Phenomenological Study on the Impact of Servant Leadership for Establishing a Culture of High Performance as Perceived by Public School District Superintendents

Robin Stout

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Phenomenological Study on the Impact of Servant Leadership for Establishing
a Culture of High Performance as Perceived by Public School District Superintendents

A Dissertation by

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Irvine, California
School of Education
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

Phenomenological Study on the Impact of Servant Leadership for Establishing a Culture of High Performance as Perceived by Public School District Superintendents

by Robin Stout

**Purpose:** The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and describe K12 public school superintendents’ perceived impact of the seven servant leadership constructs established by Patterson (2003) on establishing a culture of high performance.

**Methodology:** This phenomenological research study identified and described the extent to which superintendents perceived the impact servant leadership has on establishing a culture of high performance. Eight participants were selected through non probability purposeful and convenience sampling based on specific criteria including a minimum of three years of experience at their current district and a minimum of five years of experience as a superintendent. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews using an Interview Protocol. Responses from participants were prioritized and data was coded for themes.

**Findings:** The findings from the study indicate that public school district superintendents agree that Patterson’s (2003) seven servant leadership constructs contribute to establishing a culture of high performance. The in-depth interviews, observations, and artifacts collected resulted in 14 themes and seven major findings.

**Conclusions:** It was concluded that public school district superintendents who develop a culture of high performance have a collective commitment and belief to serve; hire people who are aligned to the shared values and purpose of the organization; operate out of love; have trusting relationships; empower people, and utilize all seven constructs.
Recommendations for Action: The ability of superintendents to utilize the seven servant leadership constructs of agapao, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service is critical to establishing a culture of high performance. To equip aspiring and current superintendents to effectively implement the constructs, the following needs to occur: an assessment tool needs to be developed for superintendents to measure their effectiveness utilizing the seven constructs; a professional development book needs to be written focused on successful implementation of the seven constructs; trainings for superintendents focused on the servant leadership constructs needs to be developed and included in conferences aspiring and current superintendents typically attend; coaching for superintendents needs to include the seven constructs; and search firms and boards of education need to use the seven servant leadership constructs when evaluating prospective superintendents.
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PREFACE

Following discussions and considerations regarding the opportunity to study Patterson’s (2003) servant leadership constructs, two faculty researchers and eight doctoral students discovered a common interest in exploring the ways K12 leaders perceive the impact these seven constructs (agapao love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service) have on establishing a culture of high performance. This resulted in a thematic study conducted by a research team of eight doctoral students.

The eight peer researchers and two faculty advisors ultimately chose a phenomenological design that would be most appropriate for this study of the servant leadership constructs and the perceived impact of superintendents and how they establish a culture of high performance within their school districts. This structure was resolved to be generally suitable as the non-experimental, descriptive approach to best accumulate the lived encounters of the leaders. Each researcher interviewed six to eight K-12 leaders to describe how they perceived the impact of these seven constructs of servant leadership by Patterson (2003) on establishing a culture of high performance at their organizations. To ensure thematic consistency, the team co-created the purpose statement, research questions, definitions, interview questions, and study procedures. It was agreed upon by the team that for increased validity, data collection would involve method triangulation using interviews, observations, and artifacts.

Throughout the study, the term peer researchers was used to refer to the other researchers who conducted this thematic study. These were: Freddie Chavarria, Title I Elementary/Middle School Principals in Orange County and San Diego County; Lillian Maldonado French, Latina Superintendents working in Title 1 school districts; Angela
Lawyer, High School Principals in Riverside County; Darrick Rice, High School Principals in Los Angeles County; Antonio Sandifer, Principals of Native American Schools in Washington State; Robin Stout, Public School District Superintendents in California; Rebecca Toto, Human Resource Administrators in California; and Alison Wills, Middle School Principals in Orange County, California.
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The United States is falling behind in the global education race as American students continue to perform below those from other advanced industrial countries. Although there has been an increased focus on student performance and accountability due to No Child Left Behind (2002), data from Pew Research Center ranks American students 38th out of 71 countries in math and 24th in science (2018). Furthermore, Singapore, Ireland, and Norway outperform the United States in Reading Literacy (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Considering this and similar chronically low test scores, the need to identify the leadership factors that contribute to high student performance (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Leithwood & Azah, 2017) is critical if Americans are to compete and prosper globally.

Many studies indicate that leadership directly or indirectly affects student learning (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010; Marzano & Waters, 2009). However, the type of leadership matters. Hattie’s Visible Learning research (2015) finds that although leadership overall does not influence performance, instructional leadership does. According to Robinson (2011), instructional leadership is student-centered and focused on learning. Dewitt (2018) adds that the instructional leader stays current with research and creates an environment of trust to implement research best practices, including collective efficacy, collaboration, and feedback.

While many leadership theories focus the interest on the organization or individuals, servant leaders focus on serving the followers (Patterson, 2003). Servant leaders care about the individual first and foremost. Since the term was first coined (Greenleaf, 1977), servant leadership has grown in popularity and has received
recognition by leading leadership theorists (Collins, 2001; Covey, 2002; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005). Ultimately, the act of servant leadership will inspire followers to lead and serve. By putting the focus on teachers and students, a superintendent as a servant leader can create a culture of collective efficacy and collaboration.

Culture has both direct and indirect effects on student learning. Additionally, a positive culture promotes a climate where students can learn. Research indicates that when a culture of high expectations exists, student performance increases (Donohoo, Hattie & Eells, 2018). When schools and school systems practice the belief that all students can learn, improvement occurs. Therefore, for a leader to yield results, intention needs to be focused on developing the culture. Leaders who are effective in developing a culture of high student performance normalize a climate of trust and collaboration (Adams, 2016). They move the system from evaluation to an environment of growth and learning. With the knowledge that establishing a culture of high student performance begins with the leader, a deeper understanding of how a servant leader establishes a culture of high student performance may benefit schools across the country.

**Background**

Leadership plays a critical role in creating and maintaining the culture of an organization. Leaders set the tone and expectations for others to follow. According to DuFour and Marzano (2011), a collective effort and belief in high expectations and collaboration can lead to high student performance. Creating this culture is the primary focus for the leader of a learning organization. Like other organizations, learning organizations require trust and a positive climate in establishing a culture of high performance (Harvey, Drolet & DeVore, 2014).
Establishing a Culture of High Student Performance

According to DuFour & Fullan (2013), a culture of continuous improvement requires leadership at all levels to create conditions for others to succeed. Educational experts agree that collective efficacy and professional learning communities can have a positive effect on student performance (DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Hattie, 2015; Marzano & Waters, 2009). By establishing a culture of “all means all,” schools and districts make a collective commitment to meet the needs of every student. Providing the structures and expectations of collaboration through professional learning communities will ensure that professional learning is results-focused.

Collective efficacy. Research shows that collective teacher efficacy has a positive impact on student performance (Donohoo, 2018; Donohoo et al., 2018; Goddard, Goddard, Kim & Miller, 2015). In fact, teacher collective efficacy has a greater influence on student performance than prior performance or socioeconomic status (Hattie & Zierer, 2018). This shared belief that the members of a team can accomplish more together than they can individually leads to a culture of collaboration. Teachers collaborate to solve problems for every student, including sharing instructional and behavioral strategies. Schools who have a shared belief in their collective impact have high expectations for student performance and focus on student learning (Donohoo et al., 2018).

When teachers see their collective work improve student performance, belief in collective impact will strengthen. Establishing a culture of collective efficacy is no easy task; however, providing evidence of impact is essential to establishing and maintaining collective efficacy in a school. This cycle of collective improvement requires continuous analysis of student data and instruction. Therefore, ensuring collaboration for
instructional improvement is essential (Goddard et al., 2015). Implementing professional learning communities can provide the structure for collective teacher efficacy to thrive.

**Professional learning communities.** The development and sustainability of professional learning communities is critical for the success of our schools and of education reform. The body of literature strongly indicates that professional learning communities contribute to an increase in educator effectiveness and school improvement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 1997; Rosenholtz, 1989; Fullan, 1993; Louis & Marks, 1998; Reeves, 2006; Sparks, 2007; Schmoker, 2004). An effective professional learning community is distinguished by the collective focus on results for every student. It requires a culture focused on learning, collaboration, and results. (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010).

Although a large body of research supports the theory of professional learning communities, studies also reveal many failed attempts at implementing professional learning communities (DuFour & Reeves, 2016). Successful implementation and sustainability of professional learning communities requires significant shifts in culture and structures (Archbald, 2016). For schools to see the benefits of professional learning communities, leaders must establish and maintain a culture focused on learning, collaboration and results.

**District Leadership**

Research indicates that school district leadership can have a positive impact on student performance (Marzano & Waters, 2009; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Leithwood, Sun & McCollough, 2019). District leadership has a broad scope of roles and responsibilities, including implementing and overseeing goals, managing budgets, and
ensuring schools are safe learning environments. With the many business-related responsibilities that can distract focus from learning, it is critical for districts to ensure that their culture and systems support an ethos of continuous improvement.

District effectiveness studies provide insight into direct and indirect factors that correlate to student performance. For example, according to Marzano and Waters (2009), setting non-negotiable goals for performance and instruction has a high correlation with student performance. In addition to the value of setting high performance goals, Leithwood, Sun, and McCullough (2019) also found use of evidence, relationships, and a coherent instructional program to have an indirect effect on math and language performance. For district initiatives to be successful, however, teachers need to have trust in the district office, particularly the superintendent.

A school district superintendent is critical to the success of the students, teachers, and staff. As the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), the superintendent is responsible for the district’s successes and failures. Accordingly, Marzano and Waters (2009) found that superintendent tenure is positively correlated with student performance. The responsibilities of the superintendent are expansive, including financial and staffing oversight, implementation of goals and policies, and community relations. One of the most important responsibilities of a superintendent is an unequivocal passion for all students to learn. With the responsibility and accountability required of the superintendent, it is essential that the superintendent is a highly effective leader.

Leadership Theoretical Foundations

Leadership models have evolved over time. According to Fullan (2001), leadership must become more sophisticated as society becomes more complex. The
success of today’s organizations is dependent on the leader. Leadership theories provide rationale and characteristics that make up models of leadership for leaders to follow. Many of the models share similar qualities and overlap. For example, the importance of creating and articulating a vision is a characteristic of most modern leadership models. However, differences between the models exist. Knowing these differences is important for a leader to impact performance.

**Resonant leadership.** Like transformational leaders, resonant leaders are intuitive and aware of individual needs. They have a high emotional intelligence, particularly in self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Boyatzis, Smith, Van Oosten & Woolsford, 2013). Their emotional intelligence helps create trust by understanding the needs of others and building relationships. Boyatzis & McKee (2005) warn, however, that an overworked resonant leader can suffer from “sacrifice syndrome,” resulting in dissonance, which could create a domino effect throughout the organization. The leader must be cognizant of this and counter the dissonance with renewal.

**Visionary leadership.** While most leadership models articulate the importance of inspiring others to follow a shared vision, Nanus (1992) asserts that achieving a shared vision of an achievable future is the most powerful engine driving an organization to long-term success. Providing the original theoretical model of visionary leadership as a subset of leadership, Nanus (1992) argues that a visionary leader requires the following qualities: direction-centered, change agent, spokesperson, and coach. Some studies, however, reveal that there may be negative effects of visionary leadership. Ates, Tarakci, Porck, Van Knippenberg and Groenen (2019) warn when there is strategic misalignment
between leaders and the organization, disengagement and lack of commitment occur. Kotter (2001) also asserts that, without vision, change efforts can easily dissolve into a list of confusing, incompatible, and time-consuming projects that go in the wrong direction or nowhere at all.

**Authentic leadership.** Although the importance of vision-casting is prevalent throughout leadership models, authentic leadership focuses on the leader’s own internal construct. Initially defined by Henderson and Hoy (1983), leadership authenticity includes accepting personal and organizational responsibilities and actions, non-manipulation of subordinates, and salience of self over role responsibilities. Donaldson and Harter (2019) describes authenticity as acting in accordance with one’s true self by owning one’s own emotions, needs, wants or beliefs. Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, and Walumbwa (2005) agree, suggesting that by being true to one’s values and authentic in one’s actions, an authentic leader will foster the development of leadership in others. Contrarily, Alvesson & Einola (2019) believe that authentic leadership is a flawed, simplistic and out-of-date view of corporate life. They assert that authentic leadership and other “positive” leadership models are a form of ideological research and put the field of leadership studies at risk of failure. Although authentic leadership may have some naysayers, it, along with transformational, visionary, resonant and servant leadership, continues to be a popular leadership model.

**Transformational leadership.** Throughout the years, researchers have studied the positive effects of transformational leadership in organizations. Transformational leadership can achieve extraordinary outcomes as the leader inspires followers while developing their own leadership capacity (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational
leaders set a clear vision and model expectations to achieve results. They inspire others to look beyond their own self-interests and follow them in the collective pursuit of group results. They encourage others to provide input and create new ways of doing things.

Transformational leaders are acutely aware of individual needs and concerns, and they establish a culture of individual development and growth. As role models to others, transformational leaders are respected and admired, resulting in a desire from their followers to emulate them (Bass & Riggio, 2006). By sharing their personal beliefs and values, transformational leaders can inspire individuals to pursue the interests of the organization (Humphreys & Einstein, 2003).

Servant leadership. While other leadership models and theories focus on what the leader does, servant leadership focuses on the leader’s character and commitment to serving others (Parris & Peachey, 2013). Servant leaders care about the individual first and foremost. Since the term was first coined (Greenleaf, 1977), servant leadership has grown in popularity and has received recognition by leading leadership theorists (Collins, 2001; Covey, 2002; Marzano et al., 2005).

The term “servant leader” originated from Robert Greenleaf’s (1970) essay, “The Servant as Leader”, which Greenleaf wrote after reading Hermann Hesse’s book, Journey to the East. The story is about a group of people on a spiritual journey. The group is attended to by a servant, Leo. After some time, Leo disappears, resulting in the journey falling apart as the group could not cope without Leo’s assistance. Several years after the journey, one of the members of the journey comes upon Leo. The man realizes that Leo is the head of the Order that sponsored the journey and was not a servant at all, but a great and noble leader. All along, the men believed Leo was their servant, but he was
their leader. Robert Greenleaf referred to Leo’s leadership as servant leadership, believing the key to Leo’s greatness is that he was a servant first (Greenleaf, 1977).

Servant leaders are first and foremost servants (Greenleaf, 1977). Greenleaf (1970) further describes a servant leader as, “It begins with the natural feeling one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first.” Servant leaders have the desire to serve others, and individual wellbeing is the servant leader’s priority and focus. The servant leader’s focus will align to that of the followers (Patterson, 2003). Ultimately, the act of servant leadership will inspire followers to lead and serve.

Many theorists have expanded Greenleaf’s theory and established models of servant leadership, including Spears (2010), who identified 10 characteristics of servant leadership: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, philosophy, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. Russell and Stone’s (2002) model identified functioning attributes of servant leadership: vision, honesty, integrity, trust, service, modeling, pioneering, appreciation of others, and empowerment. Similarly, Kathleen Patterson (2003) identified seven virtuous constructs of servant leadership in her theoretical model.

Patterson’s Servant Leadership Theoretical Framework

According to Patterson (2003), servant leadership is a virtuous theory, a theory of doing the right thing while focusing on one’s moral character. Virtues are the characteristics and mindsets one possesses and uses to interact with others. Many scholars agree there is a need for virtuous leadership in today’s organizations (Hacket & Wang, 2012; Caldwell, Hasan & Smith, 2015). Patterson (2003) asserts there are seven
constructs, working in a processional pattern, which encompass servant leadership: agapao love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service.

Patterson’s Constructs of Servant Leadership

**Agapao love.** Servant leaders lead with love. They lead with the heart to do what is right for others. Leaders who demonstrate agapao love put others at the forefront and help develop others into leaders themselves (Gunn, 2002). To lead with agapao love is to focus first on the individual, then on an individual’s talents, and finally on benefits to the organization (Patterson, 2003). When agapao love exists, the other virtues can follow.

**Humility.** Collins (2001) distinguishes great leaders from good leaders as great leaders lead with humility by illustrating modesty and focusing on the success of others. Leading with humility, a servant leader never brags or boasts, yet focuses on and praises the accomplishments of others. Humility involves surrendering one’s own ambition while considering the needs of others above one’s own (Sandage & Wiens, 2001). Furthermore, a servant leader demonstrates humility by not pretending to have all the answers and being transparent with their own knowledge.

**Altruism.** A servant leader serves without the expectation of getting anything in return. Kaplan (2000) describes altruism as personal sacrifice, selflessly helping others while not seeking personal gain. While DeYoung (2000) agrees with altruism being a selfless act and making a personal sacrifice, he also believes that altruism includes the personal satisfaction of helping others. Leading with altruism, always seeking what is best for others, is imperative to the servant leadership mentality (Patterson, 2003).

**Vision.** Unlike organizational vision, a servant leader’s vision is focused on the future of the individual (Patterson, 2003). Vision is created by using the individual’s
gifts and talents. The leader inspires followers to use their gifts and talents to become leaders themselves.

**Trust.** Trust is the foundation of leadership. Servant leaders seek to establish trust by following through and doing what they say they are going to do (Patterson, 2003). Establishing trust is essential for building and sustaining relationships. Patterson (2003) suggests that a trusting leader is one who empowers their followers.

**Empowerment.** Empowerment is a critical characteristic of servant leadership. Empowerment is giving trust to others and to develop many leaders throughout the organization (Russell & Stone, 2002). Ultimately, servant leadership is a cycle of continuous leader development.

**Service.** Service is at the heart of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977; Patterson, 2003; Russell & Stone, 2002). A servant leader puts others’ interests above their own. They give generously of their time, energy and compassion (Patterson, 2003).

Leadership is critical for an organization’s success. Servant leadership is one theory of leadership that has gained respect and popularity. Above all else, the servant leader focuses on the follower and puts the follower’s interests above their own. According to Patterson (2003), a servant leader leads with agapao love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service. As the leader of a school district, the superintendent has a critical role on student performance. By further examining leading with virtuous constructs, a superintendent may be more likely to affect positive change in the organization, resulting in increased student performance.
Statement of the Research Problem

Leaders play a significant role in the success of an organization. By setting the tone and developing the culture, leaders create a climate for others to inhabit (Fullan, 2001). Although many leadership theories exist, servant leadership has gained in popularity and has received recognition by leading leadership theorists (Collins, 2001; Covey, 2002; Marzano et al., 2005). A servant leader puts others’ interests before their own or those of the organization. A leader’s first focus should be on the “who” rather than the “what” (Collins, 2001). In a learning organization, the primary responsibility of a school district superintendent is to establish a culture of high student performance. By further exploring the servant leadership constructs effective superintendents use to establish a culture of high student performance, school district superintendents may be better equipped to positively impact their district’s success.

A school district superintendent’s ultimate responsibility is student success. Research also suggests that superintendents do have an impact on student learning (DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Leithwood & Azah, 2017; Marzano & Waters, 2009). However, a superintendent has many responsibilities, which can easily distract from the focus of student performance. Among many other things, the superintendent is tasked to be the public figure in the community, balance the budget, negotiate compensation, advocate for educational rights, and so on. With the never-ending tasks that can distract from being student- and learning-centered, it is critical for a superintendent to prioritize the interest of teachers, parents, and students above their own or those of the organization. By focusing on the people, superintendents can develop a culture where there is a collective commitment to and belief in student success.
Organizations measure their success by their intended outcomes. In the educational setting, success correlates to student performance. According to DuFour and Marzano (2011), collective effort and belief in high expectations and collaboration can lead to high student performance. Additionally, DuFour and Fullan (2013) assert that creating a culture of continuous improvement requires leadership to create conditions for others to be successful. As the culture-setter of the district, the superintendent is in a position to make a positive impact on student performance.

While there is some research supporting the impact that superintendents have on performance (DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Leithwood & Azah, 2017; Marzano & Waters, 2009), there is minimal research on the impact the superintendent can have by establishing a culture of high student performance. Furthermore, little research exists specific to the servant leadership constructs a superintendent uses in establishing a culture of high student performance. Knowing that servant leadership can contribute to positive organization-wide results and knowing that superintendents can impact student performance, it is worthwhile to further explore how superintendents’ servant leadership characteristics contribute to the establishment of a culture of high student performance.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and describe K-12 public school superintendents’ perceived impact of the seven servant leadership constructs established by Patterson (2003) on establishing a culture of high performance.
Research Question

What is the impact of Patterson’s (2003) seven servant leadership constructs on establishing a culture of high performance as perceived by superintendents of high-achieving public school districts in California?

Sub-Questions

1. What is the impact of the agapao leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?
2. What is the impact of the humility leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?
3. What is the impact of the altruism leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?
4. What is the impact of the vision leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?
5. What is the impact of the trust leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?
6. What is the impact of the empowerment leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?
7. What is the impact of the service leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?

