a result, organizations must adapt to meet the changes swirling around them if they are to survive.

An example of the rapid rate of change is the computer chip. In 1964 the computer chip was still in its infant stage, yet Moore's Law predicted the computer chip would double in power and complexity every eighteen to twenty-four months, thus giving the world the low-cost terahertz microprocessor that would process "one trillion calculations per second" (Malone, 2009, p. xv). Malone's (2009) statement "... technology, and society around it, move on and at an ever faster pace. . . [and, therefore] the advances of the intervening years now pose a threat, and an opportunity, to modern organizations . . ." (p. xi-xii).

Success in this newly competitive flat world will require businesses to look different and act differently. When writing about business and industry, several researchers and authors (Bass, 1990; Collins, 2001; Gardner et al., 2001; Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; Yukl, 1998) used teams as a base model for helping organizations meet the challenges of the 21st century. "Most organizational leaders and managers are well past the point of needing convincing that collaborative teamwork is an effective tool for managing complex tasks in a rapidly changing environment" (LaFasto & Larson, 2001, p. xi). Katzenbach and Smith (1993) concurred with LaFasto and Larson's assessment and stated, "Most people, particularly business executives, already recognize the value of teams" (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993, p. 11-12).

With all the changes in the new flat world economy, the business world recognized the need to work differently if they were to survive. According to Wagner (2008),

Corporations have changed dramatically in the last 20 years in terms of the ways that work is organized. . .the way work is organized now is lots of networks of cross-functioning teams that work together on

specific projects. Work is no longer defined by your specialty; it's defined by the task or problem you and your team are trying to solve or the end goal you want to accomplish. (p. 15)

A wide range of researchers recognized the impact teams could and have had on organizations. In his book, *Leadership in Organizations*, Yukl (1998) stated, "Teams are a special kind of group, and organizations are relying increasingly on them to improve quality, efficiency, and adaptive change" (p. 374). Glasser (1992) also commented, "workers do not usually want to run the company, but, driven by their needs for power and freedom, they want some say as to how they do their work" (p. 63). Katzenbach and Smith (1993) shared, "top management is turning increasingly to teams for three compelling reasons: teams strengthen the performance capabilities of individuals; teams are practical; and teams get results" (p. 255-256).

In this flat global economy and society new skills are needed by workers and citizens. President Jefferson first declared literacy to be the key to citizenship, and for the first 225 years of the democracy and the free-enterprise economic system, he was right. In the 21st century, however, both blue and white collar workers were now being called upon to master a new set of skills necessary to maintain political and economic relevance. Literacy was still a major factor in success but workers were also being called upon to think, reason, analyze, problem-solve, and communicate effectively. In his book *The Global Achievement Gap*, Wagner (2008) pointed out, "These are no longer skills only the elites in society must master; they are essential survival skills for all of us" (p. xxii-xxiii).

While there is a vast difference between the processes, the resources, the ingredients, and the final product in industry/business and schools, there are areas where educational leaders can learn from the larger industry/business world. Sergiovanni (1996) stated, “. . . it is valuable to examine insights gained from business and other organizations” (p. 9) as schools moved down the road toward school improvement. Sergiovanni (1996) went on to warn however, “. . . for too long educators have borrowed theories of leadership from business, sports teams, and other corporations that didn’t serve the real goals of schools” (p. vii). Education is a unique field and while some connections can be made between other entities in society and the world of education, not all lessons on efficiency in the industrial/business world apply to school buildings filled with children, teachers, staff members, and school administrators. The inputs, overall goals and intended outcomes are vastly different. Yet despite that warning, schools need to look closely at relationship issues within both worlds and how districts can learn from one another to create better environments for their children, employees, and end product customers.

A re-occurring theme in the literature centers around the role teams played in the organization. “Most organizational leaders and managers are...sold on the value of teams. They have absorbed the theory” (LaFasto & Larson, 2001, p. xi). Those organizations that believe in teams are anchored in the understanding that all organizations are in a constant state of change. In his book *Systems Thinking: Managing Chaos and Complexity: A Platform for Designing Business Architecture*, Gharajedaghi (1999) used example after example of organizations that were going through a barrage of changes internally as well as externally. Those organizations that prospered despite the

onslaught of change were those organizations which knew how to adapt to the new playing field before them. Peck (1997) referred to those types of setting as “learning organizations” and went on to explain “learning organizations must be a community. A sustainable community must be a learning community....Just as individuals must continue to learn in order to survive well, so must our organizations and institutions” (p. 136).

Business leaders and educational leaders both have recognized the importance of teams yet too often they do not create and establish teams that are productive or yield the desired results. In their book *The Orange Revolution: How One Great Team Can Transform an Entire Organization*, Gostick and Elthon (2010) acknowledged that too often leaders create teams that are not true teams. The teams they create may be organized around a goal of being effective and efficient when in reality they are “simply vague labels placed on random groupings . . .” (p. 5). Without the team having a clear direction and thoughtful organization the members of the newly organized team “continue to be a group or department of people that simply have the blanket of ‘team’ thrown upon them,” stated Gostick and Elthon (2010, p.5).

The goal is to identify the traits leaders can seek out in potential members to form highly effective teams. University of New Mexico professor John-Steiner explained in Gostick and Elthon’s (2010) book teams are driven by the fact team members pull together and the success of one aspect of the team builds the arousal of “intellectual passions and enthusiasm of others” (p. 4) thus breeding a synergetic sense of success.

Directly Related References

Lafasto & Larson (2001) were cited earlier in this document stating that in most organizations, leaders have accepted the fact that teams are vital to meet the needs in an ever-changing world. Like industry and business, school districts are struggling with an ever more rapidly changing environment. During the first half of the twentieth century, the educational system was like a calmly moving stream with an origin at kindergarten and the final emptying into the “real world” following graduation thirteen years later.

Things changed dramatically on May 25, 1961. On that date:

. . . President John F. Kennedy delivered a speech to Congress just two short months after Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first human to encircle the globe in outer space. Kennedy knew that America had enormous human and institutional assets --- far more than the Soviet Union --- yet they were not being fully utilized. Kennedy called upon the nation to rally around a set of demanding standards and what must have seemed like an impossible timeline to win the space race. (Friedman, 2005, p. 279)

Kennedy’s speech and the wave of educational legislation which followed resulted in a greater emphasis on mathematics and science in American high schools.

Wagner (2008), in his book *The Global Achievement Gap*, stated, “A little over 50 years ago, Rudolf Flesch wrote a slim volume titled *Why Johnny Can’t Read*. More than any other book, this one started the ‘reading war’” (p. xxii). Flesch’s book and the mood of the times pushed the emphasis on rigor deeper into the traditional educational structure impacting the entire kindergarten through grade 12 system. The emphasis on school

reform became more intense when *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* was released in 1983 by President Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education. The report led to a nationwide reflection not only on the nation's educational programming, but also on the role of government in local educational programming. The political pressures re-directing the efforts in the educational community toward inner reflection were not without merit. Serious issues around equality, opportunity, and access were brought to the forefront. Radically liberal and radically conservative groups each voiced their opinions on schooling in the United States.

The national mood about what schooling should look like also had an effect on the state educational systems. During the 1980s and 90s sections of the Code of Iowa were updated. Sections such as 256.11 (Educational Standards, 1999), 279.50 (Human Growth and Development, 1989), and 281.12.5 (Educational Programs, 1993) required Iowa schools to re-think their educational offerings. Iowa school districts were mandated to implement programs to teach human growth and development topics, multi-cultural/non-sexist curriculum, parenting skills courses, alternative school programs, global education, technology integration, and at the same time implementing new teacher standards and evaluator training requirements for new and existing administrators (Institute for Youth Development, 2010). The demands increased yet the length of the school day and school year remained static. The increase in mandates pressured schools to find more efficient and economical ways of dealing with the educational and political issues before them.

With the 2002 passage of federal law PL 107-110, better known as *No Child Left Behind*, "states, districts, and schools were charged with developing research-based

policies, programs, and practices that would result in quantifiable improvements in instruction and student achievement” (Johnson, 2008, p. 12). The birth of the age of educational accountability moved the focus from relationships and individuals to overall achievements, quantitative data, and specific expectations for student test scores. Students were grouped together into demographic sub-categories and reported to specific audiences as signs of educational excellence.

Another complicating factor was that the immigration rate was twice that of the previous century and that impacted the demographics make up of many school districts and communities (State Data Center of Iowa, 2010). Additionally, the difference in the mean income between the wealthiest and the poorest continued to widen (State Data Center of Iowa, 2010). Other factors impacting education were home schooling, charter schools, higher graduation requirements in mathematics and science, universal access to the Internet, and the changing job market for high school graduates as local companies turned their interests and focus on global issues (Gogoi, 2010).