Significance of the Problem

The leadership of a superintendent is critical to the success of the school district. As the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), the superintendent is responsible for the district’s successes and failures. Accordingly, research indicates that school district
leadership can have a positive impact on student performance (Marzano & Waters, 2009; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2019). With increased accountability, the role of the superintendent has evolved and become more complex. The responsibilities of the superintendent are expansive, including financial and staffing oversight, implementation of goals and policies, and community relations. In addition to being the instructional leader of the district, the superintendent is required to balance the needs of multiple stakeholders while also being an expert in human resources, construction, politics and finances (Webner, Jong, Campoli & Baron, 2017). With the many business-related responsibilities that can distract the focus from learning, it is critical for superintendents to ensure that conditions support a culture of continuous improvement.

There is a strong connection between leadership and the culture of the academic environment (McBath, 2018). As such, the leader of the educational organization sets the culture of the district. As the leader, the superintendent must be resolute in their passion for learning and equity. They must have a relentless focus on continuous improvement (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). With this passion and focus, the superintendent sets the collective belief in high expectations. When a culture of high expectations exists, student performance increases (Donohoo et al., 2018). To establish a culture of collective high expectations, the leader of the educational organization, the superintendent, needs to focus first on the people of the organization. Focusing on “who” before “what” should be the priority of the leader (Collins, 2001). By putting the interests of their teachers and staff before the interest of the district, the superintendent is a servant leader.

Leaders must meet the needs of others first (Greenleaf, 1977). They have the desire to serve others, and the individual’s wellbeing is the servant leader’s priority and
focus. As a virtuous leadership model, servant leaders lead with constructs such as humility, trust, and love (Patterson, 2003). For teachers to believe in the vision of the organization, they need to trust their leader. By making relationships with staff a priority and developing collective beliefs, a superintendent can establish trust. The servant leader can influence organizational outcomes by satisfying the needs of the followers (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016). Therefore, for a culture of high performance to emerge, a closer look at the leadership of the superintendent should be considered.

Although there is a significant body of research on educational leaders and a culture of student performance (DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Donohoo et al., 2018), and some research specific to the superintendent (Marzano & Waters, 2009), there is minimal research on a superintendent’s leadership as a servant leader and the culture of high student performance (Bohanek, 2007). By further researching superintendents’ use of servant leadership constructs in establishing a culture of high student performance, this study may better prepare superintendents to successfully lead their districts. Furthermore, this study will benefit school district superintendents as they develop cultures of continuous improvement and collective beliefs in high performance. This study may also benefit Boards of Directors during their selection processes in hiring a superintendent to lead their district. Ultimately, this study will benefit the stakeholders for whom school districts exist: the students.

**Definitions**

This section provides definitions of all terms that are relevant to the study. Theoretical definitions provide meaning from research studies, while operational
Theoretical Definitions

This section offers operational definitions of key terms in order to distinguish the individuals, environment and leadership principles pertinent to this study. As defined below, these terms are specific to the manner in which they are used in the study (Roberts, 2010).

**Agapao Love.** Agapao love is to do the right thing for the right reasons. Agapao love leaders care more for their followers than the interest of the organization, resulting in greater understanding, gratitude, kindness, forgiveness, and compassion (Gunn, 2002; Patterson, 2003).

**Altruism.** Altruism is demonstrating unselfish concern for the welfare of another, even with a risk or sacrifice against one’s personal self-interest. It involves deriving personal pleasure from helping and seeking what’s best for others, often with an attitude of humility, modesty, and selflessness (DeYoung, 2000; Kaplan, 2000; Monroe, 1994; Patterson, 2003).

**Empowerment.** Empowerment is entrusting power to others. Virtually giving away power to followers and allowing them to know and feel significant and important in their role and contribution. It requires effective listening, valuing love and equity, and an emphasis on teamwork. Empowerment encourages risk-taking and self-accountability to accomplish tasks and work toward goals (Blanchard, 2000; Melrose, 1995; Patterson, 2003; Russell & Stone, 2002).
Humility. Humility is the importance of being humble and having modesty, not being mistaken for meekness or the absence of strength. It is a virtue characterized by one’s own talents and abilities and an outward rejection of self-interest while placing true value on the recognition and success of others (Kim, Atkinson & Yang, 1999).

Service. Service is the moral equivalent of giving of oneself to serve others. It implies that leaders are focused on placing interest on others rather than on one’s own interest. It can be demonstrated through the gift of time, energy, compassion, care or belongings. Service places others first (Patterson, 2003; Russell & Stone, 2002).

Trust. Trust is the level of confidence that one individual has in another’s competence and his or her willingness to act in a fair, ethical, and predictable manner. Trust is essential to organizational culture; integrity and care for others are valued by the leader and followers. (Joseph & Winston, 2005; Patterson, 2003).

Vision. A bridge from the present to the future created by a collaborative mindset, adding meaning to the organization, sustaining higher levels of motivation and withstanding challenge. (Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2007; Landsberg, 2003; Mendez-Morse, 1993; Nanus, 1992)

Operational Definitions

Culture of high performance. A district with a culture of high performance is one that has demonstrated a growth trend over the past two years as indicated by the California Dashboard in two of the four areas of English Language Arts, Mathematics, Suspension Rate, and Graduation Rate; or has high performance as evidenced by scoring in the blue or green category for two consecutive years as indicated by the California
Dashboard in two of the four areas of English Language Arts, Mathematics, Suspension Rate, and Graduation Rate.

**K-12 school district.** A K-12 school district is defined as a district that provides comprehensive academic instruction to students in grades Kindergarten through 12th, including districts that serve K-8 students (elementary districts) and K-12 students (unified districts).

**Superintendent.** For the purpose of this study, the superintendent is defined as the organizational and instructional leader of a public-school organization.

**Delimitations**

The study was delimited to eight K-12 California public school superintendents, each of whom met at least five of the seven following criteria:

- Employed at a current K-12 district within California with a minimum of 100 staff members.
- Evidence of leading a district of high student performance.
- A minimum of three years of experience at their current district.
- A minimum of five years of experience in the K-12 profession.
- Membership in professional associations in their field, such as ACSA.
- Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings.
- Willing to be a participant and agreed to the informed consent form.

**Organization of the Study**

The study is organized into five chapters, a bibliography, and appendices. Chapter I introduces the topic of servant leadership and culture of high student
performance, including background information on Patterson’s (2003) Servant Leadership Constructs: agapao love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service. Also provided in Chapter I is the purpose, research question, and definitions utilized for the study. Chapter II presents an overview of current literature regarding servant leadership, Patterson’s (2003) Servant Leadership Constructs, and how servant leadership can contribute to a culture of high student performance. Chapter III describes the research design and methodology of the study, and includes an explanation of the population, sample, and data-gathering procedures, as well as the procedures used to analyze the data. Chapter IV presents, analyzes, and provides a discussion of the findings of the study. Chapter V contains the summary, findings, conclusions, and recommendations for actions and further research.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite educational reform efforts such as No Child Left Behind (2002) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), American students continue to fall behind globally. Within the United States, the learning gap continues to widen for students of color, socio-economically disadvantaged students, English learners and students with disabilities (US Department of Education, 2019; California School Dashboard, 2019). Many studies indicate that leadership directly or indirectly affects student learning (Louis et al., 2010; Marzano & Waters, 2009). Research indicates that when a culture of high expectations exists, student performance increases (Donohoo et al., 2018).

Many studies indicate that leadership directly or indirectly affects student learning (Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood & Anderson, 2010; Marzano & Waters, 2009). While other leadership models and theories focus on what the leader does, servant leadership focuses on the leader’s character and commitment to serving others (Parris & Peachey, 2013). Patterson’s Servant Leadership Theoretical Model (2003) asserts there are seven constructs, working in a processional pattern, which encompass servant leadership: agapao love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service.

A review of the literature was conducted to provide the theoretical framework of this study, Patterson’s (2003) Servant Leadership Model and the impact superintendents have on establishing a culture of high performance. A synthesis matrix of research was created (Appendix A) to support the development of this review. The review of the literature is organized into five parts. Part I describes five theoretical leadership models: resonant leadership, visionary leadership, authentic leadership, transformational leadership, and servant leadership. Part II describes the theoretical framework, Patterson’s (2003) Servant Leadership Theoretical Model. Part III provides the
background of leadership in K-12 education. Part IV describes a culture of high performance in K-12 education. The literature review concludes with Part V and a discussion of the major variables, which include the seven servant leadership constructs, student performance, and implications for future research.

**Leadership Theoretical Foundations**

Our world is continually evolving and becoming more complex. Leadership needs to adapt to the dynamic environment in order to lead organizations through change and enable them to change and to survive (Ackerman-Anderson & Anderson, 2010). Leadership models have evolved over time to meet the changing world. From the 1800s, when the focus was on the leader as hero, to the present, where the focus is on both the leader and followers, leadership models have been in constant flux.

Now, more than ever, employees are dissatisfied and unengaged at work (Crowley, 2011). A recent Gallup study revealed that nearly half of employees who left their jobs, did so because of their managers (Gandolfi & Stone, 2018). Today’s organizations urgently need effective leadership to survive and prosper in the global market. The following sections will discuss five current and effective leadership models, their attributes, and implications of practice in organizations. The section will include a discussion of Patterson’s (2003) Servant Leadership Theoretical Model and conclude with a discussion from the perspective of school district superintendents.

**Resonant Leadership**

Leaders set the tone of the organization. They have the ability to control outcomes and how individuals within an organization respond and adapt. Leaders have a responsibility to create environments for others to believe and work collectively toward a mission and a set of shared values. Through high emotional intelligence, resonant leaders
are intuitive about the needs of others and skilled at building relationships. The high levels of emotional energy needed, however, can lead resonant leaders to suffer from “sacrifice syndrome”, which can have a domino effect throughout the organization.

First described by Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee (2002), resonant leaders have high emotional and social intelligences and are highly attuned to themselves and others (Boyatzis et al., 2013; Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2001; McKee, Boyatzis, & Johnston, 2008). Although skill and one’s intelligence quotient (IQ) may influence success, a leader with a high emotional intelligence (EQ) will have far greater success as they are more effective under stress and ambiguity (McKee et al., 2008). Emotional and social intelligence competencies (Figure 1) involve being intuitively aware of self and others and knowing how to manage both. Self-awareness, the foundation of emotional intelligence, allows a leader to recognize their own emotions and the impact their emotions have on themselves and others. By practicing self-management, resonant leaders adjust their behavior to people and situations in a positive manner. Resonant leaders are also acutely aware of the emotions of others and can manage relationships effectively, leading to positive organizational results.
The emotionally and socially attuned resonant leader builds strong, trusting relationships, resulting in a synchronous environment where collective knowledge and commitment of “what we do” and “why we do it” are shared (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). These resonant leaders are visionary leaders and inspire organizations to achieve feats previously believed unimaginable. Although resonant leaders can adapt and be flexible in times of turmoil, continued crises can burn out even the best of leaders. Boyatzis & McKee (2005) cautions that resonant leaders who give of themselves too much for too long can suffer from “sacrifice syndrome,” causing dissonance, which can permeate the organization. To avoid this, resonant leaders need to be intentional on renewal. By mindfully attending to themselves and others, leaders can create resonance and sustain their effectiveness (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005).
Visionary Leadership

While resonant and other leadership models inspire others to follow a shared vision, visionary leadership theorists assert that achieving a shared vision of an achievable future is the most powerful engine driving an organization to long-term success (Nanus, 1992; Sashkin, 1988). Visionary leaders create meaning and purpose for others to follow by merging their own personal vision into a shared vision of the organization (Nanus, 1992). Once the vision is developed, visionary leaders systematically communicate their vision and then move to implementation.

If the vision is not communicated clearly, however, individuals may become unresponsive as they spend their time trying to figure out the vision (Heath & Heath, 2010). In addition to ineffective communication, other factors can contribute to visionary leadership breakdowns. Ates, Tarakci, Porck, Knippenberg and Groenen (2019) warn that when there is strategic misalignment between leaders and the organization, disengagement and lack of commitment occur.

Contrarily, effective visionary leadership can positively impact organizational effectiveness (Taylor, Cornelius & Colvin, 2014). Effective visionary leaders are skilled at inspiring others to fulfill the organization’s vision. They provide direction and clarity, empowering followers with meaning and purpose (Nanus, 1992). Vision provides a framework for goals, priorities and beliefs (Taylor, Cornelius & Colvin, 2014). Without vision, change efforts can easily dissolve into a list of confusing, incompatible, and time-consuming projects that go in the wrong direction or nowhere at all (Kotter, 2001).
Authentic Leadership

Authentic leaders create an environment of trust and transparency by consistently leading with their values. Grounded in the discipline of psychology, authentic leadership focuses on the leader’s self-actualization of their experiences and beliefs and acting in accordance with their true self (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May & Walumbwa, 2005; George & Sims, 2007). Authentic leadership focuses on the positive traits of the leaders and followers as opposed to negative traits (Hunt & Fedynich, 2019). Although authentic leaders can be resonant, servant and transformational, authentic leaders are distinguished by their high levels of self-awareness and authentic behavior (Autry, 2001; Gardner et al., 2005).

Although reference to authenticity can be found as far back as ancient Greek philosophy, only recently has an intention been made to align authenticity with leadership (Gardner et al., 2005). Recognizing a need to bring scholars and practitioners together to develop insights around the correlation of authenticity and leadership outcomes, an Authentic Leadership Development summit was held in June 2004 by Gallup Leadership Institute (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). The summit was a launchpad for scholars to apply authenticity to leadership theory.

Authentic leadership requires self-awareness and self-actualization, beginning with the leader’s own internal discovery of who they are as a person (Gardener et al., 2005; George & Sims, 2007). As the leader’s compass, self-awareness is developed by exploring and accepting one’s life story, ultimately resulting in self-actualization of the values and principles that will guide one’s leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2006; George & Sims, 2007). As role models to others, authentic leaders demonstrate self-regulation
through high levels of self-awareness, balanced processing, transparency, and authentic behavior (Gardner et al., 2005).

Authentic leaders lead by example. By being true to their values, authentic leaders can positively develop others to be leaders themselves. Gardner et al. (2005) holds that authentic followership is an integral component and consequence of authentic leadership development. As Figure 2 illustrates, followers closely replicate the authentic leadership development of their leaders. By modeling self-awareness, authentic leaders create inclusive, caring environments with their followers, resulting in high levels of trust and engagement and ultimately positive organizational outcomes (Gardner et al., 2005)

Figure 2. The Conceptual Framework for Authentic Leader and Follower Development. Adapted from, "Can you see the real me?" A self-based model of authentic leader and

**Transformational Leadership**

Throughout the years, researchers have studied the positive effects of transformational leadership in organizations. According to Burns (1978), transforming leadership is a process in which “leaders and followers help each other to advance to a higher level of morale and motivation.” He asserts that “transforming” generates significant changes in values, expectations and goals for both the leader and the employees in an organization. Bass (1985) furthers Burns’ research by explaining that the measure of transformational leadership is how the leader influences the followers. He also used the word “transformational,” rather than “transforming.”

Transformational leadership can achieve extraordinary outcomes as the leader inspires followers while developing their own leadership capacity (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leaders set a clear vision and model expectations to achieve results. They inspire others to follow them in the collective pursuit to greatness. They encourage others to provide input and create new ways of doing things. Transformational leaders are acutely aware of individual needs and concerns, and they establish a culture of individual development and growth. Bass and Steidemeier (1999) assert that transformational leaders must be moral and that they demonstrate their ethics and values through the following four components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

Transformational leaders are foremost a role model to others. They are respected and admired, resulting in a desire from their followers to emulate them (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Having a strong moral compass, the leader’s integrity and values are clear
throughout the organization and never waver. By uniting followers, transformational leaders gain the ability to change their followers’ goals and beliefs (Humphreys & Einstein, 2003). In times of turmoil, the leader must manage themselves while leading others and be an exemplar of emotional intelligence (Anderson & Anderson, 2010).

A leader who inspires motivation, sparks confidence, and has a clear sense of purpose leads with inspirational motivation (Martin, 2016). This is another very important principle of transformational leadership. Transformational leaders demonstrate behaviors that motivate, inspire and challenge others. They display optimism and enthusiasm while genuinely valuing individuals. By sharing their personal beliefs and values, transformational leaders can inspire individuals to pursue the interests of the organization (Humphreys & Einstein, 2003). Using symbols or stories, inspirational leaders clearly communicate expectations and develop a collective commitment to goals and a shared vision. When followers are inspired by their leader, they desire to change and improve.

Intellectual stimulation is displayed when a leader helps followers become more innovative and creative (Bass, 1999). It includes shared decision-making and innovation at its core, making it a key component of the transformational leadership framework (Martin, 2016). Transformational leaders encourage individuals to challenge their thoughts, imagination, creativity and recognize their values, beliefs, and mindset. They challenge their followers to re-examine traditional ways of doing things, and encourage individuals to try novel and creative approaches to solving problems and performing work (Bass & Aviolo, 1994). Individuals are encouraged to be creative and think outside the box, not to just conform to what everyone else is doing. Intellectual stimulation aims
to enhance creativity and it actively seeks to promote autonomy and shared leadership.

An integral part of intellectual stimulation relies on the leader allowing the followers the freedom to make decisions. In fact, followers are actually encouraged to be in charge of their own decisions. Leaders aim to change the way followers think about a problem and to see the different ways they could overcome the issues facing them (Martin, 2016).

Individualized consideration is another key principle of transformational leadership. Transformational leaders exhibit individualized consideration by listening attentively and paying close attention to their followers’ needs (Bass & Avolio, 1994). They are mentors and coaches who strive for growth and achievement by encouraging their followers to take on more responsibilities in order to help them develop to their full potential (Avolio, 1999; Bass & Avolio, 1994). Providing opportunities for individuals to grow and explore their own leadership skills and ideas is a priority of a transformational leader. Individualized consideration is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Instead, the leader must take into consideration that individuals are motivated by different things and that, in order to get the most out of individuals, you must take into consideration their individual needs (Martin, 2016). Followers are encouraged to share their ideas and are appreciated for their contributions to the organization.

Transformational leaders inspire and encourage individual differences, recognizing the benefit that each individual brings forward (Bass, 1995; Burns, 1978). True transformational leaders are focused on developing the individuals into leaders (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999).

Servant Leadership

When considering servant leaders, many think of instrumental and profound leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mother Teresa. The term “servant
leadership,” however did not draw much attention among scholars until Robert Greenleaf published the book *Servant as Leader* in 1970. In this book, Greenleaf (1970) describes servant leadership as:

The servant-leader is servant first...It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions … The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived? (p. 4).

As Greenleaf’s most cited quote, and because Greenleaf did not provide an explicit definition of servant leadership, many scholars use this quote as the founding definition of servant leadership (Van Dierendonck, 2011). Greenleaf coined servant leadership after reading Hermann Hesse’s book, *Journey to the East*. The story is about a group of people on a spiritual journey. The group is attended to by a servant, Leo. After some time, Leo disappears, resulting in the journey falling apart as the group could not cope without the assistance of Leo. Several years after the journey, one of the members of the journey comes upon Leo. The man realizes Leo is the head of the Order that sponsored the journey and was not a servant at all, but a great and noble leader. All along
the men believed Leo was their servant, but he was their leader. Robert Greenleaf referred to Leo’s leadership as servant leadership, believing the key to Leo’s greatness is that he was a servant first (Greenleaf, 1977).

Since Greenleaf’s inception of servant leadership, many scholars have expanded on the concept (Spears, 1995; Laub, 1999; Russell & Stone, 2002; Patterson, 2003; Van Dierendonck, 2011). Additionally, servant leadership has become a popular topic of many leadership theorists (Collins, 2001; Covey, 2002; Marzano et al., 2005; Autry, 2001; Sinek, 2019). Exemplary leaders are more interested in others’ success than their own (Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Sinek, 2014). The main driver for servant leaders is to put the needs of others before their own.

In 1995, Spears, who worked closely with Greenleaf, expanded on Greenleaf’s work and identified the following 10 characteristics of servant leadership he believed critical to the development of servant leaders:

1. Listening - understanding the importance of communication and seeking to understand the will of others,
2. Empathy - appreciating others for who they are,
3. Healing - ability to help make whole,
4. Awareness - being awake,
5. Persuasion - seeking to influence others by not using positional power,
6. Conceptualization - thinking beyond today toward the possibility of the future,
7. Foresight - foreseeing outcomes of situations and using intuition,
8. Stewardship - serving others,
9. Commitment to the growth of people - nurturing the growth of others, and
10. Building community - emphasizing local community as an important part of a person’s life.

Spears (2010) further asserts that the list of characteristics is not exhaustive and contributes to the work of Laub (1999). In an effort to systematize the work around servant leadership, including developing an agreed-upon list of characteristics and definitions, Laub (1999) developed the Servant Organization Leadership Assessment (OLA) instrument. The goal of the tool was to assess the level at which leaders and workers perceive that the listed characteristics were displayed in their organizations (Laub, 1999). Figure 3 illustrates Laub’s (1999) Servant Leadership and Servant Organization Model.
Figure 3: Servant Leadership and the Servant Organization Model. Adapted from:


Russell and Stone (2002) expanded on the research of Spears by identifying nine functional attributes and 11 additional characteristics of servant leadership. Russell and
Stone (2002) classified the following nine attributes as “functional” as they are mentioned the most frequently in literature related to distinctive features of servant leaders: vision, honesty, integrity, trust, service, modeling, pioneering, appreciation of others, and empowerment. Although each of the attributes is distinct, they are also interrelated and one or more attributes can often reciprocally influence one another (Russell & Stone, 2002). In addition to the functional attributes, Russell and Stone (2002) identifies communication, credibility, stewardship, visibility, influence, persuasion, listening, encouragement, teaching, and delegation as accompanying attributes that are often prerequisites for effective servant leadership. From this work, Russell & Stone (2002) developed a working model of servant leadership, illustrating how the values and accompanying attributes determine the effectiveness of the leader by affecting the level and intensity of the functional attributes (Figure 4).

In his book, *The Servant Leader: How to Build a Creative Team, Develop Great Morale, and Improve Bottom-line Performance*, James Autry (2001) describes a servant leader being a resource to their followers. Autry (2001) suggests that by using actions such as being authentic, vulnerable, accepting, present and useful, a leader will positively impact an organization’s effectiveness. Patterson (2003), on the other hand, asserts that servant leadership focuses on the leader’s virtues. As the theoretical framework of this study, a more comprehensive review of Patterson’s servant leadership constructs follows this section.

In his extensive review of the previous servant leadership models, Van Dierendonck (2011) argues that although there are many overlaps and positive characteristics in the various models, all of the models also have weaknesses. The large number of characteristics, constructs, and attributes can be confusing and overwhelming. By combining the various conceptual models with empirical evidence measured by multiple servant leadership assessments, Van Dierendonck (2011) narrowed the 40-plus servant leadership characteristics from the different conceptual models down to just six characteristics to form an operationalized definition of servant leadership (Figure 5).
According to Van Dierendonck (2011), servant leaders:

1. empower and develop people,
2. show humility,
3. are authentic,
4. accept people for who they are (interpersonal acceptance),
5. provide direction, and
6. are stewards who work for the good of the whole.


Servant leadership has many similarities to other leadership models, including the models previously outlined. Many believe servant leadership and transformational leadership are the most closely aligned among the models as they both encourage leaders and followers to “raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality” (Farling,
Winston & Stone, 1999). The main differentiation between the two models is that the servant leaders’ main purpose is to serve others first, while the transformational leaders’ main interest is in that of the organization (Bass, 2000; Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2004). As illustrated in Figure 6, both servant leadership and transformational leadership put a strong emphasis on valuing people, mentoring, and empowering followers through trust, vision and integrity. Servant leaders are often seen as weak or soft; however, they are every bit as ambitious in pursuing their goals as transformational leaders (Grant, 2014; Gandolfi & Stone, 2018). Using transformational leadership theory as a foundation, Patterson’s (2003) study seeks to present servant leadership as a logical extension of transformational leadership theory.

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**Note:** Functional attributes in italic print – accompanying attributes in regular print.
Patterson’s Servant Leadership Theoretical Framework

Patterson’s Servant Leadership Theoretical Model (2003) addresses the phenomenon unaccounted for by transformational leadership theory. According to Kuhn (1996), a new theory emerges when a theory does not explain all the phenomena it was originally intended to explain. Patterson (2003) asserts that phenomena such as altruism to followers and humility are not addressed in other leadership theories, including transformational leadership theory, thus affirming the need for a new theory. Servant leadership theory is further distinguished by Patterson (2003) as it focuses on the follower rather than on the organization, as transformational leadership does. Focusing on the “how” of servant leadership, Patterson’s (2003) model outlines seven distinct servant leadership constructs: agapao love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment and service.

According to Patterson (2003), servant leadership is a virtuous theory as the leader is guided by virtues within. Kennedy (1995) describes virtue theory as doing the right things in a given situation while focusing on one’s moral character. Virtues are the characteristics and mindsets one possesses and uses to interact with others. Many scholars affirm the need for virtuous leadership in today’s organizations (Hacket & Wang, 2012; Caldwell, Hasan & Smith, 2015).

Patterson’s Constructs of Servant Leadership

Patterson’s (2003) Servant Leadership Theoretical Model (Figure 7) is shaped by extensive research on the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of leaders and illustrates the
relationship between servant leader and follower. The model consists of seven servant-leader constructs, defined by Patterson (2003) as “The component virtues that lead to generate and support a service orientation of others.” The model is processional in nature, beginning with the heart of Patterson’s model, agapao love, and ending with the last item on his list, service.

![Diagram of the Model of Constructs](image)


Agapao love. Love is the foundational value for all other values to follow (Patterson, 2003; Winston, 2002). As her model illustrates, Patterson’s model begins with the cornerstone of the servant leader, agapao love, and is therefore considered an independent variable influencing the proceeding constructs (Ayers, 2008). The term love can often be confusing as there are multiple terms and contexts, including sexual love, brotherly love, and self-sacrificing love. Greek in origin, agapao love refers to a moral love, doing the right thing for the right reasons (Winston, 2002).

Although many critics argue there is no place in leadership or the work environment for love, many ascertain that love is, in fact, at the heart of leadership. In his book Lead from the Heart, Mark Crowley (2011) asserts that love has a significant impact on human achievement and influences motivation and performance in the work
environment. When speaking to what type of leaders followers want to follow, Kouzes & Posner (2006) argue that followers want to follow the leaders who show genuine affection, adding, “Love is definitely not too strong a word to use for how the best leaders feel about their constituents and how their constituents feel about these leaders.”

Similarly, Winston (2002) calls on organizations to see their employees as “hired hearts,” not “hired hands.” In the highly regarded book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey (1990) suggests those who are seeking to lead and influence others are required to have unconditional love within their heart. These leadership theorists are but a small example of those who put the love of the leader at the center of effective and worthwhile leadership.

Agapao love is at the heart of servant leadership. Russell & Stone (2002) argue that servant leaders love unconditionally by showing genuine care for their followers. In addition, Gunn (2002) suggests that followers' feelings of gratitude and compassion are a result of a servant leader exhibiting love and leading with feeling. By leading with agapao love, servant leaders focus first on their people, followed by their people’s talents, and finally how these talents benefit the organization (Winston, 2002).

**Humility.** Second only to agapao love, Patterson (2003) identifies humility as an integral construct of servant leadership. In his autobiography, *Gandhi: An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Gandhi states,

The seeker after truth should be humbler than the dust. The world crushes the dust under its feet, but the seeker after truth should so humble himself that even the dust could crush him. Only then, and not till then, will he have a glimpse of truth.
While the world has been inspired by the humility of many recognizable servant leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and Mother Teresa, few organizational leaders are recognized for their humility. In fact, organizational and business leaders over the years have often been viewed as narcissistic in nature, having all the answers, managing from the top down, and glory-seeking. Fortunately, the shift from centric, autocratic, and self-serving leadership to leading and serving others through humility is materializing as the leadership standard among scholars (Sinek, 2014; Kouzes & Posner, 2011; Collins, 2005; Covey, 2002).

In his pivotal study, detailed in his book, Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don’t, Collins (2001) found that the leaders who consistently outperformed and led their companies from “good to great” were ones who combined “humility with fierce resolve.” Referring to these exceptional leaders as “Level 5 leaders,” Collins described them as “low-key” with a focus on the good of the company, not themselves. Using the metaphor of a window and mirror, Collins (2005) explained that Level 5 leaders take personal responsibility when things are not going well and credit others for the successes.

Humility is an ongoing process of achieving accurate self-awareness, appreciating and recognizing the strengths of others, and modeling an openness to learning (Owens, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2013; Kouzes & Posner, 2011). Additionally, it is the ability to keep one’s accomplishments and talents in perspective and to focus on others rather than oneself (Sandage & Wiens, 2001; Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015; Sinek, 2014). This does not mean that leaders are passive or lack ambition. On the contrary, leaders who lead with humility are ambitious and visionary, continually striving for the good of
the company (Caldwell, Ichiho & Anderson, 2017; Collins, 2005). They do so, however, with the resolve that they themselves may never be recognized for their efforts.

**Altruism.** Leading with altruism, seeking the best interest of others, is imperative to the servant leaders’ mentality (Patterson, 2003). Altruism is demonstrating unselfish concern for the welfare of another, even with a risk or sacrifice against one’s personal self-interest. It involves deriving personal pleasure from helping and seeking what’s best for others, often with an attitude of humility, modesty, and selflessness (DeYoung, 2000; Kaplan, 2000; Monroe, 1994; Patterson, K. 2003). In his book *Give and Take*, Grant (2014) provides examples of altruistic leadership throughout history. Most notable is his account of Abraham Lincoln, who many believe was the greatest president of the United States. Upon election, President Lincoln appointed his electoral adversaries to his cabinet, stating that they were the most educated and experienced. Although many would have avoided putting their adversaries into leadership roles, Lincoln rebuked this line of thinking, stating, “I had no right to deprive the country of their services.”

Kaplan (2000) describes altruism as personal sacrifice, selflessly helping others with no expectation of personal gain. While DeYoung (2000) agrees with altruism being a selfless act and making a personal sacrifice, he also believes that altruism includes the personal satisfaction of helping others. Grant (2014) illustrates this concept by providing examples of current leaders with an altruistic mindset. LinkedIn founder Reid Hoffman shares, “It seems counterintuitive, but the more altruistic your attitude, then the more benefits you will gain from the relationship.” Whether or not personal gain is achieved through giving, scholars agree that servant leaders put the interest of others before their own, often sacrificing personal benefit and without the expectation of anything in return (Patterson, 2003; Northouse, 2013).
Vision. In business, vision is typically in reference to the organization’s vision and goals. Vision provides the meaning and the purpose for an organization (Nanus, 2002). However, for servant leadership, vision is not focused on the organization, but rather on the individuals within it (Patterson, 2003). Vision is created by using the individual’s gifts and talents. The leader inspires followers to use their gifts and talents to become leaders themselves.

Rather than working on an organizational goal for the future, the servant leader develops and supports the members of the organization to achieve a shared vision. Kouzes & Posner (2006) concur, stating, “What people really want to hear is not the leader’s vision. They want to hear about their own aspirations. They want to hear how their dreams will come true and their hopes will be fulfilled. They want to see themselves in the picture of the future that the leader is painting."

In their studies, Kouzes & Posner (2006) found that a forward-looking orientation is second only to honesty as the most desired attribute of a leader. Forward-looking, however, goes beyond creating an idiosyncratic vision statement for others to follow. Servant leaders develop a shared vision by establishing a common purpose or “why we do what we do.” They inspire others by passionately communicating what they believe and creating a sense of belonging (Sinek, 2009). Through their relationships, servant leaders learn the desires and ambitions of others and create alignment of individual hopes and a collective vision, thus focusing their service on the individuals of the organization, not the organization itself. By focusing their concerns on those of their followers and creating conditions that promote the wellbeing of those followers, servant leaders naturally facilitate the realization of a shared vision (Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2004).
**Trust.** Leadership is built on a foundation of trust. It is the glue that holds teams and organizations together (Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Brown, 2018). Trust is an essential element for organizations and individuals within the organization to thrive. The number one thing that can change an organization from having endless possibilities to one of failure and despair is a lack of trust (Covey & Conant, 2016). Trust is not earned or developed overnight. It is the result of stacking and layering small moments and reciprocal vulnerability over time (Brown, 2018). Although there is an endless list of factors that contribute to the development of trust, most accounts identify vulnerability and dependability as the key factors to creating and sustaining an environment or culture of trust.

A leader’s focus and priority should be on building trust rather than performance. Performance will always follow when trust is prioritized; however, when the priority is placed on performance, the culture will certainly suffer (Sinek, 2019). In his book *The Infinite Game*, Sinek (2019) illustrates this example with the Navy SEALS. Considered by many to be among the highest-performing individuals in the U.S. military, Navy SEALS are the elite of our armed forces. However, the Navy does not prioritize performance over trust. Contrarily, when evaluating SEAL candidates, the Navy prefers to select individuals with high trust and medium performance over those with lower trust and higher performance.

Organizations with higher levels of trust outperform organizations with lower levels of trust. Citing several studies, Covey & Conan (2016) found the companies that were outperforming others identified trust between managers and employees as their primary defining characteristic. Gardener et al. (2005) also found that trust in leadership increased job performance among followers, resulting in sustained organizational
performance. Understanding the impact trust has on individual and organizational performance is critical for any leader as they develop their trust-building proficiency.

For trust to develop, individuals need to feel safe. They need to know they can make mistakes and take risks without being penalized. Leaders can create a safe environment by modeling vulnerability and encouraging it in others (Brown, 2018; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Sinek, 2019; Van Dierendonck, 2011). When they see leaders demonstrate vulnerability by taking risks, taking ownership of their actions, and humbly acknowledging that they themselves do not have all the answers, followers begin to feel safe to demonstrate vulnerability as well. Followers also need to be able to depend on their leaders to do what they say they will. Leaders need to keep their commitments, deliver results, and keep confidences (Covey & Conant, 2016; Brown, 2018).

**Empowerment.** In addition to vulnerability and dependability, servant leaders foster trust by empowering others. Followers of servant leaders are empowered to be part of the decision-making process and are trusted to do their work (Autry, 2001; Patterson, 2003). By empowering others, the leader cultivates a culture of trust, resulting in sustained individual and organizational performance. In addition to being considered the “Father of Servant Leadership,” Greenleaf is also considered among many to be the “Father of the Empowerment Movement” (Patterson, 2003). Servant leadership and empowerment are intertwined. You cannot have one without the other.

Servant leaders’ satisfaction comes from developing others to pursue their own path and in turn inspiring others to do the same (Patterson, 2003). They do this by relinquishing power to others in a safe and supportive environment. Employees who are given freedom to make their own decisions are more confident and aligned to the outcome. Kouzes & Posner (2006) repeatedly found this to be true, indicating that the
best predictor of a project’s success is whether the employees were assigned to it or if they volunteered.

Empowering others through distributed leadership is far more effective than the top-down, hierarchical model. A servant leader’s goal is to develop many leaders at all levels throughout the organization (Russell, 2001) by capitalizing on everyone’s strengths, not just the ones at the top (Spears & Lawrence, 2002). Although some naysayers may assume everyone in the organization gets to go around and do whatever they want, empowerment is, in actuality, accompanied by a high degree of accountability (George, Sims, McLean & Mayer, 2007). Servant leaders balance empowering their followers with supporting them and their interests (Patterson, 2003).

**Service.** Servant leaders are first and foremost servants (Greenleaf, 1977). In what is revered as the foundational quote of servant leadership, Greenleaf (1970) describes servant leadership as, “A leader is a servant first. It begins with the natural feeling one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead.” Servant leaders have the desire to serve others, and the individual’s wellbeing is the servant leader’s priority and focus. In their book *A Leader’s Legacy*, Kouzes & Posner (2006) suggest that leaders who serve others leave the most lasting legacies. This is not because servant leaders want to be idolized or remembered for their greatness. In fact, servant leaders believe their greatest successes are the achievements of the followers they serve.

Serving others can have a long-lasting individual and collective impact. When takers take, someone always loses; however, when leaders who serve succeed, it creates a ripple effect of success throughout the organization (Grant, 2014). Leaders who serve are often seen as soft, unambitious, and easily walked on. On the contrary, in his research on
high performers, Grant (2014) discovered that the top performers were “givers”:

“Successful givers are every bit as ambitious as takers...they simply have a different way of pursuing their goals.” Servant leaders genuinely care about their followers, and put those followers’ needs, wants, and desires above the leader’s own. By leading with agapao love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, and empowerment, a servant leader is a role model to others resulting in an organizational climate of service (Patterson, 2003).

**Leadership in K-12 Education**

Effective leadership is as essential in the public sector as it is in the private sector. American public school districts have the responsibility of developing our future generations to be responsible, engaged citizens, equipped to compete at a global level. Leaders of public education are tasked to transform underperforming schools while navigating a complex system of increased accountability with decreasing resources. Effective district leadership has been proven to have a positive effect on student achievement (Lois et. al., 2010; Marzano & Waters, 2009). Therefore, it is imperative for public school districts to distinguish contributing leadership factors of high-performing school districts (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Leithwood & Azah, 2017) in order for Americans to compete and prosper globally.

American students continue to perform below those of other advanced industrial countries. Although there has been an increased focus on student performance and accountability due to national reforms such as No Child Left Behind (2002) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), data from The United States Department of Education (2019) ranks American students 15th out of 54 countries in math and 11th in science. Furthermore, Singapore, Ireland, and Norway outperform the United States in
reading (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Nationally, significant gaps continue to grow among American students. According to the United States Department of Education: The Condition of Education 2019 Report, school dropout rates for Hispanic students are double those of White students and 60% percent higher for Black students. California is no exception to the disparity of achievement. According to the California School Dashboard (2019), English learners, students with disabilities, and socio-economically disadvantaged students also perform significantly below standard. Educators are faced with more challenges than ever before. Districts are now tasked with meeting new rigorous standards for all students and eliminating achievement gaps, all despite continually diminishing resources (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). As the nation continues to “lose ground” to other countries in spite of attempts at national reform (Fullan, 2010), the need for effective school improvement strategies is critical to our future success.

In his book The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization, Peter Senge (1990) indicates that the most successful corporation of the future will be a learning organization. Education reformers concur that school improvement depends on school districts behaving as learning organizations where teachers and administrators are continually expanding their knowledge and capabilities (DuFour, 1997; Fullan, 1993). According to DuFour (1997), learning organizations demonstrate the following characteristics: are focused on results, learning is job-embedded, and a culture of continuous improvement and learning permeates throughout the district at all levels.
School districts are traditionally organized in a hierarchical structure overseen by an elected Board of Directors. The role of the Board is to establish goals for the organization, develop policies, and hire the superintendent. As the CEO of the organization, the superintendent oversees and ensures implementation of the policies and actions to achieve the organizational goals. The district is typically separated into two areas of operations: instruction and business. Within these areas are departments to support finances, personnel, instruction, operations, facilities, nutritional services, curriculum, professional learning, student services, special programs, and technology. The layers in the structure and number of departments vary greatly based on the size of the district. No matter the position, however, in a learning organization all members of the district office should be focused on a continuous cycle of learning. As research indicates, student achievement is influenced by the effective strategies the district office implements (Marzano & Waters, 2009; Louis et al., 2010; Mourshed, Chijioke, & Barber, 2010). Therefore, as the organization’s leader, the superintendent’s primary focus needs to be creating the conditions for adult learning that leads to higher student performance (DuFour & Marzano, 2011).

**K-12 Public School District Superintendent**

School district superintendents are the chief executive officers of their organizations. Their role is complex as they lead their organizations as public servants in an ever-changing landscape. The responsibilities of a school district superintendent are vast and diverse. In addition to ensuring that all students are learning at high levels, school district superintendents are responsible for maintaining fiscal solvency, implementing district policies, and ensuring compliance with federal and state regulations. This, coupled with the continual effort to navigate an often contentious
political climate, is resulting in high superintendent turnover and district instability (Hilliard & Newsome, 2013). Superintendent effectiveness, behaviors and retention have been shown to influence student performance (Hough, 2014; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Plotts & Gutmore, 2014); however, effective leaders need time to implement sustainable reform (Fullan, 2002).

In 1987, Secretary of Education William Bennett publicly referred to the school district administration as “bloated educational bureaucracy”, or “the blob,” blaming districts for the many problems occurring at schools (Marzano & Waters, 2009). Bennett further explains, “It is full of people and organizations dedicated to protecting established programs and keeping things just the way they are. Administration talk of reform even as they are circling the wagons to fend off change, or preparing to outflank your innovation…” (Bennett, Finn & Cribb, 1999). Contradictory research suggests, however, that school districts, particularly superintendents, can positively influence student performance (Bredseson, 1995; Kowalski & Brunner, 2005; Marzano & Waters, 2009).

In their review of seven studies, Petersen and Barnett (2005) found similarities in behaviors of superintendents of high-performing school districts, including developing collaborative goals, evaluating the effectiveness of instruction, and continually monitoring results. Similarly, in his study of school boards and superintendents, Shelton (2010) found that the time superintendents focused on instructional activities influenced student achievement in mathematics. Quite possibly the most significant study indicating a positive correlation between superintendent and student achievement is the meta-analysis study conducted by Marzano & Waters (2009). In their study, they found specific superintendent behaviors, defined autonomy, and superintendent tenure to
influence student achievement. The superintendent behaviors Marzano & Waters (2009) found to have a statistically significant correlation with student achievement are:

1. Ensuring collaborative goal-setting
2. Establishing non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction
3. Creating board alignment with and support of district goals
4. Monitoring achievement and instruction goals
5. Allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction

In addition to the above behaviors, Marzano & Waters (2009) found that the longevity of the superintendent also played a role in student achievement, possibly even as early as two years into a superintendent’s tenure. Unfortunately, the superintendent position suffers from high turnover rates. The average time a superintendent stays at a district is between three and five years (Hilliard & Newsome, 2013), while 70% of large district superintendents leave within the first three years (Sparks, 2012).

Although the superintendent has many roles and responsibilities, the priority should be devoted to ensuring a culture of learning. As research indicates, a focus on collaboration, goal-setting, and instruction yields results. Effective superintendents do not work alone. They recognize district success is the collective effort, commitment and belief of all. By fostering a culture of collaboration focused on results, superintendents create a school environment where teacher and student learning thrive.