In his book *The Rapids of Change: Social Entrepreneurship in Turbulent Times*, Theobald (1987) recognized almost a quarter of a century ago that “We are being swept downstream by a torrent of change” (p. 29). Theobald simply pointed out the landscape of society had changed at an amazing rate and that change had become a reality of everyday life. Theobald (1987) stated “some people are still acting as though they are on a slow-moving river and can afford to relax” (p. 29). The people Theobald referred to still attempted to use old answers to life’s new questions. The subsequent political and economic changes have had a major impact on education. During this same period of time, society’s view toward public education had also changed. Glickman (1998)

stressed the fact that public schools were “being attacked continuously” (p. 1) and the attacks pushed for the demolition of public schools as currently known and their replacement with “privatization, tuition vouchers, and unbridled free choice” (p. 1). In an *Educational Leadership* article titled “Leadership for the 21st Century: Breaking the Bonds of Dependency,” Fullan (1998) pointed out the fact there were many voices preaching that the public schools were not working well enough to serve the needs of individuals in the fast-paced 21st century world and the current structure, strategies, techniques, design, and management had become obsolete.

Education in America has been in a constant state of evolution for decades. Glickman (2001) wrote: “One of the most enduring characteristics of American education is that it is constantly changing. Americans are a restless, energetic, and inventive people. Americans place a high value on the education of their children. Americans tend to lurch from one educational panacea to the next in search for “the one right way” (p. 149). Leaders in education infer that American education has been in a constant state of change. Therefore, it became imperative for the leaders of educational institutions to, out of necessity, embrace the change process and understand it, while at the same time enabling members of the educational community to deal with change in a productive and pro-active manner. Theobald (1987) stated, “a growing number are learning to enjoy the turbulent pace. But many are so frightened that they are unable to take any steps . . .” (p. 29) to adapt to the changes around them.

In order to meet this challenge, leaders needed to give the members of their district/building the skill sets to deal with the issues that arrived as a result of the changing world. This needed to take place in an environment where there was little, if

any, disruption to the on-going education of the children within the system. Needless to say, the task was difficult. As pointed out by LaFasto and Larson (2001),

For the last twenty years, social scientists and observers of contemporary life have been commenting on a dramatic change in the way business is done in both the public and private sectors. The change that has attracted so much attention and commentary is a significant increase in teamwork and collaboration efforts. (p. vii)

While the literature was filled with reasons why organizations such as schools should better utilize teams, the path to what makes teams work better was not as clear. Educators have been overwhelmed with the barrage of mandates from federal and state entities. The political landscape at the time placed so many expectations on the educational system that the leadership in schools was forced to do things differently just to survive. The dilemma facing many in education is which path to take in attempts to meet all the demands. Educational leaders need to make changes to maximizing student achievement and graduating students who would be successful in a very different world.

Shared decision making had been in place for decades and played a major role in the systemic thinking of the 1980s and 1990s. Authors such as Glasser (1992) influenced the ideas of what teams might look like and how they behaved. The understanding as to the impact teams could have on the success of the overall system is well documented (Bass, 1990; Donaldson, 2007; Dufour, 2004; Fullan, 2004; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Glickman, 1998; Hackman, 2002; LaFasto & Larson, 2001; Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 1995; Senge, 1990; Senge, 1999; Senge, 2000; Wagner, 2008; Yukl, 1998). Teams were a logical connection to making the

change process more manageable. “Teams outperform individuals acting alone or in larger organizational groupings, especially when performance requires multiple skills, judgments, and experiences” (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993, p. 9).

Katzenbach and Smith (1993) stressed the point “Teams have existed for hundreds of years, are the subject of countless books, and have been celebrated throughout many countries and cultures” (p. 11). Team was a word and concept known to nearly everyone who had been involved in sports, classroom group projects, a club, part of a civic group, or in their day-to-day work life. Some of those experiences were positive, yet some team experiences were total failures. Webster emphasized the point when he wrote, “There are many objects of great value to man which cannot be attained by unconnected individuals, but must be attained, if at all, by association” (LaFasto & Larson, 1989, p. 13).

Webster’s statement rings as true in the twenty-first century as it did when he made it in the early 1800s.

As the functioning of teams was explored, it became increasingly clear that the potential “impact of single teams, as well as the collective impact of many teams, on the performance of larger organizations is woefully underexploited, despite the rapidly growing recognition of the need for what teams have to offer” (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993, p. 11). According to Gharajadaghi (1999),

The real challenge to building a viable social system is the ability to create unity in diversity, meeting the varying interests of independent members operating in an interdependent whole...Collectivity at the expense of individuality leads to totalitarianism and suffocation.

Individualism at the expense of the collectivity leads to chaos and social

Darwinism. In the long run, the society and the individual either stand together or fall separately. (p. 164)

Researchers such as Deal (1999), Fullan (2003), Gharajadaghi (1999), Glasser (1992), Senge (2000), and Wheatley (1999) all noted that as time passes, teams could have an enormous impact on the productivity of an organization, the satisfaction of the employees, and the efficiency of the organization.

Despite a plethora of research, teams do not always function as anticipated. Many collaborative efforts fall prey to divisive, competitive behaviors and falter before they produce any results. Rather than learning from their differences, groups often settle for superficial agreement, or polarize into different camps, reinforcing existing preconceptions and approaches (Senge, 1999). The problem is how to create teams that are productive, satisfying to the employees, efficient and sustainable over time.

The researcher alleged there were definable elements which contributed to the success of a team. If overlooked those same elements could result in frustration and the demise of the team. If teams were to have a chance of succeeding, it was important to be aware of the traits that may have contributed to that success. The responsibility to create productive, effective, and efficient teams was situated in the hands of leadership. Collins (2001) stated in his book *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't*, the first thing successful organizations did was that they:

got the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seats --- and then they figured out where to drive it. The old adage, "People are your most important asset" turns

out to be wrong. People are not your most important asset. The right people are. (p. 13)

Leaders are charged with the responsibility to not only hire the right people to do the task before them but also to invest in the development of those employees. It is vital that the leader create an environment where people will take reasonable risks, tackle difficult problems, and seek new solutions to old problems and be supported in their efforts (Fullan, 2003).

As the leader puts together teams it is important for her/him to be aware of team member traits that can contribute to the future success of the team. Successfully structuring the team can not only result in a satisfaction of team member but also holds the potential of huge benefits for the organization. Yukl (1998) believed “the extent to which a team can learn how to work more effectively and adapt its performance strategies to fit the environment is probably an important determinant of long-term team effectiveness” (p. 368). Sergiovanni (2004) stressed the fact it was a school leader’s responsibility to guide the school community “in developing and articulating its articles of faith, therefore creating a force of ideas. These ideas provide the basis for a community of hope, and they fuel the school’s efforts to transform hope into reality” (retrieved December 10, 2009).

As stated earlier, a successful team must begin with the right people. But exactly what qualities distinguished people who made effective team members (LaFasto & Larson, 2001)? It was the goal of this research to uncover the core traits team members of successful school improvement teams viewed as being critical in their teammates.

When Katzenbach and Smith (1993) reflected on what those traits might be they summarized it by stating,

Leading thinkers have come forth with a variety of intriguing images of what high-performance organizations...look like. Peter Drucker pictures it as an orchestra, Quinn Mills as clusters, Robert Waterman as an ad hococracy, Ram Charan as networked, while Katzenbach and Smith use the phrase horizontal organizations. (p. 254)

Regardless of the terminology or the phrases used, each author placed an emphasis on the role teams played as the key element in contributing to the overall success of the larger organization and how successful teams worked together.

A sobering and stirring thought concerning the effect of the human element on teams was expressed by Gilchrist (1989):

You cannot make people care. You cannot train people to care. You cannot even fire people who do not care. Caring is a personal human emotion that comes from within. You can create a climate in which people want to care, in which people exert extra effort, take extra time, take pride in their work and their association with the organization. (p. 136)

The burden falls upon the shoulders of the leader of a team. The leader needs to create environments where people will be willing to take reasonable risks, tackle difficult problems, and have a common experience of learning as a unit (Fullan, 2003, p. 145).

Through the literature studied, the researcher has cited a wide range of documentation linking the role teams can have in business/industry as well as in schools.

The emphasis in the vast majority of readings, however, took a holistic global view of the team in relationship to the larger organization. It was the goal of this study to seek the perspective of individual team members, their personal observations and thoughts as to what traits they had witnessed in their teammates that have contributed to the success of the overall team over an extended period of time.

With the overwhelming pressures public schools are experiencing, it becomes imperative that the leaders of those institutions seek the most efficient and effective ways to deal with the landslide of demands being placed upon them. *A Nation At Risk* (1983), *No Child Left Behind* (2002), *Race To The Top* (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009), Iowa Core Curriculum (2008), budget constraints, and a deep nationwide economic downturn have placed huge burdens on public education. Schools have limited resources (financial, time, and personnel) yet have huge tasks to undertake on behalf of their students, teachers, staff, parents, and the public. Proper use of teams was one answer to handling those demands as well as other issues which have arisen. Better understanding of the traits most often found in members of successful teams would give school administrators insight into how to design the teams within their jurisdiction.