**Culture of High Student Performance**

As in all organizations, culture is the foundation and glue of a school district. School and district culture is shaped by the shared beliefs, values, norms and traditions of the people who make up the community (Deal & Petersen, 2016). Culture influences the way people feel, think, and act and has a powerful impact on teacher and student
performance (DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Eaker & Keating, 2012; Fullan, 2011; Leithwood & Azah, 2017). High-performing school districts are learning organizations with a collaborative culture with a relentless focus on results for all students.

The culture that permeates a high-performing school district is an “all means all” belief. It is the collective belief that all students can successfully achieve by the efforts of all. A culture committed to building the collective capacity of staff to fulfill the purpose of the district does not take away from the significance of the individual educator, but rather validates the job-embedded professional learning needed for continuous improvement (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). To create the conditions for high-performing collaborative teams to be successful, leaders need to ensure teams have time to collaborate and the resources to collaborate effectively (DuFour & Fullan, 2013).

In learning organizations, collaborative cultures allow opportunities for learning and growing without judgement or fear (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). With this culture, trust exists as educators take risks and share their mistakes. Educators collaborate on best practices and learn from each other. Referred to as collective efficacy and professional learning communities, education reformers agree that these are among the most powerful cultural components for improving teaching and learning (DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Fullan, 2011; Louis et al., 2010).

**Collective Efficacy**

When teachers, schools, and school districts believe collectively that they can positively affect student learning, they do just that. This belief, known as collective teacher efficacy (CTE) or collective efficacy (CE), exists in the culture of high-performing schools and school districts. At the teacher level, collective teacher efficacy refers to the shared perception of educators that together they can “organize and execute
the courses of action required to have a positive effect on students” (Goddard, Hoy & Hoy, 2004). At the organizational or district level, “perceived collective efficacy reflects a teaching faculty’s belief in its collective ability to carry out teaching tasks that promote student achievement” (Adams & Forsyth, 2006). Collective efficacy at all levels throughout a school district has proven to influence student performance.

Stanford University psychologist Albert Bandura (1977) discovered a pattern where teams who believed in each other’s abilities seemed to result in greater success. Bandura defined this “collective efficacy” as “a group’s shared belief in its conjoint capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment” (Bandura, 1997). However, the interest surrounding collective efficacy in an educational context originated with Bandura’s (1993) findings of perceived collective efficacy and student achievement having a greater link than the relation of socio-economic status and student achievement. This discovery fostered the pursuit of many scholars and researchers to further uncover the correlation of collective efficacy and student performance (Eells, 2011; Goddard et al., 2015; Sandoval, Challoo & Kupczynski, 2011; Hattie, 2016).

In 2011, Sandoval et al. found that low-socioeconomic-status middle schools from schools with high collective efficacy performed well despite their economic disadvantage. Similarly, Goddard et al. (2015) found that collective efficacy positively influenced student achievement regardless of student background or previous achievement levels. In her meta-analysis of 26 studies related to collective efficacy and student achievement, Rachel Eells (2011) found a strong correlation between collective teacher efficacy and student achievement among all subject areas. It is also noteworthy that, in his Visible Learning research, Hattie (2016) ranked collective teacher efficacy at
the top of his list of factors influencing student achievement while indicating that collective teacher efficacy is three times more reliable than socioeconomic status at predicting student achievement. In addition to student achievement, Donohoo (2018) found significant evidence that collective efficacy is associated with greater job satisfaction and less burnout from teachers as well as positive attitudes toward teaching students with special education needs.

Collective efficacy has a positive impact on a school and district’s culture. Schools and districts where high levels of collective efficacy exist see greater results and have more fulfilled teachers. Contrarily, school systems with low collective efficacy see failure as the students’ fault, resulting in satisfaction with the status quo and lower performance (Donohoo et al., 2018). Given the abundance of research demonstrating the positive influence collective efficacy has on student performance, school and district leaders should be well-advised to develop and sustain a culture of collective efficacy in their schools and districts.

The most significant influence shaping collective efficacy is “evidence of impact” or “mastery experiences” (Goddard et al., 2015; Donohoo et al., 2018). The more teachers succeed, the more confident they will become. As a leader, therefore, it is essential to continually direct teachers to the link between their practice and student learning. Other actions that foster collective efficacy include creating shared experiences such as vicarious experiences and social persuasion (Donohoo & Katz, 2017; Hattie, 2009; Fullan, 2010). When team members see other members of their team tackle challenges successfully, they are more optimistic about their own performance and persuaded to rise to the challenge themselves. Creating shared experiences requires
structured collaboration with high levels of trust such as that of professional learning communities (PLCs).

**Professional Learning Communities**

Collective efficacy and professional learning communities go hand-in-hand. Both are critical to the establishment and maintenance of a culture focused on learning. Many theorists suggest that a strong professional learning community needs to exist to create an environment for collective efficacy to flourish (Goddard et al., 2015; Voelkel & Chrispeels; 2017; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008) while others indicate collective efficacy is a predictor to professional learning communities (Gray & Summers, 2015; Rosenholtz, 1989). The collective results of learning organizations who have a shared belief in their abilities to influence student performance and a structure and support systems to do so, unequivocally have positive results.

The term “professional learning community” derives from the business term “learning organization”. In the 1980s, both the corporate world and the education world began to focus on the influence of the work environment on workers (Hord, 1997). In her study of 78 schools, Susan Rosenhotlz (1989) applied this thinking to teachers and found that the schools focused on learning were characterized by “collective commitments to student learning in collaborative settings.” Studies found that teachers were collaborating with peers only three percent of their day, while by contrast, other professions typically collaborated and engaged in teamwork significantly more throughout their day (Archbald, 2016). Advocates of professional learning organizations saw the need to remove the barrier of working in isolation and develop structures to support collaboration. The shift from teaching in isolation to learning collectively became the newest trend in education with the tagline “professional learning communities”.
Significant momentum for professional learning communities occurred as a result of Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker’s publication of *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement* (1998). In their book, DuFour and Eaker describe a developed professional learning community as having a collective mission, vision, values and goals. With a collective focus on learning while constantly engaging in inquiry of best practice, professional learning teams have systems and processes to promote continuous improvement and have a relentless focus on results (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

Although professional learning communities have been a practice in learning organizations for decades, there is no universally accepted definition. However, most scholars agree that central to the definition is teacher examination of practice to improve student learning (Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017). Morriseey (2003) asserts that a professional learning community defines itself thus: “A school that operates as such engages the entire group of professionals in coming together for learning within a supportive, self-created community.” Meanwhile, DuFour et al. (2010) define professional learning communities as, “A group of educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research in order to achieve better results for the students they serve.”

An abundant body of literature indicates that professional learning communities contribute to an increase in educator effectiveness and student performance (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 1997; Rosenholtz, 1989; Fullan, 1993; Reeves, 2006; Schmoker, 2004). In her three-year study, Phillips (2003) found a dramatic increase in standardized test scores of middle-school students upon implementation of professional learning communities. Similarly, Hugues and Kritsonis (2007) found in their three-year study of
64 schools that students who attended schools with PLCs outperformed students who attended schools without PLCs. In addition to student achievement, many studies reveal that professional learning communities increase teacher effectiveness. Professional learning communities positively impact the use of formative assessment (Jones, Geant, Robertson, & Robert, 2013), improve instructional practices and strategies (Mintzes, Marcum, Messerschmidt-Yates & Mark, 2013), and increase the development of teacher-created curriculum and assessments (Williams, 2013).

Not all schools and organizations, however, experience positive results from professional learning community implementation (DuFour & Reeves, 2016; DuFour & Fullan, 2013). Ill-defined objectives, lack of time and support, and low staff morale can be detrimental to implementation efforts (Archibald, 2016). Creating and sustaining professional learning communities requires significant cultural shifts; therefore, time and attention needs to be focused on creating safe environments for teachers to take risks and share vulnerability about how they themselves and their students are performing. By building the capacity of educators to function as members of an effective professional learning community, collective efficacy can flourish and lead to substantive school improvement (DuFour & Fullan, 2013).

**Summary**

Despite the attempts at reform, our schools, overall, are failing. As a nation, we continue to have significant gaps for students of color, English learners, socio-economically disadvantaged students, and students with disabilities (California Dashboard, 2019; United States Department of Education, 2019). Although there are pockets of high performance, many districts across the country are underperforming. Studies of high-performing school districts, however, provide insight to proven factors
that contribute to their success. The impact of collective efficacy and professional learning communities on student performance is well-documented (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 1997; Rosenholtz, 1989; Fullan, 1993; Reeves, 2006; Schmoker, 2004). Additionally, some research exists linking student performance with district leadership behaviors such as goal-setting and monitoring achievement (Marzano & Waters, 2009). However, the literature review revealed minimal evidence of the leadership characteristics school district leaders practiced to successfully develop a culture rich in collective efficacy and professional learning communities.

Research shows servant leadership as an effective leadership model (Collins, 2001; Covey, 2002; Marzano et al., 2005; Autry, 2001; Sinek, 2019). Furthermore, Patterson (2003) asserts servant leadership as a virtuous model comprising the following seven constructs: agapao love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service. The literature review revealed, however, minimal research on the seven constructs and their impact on a superintendent’s performance, particularly agapao love, altruism, and service.

The review of the literature focused on the theoretical framework of this study, Patterson’s (2003) Servant Leadership Model and the impact superintendents have on establishing a culture of high performance. Despite the information, the review revealed the need for further research on the impacts the seven servant leadership constructs have on a superintendent’s ability to establish and sustain a culture of high performance. Further studies concerning superintendent’s use of the constructs could also be conducted in different environments. These studies may be beneficial to school superintendents in their quest to develop cultures of high student performance in their districts. These
studies may also be beneficial to school boards to use in their selection process of hiring a superintendent to lead their district.

**Synthesis Matrix**

A Synthesis Matrix (Appendix A) was developed by the researcher to organize the review of literature. Variables included leadership models, servant leadership theory, Patterson’s (2003) Servant Leadership Constructs and K-12 education. References used in this review of literature consists of peer-reviewed journals, books, scholarly articles, and dissertations.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This qualitative phenomenological study described the perception on the part of superintendents of high-performing school districts of the impact Patterson’s (2003) servant leadership constructs have on student performance. The study explores the lived experience of superintendents for each of Patterson’s (2003) seven constructs: agapao love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service. This qualitative research method was used because it attempts to gain a deeper understanding of superintendents’ lived experience (Patton, 2015). The chapter details the rationale for the research design, population, sample size, instrumentation, collection of data and delimitations of the study.

The chapter begins with the purpose statement and research questions designed by the thematic team. Following the purpose statement and research questions, the research design to accomplish the purpose of the study is described (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The methodology section includes the population, target population, the process used to determine the research sample and the instrument used in data collection. The chapter then details the data collection and analysis methods used in the study. To illustrate the steps taken to increase validity and reliability, an outline of the limitations is included. Finally, an overall summary of the methodology used in the study concludes the chapter.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and describe K-12 public school superintendents’ perceived impact of the seven servant leadership constructs established by Patterson (2003) on establishing a culture of high performance.
**Research Question**

What is the impact of Patterson’s (2003) seven servant leadership constructs on establishing a culture of high performance as perceived by superintendents of high-achieving public school districts in California?

**Sub-Questions**

1. What is the impact of the agapao leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?
2. What is the impact of the humility leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?
3. What is the impact of the altruism leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?
4. What is the impact of the vision leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?
5. What is the impact of the trust leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?
6. What is the impact of the empowerment leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?
7. What is the impact of the service leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?

**Research Design**

The methodology of this qualitative phenomenological study will be to explore and describe superintendents’ perceived impact of Patterson’s (2003) seven servant leadership constructs on establishing a culture of high student performance in K-12
school districts in California. The thematic team conferred and discussed the best approach for the study; both qualitative and mixed-methods approaches were considered. Since the intent of this study was to uncover and understand the experiences of a population, the thematic team concluded that a qualitative phenomenological study was the most appropriate approach to address the research question and sub-questions.

A phenomenological study describes the meaning of individuals’ lived experience of a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). This method supports the purpose of the study: to describe superintendents’ lived experiences. According to Patton (2015), a phenomenological study requires in-depth interviews with people who have direct experience to truly learn the essence of the person’s experience, not to understand why something occurred or correlate findings. As the goal of this study is to develop a description of superintendents’ perceptions of the impact of Patterson’s seven servant leadership constructs on establishing a culture of high student performance, the thematic team concluded that holding in-depth interviews using open-ended questions is the most appropriate data collection method.

**Population**

A research population is a total group that conforms to specific criteria to which results can be generalized (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In this phenomenological study, the researcher aims to describe superintendents’ perceptions of the impact of Patterson’s seven servant leadership constructs on establishing a culture of high student performance. The population for this study is superintendents of public school districts in California. School districts typically have a similar organizational structure in terms of job responsibilities and duties, including a superintendent.
For this study, superintendents included the chief executive officer of a public school district. The responsibilities of the superintendent are expansive, including but not limited to financial and staffing oversight, implementation of goals and policies, and community relations. In addition to being the instructional leader of the district, the superintendent is required to balance the needs of multiple stakeholders while also being an expert in human resources, construction, politics and finances (Webner, Jong, Campoli & Baron, 2017).

According to the California Department of Education (n.d.) website, there were 1,037 public school districts in California during the 2018-2019 school year (Table 1). These school districts provide a free public education for students residing in California. The districts vary in grade levels served. Unified districts typically serve all ages in grades kindergarten through 12, elementary districts serve students in grades kindergarten through 5 or 6, and high school districts serve students in grades 9 through 12.

Table 1: California Public School Districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Type</th>
<th>Number of Districts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unified School Districts</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary School Districts</td>
<td>528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Districts</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sampling Frame**

The sampling frame was defined as a small percentage of the total population, tapered down to participants who have specific attributes or characteristics that meet the purpose of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). For this study, the sampling frame was 89
public school superintendents from the Northern California counties of El Dorado,
Placer, Nevada, Napa, Contra Costa, San Joaquin, Alameda and Sacramento, and Los
Angeles county in Southern California who fit the criteria of leading a high-performing
K-12 district. A high-performing district is defined as a district that has demonstrated a
growth trend over the past two years as indicated by the California Dashboard in two of
the four areas of English Language Arts, Mathematics, Suspension Rate, and Graduation
Rate; or one that has high performance as evidenced by scoring in the blue or green
category for two consecutive years as indicated by the California Dashboard in two of the
four areas of English Language Arts, Mathematics, Suspension Rate, and Graduation
Rate. The study focused on public school superintendents who exhibited at least five of
the listed characteristics:

● Employed at a current K-12 district within California with a minimum of 100
  staff members.

● Evidence of leading a district of high student performance.

● A minimum of three years of experience at their current district.

● A minimum of five years of experience in the K-12 profession.

● Membership in professional associations in their field, such as ACSA.

● Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or
  association meetings.

● Willing to be a participant and agreed to the informed consent form.

Sample

The sampling for the study was defined as the group for which the findings of the
study were intended to generalize (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The sample for the
study was identified through non-probability, purposeful and convenience sampling to provide information-rich sources to address the research question (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Non-probability sampling is the most common sampling type in educational research as the researcher does not include any type of random selection from a population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Non-probability sampling is typically less costly and time-consuming than probability sampling and usually assures a high participation rate (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In this study, purposeful sampling was used to ensure that the eight participants held specific characteristics, and convenience sampling was used for ease of accessibility.

Purposeful sampling, a type of non-probability sampling, is used when the researcher selects subjects based on specific characteristics (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher selects participants based on their judgement of who will provide the best information to address the purpose of the research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). For this study, superintendents who exhibited at least five of the predetermined characteristics were sought to participate.

Another type of non-probability sampling is convenience sampling. Also known as available sampling, convenience sampling is selection of participants on the basis of their being accessible or expedient (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). For this phenomenological study, participants were selected based on location and availability to participate in the study. Both purposeful and convenience sampling allow the researcher to generalize the research outcomes to subjects who share the same characteristics as the target population. These sampling methods address the objective of understanding the
shared experiences of the target population. Figure 8 outlines the population, sampling frame and sample population for this qualitative phenomenological study.

Figure 8: Population, sample frame, and sample

In addition to selecting the type of sampling, identifying an appropriate sample size is important in interpreting the results and generalizing the conclusions of the study. The importance of the sample is in the depth of the knowledge that can be provided by the individual members, not in the total number of sample participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). According to Patton (2015), sample size should be based on expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon given the purpose of the study. The researcher selected eight as the sample size for the study. This was a sufficient sample size to explore the lived experience of California public school superintendents of high-performing districts and was consistent with the number of participants for the other thematic groups.
Sample Selection Process

For ease of accessibility, the researcher first sought out superintendents in the county in which she served, Placer County, who met the following criteria.

- Employed at a current K-12 district within California with a minimum of 100 staff members.
- Evidence of leading a district of high student performance.
- A minimum of three years of experience at their current district.
- A minimum of five years of experience in the K-12 profession.
- Membership in professional associations in their field, such as ACSA.
- Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings.
- Willing to be a participant and agreed to the informed consent form.

The researcher contacted via email the local county superintendent to identify participants who met the criteria of years of service at their current district. All 19 school district superintendents in the county, with the exception of three, have served as the superintendent of their districts for the minimum number of two to three years per the criteria. The three exceptional districts were stricken from the list of possible superintendents. The researcher then eliminated any district from the county list that did not meet size criteria: a minimum staff of 100. This resulted in a total of seven remaining district superintendents. The researcher then entered the seven remaining districts in the California School Dashboard to identify which districts met the criteria to be described as high-performing. Six of the seven districts qualified as high-performing. The purposeful
and convenience sampling method led to six Placer County superintendents who met the criteria for the study. These superintendents were added to a list of potential participants.

The researcher expanded the search to other Northern California counties including El Dorado County, Napa County, Nevada County, Contra Costa County, Alameda County, San Joaquin County and Sacramento County. For these counties, the researcher first established which districts met the high-performing criteria and were large enough to have at least 100 staff members. The researcher then emailed the superintendents of the districts, describing the research study and the criteria needed to participate. When verification was established, the superintendent was added to the list of potential participants. This resulted in a total of 18 potential participants who met the criteria of the study within the eight Northern California Counties.

In an effort to increase the number of potential participants and to expand the geographical area, the researcher reached out to a superintendent in Los Angeles County who met the criteria. In turn, the superintendent recommended five other district superintendents who met the criteria. Eight eligible superintendents were selected to participate in the study; five from Northern California and three from Southern California.

**Instrumentation**

The researcher was used as an instrument for data collection and analysis for this qualitative research through in-depth interviews. A phenomenological interview focuses on capturing the lived experience of participants by evoking anecdotal accounts and stories through informal, interactive interviews (Patton, 2015). A pitfall of interviews, however, is the potential for subjectivity and bias (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010), so measures were taken to reduce bias in the study by developing an interview protocol,
finalizing interview questions with expert researchers, and piloting a field test with experienced public school superintendents and experienced researchers.

The thematic team, along with the two faculty advisors, collectively developed semi-structured questions aligned to the research questions. Semi-structured questions are open-ended questions, specific in their intent, which allows respondents to answer individually (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The faculty advisors created working groups by assigning a group of two people to examine two of the seven constructs from Patterson’s (2003) servant leadership list. The individual groups were tasked to develop two interview questions and one probe for each construct. Probes are used to seek further clarification or elaboration and should be neutral so as to not affect the response (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The thematic team created an alignment table (Appendix C) to ensure alignment of the survey questions to the research questions. Individual groups shared their questions and probes with the larger group and were evaluated using the alignment table. This process resulted in a draft interview protocol consisting of 14 interview questions and seven probes.

The two faculty advisors, who are considered experts in qualitative research, reviewed the research protocol and approved the use of the protocol in a field test to evaluate the effectiveness of the interview questions. Each team member administered a field test to a similar population of their study. The field test also included an observer, skilled in qualitative interviews, to provide feedback on the process and questions. The thematic team brought the collective feedback back to the team, and along with the advisors, revised the questions and probes and finalized the interview protocol to be used in the research study.
**Researcher as Instrument**

The nature of this phenomenological study called for the researcher to act as the primary instrument for data collection. The researcher becomes the instrument in qualitative research when they become immersed in the environment as a method of collecting data to understand the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). For this study, the researcher conducted interviews to understand the lived experiences of the participants. The researcher has over 20 years of experience in education and is currently employed as a school superintendent within the region where the study was conducted. Based on the researcher’s experience in a similar setting, current position, and relationships, the researcher was highly aware of potential biases (Patton, 2015). As a result, a field test was administered to address the potential bias.

**Field Test**

An interview field test, or pilot test, is an essential step in preparing for research as it provides feedback and checks for bias in the questions, interviewer and procedures (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher administered a field test to an experienced educator comparable to the population of the study using the agreed upon questions (Appendix D) established by the thematic team and faculty advisors. Although the field test participant met the criteria of the study, the participant was not part of the study. During the field test, a skilled qualitative researcher observed the interview and captured notes providing feedback on the length and ease of the interview and alignment of the questions. The researcher also sought similar feedback from the interviewee. A summary of the feedback was shared with the faculty advisors, who collected the feedback from all thematic team members. The team met to review the feedback and revised the interview protocol accordingly. The finalized interview protocol (Appendix
B) was used to conduct qualitative research interviews with six superintendents of high-performing public school districts.