“The best way to understand teams is to look at teams themselves. Their stories reveal their accomplishments, skills, emotions, and commitment better than any abstract commentary or logical presentation” (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993, p. 9). Thus the justification for using a case study approach was to understand how team members viewed the attributes necessary in fellow team members if the school improvement team was to be successful over an extended period of time.

The literature is clear in the emphasis on the need for leaders to organize teams to do the work more efficiently and effectively. The research around business/industry, schools, and systemic thinking all point to the need for teams to become a vital part of twenty-first century organizations. The literature, however, is not as clear as to what participants on successful teams feel are the key traits they see in their fellow team members. Thus this case study seeks to identify those key traits through the use of interviews.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Procedures

The researcher utilized a qualitative collective case study design. Qualitative research was defined by Bogdan and Biklen (2003) as “an approach to social science that emphasizes collecting descriptive data in natural settings, uses inductive thinking, and emphasizes understanding the subject’s point of view” (p. 261). Multiple state and regional sources were accessed to determine which schools/buildings would be included in the study. Data collection took the form of interviews, observations and review of historical documents. The cases for this study consisted of school improvement teams from four moderately-sized Iowa school districts, which were identified by multiple entities as being successful over at least the last four years in their implementation of school improvement initiatives. Creswell (1998), in his book *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*, referenced Glesne and Peshkin (1992) and Merriam (1988) when he recommended narrowing a broad qualitative study to very few subjects.

This was a multi-case study which Bogdan and Biklen (2003) viewed as a study “that involves two or more subjects, settings, or depositories of data” (p. 260). Creswell (1998) reminded researchers “the study of more than one case dilutes the overall analysis; the more cases an individual studies, the greater the lack of depth in any single case” (p. 63). The researcher’s decision to include four districts in the study was to seek a broader application of the findings to enable future leaders a better understanding of the makeup of successful teams and qualities viewed by team members as having contributed to that success.

One of the boundaries of the cases studied included the timing of the study. The spring, summer, and fall of 2009 as well as the winter of 2010 were marked by a huge economic downturn which impacted all levels of the United States economy and put a great deal of pressure on communities, families, students, and taxing entities such as schools. When schools are under financial pressure, the result naturally trickles down through the system and impacts classroom teachers and support staff, and affecting morale at all levels of the school district and community. By using an extended period of time (a four-year period), the immediate impact of short-term events was less likely to impact the overall results of the study. The time period was also utilized in this study to lessen the impact of changes in administrators or administrative team members so that the focus was directed to the characteristics of those on the school improvement team. Administrative changes often cause organizational disruption. The goal of this study was to minimize the impact of administrative change in determining the success of the team.

Another boundary of this case study was the process used to gather the data for the study. Names of districts/buildings were obtained using multiple sources for the names of those districts. The sources included Area Education Agency Educational Services personnel, School Administrators of Iowa personnel, Iowa Association of School Boards personnel, and Iowa Department of Education School Improvement Consultants. The criteria posed to those entities were:

- the district was considered a moderate-sized district for Iowa (300 students to 999 students in the kindergarten through grade 12 system),
- the district had a school improvement team (other names may have been used to identify the same team structure within the system) which consisted of a

combination of, but not limited to, administrators, teachers, and parents and/or support staff/students/members of the public,

- the school improvement team helped design the district's staff development plan, assessed student achievement results, and made recommendations for district-wide or building-level goals aimed at increasing student achievement and/or the culture/climate of the building or district, and
- the district/building had been successful in implementation to meet new initiatives regarding student achievement and culture/climate issues over at least the last four school years.

Identified districts did not need to be identified by all four agencies, but needed to be identified by at least two of the organizations before the district was added to the pool of potential districts to be part of the case study. The identified district had to meet all four of the criteria. The superintendents of schools for the identified districts were contacted and permission sought before research began. The letter may be accessed in Appendix A. The building principal was also contacted and informed of the research and a timeline established to conduct the interviews, obtain documents, and schedule follow-up interviews.

The interviews were designed to be open-ended and flexibly structured with the goal of understanding participants' perceptions regarding traits demonstrated by other team members and how those traits contributed to the team's success over an extended period of time (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The interview protocol may be found in Appendix E.

By identifying the attributes of participants on successful school improvement teams the findings from this study have the potential to impact the way school administrators organize teams within their school system structure. Those responsible for the coordination of school improvement teams, as well as team members themselves, have a better idea of the qualities most often observed in members of successful school improvement teams as having contributed to their success. Such knowledge of those attributes can be of value to both the team leader and the team members themselves. In designing teams using the identified attributes, the team is better positioned to smoothly advance toward district/building goals and avoid potential hurdles.

Participants

School improvement teams from four moderately-sized school districts in Iowa were included in this study. A table listing all the public school districts which fell into the established sized category can be found in Appendix G. The recommendations originated from the Iowa Department of Education School Improvement Consultant, Iowa Association of School Boards, School Administrators of Iowa, and/or the Area Education Agency Educational Services personnel. The names of those individuals from each agency were kept confidential. Once the list of school districts was completed, four of those districts listed were selected using simple random sampling so that each member of the pool of schools had an equal and independent chance of being selected (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

Individual participants in the study were current or recent past members of school improvement teams. Following permission from the district superintendent of schools (Appendices A & B) and the building principal(s), the researcher used random numbers

to sample each school improvement team and interviewed four members of each team. Participants in the interview had the purpose of the study explained to them and how the results would be used. Each interview participants' identity was held in confidence and their link to a specific school district was only identified by a letter of the alphabet. The signature of each interviewee was obtained on the Participant Consent Form (Appendix C) in accordance with the human research review board otherwise known as the Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirement. Open-ended questions were used for the interview tool. Semi-structured interviews were recorded to ensure accuracy and subsequently transcribed by the researcher.

The researcher took abbreviated notes as the interview was being conducted (Creswell, 1998). The interview protocol (Appendix E) enabled the researcher to take notes during the interview about the responses and informal communication that took place during the interview (e.g. pauses, uneasiness, excitement, enthusiasm, etc.). The interview protocol ensured each interviewee was asked identical open-ended questions. The protocol also allowed for documentation of historic information (e.g. date of interview, time, place) (Creswell, 1998).

As the interview proceeded the goal of the researcher was to elicit deep answers to the open-ended questions. The researcher used open-ended questions to focus the discussion and followed up with probes, picking up on the topics and issues the interviewee initiated. The probes were not intended to challenge the interviewee's statements but rather to seek clarification and greater understanding. The probes took the form of questions and statements such as: "What do you mean?, I am not sure that I am following you, Would you explain that?, What were you thinking at the time?, Give me

an example, and Tell me about that” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 96). The researcher also obtained agendas, minutes, and/or action plans for school improvement team meetings in an attempt to see consistencies across time and to seek insight into the types of items the school improvement team discussed, and/or had input in, and/or had decision-making power over.

All interviews were transcribed and coded. Analysis of the data was conducted and themes were identified. Member checks were conducted to reinforce the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Creswell, 1998). The researcher took the data collected back to the participants so they had input as to the accuracy and credibility of the account (Creswell, 1998). The researcher also utilized peer review as an external check of the research process. The role of the peer reviewer was to ask hard questions regarding the “data and assumptions made by the researcher, meanings, and interpretation of the researcher’s work to guarantee the message intended to be conveyed is actually communicated to the readers” (Creswell, 1998, p. 202). The peer review took the form of a sitting-school administrator whose district was not part of the study.

Instrumentation

The researcher utilized two main tools to collect data. The researcher conducted interviews of randomly selected members of the school improvement teams. An audio recording device was used to ensure accuracy of the data collected and also allowed the interviewer to pay direct attention to the interviewee’s answers while noting the informal communication that took place during the interview session (e.g. pauses, uneasiness, excitement).

Garman and Piantanida (1999) pointed out a key to qualitative research interviewing is answering the question, “What makes interviews appropriate for or necessary to this study?” (p.46). In response to the Garman and Piantanida question, the study was designed to seek the personal perceptions of school improvement team members. To elicit those perceptions the interview approach was the proper tool. It was the intent of the researcher to not only note direct answers to interview questions, but to also note the informal communication during the interview and to seek deeper meaning in the interviewee’s answers with follow-up probes to the established interview protocol.

The interview instrument (Appendix E) consisted of six formal questions designed to bring consistency to the interviews. Each question generally led to follow up probes. Creswell (1998) recommended the design of the interview protocol to be “approximately five open-ended questions” (p. 124). Creswell (1998) also stressed it is important that “a good interviewer is a listener rather than a speaker during the interview” (p. 125). The interview began using a formal interview greeting (Appendix D). The interview greeting was used to begin the interview process in an attempt to relax the interviewee and give her/him some insight into the purpose of the study as well as to build a comfortable level of trust between the interviewer and the interviewee.

In the days following the interview the researcher sent each interviewee an electronic letter of appreciation (Appendix F). The letter had a three-fold purpose, to: 1) show the researcher’s appreciation, 2) re-assure the interviewee of the intent of the study and the confidentiality component of the research, and 3) remind the interviewee of the member check to ensure accuracy of the data.

The second instrument used in the study was collection of agendas, minutes of meetings, and related documents utilized by the school improvement team. The purpose of document collection was to reflect the formal documentation of the school improvement team, their internal structure, and decision-making process utilized by the team. Document study complimented the information gathered in the. It is important to note that as Creswell (1998) stated, a case study requires deep reflection on the data collected and analysis of that data. It is important to have methods in place to check the validity of the data in a qualitative study.

At the beginning the study, there was no check list or contrast-comparison sheet to evaluate the documents collected. The purpose of the study was not to evaluate documents. Rather the researcher used the documents and to note trends and evident processes which supported or refuted interview findings.

Once the analysis of the interviews and documents is complete the researcher utilized member checking to ensure the intent of the participant was captured and participants were invited to examine drafts in which their words or actions were noted. The member checking gave “participants opportunities to react to tentative findings generated by the researcher” (Harch, 2002, p. 101.).

Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

This study sought to identify the qualities or behaviors of individual team members of successful school improvement teams, as viewed by their fellow team members. The study sought to identify key factors that led to the success of school improvement teams in moderately-sized Iowa public schools over an extended period of time. During a period of increased political and financial pressures around accountability, the information gained from the study should aid schools in structuring or re-order teams as they initiate school improvement efforts.

Districts with successful school improvement teams were identified by outside state education entities. Those entities providing information were the Iowa Department of Education, Area Education Agencies, School Administrators of Iowa, and the Iowa Association of School Boards. The identity of the state entity which listed a specific school district was held in confidence thus maintaining confidentiality.

If a school district appeared on the list provided by at least two of the entities, the name of the district was entered into a pool. Randomly four school districts were selected to be part of the study. The four districts selected ranged in K-12 enrollment from 550 – 990 students, thus being part of the 188 moderately-sized school districts in Iowa. Each district remained anonymous as a way to protect the confidentiality of the district and the school improvement team members. The districts had school improvement teams (the names of the team may vary from district to district, but the

intent of the team was consistent with all districts in the study) which varied in length of existence from nine (9) to twenty-one (21) years.

One district was involved in a whole-grade sharing agreement with a neighboring district. Each of the independent districts making up that whole grade sharing entity would have qualified independently as a member of this pool. Since their school improvement team was a combination of members from each of the two sharing partners, they were included in the study.

Figure 4.1 depicts the range for the number of years the school improvement teams had been in existence for the four subject school districts.

Figure 4.1

Identified School District	Years School Improvement Team Had Existed
District A	14 years
District B (whole grade sharing)	9 years
District C	21 years
District D	18 years

Once a district was selected, the school Superintendent was contacted and permission obtained to use the district as part of the overall study. The school Superintendent was asked to use a set of random numbers to select four members of the school improvement team to be interviewed.

Participants

Each participant's identity was protected. For reporting purposes, each participant was simply identified by a letter of the alphabet. The names were scrambled in the final report to protect the identity of interview participant and the name of their

school district. The breakdown of participants who were interviewed can be found in

Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2

Interviewee	Total Years of Teaching Experience	Total Years in Current School District	Number of Years on School Improvement Team	How Selected for the School Improvement Team
A	27	25	2	Administration
B	22	22	2	Volunteer
C	9	7	3	Administration
D	20	13	8 + 8	Rotation
E	13	11	3	Volunteer
F	6	6	3	Rotation
G	16	12	4	Volunteer
H	23	23	8	Volunteer
I	20	20	17	Administration
J	21	17	15	Volunteer
K	26	21	15	Volunteer
L	19	12	7	Administration
M	18	10	4	Administration
N	29	18	18	Volunteer
O	13	11	4	Administration

The average years of teaching experience of the interviewees was 18.8 years with 15.2 as the average number of years with the current school district. Total number of years of teaching experience ranged from a low of nine years to a high of twenty-seven years. Years spent in the current school district ranged from a low of seven years to a high of twenty-five years. Years of experience on the district school improvement team averaged 7.5 years and ranged from a low of two years to a high of eighteen years. One participant had served eight years on the school improvement team for the current school district he/she was working in and eight years in a previous school district.

Six of the interviewees were asked to be on the school improvement team by a school administrator. Six volunteered to serve on the school improvement team and three interviewees were serving as part of a district rotation. Those with the longer terms of service on the district school improvement team did so on a volunteer basis, while those who were part of a district-wide rotation had served the fewest number of years.

Nine of the interview participants were female and six were male. The nine represented sixty percent of the interview pool. According to the Iowa Department of Education *Condition of Education Report*, 73.7 percent of Iowa teachers are female (2008). With a small pool of interview candidates it was reassuring to find the interview pool that closely aligned with the state average. Of the pool members, five were elementary teachers. Four of the pool members spent the bulk of their teaching assignment working with middle school students and six of the interview participants were assigned to the high school. Three of the participants had previous teaching experience outside the state of Iowa. The remainder had taught only in Iowa, although not always with the current school district.

Each school improvement team member who was interviewed was subject to the interview protocol (see Appendix D). This allowed for each subject to be treated the same and to be given insight about the intent of the interview session and the process to be used. Each interview candidate was also presented with a participant informed consent form (see Appendix E) which stated the intent of the study, potential risks, and information regarding how the interview content would be handled.

Each interview was electronically recorded and notes were taken by the researcher. The purpose of the hand written notes was to capture the non-verbal communication as the interview proceeded. The electronic recording was used to ensure accuracy.

Data

Each interviewee was asked, “What do you believe are the traits you see in your co-workers on the team, which contribute to your team’s success for such an extended period of time?” The responses were remarkably similar from district to district and from interview to interview. The responses fell into eight main themes. Those themes were:

- Everyone brings something positive to the team
- Being a team player
- Life-long learning
- Clearly defined roles on the team/ground rules
- Longevity working together
- Approachable
- Strong communication skills
- Vision of the future

Theme 1: Everyone brings something positive to the team

One of the qualities which was commonly mentioned by at least one member of each team was around the idea that each person on the team came to meetings with a positive approach about the issues facing the district. The emphasis was on the individual uniqueness of each member of the team yet the blending together of each other's strengths focused on a common purpose.

C: "We each bring something different to the table and differing areas of expertise. Each of us has strengths and we use them in a positive way to help our district reach our goals. There is respect for each other."

O: "We each appreciate the gifts of each person on our team. We enjoy each other's company."

N: "We are from different buildings and different content areas and we complement each other's skills, talents, and gifts."

A: "Each of us has a role to play and being on the school improvement team is an honor and a responsibility. With that goes an unwritten expectation that my role is valued and important to our school's success."

I: "We are part of a community and see the same data or problem from a slightly different perspective. By respecting each other's gifts we are able to make the best possible decisions."

Theme 2: Being a team player

Nine of the interviewees spent some time during the interview discussion sharing about the need for individuals to each play a role on the team thus creating the team strength. Of those nine, there was a sense that each individual had to be willing to

assume a leadership role when called upon but also to be willing to help get a task done and goal met.

E: “We take pride in what we do. We are all members of the same team and take the same risks and celebrate the same accomplishments. As a team we stand by each other and our team recommendations.”

A: “People on the team feel they are part of something bigger than themselves . . . I am from the old school and I have high expectations of myself, the students in my classroom, and the people I serve with on committees....we hold each other accountable.”

B: “...no single member of the team is more important or vital than any other member of the team --- we are all on the same team.”

O: “We are each willing to step up and do our part to help the entire school district be successful.”

I: “Not everyone on the team is outgoing yet we all know we need to play different roles on the team at different times when we are called upon by the rest of the team.”

Theme 3: Life-long learning

The ability to learn together as a group and to have a common language on a given topic or initiative was a powerful asset in the eyes of interviewees. Those interviewed identified group learning as being significant to their success. Being offered the opportunity to learn together was not root of their comments. The underpinning was the on-going internal desire to be a life-long learner and the passion to go deeper in their individual growth. Team members appreciated that, although some on the team had more

expertise in a given area, the entire team was given the opportunity to learn and grow together as a common experience.

H: “We have made an attempt to help everyone model the fact we are always learning and growing.”

J: “We each need to be willing to learn and to never stop learning. We need to be open to ideas and what the future holds for us.”

D: “We learn together and no one member of the team is left behind. We move forward together and grow as learners ourselves.”

G: “We want everyone to have the training they need and help each other think beyond today toward what we need to continue to learn thus allowing us to grow.”

I: “We are constantly learning from each other professionally, reading and researching together.”