**Validity**

Validity is the trustworthiness of the data of a study (Roberts, 2010). Qualitative researchers implement various methods to establish validity of their study, including triangulation, member checking, low-inference descriptors, mechanically recording data, participant review, and peer debriefing (Creswell, 2005; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Several of these strategies were used by the researcher to increase the validity of the data.

An instrument is valid to the extent it accurately measures what it intends to measure (Patten, 2012). The interview questions for this study were aligned to the research questions and Patterson’s (2003) seven servant leadership constructs. Additionally, the interview protocol was created by multiple researchers and approved by two expert qualitative researchers. Collectively, these strategies increased the validity of the interview protocol.

In addition to the validity strategies employed for the interview protocol, accuracy of interview records was established by video-recording all interviews via Zoom. Each participant was also provided their transcript to review for accuracy. If inaccuracies existed, modifications were made by the participant. McMillan & Schumacher (2010) indicate that these processes of mechanically recording data and participant review can be valuable strategies to increase the quality of the data.

**Reliability**

An instrument is considered reliable if it provides consistent results (Patten, 2014). In this qualitative study, the researcher was the main instrument for data collection. To increase reliability, the interview protocol was developed by eight
researchers and approved by two expert qualitative researchers. A field test was conducted by all eight members of the thematic team to establish reliability of the data collection instrument. Each interview was conducted using the protocol and the researcher did not veer from the script.

**Data Collection**

Qualitative research requires direct interaction with participants through observations, interviews, and the study of artifacts (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The data collection for this phenomenological study was through in-depth, semi-structured interviews aimed at understanding the lived experiences of public-school superintendents of high-performing school districts. The interview protocol and questions (Appendix B) were designed collectively by the thematic team and approved by the two faculty advisors, ensuring alignment to the research questions and Patterson’s (2003) seven servant leadership constructs. During interviews, facial expressions and gestures were noted of participants and were included in the data as applicable. In addition to the interviews, artifacts were collected and compiled from the study participants through searching the districts’ websites and social media accounts. Interviews, observations, and artifacts supported triangulation of research findings.

Before any data was collected, the researcher completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Program Human Subjects Research course and was granted a certificate of completion (Appendix E). In addition, the researcher applied for and received approval (Appendix F) from the Brandman University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure the rights of the participants of the study were protected. Upon approval from IRB, the researcher reached out via email to participants who met the criteria. For those participants who replied in agreement to participate in the study, a
follow-up email was sent. The follow-up email included an invitation to participate in
the study, a copy of the Brandman University Bill of Rights (Appendix G), the IRB
informed consent (Appendix H), and potential dates and times for the interview.

Each interview was conducted via Zoom, and all interviews were recorded and
transcribed. Interviews ranged in length from 37 to 57 minutes. The interviewer adhered
to the interview protocol to avoid directing a response from the interviewee. Probes were
used in all interviews to evoke depth in responses. Following the interviews,
transcriptions were shared with participants to affirm validity of the data. All interview
recordings and transcriptions were stored on a password-protected computer and will be
destroyed after three years from the completion of the study.

Data Analysis

Data in qualitative studies is typically quite extensive due to the nature of the data
collection. Pages of interview transcripts and field notes need to be analyzed, interpreted
and summarized. Qualitative researchers make meaning of the data through a process of
inductive analysis where the researcher develops categories and patterns from the specific
data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). For this qualitative study, the researcher used a
transcript of the conversation provided from the Zoom recording for eight, in-depth,
semi-structured interviews. Only the text transcription was used for the study, not the
video component of Zoom. Upon completion of all interviews, the researcher organized
responses by research question. Next, data was analyzed by coding the transcripts of each
interview using NVivo Qualitative Software. Coding refers to a phrase given to provide
meaning to a segment (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).
Intercoder Reliability

To increase validity and reliability of the data, it is important to establish intercoder consistency. According to Patton (2015), intercoder consistency is expected to assure reliability of the findings. Intercoder reliability refers to the consistency established between the scoring of different observers using the same instrument (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). A thematic team member separately coded and analyzed one of the interviews. Creswell (2005) indicates an agreement level of at least 80% is required when identifying themes from the coding process. The thematic team member reached the required 80% agreement level.

Limitations

Limitations are specific features of a study that may negatively impact the results or make it difficult to generalize (Roberts, 2010). As some limitations cannot be avoided, it is important to be transparent so individuals can determine for themselves the degree to which limitations affect the results of the study. This thematic phenomenological study was conducted by eight researchers using the same instrument and methodology and focused on leaders from high-performing educational institutions. Limitations of the study include time constraints, sample size, and researcher as an instrument of the study.

Time Constraints

In a typical year, public school district superintendents have limited time due to the responsibilities the job entails. This year, with the COVID-19 pandemic, added pressures and complexities constrain the time of superintendents even more. Because of this, keeping interviews to 60 minutes was critical; however, because of additional time constraints for superintendents, participants may have been brief in their responses, which may have compromised the results.
Sample Size

In an effort to keep data collection manageable, the thematic team agreed to a small sample size of six to eight participants. Although there is no mandatory sample size in qualitative research, McMillan & Schumacher (2010) suggest it is important to consider the depth of the knowledge obtained rather than sample size. However, the smaller the sample, the more difficult it is to generalize the findings. Even though the individual sample size was small, the thematic team interviewed over 48 participants. These interviews consisted of rich data that will contribute to the collective research on servant leadership.

Researcher as Instrument of the Study

The researcher becomes the instrument in qualitative research when they become immersed in the environment as a method of collecting data to understand the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). Researchers need to acknowledge and be transparent about their potential bias, including experiences and beliefs. The researcher should communicate neutrality and be skilled in interviewing to increase reliability. For this study, the researcher needed to acknowledge and communicate her experience as a school superintendent to reduce bias.

Summary

Chapter III presented the methodology used to gain information on the ways in which high-performing K-12 public school district superintendents perceived the impact of Patterson’s (2003) seven servant leadership constructs on the culture of high performance. The chapter commenced with the purpose and research questions, followed by details of the population, sampling frame, sample, and selection process of the sample. Information related to the instrumentation used in the study, including validity and
reliability, were also explained. Details of the data collection process and how data was
analyzed were also included in the chapter. This study was conducted with school
superintendents, while another six researchers from the thematic team conducted a
similar study, utilizing the same methodology and instruments with different populations.
Finally, limitations of the study were presented, including time, sample size, and
researcher as instrument. The findings of the study, describing high-performing K-12
public school district superintendents’ perceived impact of Patterson’s (2003) seven
servant leadership constructs on the culture of high performance, are presented in Chapter
IV.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

This qualitative phenomenological study described the perception on the part of superintendents of high-performing school districts of the impact Patterson’s (2003) servant leadership constructs have on student performance. The study explores the lived experience of superintendents for each of Patterson’s (2003) seven constructs: agapao love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service. Chapter IV reestablishes the purpose of the study, research questions, and research methods and data-collection methods used in the study. The chapter provides an in-depth analysis for each of the interview questions and concludes with a summary of the findings.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and describe K-12 public school superintendents’ perceived impact of the seven servant leadership constructs established by Patterson (2003) on establishing a culture of high performance.

Research Questions

The research question and sub-questions were designed to focus on the perceived impact Patterson’s (2003) servant leadership has on establishing a culture of high performance. The questions are as follows:

Central Question

What is the impact of Patterson’s (2003) seven servant leadership constructs on establishing a culture of high performance as perceived by superintendents of high-achieving public school districts in California?
Sub-Questions

1. What is the impact of the agapao leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?
2. What is the impact of the humility leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?
3. What is the impact of the altruism leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?
4. What is the impact of the vision leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?
5. What is the impact of the trust leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?
6. What is the impact of the empowerment leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?
7. What is the impact of the service leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?

Research Methods and Data-Collection Procedures

A phenomenological study describes the meaning of individuals’ lived experience of a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). Since the intent of this study was to uncover and understand the experiences of a population, the thematic team concluded that a qualitative phenomenological study was the most appropriate approach to address the research question and sub-questions. According to Patton (2015), a phenomenological study requires in-depth interviews with people who have direct experience to truly learn the essence of the person’s experience, not merely to understand
why something occurred or correlate findings. As the goal of this study is to develop a
description of superintendents’ perceptions of the impact of Patterson’s seven servant
leadership constructs on establishing a culture of high student performance, the thematic
team concluded that holding in-depth interviews using open-ended questions is the most
appropriate data-collection method. In addition to the interviews, artifacts were collected
and compiled from the study participants through searching the districts’ websites and
social-media accounts. Interviews, observations, and artifacts supported triangulation of
research findings.

Data Collection and Participants

Adhering to research ethics and effective research strategies are critical to
credible research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Before any data was collected, the
researcher completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Program
Human Subjects Research course and was granted a certificate of completion (Appendix
E). In addition, the researcher applied for and received approval (Appendix F) from the
Brandman University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure the rights of the
participants of the study were protected. Upon approval from IRB, the researcher
reached out via email to participants who met the criteria. For the eight participants who
replied in agreement to participate in the study, a follow-up email was sent. The follow-
up email included an invitation to participate in the study, a copy of the Brandman
University Bill of Rights (Appendix G), the IRB informed consent (Appendix H), and
potential dates and times for the interview.

Interview, Observation, and Artifact Data Collections

Qualitative research requires direct interaction with participants through
observations, interviews, and the study of artifacts (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). As
such, the nature of this phenomenological study called for the researcher to act as the primary instrument for data collection. The researcher becomes the instrument in qualitative research when they become immersed in the environment as a method of collecting data to understand the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). For this study, the researcher conducted interviews to understand the lived experiences of the participants.

A phenomenological interview focuses on capturing the lived experience of participants by evoking anecdotal accounts and stories through informal, interactive interviews (Patton, 2015). A pitfall of interviews, however, is the potential for subjectivity and bias (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010), so measures were taken to reduce bias in the study by developing an interview protocol (Appendix B) and piloting a field test with experienced public school superintendents and experienced researchers. Additionally, the interviewer adhered to the interview protocol to avoid directing a response from the interviewee. Due to COVID-19, each interview was conducted via Zoom and all interviews were recorded and transcribed. Interviews ranged in length from 37 to 57 minutes. Following the interviews, transcriptions were shared with participants to affirm validity of the data.

In addition to the responses to the interview questions, observational data was collected during each of the Zoom recorded interviews and artifacts were collected. During the interviews, observational data was documented and categorized into three communication areas to include facial expressions, body language, and expression or tone of voice. Furthermore, artifacts were collected from each of the eight participants’ district websites and social-media accounts.
Population

A research population is a total group that conforms to specific criteria to which results can be generalized (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The population for this study is superintendents of public school districts in California. School districts provide a free public education for students in transitional kindergarten through grade 12 residing in California. According to the California Department of Education (n.d.) website, there were 1,037 public school districts in California during the 2018-2019 school year. Therefore, the population for this study was the 1,037 superintendents of public school districts in California.

Sample

The sampling for the study was defined as the group for which the findings of the study were intended to generalize (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Since it is improbably difficult to conduct a qualitative study of an entire population, a sampling frame was used to narrow the participant group. The sampling frame was defined as a small percentage of the total population, tapered down to participants who have specific desired attributes or characteristics that meet the purpose of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). For this study, the sampling frame was 89 public school superintendents from nine counties. Figure 8 illustrates the population, sample frame, and sample used in the study.
The sample for the study was identified through non-probability, purposeful and convenience sampling to provide information-rich sources to address the research question (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The sample met the criteria of leading a high-performing district and of public school superintendents who exhibited at least five of the listed characteristics:

- Employed at a current K-12 district within California with a minimum of 100 staff members.
- Evidence of leading a district of high student performance.
- A minimum of three years of experience at their current district.
- A minimum of five years of experience in the K-12 profession.
- Membership in professional associations in their field, such as ACSA.
- Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings.
- Willing to be a participant and agreed to the informed consent form.

A high-performing district is defined as a district that has demonstrated a growth trend over the past two years as indicated by the California Dashboard in two of the four areas of English Language Arts, Mathematics, Suspension Rate, and Graduation Rate; or one that has high performance as evidenced by scoring in the blue or green category for two consecutive years as indicated by the California Dashboard in two of the four areas of English Language Arts, Mathematics, Suspension Rate, and Graduation Rate. Table 2 illustrates that all of the participants met the previously established criteria.

Table 2: Study Participant Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public School District Superintendent is employed at a current school district within California with a minimum of 100 staff members.</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of leading schools or districts with a culture of high performance.</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A minimum of three years of experience at their current district.</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A minimum of 5 years’ experience in the K-12 profession.</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership in professional associations in their field, such as ACSA</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Demographic Data**

Eight public school district superintendents who met the established criteria were selected to participate in the study. To maintain confidentiality, each participant was assigned a number based on the date and time their interview was conducted. Therefore,
demographic data was reported without reference to any participating individual. Of the eight participating public school district superintendents, five were from Northern California while three were from Southern California. Participants included six males and two female superintendents. Educational experience ranged from 27 to 37 years while experience as a superintendent ranged from 7 to 15 years. Table 3 represents the demographics of the eight public school district superintendents who participated in the research study.

Table 3: Demographic Data of Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years In Education</th>
<th>Years as a Superintendent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27 years</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>34 years</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30 years</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>37 years</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>37 years</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31 years</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>29 years</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35 years</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Qualitative research methods consisting of interviews, observations, and data collection were utilized to explore and describe public school district superintendents’ perceptions of the impact of Patterson’s (2003) servant leadership constructs on establishing a culture of high performance. All data collected were coded into themes.
Themes emerged from the lived experiences shared during interviews and aligned to the research questions.

**Validity and Reliability**

Several methods were implemented to establish reliability and validity of the study, including triangulation of data, development of an interview protocol, transcript review, interview field test, and intercoder reliability. This qualitative study required direct interaction with participants through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. During interviews, participants’ facial expressions and gestures were noted and included in the data. In addition to the interviews, artifacts were also collected and included in the data. Findings based on observations, interviews, and artifacts were triangulated. The interview protocol was developed by the thematic team and was approved by two expert qualitative researchers, ensuring it was aligned to the research questions. A field test was conducted utilizing the protocol and revisions made by the thematic team based on the feedback received. To ensure that the interview data was accurate, transcripts were sent to participants to confirm accuracy. Finally, a thematic team member separately coded and analyzed one of the interviews and indicated a 90% agreement level of themes from the coding process.

**Data by Research Question**

The presentation of data is organized by each of the research sub-questions used in the study. Each of the research sub-questions relates to one of the seven constructs. The central question, “What is the impact of Patterson’s (2003) seven servant leadership constructs on establishing a culture of high performance as perceived by superintendents
of high-achieving public school districts in California?” was addressed through each sub-question.

**Sub-Questions**

1. What is the impact of the agapao leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?
2. What is the impact of the humility leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?
3. What is the impact of the altruism leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?
4. What is the impact of the vision leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?
5. What is the impact of the trust leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?
6. What is the impact of the empowerment leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?
7. What is the impact of the service leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?

Figures 9 and 10 provide a visual representation of the distribution of frequencies and themes. Coding observations, interviews, and artifacts resulted in 23 themes and 616 frequencies across the seven constructs of agapao love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service. Interviews resulted in the highest number of frequencies at 570 while artifacts had 32 frequencies. The lowest number of frequencies came from observations at 14. For themes to be included in the study, they needed to be referenced
by a minimum of six (75%) of the participants. Additionally, a theme needed to represent a minimum of 20% or more of all data coded within a construct. These criteria resulted in a total number of 14 themes qualifying to be included in the study.

In addition to the 14 themes among all seven constructs, the number of themes and frequencies was also calculated. Agapao had the highest frequency with two themes and 99 frequencies, accounting for 16.1% of the data. With the second highest frequency of 96 and two themes, service accounted for 15.6% of the data. With only 0.5% difference, empowerment at 15.1% of the data had the third highest frequency at 93 and two themes. While trust had only one theme and 87 frequencies (14.1%), vision had more themes (two) but fewer frequencies at 83 (13.5%). Humility had the highest number of themes (three) with 82 frequencies (13.3%). Lastly, altruism had two themes with the lowest number of frequencies at 76 (12.3%).

Figure 9. Frequency and percentage in each construct.
The following section provides a detailed analysis of the qualitative in-depth interview data derived from the perception of eight public school district superintendents on the impact Patterson’s (2003) servant leadership constructs have on establishing a culture of high performance. For ease of reference, the analysis is organized by research sub-question and includes the thematic team’s agreed-upon definition. Themes for each construct are ordered according to the number of frequencies.

**Agapao: Research Question 1 Theme Results**

*What is the impact of the agapao leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?*

Agapao is defined as doing the right things for the right reasons and caring more for one’s followers than for the interest of the organization (Gunn, 2002; Patterson, 2003). Furthermore, when leading with agapao love, superintendents display greater
understanding, gratitude, kindness, forgiveness, and compassion (Gunn, 2002; Patterson, 2003). Findings from the interviews indicate that superintendents perceive that a pervasive culture of love and leading by example contributes to establishing a culture of high performance.

Table 4 and Figure 11 illustrate the emerging themes and frequencies for agapao love. General analysis shows 100% of participants provided examples that a permeating culture of agapao love in the organization contributes to establishing a culture of high performance. In addition, having a culture of agapao love was referenced 52 times in the interviews, one of the highest frequency counts in the study. The analysis also reveals seven of the eight superintendents suggest that modeling care by leading by example contributes to establishing a culture of high performance with a frequency of 32. All frequencies were from interviews, with zero references in observations or artifacts.

Table 4: Agapao

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/pattern</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>% based on N</th>
<th>Interview sources</th>
<th>Observation sources</th>
<th>Artifact Sources</th>
<th>Frequency of reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A culture of serving others permeates the organization</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model care for people by leading by example</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. The N for interview participants = 8.*
Figure 11. Themes and frequencies for agapao.

**A culture of serving others permeates the organization.** This theme was the most frequently referenced with 52.5% of the coded responses for the agapao construct. Trends referenced within the theme were that it takes time to develop a culture of serving others and that it requires building relationships. All participants perceived agapao as an influence on the establishment of a culture of high performance, as evidenced by their lived experiences shared in the interviews. Throughout his interview, Participant 1 referred to agapao love as a way of being rather than an event: “It can be a hard thing to put your finger on, but it’s a culture that needs to be created over time at all levels of the organization.” He continues by stating, “I think it really sets the stage for all of the great work that we do as a district and as schools.”

Participant 4 shared similar experiences of agapao in her district. Describing agapao, Participant 4 shared, “It’s almost greater than the district itself. It goes beyond
the walls of the district. How we feel about one another and how we take care of one another is almost more important than the district itself.” She also described her organization like a family stating, “It feels like it’s like a family…and with the same challenges we disagree and fight…but you know that at the end of the day we’re there for each other.”

**Model care for people by leading by example.** This theme was also highly referenced and made up 32.3% of the themes for the construct agapao. This theme, prevalent in seven of the eight interviews, shows that superintendents perceive that modeling care for people by leading by example contributes to a culture of high performance. This was highlighted in the lived experiences shared, including Participant 8’s response, “The organization is only as good as its people and unless we take care of one another, the organization will not thrive.” Participant 8 further explained that if taking care of people is a priority, then everything else, including student performance, will follow. “Our responsibility is really to take care of the people so that they take care of the programs and of course those programs meet the needs of students. If we’re taking care of one another then we have people taking care of the students.”

Trends throughout this theme include modeling, collaboration, compassion, kindness, gratitude and listening. Examples were provided throughout the interviews of superintendents modeling care for others. Participant 5 shared several examples of showing care for others, including showing gratitude by writing thank-you notes to staff for their service: “We send personalized handwritten thank you notes to them and a $5 Starbucks card. You know, the good old-fashioned way of showing appreciation and care.” Participant 5 also shared his belief that putting in more effort to meet face-to-face rather than a text or a phone call shows care and value. He also expects his
administrative team to model care by being visible and showing gratitude and care to others:

I’ve made it very personal. I’ve asked principals to do the same. I don’t want principals sending emails to teachers about an issue. If you’ve got a problem with a teacher or if you got praise for a teacher, do it in person. And, so that’s what I would say that’s probably the number one way that we demonstrate that kind of love that doing the right thing for the right reasons is by being personal.

**Humility: Research Question 2 Theme Results**

*What is the impact of the humility leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?*

For this study, humility is defined as being humble and having modesty, not to be mistaken for meekness or the absence of strength. It is a virtue characterized by one’s own talents and abilities and an outward rejection of self-interest while placing true value on the recognition and success of others (Kim, Atkinson & Yang, 1999). Findings from the interviews indicate superintendents perceive that being willing to do any job, putting the needs of others before one’s own, and demonstrating vulnerability by being honest with one’s shortcomings contribute to establishing a culture of high performance.

Table 5 and Figure 12 illustrate the emerging themes and frequencies for humility. Themes for humility are prioritized by the number of references made. It is important to note that although the theme *be willing to do any job or position* was referenced the most frequently, it had the lowest number of respondents (6). *Putting needs of others before your own* had 7 participants and was referenced 26 times while *demonstrating vulnerability by being honest with your shortcomings* had 8 participants.
and 23 references. All frequencies were from interviews with zero references in observations or artifacts.