C: “We learn together as a group and are open with each other on how it will impact students at our level....We go to all the same training together and learn about things as a group.”

Theme 4: Clearly defined roles on the team/ground rules

Two of the attributes identified by interviewees as contributing to their school improvement team’s success were not about personal characteristics. Clearly defined roles on the team and ground rules was not so much the trait by itself but the fact team members accepted those roles and not only adhered to the group’s social norms or ground rules but was also willing to hold each other accountable to those rules.

The establishment of clearly defined roles for team members and the establishment of ground rules is more of an operational process than a characteristic.

The reason it stood out in the interviews is the way team members accepted and helped shape the clearly defined team roles. Those team members also helped create the unique culture that contributes to the team's success. Part of the development of that culture was the establishment of the team norms and how team members held themselves and others to that standard.

H: "People skills are important. Members of our team are able to listen to each other's ideas and opinions with an open mind. We accept each other's perspective and try to understand how it might impact students, each of us, as well as the district."

B: "There is no fear in the room and everyone is honest about what they understand to be the issues from our building....You feel comfortable speaking openly and freely about issues and if certain initiatives have been successful or not."

G: "We have a wonderful working relationship as a team and we know how to treat each other with respect and honor everyone's ideas and concerns."

C: "... there is respect for each other."

L: "We do not always agree. If we are going to be productive we need to have honest conversations and be willing to hear opposing viewpoints but with the understanding we will leave speaking with one common voice."

K: "Our team is made up of people who have good social skills and understand for us to be productive we need to operate under certain ground rules which show respect to everyone on the team."

F: "...when we, as a team, can demonstrate respect for others even though we may disagree, that filters down to the rest of the staff and even the students."

Theme 5: Longevity working together

Longevity working together was identified by participating team members as having a positive impact on the team's success. Like the previous theme, longevity working together is not an attribute in and of itself. Longevity working together can simply be the matter of the passing of time without any real meaning. The interviewees, however, discussed longevity working together not so much in relationship to time spent together as the creation of a history together. As a group they had certain mile markers along the way toward the district's goals. Those mile markers, at times, not only highlighted successes but also marked turning points or setbacks as the team worked on new initiatives or had changes on the team. The longevity related to not just the relationships with long-time members of the team but also the formal and informal processes used to bring new members into the group and to help them understand the past and the role of the team.

D: "We have had good role models in the past on the team and we feel the responsibility to move forward with that same level of commitment and dedication."

M: "Many of us have been on the team for quite a long time and as a result have a clear picture of the long-term goals of the district. It is our duty, then, to help the new members of the team 'get up to speed.'"

J: "Our time (as a team) together is valuable. The more we meet together the more we learn about each other."

I: "I think one of the reasons we have been successful is the fact we have some history with each other and we have some common experiences with each other that helps build a bridge between us and connectedness."

F: “We have been together as a team long enough that we have a trusting relationship...”

A: “Some of us have been on the team a long time and this is ‘our’ school and we want the best for ‘our’ school.”

K: “There will always be changes. The advantage our team has is the fact we help new members learn what our district has done in the past and at the same time help them get their feet on the ground as to what the future may be like.”

Theme 6: Approachability

The approachability characteristic has two paths. On one hand interviewees felt the members of their team were open to new ideas and suggestions and no one came to the meeting closed minded or unwilling to hear what the others had to say. They felt their team members each were unique and represented different part of the district yet at the same time they were able to see the district as a whole and not just as single building, grade-level or department.

The second path those interviewed saw as valuable was the fact team members were approachable back in their own buildings or wing of the building. Other members of the faculty and staff felt comfortable visiting with them, asking questions, and/or sharing thoughts and ideas.

C: “Each member of the team is approachable and makes people feel comfortable when there is a question or a concern.”

I: “We wear our heart on our sleeve. We are all in this together and we want all the members of our staff to see our team as being open to their input.”

H: “To be productive our team members must have the trust of the rest of the staff and everyone has to feel like they can come to any one of us with questions or suggestions.”

L: “I know I can talk to other members of the team at any time about any subject. Our team members are approachable and available.”

B: “...the expectation is that everyone will be approachable back in our buildings with our co-workers.”

Theme 7: Strong communication skills

An area interviewees brought up was effective communication skills. The main emphasis shared was around the ability to be articulate both verbally and in writing. It was important to be able to clearly explain a new direction or initiative with as little confusion as possible. At the same time those interviewed also placed an emphasis on listening skills and the ability to not only hear the words being shared by those around them but to understand the factors contributing to the speaker’s thoughts.

K: “It is imperative to be a good communicator. Not only do we need to explain our thoughts clearly to each other but also to the rest of the building staff.”

E: “It is important to not only be able to explain our decision but also to be able to listen and hear what our co-workers are saying and their concerns.”

G: “Each team member must honestly be interested in hearing the ideas of other and how our efforts might impact different teachers at different levels.”

O: “Everyone has voice. Everyone’s ideas have value. At each meeting we want everyone to have a chance to contribute to the discussion.”

N: “To be a good team member we each need to be good listeners.”

Theme 8: Vision of the future

In every interview the researcher noted the fact those being interviewed saw themselves as working toward a goal or set of goals; some short-term and others were long-term goals. Several of the interviewees shared how important it was for members of the school improvement team to have a vision of the future. They talked about the need for individual professional visions but also a need for a clear vision of where the district was headed. When the team members each shared a common vision for the district they felt it was an energizing factor and stimulated trust and enthusiasm among the team, the faculty and the entire community.

F: “We have a clear vision of what the future holds for our students and as a result we all know the direction we are heading.”

M: “Together we are mapping the future and we need everyone to be clear as to our direction.”

A: “Our team and our entire school have a clear vision and we have clear goals as to where we want to go . . .”

J: “As much as we would like to go back to the way it was, we, as a team, know the world for our graduates has changed and we hold each other accountable as we make plans for the future together.”

E: “...every teacher, regardless of content-area or grade-level, has a picture of what they want best for our students....We don't make any excuses – there are not throw-away kids. Together we need to map the future.”

Related Data

The interview protocol called for a set of established questions to be asked of each interviewee. The protocol sought to uncover the interviewee's perspective on the role of the school improvement team, how the members of the school improvement team knew if they had been successful, and what the traits members of the school improvement team demonstrated that contributed to the team's success over an extended period of time.

Interviewees were first asked what they viewed as the role of the school improvement team, two responses consistently surfaced: first, to give the school district direction and secondly, to represent the faculty/staff. In some cases a single interviewee had more than a single response to the question.

Nine of the interviewees responded with an answer around giving the district direction as they moved toward district school improvement goals. When asked about the role of the school improvement team, K responded, "...to guide the vision of the district...what we are working toward and what are our goals." G emphasized, "...we do research on what we need to offer as an initiative to help us reach our goals." Finally, F referred to this as the "bigger picture" and helping the district map out future directions for the district.

At least one member from each school district in the study made a comment regarding research as one of the steps in mapping out next steps planned for a school district. F commented on doing "research on best practices," while M referred to the team doing "a lot of reading of educational books and discussions" in an attempt to develop a district-wide plan. Interviewee I summed up her/his thoughts when she/he stated, "... to facilitate growth - - - to create an environment for the individuals within

the organization to bring forth ideas and actions which will drive improved student achievement.”

A second common response to question regarding the role of the school improvement team was to represent the faculty/staff. Interviewee E responded, “My role on the school improvement team is to represent the staff.” B put it slightly differently when she/he stated, “My role is to give input on public perception and student perception.” F stated, “. . . to listen to my co-workers and get a feel for what they feel is the need for further learning opportunities and future direction.” Respondent I stressed the point, “The school improvement team is a vehicle for members of the organization to be heard and to have their ideas voiced to a large audience.”

Communication was included in the responses of seven of the interviews. O supported that notion by stating, “Our role is to be communication between the administration and teachers.” D also stated, “I am an ‘in-between person’ between my wing of the school and the school improvement team and administration.”

By design, the researcher never defined success with a numerical value or any outside assessment. For the purpose of this study the researcher defined success as “the perception of the participants that they are having a positive impact on the school district’s efforts to improve student achievement and/or the culture/climate of the building or district.”

Also part of the interview protocol was asking the interviewees how they knew if the school improvement team had been successful. The data overwhelmingly described a journey toward something rather than a destination reached. The vast majority of the responses focused on philosophical statements like B’s response, “We are on a long,

continuous journey of school improvement and our success is linked to the growth in every student and every employee in this district. We will never be able to pick one single number or single event to identify as success.” Interviewee I stated, “. . . you may not know if we have been successful for several years after several classes of students have gone through the system. We need to continue to grow as a system and organization.” Well into the interview, Interviewee I came back to the question and stated, “We need to make good decisions regarding best practices and research-based strategies on how we can better reach every student moving through our system. That is our road to success.”

Several of the responses were linked to district-wide goals. Teacher F stated, “. . . one indicator of success is if we are implementing in all classrooms best practices and if we continue to move closer and closer to our district goals.” G stated it slightly differently when she/he stated, “. . . we do not start something and stop it and jump to something new. We make a commitment to a long-term plan and mark off small steps of success as we move closer and closer to that larger goal.” In the responses it became obvious many of the interviewees saw the district-wide goals as important to their purpose.

Eleven of the fifteen interviewees brought up the impact their planning has had on students as one indicator of success as a team. J put it in these words, “If in the end what we have done has a positive impact on kids, we have been successful.” K summed it up by simply stating, “It shows up in the kids.” One insightful response was from L who took a slightly different perspective on success and how it can impact students when she/he summarized her/his thoughts by saying, “. . . we can not only use our student

achievement data to define our success. I think it is linked more closely to our ethical treatment of students, faculty, staff, and our openness to parents and patrons.” L summarized her/his response by stating, “Success is more than a score or a number.”

Analysis of Data

After transcribing, conducting member checks with the interviewees, and categorizing the data, the researcher was confident the data had captured in such a way as to be able to summarize and analyze the findings. When the interviewees were asked, “What do you believe are the traits you see in your co-workers on the team, which contribute to your team’s success for such an extended period of time?” the responses fell into the eight following categories:

- Everyone brings something positive to the team
- Being a team player
- Life-long learning
- Clearly defined roles on the team/ground rules
- Longevity working together
- Approachable
- Strong communication skills
- Vision of the future

Not all respondents listed all eight, nor were any of the eight traits listed by every participant in the interview process. Each of the eight traits identified were named by at least one of those interviewed from each district. The pattern, however, became obvious to the researcher that these eight traits were, in the eyes of those interviewed, the main

reasons their team had remained successful in the school improvement process for an extended period of time.

Of the eight identified characteristics, five of the eight appeared to be major contributors to the success of the team while the other three appeared to be more minor contributors. “Everyone brings something positive to the team,” “Being a team player,” “Life-long learning,” “Clearly defined roles on the team/ground rules,” and “Longevity working together” were the attributes most often brought up in the interviews.

The positive attitudes of the team members and their willingness to come to the meetings or retreats with ideas and suggestions created an environment of enthusiasm and passion for what they did together as a team. Comments like, “We enjoy each other’s company” (O) and “we complement each other’s skills, talents, and gifts” (N) reflected the fact the group enjoyed being together as a team and the result was a good overall working environment. Nearly as common as “Everyone brings something positive to the team” were comments which fell under the trait heading of “Being a team player.” Two quotes stood out and captured the sense that the vast majority of the interviewees felt: “People on the team feel they are part of something bigger than themselves...” (A), and “...no single member of the team is more important or vital than any other member of the team --- we are all on the same team” (B).

A third characteristic which was commonly identified by those taking part in the study was the idea that each of them were “life-long learners.” Often throughout the interviews, those being interviewed referenced things like, “We are always learning and growing” (H) and “We learn together as a group” (C) when they talked about the school improvement team and why they have been successful over an extended period of time.

Three things became obvious in their response: first, the common experience of learning together was a binding force; second, the willingness of team members to never stop learning; and finally, as a result of these joint learning experiences, they had a common language and understanding of what they were dealing with or discussing.

A fourth quality regularly listed by the interviewees was “clearly defined roles on the team/ground rules.” On first glance, an outside observer may have perceived this identified trait as more of a procedural or mechanical strategy to be used with teams, rather than a stand-alone trait. The reason the researcher included it, however, as a characteristic was due to the frequency participants in the study referred back to the “people skills” (H) and “social skills” (K) team members demonstrated during team meetings, retreats, and the conduct of team members outside the meeting/retreat setting. School improvement team members in the study may not have made direct reference to role definition or to specific ground rules under which the team operated; yet, they often included reference to such factors as being open to the ideas of others, the working relationship among team members, comfort levels at meetings, and willingness to take a risk with ideas due to the culture created on the team. Interviewee F captured the feelings of a majority of the participants when she/he stated, “...when we, as a team, can demonstrate respect for others even though we may disagree, that filters down to the rest of the staff and even the students.” The idea of ground rules was never spelled out by any of the participants in hard, fast rules of operation, yet were the “unwritten rules of civility”(O). Things mentioned by team members were items like: respecting each other’s opinions, listening for understanding, focusing on the speaker, always centering around the district’s mission, keeping the end in mind, confidentiality (not secrecy), and being

willing to hold each other accountable if a given member slipped from the accepted social norm of the group.

“Longevity working together” was the fifth major quality identified by those taking part in the study. While the longevity issue was not tied to a set number of years on the team or even years in the school district, the longevity was more closely related to having a set number of common experiences during the duration of their service which seemed to impact the effectiveness and contributed to the success of the team. The common experiences and the length of time built “a trusting relationship” (F) and a sense that “this is ‘our’ school and we want the best for ‘our school’” (A). The length of time and the commonality of similar experience were viewed by Interviewee I as allowing them to build a bridge between the team members and give them a unique “connectedness.”

The three remaining attributes identified in the study were being “approachability,” having “strong communication skills,” and a “vision of the future.” While the final three traits identified were not as commonly mentioned by interviewees, they were still major factors in the reason those interviewed felt their team had been successful over an extended period of time.

The trait of being approachable reflected two different qualities. Interviewees felt their teammates were not only open to new ideas and suggestions at their meeting but were also open to hearing from co-workers once they returned to their building or grade-level teams.

Possessing strong communications skills was listed as a trait team members saw in their teammates. The communications skills those interviewed saw as important were

both oral and written but also the ability to listen and be able to understand when others are sharing ideas and concepts.

The trait of being able to have a solid vision of the future, both short-term and long-term, was a contributing factor to the success of school improvement teams, as shared by those being interviewed. The vision included not only a personal vision of the future but also a holistic, systematic vision of the future.

Beyond the major eight categories of traits listed by the interviewees, there were five additional categories identified in the study. The remaining five were not identified as being significant because they were mentioned by no more than two interviews. The five traits identified were: leadership on the team, willingness to serve, understanding the background of the school and communities, multiple years of classroom experience, and clear understanding of how to reach all learners.

While leadership is always a key, the vast majority of interviewees did not feel there was a need for a specific single person to hold a leadership position on the team. Rather most interviewees felt all team members needed to shoulder part of the leadership of the team.

Willingness to serve was not mentioned by more than two participants. Some interviewees were appointed to the school improvement team, other districts used a rotation of staff to serve on the team, and others were on a volunteer basis. As a result the willingness to serve on this particular committee or team was not deemed a factor which contributed to the team's success over an extended period of time.

Understanding the background of the school and the communities was not mentioned often enough to be included in the final results. While most of those

interviewed had multiple years in the current district only three of the interviewees were actually originally from the district in which they were currently teaching. In fact, a couple of interviewees shared they felt it was good to have some new ideas from other districts and perspectives brought to the team to keep the team sharp and always learning.

Having multiple years of experience in the classroom gives a person certain insight into the workings of the organization. Classroom experience, however, was not mentioned as a key trait leading to the success of the team. While the experience in the classroom has value, the experience the interviewees spent most time talking about was the common experiences of being on the team as a unit.

A final trait mentioned but not ruled significant was having a clear understanding on how to reach all learners. Those mentioning this as a trait were teachers of student with differing needs, either with learning disabilities or giftedness. The understanding of various learning styles and needs is important but not identified by the interviewees as a determining factor in contributing to the success of the school improvement team.

During the interviews, interviewees were asked, “What do you believe are the traits you see in your co-workers on the team, which contribute to your team’s success for such an extended period of time?” Responses fell into eight categories: everyone brings something positive to the team, being a team player, life-long learning, clearly defined roles on the team/ground rules, longevity working together, being approachable, strong communication skills, and a vision of the future.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to add to the existing knowledge regarding the attributes or behaviors of individual team members of successful school improvement teams, as viewed by their fellow team members. Districts with successful school improvement teams were identified by outside educational entities. The Iowa Department of Education, School Administrators of Iowa, Iowa Association of School Boards, and Iowa's Area Education Agencies referred school district perceived to have successful school improvement teams to the researcher.

Using random numbers the four districts to be included in the case study were selected. From those districts, four members of the district's school improvement team were randomly selected to be interviewed. This study was based on research in which members of successful school improvement teams were interviewed and asked to assess their fellow team members. By using open-ended questions the researcher attempted to seek their perceptions on what attributes their team members had which contributed to the overall success of the team. An interview protocol was followed and all interviews were recorded electronically to insure accuracy.

Responses fell into eight categories when interviewees were asked, "What do you believe are the traits you see in your co-workers on the team, which contribute to your team's success for such an extended period of time?" The eight categories were everyone brings something positive to the team, being a team player, life-long learning, clearly defined roles on the team/ground rules, longevity working together, being approachable, strong communication skills, and a vision of the future.