Table 5: Humility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/pattern</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>% based on N</th>
<th>Interview sources</th>
<th>Observation sources</th>
<th>Artifact Sources</th>
<th>Frequency of reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Be willing to do any job or position</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put needs of others before your own</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate vulnerability by being honest with your shortcomings</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. The N for interview participants = 8.*
Figure 12. Themes and frequencies for humility.

**Be willing to do any job or any position.** This theme was the most frequently referenced for the construct of humility at 40.2%. The theme was referenced by 75% of the participants with a total of 33 frequencies. As a highly referenced theme, respondents perceive that being willing to do any job or position contributes to a culture of high performance. This is illustrated through the lived experiences shared during the interviews of the participants.

Superintendents expressed their desire to show others that their title or position did not make them “better than anyone else.” By jumping in when there was a need, no matter if it was putting away chairs, cleaning lunch tables, or answering phones, superintendents perceived this to demonstrate humility. As expressed by Participant 2, “You are kind of saying, I’m here. I’m willing to do this. I’m not putting myself above you. I’m going to answer phones like everyone else does.” In sharing examples of doing various jobs, Participant 2 also explained that this action also helps him understand as a leader what their job entails and what supports they need to be successful.

Participant 3 shared similar examples of the importance of showing staff that he is willing to do anything and is not better than anyone else. Describing working at a Back to School Bar-B-Que, Participant 3 shared,

I am the person that hands you your veggie patty or hamburger. So, I put on my apron, put on my gloves, and you know talk to people. How was your summer? How are your kids? Actions really show you’re no better than anybody else. It’s the idea that I won’t ask you to do something I’m not willing to do.
The lived experiences shared by superintendents of being willing to do any job or position demonstrate that no person or position is better than any other position or any person was prevalent in the interviews, as indicated by the high frequency.

**Put needs of others before your own.** This theme was the second most frequently referenced for the construct of humility at 31.7%. The theme was referenced by 80% of the participants with a total of 26 frequencies. As a highly referenced theme, respondents perceive that putting the needs of others before their own contributes to a culture of high performance. This is illustrated through the lived experiences shared during the interviews of the participants.

Trends throughout this theme include recognizing individual needs and providing support. Participant 7 shared several examples of putting the needs of staff above himself, including keeping the number of administrative and support positions minimal at the district office so the dollars could be used for teachers. “My district is very small and would love more support, but we run it on a smaller budget with less administrators and support personnel simply to have more revenue to get back to the teacher in raises. Trying to make things easier for the employees, it puts pressure on us over here.” Although this made more work for himself and other administrators, Participant 7 indicated that, in his view, this demonstration of humility positively impacts the culture of the organization.

Participant 3 indicated that if he knows others in the district are going without, he will not take something before he knows they have what they need. He shared a similar example of putting the needs of others before himself by describing the state of his office. “I could show you a few brown spots of tiles in my ceiling in my office. Well, guess
what. When they get every classroom that doesn’t have that and fixes it, then they can come fix this.” Another example he shared was around technology in that he prioritized every teacher and student having a laptop before he or another administrator could get one. The examples provided by both participants illustrate demonstrating humility by giving to students and staff over themselves.

**Demonstrate vulnerability by being honest with your shortcomings.** This theme was referenced for the construct of humility at 28%. The theme was referenced by 80% of the participants with a total of 23 frequencies. As a highly referenced theme, respondents perceive that demonstrating vulnerability by being honest with your shortcomings contributes to a culture of high performance. This is illustrated through the lived experiences shared during the interviews of the participants.

Trends throughout this theme include being honest, owning it and apologizing after getting something wrong, and being okay with not knowing all of the answers. Participant 4 expressed, “I think it’s also about being willing to say you don’t know something or being able to say that I got something wrong and be able to apologize.” Several superintendents called out humility in not knowing all the answers as a strength. Participant 1 shared, “To me it actually shows more strength than someone who’s outwardly trying to show strength and show power through their actions. I have found it to be far more effective in my time at all levels as a leader.” Participant 8 shared a similar perception, stating, “I don’t have all the answers. I’m not uncomfortable asking questions to learn. I don’t see asking questions or not knowing as a sign of weakness. I see it as a sign of strength.”
Altruism: Research Question 3 Theme Results

What is the impact of the altruism leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?

For this study, altruism is defined as demonstrating unselfish concern for the welfare of another, even at some risk or sacrifice against one’s personal self-interest. It involves deriving personal pleasure from helping and seeking what’s best for others, often with an attitude of humility, modestly, and selflessness. (DeYoung, 2000; Kaplan, 2000; Monroe, 1994; Patterson, 2003). Findings from the interviews indicate that superintendents perceive demonstrating a service mindset and prioritizing the wellbeing of students contribute to establishing a culture of high performance.

Table 6 and Figure 13 illustrate the emerging themes and frequencies for Altruism. Themes for altruism are prioritized by the number of references made. It is important to note that although the theme demonstrate a service mindset was referenced the most frequently (51.3%), it a lower number of respondents (7) compared to prioritizing the wellbeing of students, which had 8 participants and was referenced 29 times. References for the theme demonstrate a service mindset include interviews and observations, while the theme prioritize the wellbeing of students was solely referenced in interviews.

Table 6: Altruism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/pattern</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>% based on N</th>
<th>Interview sources</th>
<th>Observation sources</th>
<th>Artifact Sources</th>
<th>Frequency of reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate a service mindset</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Prioritize the wellbeing of students | 8 | 100 | 29 | 0 | 0 | 29

*Note.* The N for interview participants = 8.

Figure 13. Themes and frequencies for altruism.

**Demonstrate a service mindset.** This theme was referenced for the construct of altruism at 51.3%. The theme was referenced by 80% of the participants with a total of 39 frequencies. In a highly referenced theme, respondents perceive that demonstrating a service mindset contributes to a culture of high performance. This is illustrated through the lived experiences shared and observed during the interviews of the participants.

Trends throughout this theme include making sacrifices to serve selflessly and the resulting toll it can take. Several participants conveyed that educators go into education to serve. Participant 2 perceives performance to be linked to altruism. “You’re linking altruism to student performance and it really gets to the heart of what an effective teacher
can do.” He further notes that good teachers make a lot of sacrifices for the benefit of their students, primarily in time.

A good teacher literally kills themselves for 10 months…they have to give up many, many things to be a good teacher. That’s what altruism is. You’re actually saying I’m going to do less fun…because I have these 30 souls sitting before me that I need to educate.

Superintendents also perceive altruism can take a toll on their wellbeing as they strive to serve selflessly. Participant 1 shared,

We spend so much time focused on everyone else that we’re working longer hours, we’re stressing more, we’re sleeping less, we’re setting aside things that give us relief. I think as an altruistic leader, finding that balance is absolutely critical to being able to serve others.

Participant 8 shares a similar perception, stating, “The most precious commodity any of us have at this point is time and that is the first thing that goes out the window and is needed for self-care. I know I am not doing enough of that.”

**Prioritize the wellbeing of students.** This theme was referenced for the construct of altruism at 38.2%. The theme was referenced by 100% of the participants with a total of 29 frequencies. In a highly referenced theme, respondents perceive that prioritizing the wellbeing of students to a culture of high performance. This is illustrated through the lived experiences shared during the interviews of the participants.

Trends throughout this theme include meeting people where they are and providing individualized supports for students and their families. In his pursuit of getting “the right people on the bus,” Participant 7 expects his staff to be there to serve the
neediest kids. “Working in this district requires you to give a lot and requires you to provide global support to families and to kids. Our kids are successful because we provide additional supports that help them become successful.” He shared that he is most proud of the shift in the culture of serving students since he first came to the district. When first coming to the district, the blame of student performance was placed on the student or family. “Probably my greatest accomplishment being here is really stamping out and eradicating the feelings of blaming the community or blaming the kids.”

**Vision: Research Question 4 Theme Results**

> What is the impact of the vision leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?

For this study, vision is defined as a bridge from the present to the future created by a collaborative mindset, adding meaning to the organization, sustaining higher levels of motivation and withstanding challenge (Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2007; Landsberg, 2003; Mendez-Morse, 1993; Nanus, 1992). Findings from the interviews indicate that superintendents perceive that creating a common purpose, knowing how you are going to fulfill the purpose, and ensuring all decisions are aligned to the purpose contribute to establishing a culture of high performance.

Table 7 and Figure 14 illustrate the emerging themes and frequencies for vision. It is important to note that both themes were referenced by 100% of the participants. Creating a common purpose and determining how you are going to get there had the highest frequency and was referenced 38 times in interviews and 8 times in artifacts. Ensuring all decisions are aligned to the purpose also had 8 references for artifacts and 26 for interviews.
Table 7: Vision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/pattern</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>% based on N</th>
<th>Interview sources</th>
<th>Observation sources</th>
<th>Artifact Sources</th>
<th>Frequency of reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create your common purpose and how you are going to get there</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure all decisions are aligned to your purpose</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The N for interview participants = 8.

Figure 14. Themes and frequencies for vision.

**Create your common purpose and how you are going to get there.** This theme was referenced for the construct of vision at 55.4%. The theme was referenced by all 8 of the participants with a total of 46 frequencies. As a highly referenced theme,
respondents perceive that creating a common purpose and articulating how you are going to get there contributes to a culture of high performance. This is illustrated through the lived experiences shared during the interviews of the participants and through the artifacts collected.

Trends throughout this theme include the importance of having a shared purpose, communicating and sharing the purpose effectively, and knowing the plan that will deliver the purpose. All participants expressed the importance of establishing a shared vision. Participant 6 stated, “Don’t be a moving target. Make sure that you know what you stand for, what your organization…and then allow others to be able to keep their focus on it.” Similarly, Participant 7 shared,

A clear vision ensures all employees, kids, and parents know what we’re trying to achieve. And, when everyone is pulling in the same direction that is when as a school or district you can make big jumps because everyone is doing the same thing.

Having a plan to implement the purpose was also a trend throughout the interviews. Participant 4 shared, “The vision is the starting point and the strategic plan is the roadmap. You cannot develop a strategic plan unless you have a vision.” Artifacts collected on district websites also referenced the importance of visions and mapping out a plan to get there. This includes strategic plans, site plans, and Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs).

Ensure all decisions are aligned to your purpose. This theme was referenced for the construct of vision at 41%. The theme was referenced by all 8 of the participants with a total of 34 frequencies. In a highly referenced theme, respondents perceive that
ensuring all decisions are aligned to the purpose contributes to a culture of high performance. This is illustrated through the lived experiences shared during the interviews of the participants and artifacts collected.

Trends throughout this theme include keeping a laser-like focus on the purpose and continual monitoring to ensure everything that the district and individuals within the district do are aligned to the purpose. A prevalent perception revealed in the interviews is the importance of having the “right staff”, which are those who believe and are aligned in the purpose. In response to prioritizing the vision, Participant 6 expressed, “Hiring the right type of people that are aligned to making sure we create a culture of innovation is a priority.” He goes on further to share his expectations that his administrators will be aligned and model the vision by stating, “Are you walking and talking the vision? If you say that you’re about student achievement. Are you in your office or are you out in the classrooms?” Participant 3 perceives that ensuring alignment helps site administrators communicate why decisions are made. He shared,

When there is strong alignment, you know everything they’re doing is aligned to that. It also is a way where I’ve seen good leaders use it as a gatekeeper to do things that aren’t aligned. You know, we’re not going to do this grant because it actually doesn’t align to where we are going and it will just be a distraction.

In addition to the interviews, alignment of purpose was referenced on in LCAPs found on the district websites showing funds aligned to goals.

**Trust: Research Question 5 Theme Results**

*What is the impact of the trust leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?*
Trust is defined as the level of confidence that one individual has in another’s competence and his or her willingness to act in a fair, ethical, and predictable manner. Trust is essential to organizational culture; integrity and care for others are valued by the leader and followers. (Joseph & Winston, 2005; Patterson, 2003). Findings from the interviews indicate superintendents perceive that being true to your word and following through with your actions contribute to establishing a culture of high performance.

Table 8 and Figure 15 illustrate the emerging theme and frequencies for trust. As the only qualifying theme for the construct of trust, general analysis shows 100% of participants referenced being true to your word and following through with your actions. This theme was referenced 65 times in the interview and observed 3 times for a total frequency count of 68, one of the highest frequency counts in the study.

Table 8: Trust

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/pattern</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>% based on N</th>
<th>Interview sources</th>
<th>Observation sources</th>
<th>Artifact Sources</th>
<th>Frequency of reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Be true to your word and follow through with your actions</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The N for interview participants = 8.
Figure 15. Themes and frequencies for trust.

**Be true to your word and follow through with your actions.** This theme was the only qualifying theme and was referenced for the construct of trust at 78.2%. The remaining 22.8% included two other emerging themes; however, they did not meet the criteria at 17.2% and 4.6% respectively and therefore were not included in the study. As a highly referenced theme, respondents perceive that being true to your word and following through with your actions contribute to a culture of high performance. This is illustrated through the lived experiences shared and observed during the interviews of the participants.

Trends throughout this theme include keeping your word and being transparent and honest if you are unable to follow through with a commitment. This means ensuring that your actions model your commitments. Participant 8 illustrates this perception by sharing,
There is nothing without trust. It is important for me to always say what I mean, even when it is hard. When I share a commitment, it means I am true to that commitment. It is true in large things and small. If I say I value people and then I tell them to work every weekend, I am not truly valuing people. My words and my actions have to align.

In describing the impact trust has on a culture of high performance, Participant 8 recounted an important time when she earned trust of her staff. Her commitment was to never lay anybody off. During a difficult economic period, this commitment led to difficult conversations with the association, which led to some radical changes. By following through with her commitment, Participant 8 shared,

…we were able to maintain our focus on teaching and learning because at the end of the day, high performance comes when we provide our people with the skills, resources, and tools they need to do their job. Detracting from that focus would detract from the achievement.

In addition to following through with commitments, being transparent and honest when you cannot keep a commitment was also prevalent throughout the interviews. In responding to the importance of building a culture of trust, Participant 2 shared, “It is really important to keep your word and then to explain when you can’t keep it.” Participant 3 further elaborates the importance of transparency by describing a time when he had to be honest with his staff when a commitment was not fulfilled. The district committed to installing air filters in all of the schools; however, some were missed. Participant 3 expressed that by acknowledging and owning the mistake, it helped gain trust that the remaining filters would be installed.
Empowerment: Research Question 6 Theme Results

What is the impact of the empowerment leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?

For this study, empowerment is defined as entrusting powers to others, virtually giving away power to followers and allowing them to know and to feel important in their role and contribution. It requires effective listening, valuing love and equity, and an emphasis on teamwork. Empowerment encourages risk-taking and self-accountability to accomplish tasks and work toward goals. (Blanchard, 2000; Melrose, 1995; Patterson, 2003; Russell & Stone, 2002). Findings from the interviews indicate that superintendents perceive that implementing a non-hierarchical organizational structure and developing the leadership capacity of others contribute to establishing a culture of high performance.

Table 9 and Figure 16 illustrate the emerging themes and frequencies for empowerment. Themes for empowerment are prioritized by the number of references made. Implementing a non-hierarchical organizational structure had the highest frequency and was referenced 65 times in interviews of all eight participants. Developing the leadership capacity of others was referenced by seven of the participants 26 times in interviews and was collected in two artifacts.

Table 9: Empowerment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/pattern</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>% based on N</th>
<th>Interview sources</th>
<th>Observation sources</th>
<th>Artifact Sources</th>
<th>Frequency of reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implement a non-hierarchical organizational structure</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Develop the leadership capacity of others

|                | 7 | 87.5 | 23 | 0 | 2 | 25 |

Note. The N for interview participants = 8.

Figure 16. Themes and frequencies for empowerment.

**Implement a non-hierarchical organizational structure.** This theme was the highest qualifying theme and was referenced for the construct of empowerment at 69.9%. It was referenced by all 8 participants with a frequency of 65. In a highly referenced theme, respondents perceive that implementing a non-hierarchical organizational structure contributes to a culture of high performance. This is illustrated through the lived experiences shared and observed during the interviews of the participants.

*Flattened, linear, and distributive leadership* were terms superintendents used when referencing a non-hierarchical organization structure. In responding to how he perceives empowerment in his school district, Participant 2 remarked,
I think I’m going to be bold and say I think you get an idea of empowerment directly with how hierarchical an organization is. We are definitely low hierarchical. I mean, we are very low. We’re kind of proud of that a little bit. When you’re low hierarchical it means that you are trusting people to interact with each other and that each person is important and we’re really freeing people to do the best with what they have.

Participant 6 also contributed hierarchy when referencing empowerment by describing his organization as having a flattened and distributive leadership. In doing so, he also described the importance of having staff with multiple perspectives:

You know your weaknesses and you know your strengths, so you surround yourself with people who are different than you. I think that is critical. I work with superintendents who wanted everybody like themselves and I think that is a recipe for disaster if everybody was like me. I’ve been real deliberate and make sure that I give up power, but also make sure I have the right types of people.

**Develop the leadership capacity of others.** This theme was referenced for the construct of empowerment at 26.9% from seven of the participants. The frequency of this theme in interviews was 23 and 2 for artifacts. Artifacts included two board presentations from staff members illustrating the leadership capacity of staff members. In a highly referenced theme, respondents perceive that developing the leadership capacity of others contributes to a culture of high performance. This is illustrated through the lived experiences shared and observed during the interviews of the participants and artifacts collected.
Trends throughout this theme include trusting others to make decisions and providing them supports to be successful. Participant 1 shared that developing the capacity of others was a priority when first becoming a superintendent and highlighted its importance to the sustainability of the district.

You have to have empowerment. You have to empower others to make decisions. You have to empower others to lead. Because again, when I leave this school district, whenever that is, the district needs to continue to move forward and if I’ve done a good job of developing the leadership capacity of the district, this district will continue to thrive and move forward in a positive way.

When describing his experience of empowerment in his district, Participant 7 describes the positive impact developing teacher leaders has on performance and the need to provide supports. In his interview, Participant 7 shares a time recently where staff needed to learn a new technology quickly. Although some staff were demonstrating success with the technology, they were nervous about standing up in front of their peers to provide training. “It was scary for people. A lot of people are like, you know, please, please, please don’t make me go video and share it with anybody.” He further shares the need to provide supports and encouragement: “We have to give people the trust…you’re doing good work.”

**Service: Research Question 7 Theme Results**

*What is the impact of the service leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?*

For this study, service is defined as the moral equivalent of giving of oneself to serve others. It implies that leaders are focused on placing the interests of others ahead of
their own. It can be demonstrated through the gift of time, energy, compassion, care or belongings (Patterson, 2003; Russell & Stone, 2002). Findings from the interviews indicate superintendents perceive that a collective commitment to serve and use other constructs contributes to establishing a culture of high performance.

Table 10 and Figure 17 illustrate the emerging themes and frequencies for service. Themes for service are prioritized by the number of references made. Collective belief and commitment to serve had the highest frequency and was referenced 56 times in interviews with all eight participants. It was also referenced in observations and artifacts. Requiring the use of other constructs was referenced by all participants 26 times in interviews with no references in observations or artifacts.

Table 10: Service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/pattern</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>% based on N</th>
<th>Interview sources</th>
<th>Observation sources</th>
<th>Artifact Sources</th>
<th>Frequency of reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collective belief and commitment to serve</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requires use of other constructs</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. The N for interview participants = 8.*
Collective belief and commitment to serve. This theme was referenced for the construct of service at 72.9% from all eight of the participants. The frequency of this theme in interviews was 56. It was also observed six times and referenced in eight artifacts. Artifacts included strategic plans and newsletters located on district websites. As a highly referenced theme, respondents perceive that a collective commitment to serve contributes to a culture of high performance. This is illustrated through the lived experiences shared and observed during the interviews with the participants and through the artifacts collected.

Trends throughout this theme include having a service mindset and focusing decisions on serving students. “No matter what your role is, you’re here to serve students, your families and your colleagues. That’s the mentality that has to be there,” Participant 3 shared. Participant 1 shared a similar perception: “We exist to serve others.
We’re here to serve and support. We’re here to serve and support our schools. Our staff, our students, our families. We’re here to serve and support.” Similarly, Participant 5 expressed, “The ultimate thing is when it comes to service, never forget who we serve. Students first.” In regards to the impact serving students makes, Participant 5 shared, “By serving our neediest students, our test scores will not just rise, they will explode.”

In addition to the collective belief in service, superintendents expressed examples of putting students first in their decision-making. Participant 1 shared an example of how his staff selected the hybrid model to implement during the pandemic. Staff brainstormed various options, including an A/B schedule that would have students on campus twice a week and an a.m./p.m. model that would have students on campus every day. While discussing the implications of both, Participant 1 asked his team, “When we look at the A/B schedule and we look at the a.m./p.m. schedule, what’s best for students?” He further described the decision thus: “At that moment the whole conversation shifted to, first we serve students and they listed all the reasons a.m./p.m. was better for kids.”

**Requires use of other constructs.** This theme was referenced for the construct of service at 27.1% from all eight of the participants. The frequency of this theme in interviews was 26 with no references in observations or artifacts. In a highly referenced theme, respondents perceive that the use of constructs contributes to a culture of high performance. This is illustrated through the lived experiences shared and observed during the interviews of the participants.