With these findings from successful school improvement teams, the researcher believes the findings could be used in the structuring or re-ordering of teams in other school districts in an attempt to yield greater productivity and effectiveness. It is the belief of this researcher that the study yielded such results and the results can be replicated to benefit the school improvement process in a broader population of school districts.

Multiple studies have revealed the impact teams can have on organizations. In a time of growing accountability and expectations on schools, it is imperative, in the eyes of the researcher, for leaders to seek the most efficient and effective ways to undertake a systemic approach to problem-solving. The proper use of teams can be the vehicle to aid the system in reaching their overall goals.

Leaders in school settings beginning the team structuring process are advised to seek team members who reflect as many of the attributes listed by the interviewees as possible. However, in many cases the leader inherits a faculty and staff, so it may be difficult to build a team mirroring the characteristics identified. The leaders would be advised, nonetheless, to select team members who meet as many of the attributes as possible and work to cultivate the remaining attributes in other members of the team as the team evolves. As the findings of the study would indicate, the characteristics identified help to lay a foundation on which to build teams in the school improvement process.

As the school leader begins the attribute identification and attribute building process, the leader would be advised to focus on the eight identified characteristics: (a) encouraging everyone to bring something positive to the team; (b) coaching faculty and

staff on how to be a team player; (c) modeling and encouraging life-long learning; (d) focusing on clearly defined roles on the team/ground rules; (e) create opportunities which promote longevity working together; (f) encourage all employees in all settings to be approachable; (g) stress the importance system-wide of strong communication skills; and (h) demonstrate and encourage vision-building. Each of the attributes can be modeled, coached, self-assessed, and peer monitored with little or no financial stress on the organization yet the investment of time can produce benefits as the building/district works toward reaching goals.

The researcher recognizes the wealth of research supporting the role of the leader in successful school improvement efforts. This study was in no way an attempt to undermine that research and in fact supports those findings. The leader in any organization sets the tone and attitude the organization will take toward any initiative. Leaders design the committees, set agendas, determine the level of transparency of the process, each team member's role, and the parameters under which the team will function. While the role of the leader was set aside for the sake of this study it was not ignored nor minimized.

While acknowledging the important role of the leader, this study went to the next level of implementation of initiatives and looked at the perceived attributes of those working on successful school improvement teams. Team members surrounding the team leader play an important role in the successful implementation of any initiative. This study focused on the school improvement process and the attributes of those team members which contributed to the overall success of the team in making initiatives become reality in their particular school setting.

The researcher categorized the responses from interviewees into broad categories in order to capture the intent of the interviewees. The five main attributes were listed by each team or at least eight of the interviewees. Those attributes include bringing something to the table, being a team player, life-long learning, clearly defined roles on the team/ground rules, and longevity working together.

A secondary group of attributes were identified by interviewees. This group was identified by at least three teams and three or more interviewees. Those items included approachability, strong communications skills, and having a vision of the future. The final responses noted were not mentioned by more than two interviewees. Those items included leadership on the team, willingness to serve, understanding the background of the school and community, multiple years in the classroom, and having a clear understanding of how to reach all learners.

The researcher chose to list all five main attributes, three secondary attributes, and other responses as contributing to the overall success of school improvement teams. Future researchers may choose to re-define the attribute categories. In future studies, attributes of clearly defined roles on the team/ground rules, longevity of working together, and leadership on the team could be identified as process or procedural attributes, while the other ten items could be viewed as individual attributes.

As part of this study, the researcher recommends the use of the five main attributes as a checklist for the leader to use as she/he begins to structure a team. Each team member may have specific attributes as a strength area and may be short in other areas. The key to the success of the team will be to weigh those differences and similarities. The remaining eight attributes can also help determine the overall make up of the team. Having

team members self-assess their own personal strengths can contribute to the overall understanding by all team members as to their individual importance to the team and at the same time keep those items at the forefront as the team begins its assigned task.

The researcher recommends further study on a larger scale with both smaller and larger sized school districts in an attempt to mold a deeper definition of the attributes and investigate strategies and techniques leaders may use to plant the characteristic development in current and future team members.

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Appendix A

November 12, 2009
Superintendent Lars Larson
Snowshoe Community School District
Snowshoe, Iowa 10101

Dr. Larson,

I am a doctoral candidate at Drake University. I am completing my dissertation researching the traits which contribute to the success of school improvement teams in moderately sized school districts in Iowa. As part of my research study I have contacted several agencies and governmental departments asking them to identify school districts which have school improvement teams that have successfully implemented district-wide or building-wide school improvement initiative consistently over the past four years. Your school district is one of those recommended for my research.

I am seeking permission to contact some of the members of your school improvement team. Randomly selected members of the team will be asked to take part in a short interview. The interview will take about 30 minutes.

I would ask that you take a moment to sign the attached form so I may seek their involvement? Would you also provide me with the names of the members of your school improvement team? Team members will be chosen randomly by the Superintendent to be interviewed. I would appreciate your support.

Confidentiality of the school and team members will be protected during the research and in the final reported results. Compilation of the data will be reported and insights from team members shared using pseudonyms to protect team members and districts. Individual participants may withdraw at any time without penalty. Thank you for your assistance. Your signature on the attached form and the list of names may be returned to me in the self-addressed stamped envelope and indicates your willingness to be a participant in this study.

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact me at ethicalleaders@wctatel.net or by telephone at 641/584-2488.

Respectfully,

Larry D. Hill, Doctoral Candidate
525 South Lynn Street
Thompson, Iowa 50478

Appendix B

Superintendent's Informed Consent Form

I, _____, Superintendent of _____ School District do hereby give my permission for Larry D. Hill, Doctoral Candidate at Drake University, to contact the school principals in our district and the members of our school improvement team as participants in a study being conducted by him for the purposes of his dissertation research. Principals and school improvement team members will be asked to take part in an interview by Larry D. Hill. The interview will take approximately 30 (thirty) minutes to complete. Hill will also request certain documents related to your district's school improvement team.

I understand the collection of any data will be confidential and participants may withdraw at any time during the study. All results will be reported confidentially.

There is minimal risk associated with participation in this study. While the interview questions are very generic, participants may experience some emotional discomfort or anxious feelings during the interview. The potential benefit of the research is to better understand traits members of school improvement teams view as contributing to the success of the district's school improvement team.

I understand if I have questions or concerns about the conduct of this study, I am encouraged to contact the Drake University Institutional Review Board (IRB) at IRB@drake.edu or 515-271-3472.

I understand if I have any questions regarding the study or data collection I may contact Larry D. Hill at ethicaleaders@wctatel.net or 641/584-2488. If I have further questions I may contact Larry D. Hill's dissertation advisor Dr. David Darnell at Drake University by calling 1-800-44-DRAKE.

(Signature)

(Date)

(Printed Name)

Appendix C

Participant's Informed Consent Form

I, _____, am a teacher at the _____ School District. I understand that Larry D. Hill, Doctoral Candidate at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa, has contacted the Superintendent of Schools and building principal for permission to include our school district and members of this faculty as part of this study being conducted by Larry D. Hill as a partial fulfillment of the dissertation research requirements for the researcher's Ed.D. in leadership.

There is minimal risk associated with participation in this study. While the interview questions are very generic, participants may experience some emotional discomfort or anxious feelings during the interview. The potential benefit of the research is to better understand traits members of school improvement teams view as contributing to the success of the district's school improvement team.

I agree to participate in this research study and understand:

1. the interview will take approximately 30 (thirty) minutes to complete,
2. the nature of my participation (either by phone or in-person) will be in the form of an interview and will be recorded for accuracy and will be used only in this study,
3. my participation is entirely voluntary and I realize my name was randomly chosen using a random number system,
4. I may terminate my involvement in this study at any time without fear of being penalized,
5. my identity and school district will be protected by the use of a pseudonym in place of my real name.

I understand if I have any questions regarding the study or data collection I may contact Larry D. Hill at ethicaleaders@wctatel.net or 641/584-2488. If I have further questions I may contact Larry D. Hill's dissertation advisor Dr. David Darnell at Drake University by calling 1-800-44-DRAKE. I understand if I have questions or concerns about the conduct of this study, I am encouraged to contact the Drake University Institutional Review Board (IRB) at IRB@drake.edu or 515-271-3472.

(Signature)

(Date)

(Printed Name)

Appendix D

Interview Protocol Greeting and Explanation

- A. Begin with introductions
- B. Present the interviewee with the interviewer's business card or contact information
- C. "I want to begin by thanking you for allowing me to interview you this afternoon. I know how busy you are this time of year and I respect your time away from preparation for class and all the duties you are responsible for."
- D. "This interview is part of a process I am using in my doctoral study. I am interviewing several members of school improvement teams from across our state seeking to identify what you feel are important traits to have in fellow members of your school improvement team. Our interview will take about a half hour and I want you to feel comfortable to expand on questions I may ask if you feel it will give me a better picture of just what your team experience is like and what your team members are like."
- E. "Do you have any questions before we begin? If not, I have a Participant Informed Consent form I would ask you to sign. I will read through it with you and I will ask you to sign both copies: one for your files and one for my files."