The trend throughout the theme was the use of other constructs, including agapao love, altruism, empowerment, humility, and trust. Participant 4 provided many examples of altruism throughout her district. In response to asking for examples of service within
her district, she responded, “The idea of service with our frontline employees who literally give of themselves, their body, their health, and safety really to make sure students are fed.” In addition to sharing examples of service in his district, Participant 7 shared how he finds meaning in providing service, explaining,

I like doing good things for good people. I like working where my work is valued. Trusting that I make a difference where I work and coming to work is meaningful to me, so you have to be able to create the environment where people can find meaning.

Participant 1 also shared the importance of service in his district:

When you have that focus on service and you’re married to that focus, along with trust and empowerment and agapao love and humility and altruism and vision, when you marry all of the constructs together…I think that’s when magic happens for students and for student performance.

**Summary**

Chapter IV discussed the data analysis and findings of the research conducted to address the research questions of the perceived impact Patterson’s (2003) servant leadership constructs had on establishing a culture of high performance. Patterson’s (2003) constructs include agapao, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment and service. Data was collected, capturing the lived experiences of eight superintendents through semi-structured interviews, observations, and the collection of artifacts. Data was coded into themes resulting in 14 emerging themes. A brief summary of the findings is provided below.
Agapao

Agapao was the most frequently referenced construct in this study with 99 references or 16.1% of the total references made in the study. Two themes emerged and are described below.

1. A culture of serving others permeates the organization was referenced by 100% of the participants. This theme yielded the highest number of references in the construct of agapao and yielded 52.5% of the data coded.

2. Model care for people by leading by example was referenced by 87.5% of participants and represented 32.3% of the data coded in the construct of agapao.

When analyzing the data collected, findings show that superintendents perceived that the construct of agapao impacts establishing a culture of high performance.

Humility

Humility was the second least referenced construct in this study with 82 references or 13.3% of the total references made in the study. Three themes emerged and are described below.

1. Be willing to do any job or position was referenced by 75% of the participants. This theme yielded the highest number of references in the construct of humility and yielded 40.2% of the data coded.

2. Put needs of others before your own was referenced by 87.5% of participants and represented 31.7% of the data coded in the construct of humility.
3. *Demonstrate vulnerability by being honest with your shortcomings* was referenced by 100% of the participants and represented 28% of the data coded in the construct of humility.

When analyzing the data collected, findings show that superintendents perceived that the construct of humility impacts establishing a culture of high performance.

**Altruism**

Altruism was the least referenced construct in this study with 76 references or 12.3% of the total references made in the study. Two themes emerged from the data and are described below.

1. *Demonstrate a service mindset* was referenced by 100% of the participants. This theme yielded the highest number of references in the construct of altruism and yielded 51.3% of the data coded.

2. *Prioritize the wellbeing of students* was referenced by 100% of participants and represented 38.2% of the data coded in the construct of altruism.

When analyzing the data collected, findings show that superintendents perceived that the construct of altruism impacts establishing a culture of high performance.

**Vision**

Vision was the fifth most referenced construct in this study with 83 references or 13.5% of the total references made in the study. Two themes emerged from the data and are described below.

1. *Create your common purpose and how you are going to get there* was referenced by 100% of the participants. This theme yielded the highest
number of references in the construct of vision and yielded 55.4% of the data coded.

2. *Ensure all decisions are aligned to your purpose* was referenced by 100% of participants and represented 41% of the data coded in the construct of vision.

When analyzing the data collected, findings show that superintendents perceived that the construct of vision impacts establishing a culture of high performance.

**Trust**

Trust was the fourth highest referenced construct in this study with 87 references or 14.1% of the total references made in the study. One theme emerged from the data and is described below.

1. *Be true to your word and follow through with your commitments* was referenced by 100% of the participants. This theme yielded the highest number of references and was the only qualifying theme in the construct of trust and yielded 78.2% of the data coded.

When analyzing the data collected, findings show that superintendents perceived that the construct of trust impacts establishing a culture of high performance.

**Empowerment**

Empowerment was the third most referenced construct in this study with 93 references or 15.1% of the total references made in the study. Two themes emerged and are described below.

1. *Implement a non-hierarchical organizational structure* was referenced by 100% of the participants. This theme yielded the highest number of
references in the construct of empowerment and yielded 69.9% of the data coded.

2. Develop the leadership capacity of others was referenced by 87.5% of participants and represented 26.9% of the data coded in the construct of empowerment.

When analyzing the data collected, findings show that superintendents perceived that the construct of empowerment impacts establishing a culture of high performance.

Service

Service was the second highest referenced construct in this study with 96 references or 15.6% of the total references made in the study. Two themes emerged and are described below.

1. Collective belief and commitment to serve was referenced by 100% of the participants. This theme yielded the highest number of references in the construct of service and yielded 72.9% of the data coded.

2. Requires use of other constructs was referenced by 100% of participants and represented 27.1% of the data coded in the construct of service.

When analyzing the data collected, findings show that superintendents perceived that the construct of service impacts establishing a culture of high performance.

Chapter V provides a more detailed discussion of the findings, including illuminating unexpected findings. In addition, the chapter discusses implications for action and recommendations for further research. Finally, Chapter V concludes with final remarks and reflection.
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

This phenomenological study describes the lived experiences of public school district superintendents and their perception of the impact Patterson’s (2003) constructs of agapao, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service have on the establishment of a culture of high performance. Chapter V begins with a summary of the purpose, research questions, and methodology, including data-collection methods and population sample. An analysis of the data generated by the in-depth interviews, observations and artifacts collected revealed seven major findings and 14 themes. Subsequently, conclusions of the findings and implications for actions have been established. Finally, recommendations for future studies have been determined.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and describe K-12 public school superintendents’ perceived impact of the seven servant leadership constructs established by Patterson (2003) on establishing a culture of high performance.

Research Question

What is the impact of Patterson’s (2003) seven servant leadership constructs on establishing a culture of high performance as perceived by superintendents of high-achieving public school districts in California?

Sub-Questions

1. What is the impact of the agapao leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?

2. What is the impact of the humility leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?
3. What is the impact of the altruism leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?

4. What is the impact of the vision leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?

5. What is the impact of the trust leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?

6. What is the impact of the empowerment leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?

7. What is the impact of the service leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?

**Methodology**

The methodology of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore and describe the lived experience of public school district superintendents and their perceived impact of Patterson’s (2003) servant leadership constructs on the establishment of a culture of high performance. A phenomenological study describes the meaning of individuals’ lived experience of a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). According to Patton (2015), a phenomenological study requires in-depth interviews with people who have direct experience to truly learn the essence of the person’s experience, not merely to understand why something occurred or to correlate findings. As the goal of this study is to describe superintendents’ perceptions of the impact of Patterson’s seven servant leadership constructs on establishing a culture of high student performance, the thematic team concluded that conducting in-depth interviews using open-ended questions is the most appropriate data-collection method. Along with the thematic chair and faculty
member, the thematic team developed an interview protocol (Appendix B) aligned to the research questions.

Eight interviews were conducted with public school district superintendents. Due to the pandemic, all interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom and were recorded. A transcription of the recording was used for coding and was shared with the participants to ensure accuracy. Transcripts were then entered into NVivo. Data was then coded resulting in 14 emerging themes. In addition to the responses to the interview questions, observational data was collected during each of the Zoom recorded interviews and artifacts were collected. During the interviews, observational data was documented and categorized into three communication areas to include facial expressions, body language, and expression or tone of voice. Furthermore, artifacts were collected from each of the eight participants’ district websites and social-media accounts. Interviews, observations, and artifacts supported triangulation of research findings. Finally, a thematic team member separately coded and analyzed one of the interviews and indicated a 90% agreement level of themes from the coding process.

Population

A research population is a total group that conforms to specific criteria to which results can be generalized (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In this phenomenological study, the researcher aims to describe superintendents’ perceptions of the impact of Patterson’s seven servant leadership constructs on establishing a culture of high student performance. The population for this study is superintendents of public school districts in California. According to the California Department of Education (n.d.) website, there were 1,037 public school districts in California during the 2018-2019 school year.
Therefore, the population for this study was the 1,037 superintendents of public school districts in California.

**Sample**

The sampling for the study was defined as the group for which the findings of the study were intended to generalize (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Since it is improbable to conduct a qualitative study of an entire population, a sampling frame was used to narrow the participant group. The sampling frame was defined as a small percentage of the total population, tapered down to participants who have specific attributes or characteristics that meet the purpose of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). For this study, the sampling frame was 89 public school superintendents from nine counties.

The sample for the study was identified through non-probability, purposeful and convenience sampling to provide information-rich sources to address the research question (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The sample met the criteria of leading a high-performing district and of public school superintendents who exhibited at least five of the listed characteristics:

- Employed at a current K-12 district within California with a minimum of 100 staff members.
- Evidence of leading a district of high student performance.
- A minimum of three years of experience at their current district.
- A minimum of five years of experience in the K-12 profession.
- Membership in professional associations in their field, such as ACSA.
- Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings.
• Willing to be a participant and agreed to the informed consent form.

Table 11 illustrates the participants who met the established criteria.

Table 11: Study Participant Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public School District Superintendent is employed at a current school district within California with a minimum of 100 staff members.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of leading schools or districts with a culture of high performance.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A minimum of three years of experience at their current district.</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A minimum of five years of experience in the K-12 profession.</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership in professional associations in their field, such as ACSA</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Demographic Data

Eight public school district superintendents who met the established criteria were selected to participate in the study. To maintain confidentiality, each participant was assigned a number based on the date and time their interview was conducted. Therefore, demographic data was reported without reference to any participating individual. Of the eight participating public school district superintendents, five were from Northern California while three were from Southern California. Participants included six male and two female superintendents. Educational experience ranged from 27-37 years while experience as a superintendent ranged from seven to 15 years. Table 12 represents the demographics of the eight public school district superintendents who participated in the research study.
Table 12: Demographic Data of Study Participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years In Education</th>
<th>Years as a Superintendent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Male</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>35 years</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Major Findings**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and describe public school district superintendents’ perception of the impact Patterson’s (2003) servant leadership constructs of agapao, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment and service have on the establishment of a culture of high performance. The major findings of this study describe the relationship of this study to prior research and review of literature and aligns to the central research question: What is the impact of Patterson’s (2003) seven servant leadership constructs on establishing a culture of high performance as perceived by superintendents of high-achieving public school districts in California? Based on the findings of this study and supporting research, it is concluded that establishing a culture of high performance depends on a superintendent’s ability to utilize the seven servant leadership constructs. A summary of the major findings is presented below and is organized by each sub-question.
Research Sub-Question 1

What is the impact of the agapao leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?

Major finding 1. The importance of having a culture of serving others and modeling care. Public school district superintendents who participated in this study referenced agapao more than any other construct with a frequency rate of 99 or 16.1% of the total references in the study. All of the public school district superintendents interviewed emphasized the importance of having a culture of serving others throughout the organization with 52.5% of the coded responses for the agapao construct. Superintendents expressed the notion this culture of serving others is not an event, but rather must permeate the organization. In addition to a culture of serving others, seven of the eight participants indicated that modeling care for people via leading by example demonstrates agapao and contributes to a culture of high performance, with 32.3% of the coded responses. Examples shared by participating superintendents included modeling compassion, kindness, gratitude, collaboration, and listening.

Findings from this study align to Patterson’s (2003) Servant Leadership Theoretical Model and review of literature. Love is the foundational value for all other values to follow (Patterson, 2003; Winston, 2002). As the most commonly referenced construct, participating superintendents expressed that a culture of service and care needs to exist throughout a school district for performance to be possible. Love has a significant impact on human achievement and influences motivation and performance in the work environment (Crowley, 2011). Furthermore, Kouzes & Posner (2006) argue that followers want to follow the leaders who show genuine affection, adding, “Love is
definitely not too strong a word to use for how the best leaders feel about their constituents and how their constituents feel about these leaders.”

**Research Sub-Question 2**

*What is the impact of the humility leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?*

**Major finding 2. Put needs of others before your own by being willing to do any position and demonstrating vulnerability.** Public school district superintendents who participated in this study referenced humility 82 times or 13.3% of the total references in the study. Six of the public school district superintendents interviewed emphasized the importance of being willing to do any job or position with 40.2% of the coded responses for the humility construct. Superintendents expressed the importance of showing others that their title or position did not make them better than anyone else. In addition to a being willing to do any job or position, seven of the eight participants indicated that putting the needs of others before their own demonstrates humility and contributes to a culture of high performance with 31.7% of the coded responses. Examples shared by participating superintendents included prioritizing dollars and resources to go to teachers. All superintendents perceived that demonstrating vulnerability by being honest with their shortcomings contributed to a culture of high performance with 28% of the coded responses. Examples shared by participants included being willing to say you do not know something and apologizing for mistakes.

Findings from this study align to Patterson’s (2003) Servant Leadership Theoretical Model and review of literature. As an integral construct of servant leadership (Patterson, 2003), humility is materializing as the leadership standard among scholars (Sinek, 2014; Kouzes & Posner, 2011; Collins, 2005; Covey, 2002). In his pivotal study,
detailed in his book *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don’t*, Collins (2001) found that the leaders who consistently outperformed and led their companies from “good to great” were ones who combined “humility with fierce resolve.” Referring to these exceptional leaders as “Level 5 leaders,” Collins described them as “low-key” with a focus on the good of the company, not themselves. Using the metaphor of a window and mirror, Collins (2005) explained that Level 5 leaders take personal responsibility when things are not going well and credit others for the successes. Participating superintendents in this study indicated alignment to Collins’ (2005) Level 5 leadership, expressing the importance of taking responsibility.

**Research Sub-Question 3**

*What is the impact of the altruism leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?*

**Major finding 3. Demonstrating a service mindset and prioritizing the wellbeing of students.** Public school district superintendents who participated in this study referenced altruism the least of any other construct with a frequency rate of 76 or 12.3% of the total references in the study. Seven of public school district superintendents interviewed emphasized the importance of demonstrating a service mindset with 51.3% of the coded responses for the altruism construct. Superintendents expressed a service mindset, including making sacrifices to serve selflessly, and described the resulting toll it can take. In addition to demonstrating a service mindset, all participants indicated that prioritizing the wellbeing of students demonstrates altruism and contributes to a culture of high performance with 38.2% of the coded responses. Examples shared by participating superintendents included providing supports for students and families, particularly those with the highest needs.
Findings from this study align to Patterson’s (2003) Servant Leadership Theoretical Model and review of literature. Leading with altruism, seeking the best interest of others, is imperative to the servant leaders’ mentality (Patterson, 2003). This mentality was expressed by superintendents as they put the needs of their students first. The literature review also indicated opposing views of self-interest. Kaplan (2000) describes altruism as personal sacrifice, selflessly helping others with no expectation of personal gain. While DeYoung (2000) agrees with altruism being a selfless act and making a personal sacrifice, he also believes that altruism includes the personal satisfaction of helping others. Both thoughts were illuminated in the study. Some superintendents expressed how serving others “filled their bucket,” while others did not express any personal gain.

**Research Sub-Question 4**

*What is the impact of the vision leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?*

**Major finding 4. Create a common purpose and ensure alignment.** Public school district superintendents who participated in this study referenced vision as the fifth highest construct with a frequency rate of 83 or 13.5% of the total references in the study. All of the public school district superintendents interviewed emphasized the importance of creating a common purpose and knowing how you are going to get there with 55.4% of the coded responses for the vision construct. Participants expressed the importance of having a shared purpose, communicating and sharing the purpose effectively, and knowing the plan that will deliver the purpose. In addition to creating a common purpose and knowing you are going to get there, all participants indicated that ensuring all decisions are aligned to the purpose demonstrates vision and contributes to a culture of
high performance with 41% of the coded responses. Participating superintendents expressed the importance of hiring the right people who are aligned to the purpose and ensuring all decisions are aligned to the purpose.

Findings from this study align to Patterson’s (2003) Servant Leadership Theoretical Model and review of literature. For servant leadership, vision is not focused on the organization, but rather on the individuals within it (Patterson, 2003). Vision is created by using the individual’s gifts and talents. The leader inspires followers to use their gifts and talents to become leaders themselves. This was illustrated through the participant interviews as superintendents expressed the importance of hiring the right people. Additionally, participants expressed the importance of developing a common purpose. According to Kouzes and Posner (2006) and Sinek (2009), developing a shared vision by creating a common purpose of “why we do what we do” is critical for the success of an organization.

**Research Sub-Question 5**

*What is the impact of the trust leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?*

**Major finding 5. Be true to your word and follow through.** Public school district superintendents who participated in this study referenced trust as the fourth most commonly mentioned construct, with a frequency rate of 87 or 14.1% of the total references in the study. All participants indicated that being true to your word and following through with your actions demonstrates trust and contributes to a culture of high performance with 78.2% of the coded responses. Examples shared by participating superintendents included keeping your word and being transparent and honest if you are
unable to follow through with a commitment. Superintendents also expressed that trust is earned over time and can easily be lost.

Findings from this study align to Patterson’s (2003) Servant Leadership Theoretical Model and review of literature. Trust is not earned or developed overnight. It is the result of stacking and layering small moments and reciprocal vulnerability over time (Brown, 2018). This aligns to the participants’ perception of being honest and transparent, even if it is hard and you are owning a mistake. A leader’s focus and priority should be on building trust rather than performance. Performance will always follow when trust is prioritized; however, when the priority is placed on performance, the culture will certainly suffer (Sinek, 2019). Participants in the study echoed this sentiment as they shared, “There is nothing without trust,” indicating trust has to come before all else.

Research Sub-Question 6

What is the impact of the empowerment leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?

Major finding 6. Implement a non-hierarchical organizational structure and develop the leadership capacity of others. Public school district superintendents who participated in this study referenced empowerment as the third highest construct with a frequency rate of 93 or 15.1% of the total references in the study. All of the public school district superintendents interviewed emphasized the importance of implementing a non-hierarchical organizational structure with 69.9% of the coded responses for the empowerment construct. Flattened, linear, and distributive leadership were terms superintendents used when referencing a non-hierarchical organization structure. Utilizing and valuing the different strengths of others was also shared as important to
empowerment—specifically, hiring people who are different from the one doing the hiring. In addition to a non-hierarchical organizational structure, seven of the eight participants indicated that developing the leadership capacity of others demonstrates empowerment and contributes to a culture of high performance with 26.9% of the coded responses. Examples shared by participating superintendents included developing teacher leaders to support other teachers and the importance of empowerment to the sustainability of the district.

Findings from this study align to Patterson’s (2003) Servant Leadership Theoretical Model and review of literature. Followers of servant leaders are empowered to be part of the decision-making process and are trusted to do their work (Autry, 2001; Patterson, 2003). Additionally, servant leaders’ satisfaction comes from developing others to pursue their own paths and in turn inspiring still others to do the same (Patterson, 2003). They do this by relinquishing power to others in a safe and supportive environment. This was illustrated in the study as participants said they provided supports for their staff, but then “got out of their way” to do their job. Examples included giving principals the autonomy to make decisions that were best for their site.

**Research Sub-Question 7**

*What is the impact of the service leadership construct on establishing a culture of high performance?*

**Major finding 7. Collective belief to serve and interplay of constructs.** Public school district superintendents who participated in this study referenced service as the second most commonly mentioned construct with a frequency rate of 96 or 15.6% of the total references in the study. All of the public school district superintendents interviewed emphasized the importance of having a collective belief and commitment to serve with
72.9% of the coded responses for the service construct. This was illustrated in examples of making decisions through the lens of putting the needs of students first. In addition to a collective belief and commitment to serve, all participants indicated service includes the use of other constructs contributing to a culture of high performance with 27.1% of the coded responses. Examples shared by participating superintendents included leading with agapao love, altruism, empowerment, humility and trust.

Findings from this study align to Patterson’s (2003) Servant Leadership Theoretical Model and review of literature. All participants referenced one or more of the constructs as contributing to service and its perceived impact on establishing a culture of high performance. According to Patterson (2003), by leading with agapao love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, and empowerment, a servant leader is a role model to others, resulting in an organizational climate of service.

**Unexpected Findings**

This study resulted in two unexpected findings. The first unexpected finding was the prevalence at which agapao was referenced among all participants throughout the interviews. The second unexpected finding was the frequency at which all constructs were referenced while responding to other constructs. These unexpected findings contributed to the following conclusions and implications for actions.

As the most highly referenced construct, agapao was prevalent throughout the interviews of all participants. This is aligned to the review of literature and research indicating that love is the foundational value for all other values to follow (Patterson, 2003; Winston, 2002; Covey, 1990; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Crowley, 2011). Although the data revealed congruency with the review of literature and research, the researcher was surprised by the display of emotion three of the superintendents expressed when
speaking about the care and pride of their followers, specifically when responding to the questions focused on altruism. To the public, superintendents often portray themselves as professional with little emotion. However, during the interviews three superintendents expressed high emotion, including becoming choked up and teary-eyed when speaking about the love and admiration they had for their staff.

In addition to the outward expression of agapao, another unexpected finding was the prevalence and interplay of all constructs throughout the interviews. When responding to a prompt for a specific construct, all participants referred to one or more other constructs. For example, when responding to questions focused on the construct of empowerment, all participants also referenced trust. Furthermore, the frequency of reference to other constructs was so high for the questions focused on service that requires use of other constructs emerged as a theme. Although this is aligned to the review of literature and research (Patterson, 2003; Winston, 2002), it was surprising to the researcher how frequently the conjunction of constructs was referenced.