Appendix E

Interview Protocol

Topic of Interview: _____ Date: _____

Interviewee's Name: _____ School District/Building: _____

Time: _____ Place Interview is Conducted: _____
Start End**QUESTIONS:**

1. How long have you been involved with your district's school improvement team?
2. What do you feel is the role of the school improvement team in your district?
3. How do you know the team has been successful in reaching the intended goals of the team?
4. What do you believe are the traits you see in your co-workers on the team, which contribute to your team's success for such an extended period of time?

Briefly explain what you mean by each of the traits you identified.

5. Why has your district's school improvement team been so successful over the last few years?
6. If you were to add new members to your school improvement team, what traits would you want to see in those new team members that would promote future success for this team?

Appendix F

March 30, 2010

Lena Larson

Snowshoe Community School District

Snowshoe, Iowa 10101

Ms. Larson,

It was an honor to have met you on Tuesday, February 11, 2010. I wanted to take a moment to thank you for taking the time to allow me to interview you as part of my doctoral study at Drake University. The study is going quite well and I want to reassure you I will contact you in the near future and ask that you review what I have written regarding your comments and insights. You were very helpful and a most gracious interviewee.

My goal is to identify personal traits of members which have contributed to the team's success and be able replicate those findings to assist school districts which may struggle with the school improvement process.

I want to reassure you confidentiality of the school and team members will be protected during the research and in the final reported results. Compilation of the data will be reported and insights from team members shared using pseudonyms to protect team members and districts.

In the next few weeks I will be contacting you and asking you to review the comments you shared with me in the interview to check for accuracy and to make sure I have captured what you had intended me to understand.

Again I want to thank you for your time and your insights.

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact me at ethicalleaders@wctatel.net or by telephone at 641/584-2488.

Respectfully,

Larry D. Hill, Doctoral Candidate
525 South Lynn Street
Thompson, Iowa 50478

Appendix G (1 of 5)

Certified Enrollment for Grades Kindergarten Through Grade 12

2008-2009 School Year

CERTIFIED ENROLLMENT		CERTIFIED ENROLLMENT	
NAME	LINE 7	NAME	LINE 7
AGWSR	661.9	Central	530.2
Adair-Casey	351.5	Central City	465.3
Akron Westfield	535.0	Central Decatur	675.0
Alburnett	572.9	Central Lyon	691.2
Allison-Bristow	304.0	Charter Oak-Ute	321.9
Alta	512.8	Clarinda	993.4
Baxter	383.4	Clarion-Goldfield	884.6
BCLUW	621.4	Clarksville	371.8
Bedford	536.3	Clay Central-Everly	394.2
Belle Plaine	617.5	Colfax-Mingo	865.8
Bellevue	620.7	Collins-Maxwell	531.5
Belmond-Klemme	738.5	Colo-Nesco	474.4
Eddyville-Blakesburg	731.0	Columbus	989.2
Boyden-Hull	623.2	Coon Rapids-Bayard	444.4
West Hancock	616.1	Corning	475.7
BGM	540.5	Danville	486.3
North Iowa	539.9	Denver	744.1
Calamus-Wheatland	498.4	Dike-New Hartford	797.7
Camanche	954.0	Dunkerton	466.8
Cardinal	631.3	Boyer Valley	435.9
Central Lee	889.3	Durant	575.9

Appendix G (2 of 5)

Certified Enrollment for Grades Kindergarten Through Grade 12

2008-2009 School Year

CERTIFIED ENROLLMENT		CERTIFIED ENROLLMENT	
NAME	LINE 7	NAME	LINE 7
Eagle Grove	850.2	Green Mountain-Garwin	355.2
Earlham	640.6	Griswold	639.2
East Buchanan	558.9	Grundy Center	625.8
East Central	395.0	Guthrie Center	546.8
East Greene	369.0	Clayton Ridge	669.2
East Marshall	711.6	H-L-V	375.2
East Union	498.6	Harmony	427.1
Eastern Allamakee	422.0	Hartley-Melvin-Sanborn	667.4
River Valley	465.4	Highland	653.6
Edgewood-Colesburg	487.0	Hinton	563.7
Eldora-New Providence	643.8	Hubbard-Radcliffe	416.0
Emmetsburg	695.7	Hudson	678.0
English Valley	421.9	Interstate 35	877.7
Fremont-Mills	469.0	Iowa Valley	659.2
Galva-Holstein	453.2	IKM	415.7
Garner-Hayfield	750.2	Janesville Consolidated	338.9
George-Little Rock	488.4	Jesup	902.3
Gladbrook-Reinbeck	694.9	Keota	344.6
Glidden-Ralston	357.8	Kingsley-Pierson	457.0
Nodaway Valley	711.0	Lake Mills	623.9

Appendix G (3 of 5)

Certified Enrollment for Grades Kindergarten Through Grade 12

2008-2009 School Year

CERTIFIED ENROLLMENT		CERTIFIED ENROLLMENT	
NAME	LINE 7	NAME	LINE 7
Lamoni	341.4	Midland	586.2
Lawton-Bronson	605.3	Missouri Valley	929.4
Lenox	362.3	MFL Marmac	869.0
North Cedar	951.7	Montezuma	487.0
Lisbon	675.2	Moravia	318.0
Logan-Magnolia	643.1	Mount Ayr	627.5
Lone Tree	385.0	Nashua-Plainfield	711.1
Louisa-Muscatine	817.1	Newell-Fonda	426.9
Lynnville-Sully	469.7	New London	552.9
Madrid	627.0	Nora Springs-Rock Falls	422.0
Malvern	357.8	North Central	506.1
Manning	412.0	Northeast	555.0
Manson Northwest		North Fayette	906.2
Webster	658.9	North Mahaska	537.7
Maple Valley	521.6	North Linn	765.0
Maquoketa Valley	793.7	North Kossuth	331.3
Marcus-Meriden- Cleghorn	459.1	North Tama County	531.3
Martensdale-St. Marys	533.7	North Winneshiek	301.9
Mediapolis	875.9	Northwood-Kensett	518.1
Melcher-Dallas	347.0	Odebolt-Arthur	354.5
		Ogden	699.1

Appendix G (4 of 5)

Certified Enrollment for Grades Kindergarten Through Grade 12

2008-2009 School Year

CERTIFIED ENROLLMENT		CERTIFIED ENROLLMENT	
NAME	LINE 7	NAME	LINE 7
Okoboji	878.4	Schleswig	311.8
Osage	981.4	Sheffield-Chapin	453.4
Panorama	820.5	Sibley-Ocheyedan	808.5
Pekin	727.6	Sidney	354.8
Pleasantville	681.5	Sigourney	584.7
Pocahontas Area	549.6	Sioux Center	998.2
Postville	604.3	Sioux Central	437.0
Prairie Valley	676.0	Southern Cal	512.5
Preston	346.0	Southeast Warren	569.2
Remsen-Union	418.9	South Hamilton	699.2
Riverside	668.9	Southeast Webster	564.2
Rock Valley	570.0	South O'Brien	646.9
Rockwell-Swaledale	313.6	South Winneshiek	616.9
Rockwell City-Lytton	492.1	Springville	443.2
Roland-Story	992.5	Starmont	669.8
Rudd-Rockford- Marble Rock	536.0	West Central Valley	960.2
Sac	432.3	Sumner	580.2
St. Ansgar	680.3	Tipton	837.3
Schaller-Crestland	392.4	Treynor	591.9
		Tri-Center	725.6

Appendix G (5 of 5)

Certified Enrollment for Grades Kindergarten Through Grade 12

2008-2009 School Year

CERTIFIED ENROLLMENT		CERTIFIED ENROLLMENT	
NAME	LINE 7	NAME	LINE 7
Tri-County	317.6	West Bend-Mallard	347.1
Tripoli	495.0	West Branch	785.3
Turkey Valley	465.1	West Burlington Ind.	452.3
Twin Cedars	423.7	West Central	304.2
Underwood	763.4	West Harrison	503.2
United	353.4	West Lyon	753.9
Valley	477.5	West Marshall	885.6
Van Buren	736.3	West Monona	662.4
Van Meter	584.7	West Sioux	715.7
Villisca	383.3	Westwood	589.7
Waco	524.0	Wilton	842.0
Wall Lake View Auburn	506.8	Winfield-Mt. Union	388.5
Wapello	772.7	Woodbine	436.4
Wapsie Valley	699.8	Woodbury Central	594.1
Wayne	533.6	Woodward-Granger	800.8

Iowa Department of Education. (2009). School District Certified Enrollment. Retrieved at http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1348&Itemid=2410