**Conclusions**

The findings of this study and review of literature resulted in the following conclusions describing how public school district superintendents use Patterson’s (2003) servant leadership constructs of agapao, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment and service to establish a culture of high performance.

**Conclusion 1: A Collective Commitment and Belief to Serve**

Based on the findings of this study and supporting research, it is concluded that establishing a culture of high performance depends on a superintendent’s ability to create a collective commitment and belief to serve others within their district. All the superintendents discussed the importance of having a permeating mindset of service
throughout the district, indicating that the sole reason for their existence was to serve and support students. Specifically, superintendents expressed that the actions of teachers should be viewed through the lens of serving the needs of all students. Similarly, principals and superintendents serve and support teachers so they in turn can serve students. A culture of serving others can have a long-lasting individual and collective impact. When takers take, someone always loses; however, when leaders who serve succeed, it creates a ripple effect of success throughout the organization (Grant, 2014). Culture influences the way people feel, think, and act and has a powerful impact on teacher and student performance (DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Eaker & Keating, 2012; Fullan, 2011; Leithwood & Azah, 2017). High-performing school districts are learning organizations with a collaborative culture and a relentless focus on results for all students.

**Conclusion 2: Hire People Who Are Aligned to the Shared Values and Purpose**

Based on the findings of this study and supporting research, it is concluded that superintendents who fail to hire people who are aligned to the shared value and purpose of the district will struggle with establishing a culture of high performance. All the superintendents discussed the importance of having the right people who share the belief that their collective purpose is to ensure the success of every student. When teachers, schools, and school districts believe collectively that they can positively affect student learning, they do just that.

This belief, known as collective teacher efficacy (CTE) or collective efficacy (CE), exists in the culture of high-performing schools and school districts. At the teacher level, collective teacher efficacy refers to the shared perception of educators that together they can “organize and execute the courses of action required to have a positive effect on students” (Goddard, Hoy & Hoy, 2004). At the organizational or district level,
“perceived collective efficacy reflects a teaching faculty’s belief in its collective ability to carry out teaching tasks that promote student achievement” (Adams & Forsyth, 2006). Collective efficacy at all levels throughout a school district has proven to influence student performance.

**Conclusion 3: Operate Out of Love**

Based on the findings of this study and supporting research, it is concluded that superintendents who operate out of love are better able to establish a culture where performance can grow. Love has a significant impact on human achievement and influences motivation and performance in the work environment (Crowley, 2011). This was affirmed by superintendents as they attributed their performance to demonstrating genuine care. Superintendents demonstrated love to individuals by creating a culture where everyone’s role is equally important and valued. Stephen Covey (1990) suggests that those who are seeking to lead and influence others are required to have unconditional love within their heart. Superintendents illustrated this by describing examples of putting the needs of others before their own often while sacrificing their own interests.

**Conclusion 4: Trusting Relationships Matter**

Based on the findings of this study and supporting research, it is concluded that superintendents who do not spend time developing trusting relationships will have extreme difficulty establishing a culture of high performance. Trust is the glue that holds teams and organizations together (Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Brown, 2018). All superintendents expressed the importance of being true to one’s word and following through with commitments as crucial to establishing trusting relationships. Other actions include being vulnerable by being honest with one’s shortcomings. Trust is an essential element for organizations and individuals within the organization to thrive.
Superintendents also affirmed that nothing would happen in the organization without trust, so time and energy needs to be devoted to fostering trust. The number one thing that can change an organization from having endless possibilities to one of failure and despair is a lack of trust (Covey & Conant, 2016).

**Conclusion 5: Empower People**

Based on the findings of this study and supporting research, it is concluded that superintendents who do not develop others or empower them to make decisions will struggle in establishing a culture of high performance. Decisions cannot be made in a silo. Similarly, an organization does not run on one person’s skill set or strengths. Superintendents described the importance of developing the leadership capacity of others as a contributing factor of a culture of high performance, including empowering others through distributed leadership, indicating that it is far more effective than the top-down, hierarchical model. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of trusting others, encouraging risk-taking, and having a growth mindset when failure occurs. Finally, providing supports is a critical component of empowerment. A servant leader’s goal is to develop many leaders at all levels throughout the organization (Russell, 2001) by capitalizing on everyone’s strengths, not just the strengths of those at the top (Spears & Lawrence, 2002).

**Conclusion 6: Importance and Interplay of All Seven Constructs**

Based on the findings of this study and supporting research, it is concluded the seven servant leadership constructs of agapao, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment and service matter, work together, and contribute to a culture of high performance. Although the research indicates that each construct contributes to a culture of high performance, no construct works in isolation and it is imperative that
superintendents understand this and are able to effectively utilize all constructs. In all instances, superintendents referenced the need for other constructs while speaking to a specific construct. Empowerment depends on trust, service depends on altruism, trust depends on humility and so forth. According to Patterson (2003), servant leadership is a virtuous theory as the leader is guided by virtues within. Virtues are the characteristics and mindsets one possesses and uses to interact with others. Many scholars affirm the need for virtuous leadership in today’s organizations (Hacket & Wang, 2012; Caldwell, Hasan & Smith, 2015).

**Implications for Action**

The ability of superintendents to utilize the servant leadership constructs of agapao, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment and service in their districts is critical to the success of our future generation. Superintendents who have difficulty implementing and “living” these constructs will struggle to effectively establish a culture of high performance. The following discusses implications for action to address the conclusions derived from the study with the goal of building the capacity of superintendents to establish a culture of high performance.

**Implication 1: Servant Leadership Assessment Instrument for Superintendents**

A servant leadership assessment instrument for superintendents needs to be developed for superintendents to assess their proficiency utilizing the servant leadership constructs. The researcher will use The Servant Leadership Assessment Instrument (Dennis & Bocarnea, 2005) as a guide and seek input from educational experts to develop the assessment. Superintendents need to know how their servant leadership is perceived
by their followers in order to develop and grow. The development of a servant leadership assessment instrument for superintendents will serve this purpose.

**Implication 2: Professional Book or Guide to Support Implementation of Constructs**

The researcher will develop a professional development book focused on superintendents as servant leaders to successfully utilize the constructs in their district. The book will include the previously mentioned assessment tool and supporting strategies to utilize the constructs in establishing a culture of high performance. This book will also be the framework for the development of a professional development series that needs to be shared at trainings or workshops, as indicated below. Superintendents need specific and targeted professional learning and actionable strategies to successfully implement the constructs in their districts. The development of a professional development book or guide will serve this purpose.

**Implication 3: Servant Leadership Training for New and Aspiring Superintendents**

Many new and aspiring superintendents attend trainings through the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) and The School Superintendents Association (AASA). Although some themes of the trainings include content focused on human relations, no modules are specific to servant leadership. It is critical that the aforementioned superintendent training includes content focused on servant leadership so that new and aspiring superintendents are equipped to use the servant leadership constructs effectively. Learning the importance of these constructs and how to utilize them will give new and aspiring superintendents a greater opportunity to develop the relationships necessary to establish a culture of high performance.
Implication 4: Coaching for Superintendents

All superintendents should have a coach to act as a thought partner and to support them in their development and growth. Because of the impact the servant leadership constructs have on developing a culture of high performance, superintendent contracts should include a requirement of monthly coaching sessions. Coaching sessions should focus part of their conversations on the servant leadership constructs. The coach should use research from this study and similar studies to support the superintendent in their growth at utilizing the constructs.

Implication 5: Servant Leadership Sessions at Conferences

Superintendents have access to professional development through conferences held by ACSA, CSBA, and AASA. Conferences need to include sessions utilizing the professional development book previously mentioned as a framework for the content for conference sessions. Attending servant leadership sessions at conferences will equip superintendents with actionable strategies to implement in their district. Superintendents need specific and targeted professional learning and actionable strategies in order to successfully implement the constructs in their district. Conference attendance will accomplish this purpose.

Implication 6: Searching for New Superintendents

As this study and supporting research indicates, superintendents who are effective in utilizing the servant leadership constructs are better equipped to establish a culture of high performance. Knowing this, including the servant leadership constructs as part of the superintendent hiring process for search firms and boards of education is critical. This could possibly take the form of specific questions for the interview process and
Recommendations for Further Research

This study focused on the lived experiences of public school district superintendents and their perception of the impact the seven servant leadership constructs had on establishing a culture of high performance. The constructs explored consist of agapao, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment and service. Based on the findings and research of the study, several recommendations for further research on the servant leadership constructs and culture of high performance have been identified.

Recommendation 1: Meta-Analysis of the Servant Leadership Dissertations

It is recommended that a meta-analysis study be conducted using the eight dissertations from the servant leadership thematic. Although eight researchers conducted the studies based upon Patterson’s (2003) servant leadership model, each researcher focused on a different target population. In addition to public school district superintendents, target populations of the thematic included two high school principals, human resource administrators, Latina superintendents of Title I school districts, principals of Native American schools, public middle school principals and Title I middle school principals. A future study could analyze the data and findings across all eight studies to draw new conclusions and add to the research of the impact the servant leadership constructs have on establishing a culture of high performance.

Recommendation 2: Comparative Study of Gender

It is recommended that a comparative study be conducted to determine whether women and men perceive the impact servant leadership constructs have on establishing a
culture of high performance differently. Although this study included both male and female participants, this research did not compare the similarities and differences.

**Recommendation 3: Comparative Study of Demographics of School District**

It is recommended that a comparative study be conducted to determine whether or not differences exist in the perception the impact servant leadership constructs have on establishing a culture of high performance among superintendents leading organizations serving varying demographics of students. For example, a study could be conducted comparing the perception of Title I and non-Title I district leaders.

**Recommendation 4: Replicate the Study from the Perspective of Staff**

It is recommended that a phenomenological study be conducted of the lived experience of school staff and their perception of the impact the servant leadership constructs have on establishing a culture of high performance. A comparative study could also be conducted comparing the perceptions of superintendents and school staff.

**Recommendation 5: Study a Single Construct at a Deeper Level**

It is recommended that a phenomenological study be conducted to look at one or more of the servant leadership constructs at a deeper level. Research on a construct at a deeper level will contribute to the research on this subject.

**Recommendation 6: Case Study of High Performing School Districts**

It is recommended that a case study be conducted of high-performing districts to see how the superintendent utilizes the servant leadership constructs in establishing a culture of high performance.
Concluding Remarks and Reflections

Public school districts have the enormous responsibility of developing our future generations to be responsible, engaged citizens, equipped to compete at a global level. Leaders of public education are tasked to transform schools while navigating a complex system of increased accountability with decreasing resources. Although research exists on factors that contribute to an increase of student performance such as professional learning communities and collective efficacy, minimal research describes the impact servant leadership constructs have on establishing a culture of high performance. This study focused on the lived experiences of eight public school district superintendents and their perception of the impact the servant leadership constructs of agapao, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment and service have on establishing a culture of high performance. Along with a review of literature, in-depth interviews, observations and collected artifacts all validated the impact the servant leadership constructs have on establishing a culture of high performance.

As a fellow superintendent and servant leader, conducting this study has been very rewarding and valuable. I was humbled and honored to interview the eight public school district superintendents who participated in the study and grateful for their openness to share their stories. It brought to life the service and care they provide their districts every day. By openly sharing their experiences, the superintendents gave valuable insight on ways the use of the servant leadership constructs has affected the establishment of a culture of high performance.

When thinking about the inspiring stories shared by the superintendents, I am moved to a feeling of hope for the future of our students. My belief is that this research will not only contribute to the body of work of leadership and student performance, but
will be a resource for superintendents as they strive to serve their districts as they navigate the complexities of their position. Leadership matters. It is imperative that we equip superintendents to lead their districts with agapao love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment and service. Our future generation depends on it.


## APPENDIX A

### Synthesis Matrix

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APPENDIX B

Thematic Servant Leadership Interview Protocol and Questions

“My name is Robin Stout and I am a doctoral candidate at Brandman University in the area of Organizational Leadership. I’m a part of a team conducting research to explore the ways superintendents perceive the impact these seven constructs (agapao love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service) have on establishing a culture of high performance. We are seeking to better understand what it is that you do to build a culture of high performance within your school district.

I want to thank you for agreeing to participate in the interview on servant leadership. The information you give, along with the others, hopefully will provide a clear picture of how superintendents establish a culture of high performance.

The questions I will be asking are the same for everyone participating in the study. The reason for this study is to try to guarantee, as much as possible, that my interviews with all participating superintendents will be conducted in the same manner.

**Informed Consent**

I would like to remind you that any information that is obtained in connection to this study will remain confidential. All of the data will be reported without reference to any individual(s) or any institution(s). For ease of our discussion and accuracy I will record our conversation as indicated in the Informed Consent sent to you via email. I will have the recording transcribed to a Word document and will send it to you via electronic mail so that you can check to make sure that I have accurately captured your thoughts and ideas. The digital recording will be erased.

Did you receive the Informed Consent and Brandman Bill of Rights I sent you via email? Do you have any questions or need clarification about either document? Do you consent to move forward with the interview?

We have scheduled an hour for the interview. At any point during the interview you may ask that I skip a particular question or stop the interview altogether.

Do you have any questions before we begin? Okay, let’s get started, and thanks so much for your time.

**Agapao**

Agapao love is to do the right thing for the right reasons. Agapao love leaders care more for their followers than the interest of the organization resulting in greater understanding, gratitude, kindness, forgiveness, and compassion. (Gunn, 2002; Patterson, 2003)
Sub-Question 1: What is the impact of the agapao leadership constructs on establishing a culture of high performance?

Q1: What are your perceptions of the culture that exists in your school district resulting from Agapao Love?
Probe: Can you give examples of this?

Q2: What would you describe as the 2 or 3 most important ways to demonstrate Agapao Love?

Humility

Humility is the importance of being humble and having modesty, not to be mistaken for meekness or the absence of strength. It is a virtue characterized by one’s own talents and abilities and an outward rejection of self-interest while placing true value on the recognition and success of others. (Kim et al., 1999)

Sub-Question 2: What is the impact of the humility leadership constructs on establishing a culture of high performance?

Q1 - Tell me about a time where you put your staff and teachers needs before your own.

Q2 - Servant leaders are characterized by displaying humility towards the members of their school district. Tell me about a time when you showed humility towards your staff or a staff member?
Probe: How did this make you feel?

Altruism

Altruism is demonstrating unselfish concern for the welfare of another, even at some risk or sacrifice against one’s personal self-interest. It involves deriving personal pleasure from helping and seeking what’s best for others, often with an attitude of humility, modesty, and selflessness. (DeYoung, 2000; Kaplan, 2000; Monroe, 1994; Patterson, 2003)

Sub-Question 3: What is the impact of the altruism leadership constructs on establishing a culture of high performance?

Q1: What is your perception of altruism and its impact on your school district’s culture of high performance?

Q2: What do you believe are the specific impacts it has on the culture of performance in your school district?
Probe: Can you give me an example of how altruism has impacted your school district’s culture of high performance?
Vision

bridge from the present to the future created by a collaborative mindset, adding
meaning to the organization, sustaining higher levels of motivation and
Mendez-Morse, 1993; Nanus, 1992)

Sub-Question 4: What is the impact of the vision leadership constructs on
establishing a culture of high performance?

Q1: How does the use of creating a vision in your leadership impact the
establishment of a culture of high performance?

Probe: Share examples of how your day-to-day management supports your vision
for a culture of high performance.

Q2: What behaviors or actions do you observe when vision is prioritized in school
leadership?

Trust

Trust is the level of confidence that one individual has in another’s competence
and his or her willingness to act in a fair, ethical, and predictable manner. Trust is
essential to organizational culture; integrity and care for others are valued by the
leader and followers.

Sub-Question 5: What is the impact of the trust leadership constructs on
establishing a culture of high performance?

Q1: There is a lot of literature on the importance of building a climate of trust
within a school district. How do you develop and sustain trust in your
organization?

Q2: Thinking about your school district, please share some examples of how trust
has supported a culture of high performance.

Probe: You have shared some ways you develop and sustain trust. Are there 2-3
key leadership behaviors for developing a climate of trust?

Empowerment

Empowerment is entrusting power to others, virtually giving away power to
followers and allowing them to know and feel significant and important in their
role and contribution. It requires effective listening, valuing love and equity, and
an emphasis on teamwork. Empowerment encourages risk-taking and self-
accountability to accomplish tasks and work toward goals. (Blanchard, 2000;
Melrose, 1995; Patterson, 2003; Russell & Stone, 2002).
Sub-Question 6: What is the impact of the empowerment leadership constructs on establishing a culture of high performance?

Q1: How do you perceive empowerment in your school district?

Q2: Empowerment often encourages risk-taking and self-accountability. Please describe the opportunities you see staff having within your school district to utilize empowerment.

Probe: Please tell me about a few specific ways you see empowerment impacting performance.

Service

Service is the moral equivalent of giving of oneself to serve others. It implies that leaders are focused on placing interest on others rather than on their own interest. It can be demonstrated through the gift of time, energy, compassion, care or belongings. Service places others first. (Patterson, 2003; Russell & Stone, 2002).

Sub-Question 7: What is the impact of the service leadership constructs on establishing a culture of high performance?

Q1: Please share some examples when you have witnessed service within your school district. How did that service impact the culture of high performance?

Q2: Describe a service that is provided in your school district. What do you believe is the impact of this service on the overall performance within the organization?

Probe: Why do you believe this service has that impact?

“Thank you very much for your time. If you like, when the results of our research are known, we will send you a copy of our findings.”

General Probes

Possible Probes for any of the items – For researcher’s eyes only

The General probes may be used during the interviewee when you want to get more information or expand the conversation with them. These are not questions you share with the interviewee. It is best to be familiar with these probes and use them in a conversational way when appropriate to extend their responses.
1. “Would you expand upon that a bit?”
2. “Do you have more to add?”
3. “What did you mean by ……..”
4. “Why do think that was the case?”
5. “Could you please tell me more about…. “
6. “Can you give me an example of ……”
7. “How did you feel about that?”
APPENDIX C

Alignment Table

Alignment of Interview Questions to Research Questions

Purpose: The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and describe superintendents’ perceived impact of servant leadership constructs established by Patterson (2003) on establishing a culture of high performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Corresponding interview questions</th>
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</table>
| 1. What is the impact of the agapao leadership constructs on establishing a culture of high performance? | Q1: What are your perceptions of the culture that exists in your school district resulting from agapao love?  
Q2: What would you describe as the 2 or 3 most important ways to demonstrate agapao love? |
| 2. What is the impact of the humility leadership constructs on establishing a culture of high performance? | Q1 - Tell me about a time where you put your staff and teachers needs before your own.  
Q2 - Servant leaders are characterized by displaying humility towards the members of their school district. Tell me about a time when you showed humility towards your staff or a staff member. |
| 3. What is the impact of the altruism leadership constructs on establishing a culture of high performance? | Q1: What is your perception of altruism and its impact on |
4. What is the impact of the vision leadership constructs on establishing a culture of high performance?

5. What is the impact of the trust leadership constructs on establishing a culture of high performance?

6. What is the impact of the empowerment leadership constructs on establishing a culture of high performance?

7. What is the impact of the service leadership constructs on establishing a culture of high performance?

Q1: How does the use of creating a vision in your leadership impact the establishment of a culture of high performance?
Q2: What behaviors or actions do you observe when vision is prioritized in school leadership?

Q1: There is a lot of literature on the importance of building a climate of trust within a school district. How do you develop and sustain trust in your school district?
Q2: Thinking about your school district, please share some examples of how trust has supported a culture of high performance.

Q1: How do you perceive empowerment in your school district?
Q2: Empowerment often encourages risk-taking and self-accountability. Please describe the opportunities you see staff having within your school district to utilize empowerment.
| Q1: Please share some examples when you have witnessed service within your school district. How did that service impact the culture of high performance? |
| Q2: Describe a service that is provided in your school district. What do you believe is the impact of this service on the overall performance within the organization? |
APPENDIX D

Interview Observer Feedback
Reflection Questions

1. How long did the interview take? Did the time seem to be appropriate?
2. Were the questions clear, or were there places when the interviewee was unclear?
3. Where there any words or terms used during the interview that were unclear or confusing?
4. How did you feel during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous? For the observer: how did you perceive the interviewer in regard to the preceding descriptors?
5. Did you feel prepared to conduct the interview? Is there something you could have done to be better prepared? For the observer: how did you perceive the interviewer in regard to the preceding descriptors?
6. What parts of the interview went the most smoothly, and why do you think that was the case?
7. Are there parts of the interview that seemed to be awkward, and why do you think that was the case?
8. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would it be and how would you change it?
9. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?
APPENDIX E

CITI Program Human Subject Research Certificate of Completion

This is to certify that:

Robin Stout

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Human Subjects Research (Curriculum Group)
Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Brandman University

Completion Date: 06-May-2019
Expiration Date: N/A
Record ID: 31503021

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME. Do not use for TransCelerate mutual recognition (see Completion Report).

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w5701895f-0df6-4c82-04a4-06d9518ba9ff-31503021
APPENDIX F

Brandman University IRB Approval Form

Dear Robin Stout,

Congratulations, your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the Brandman University Institutional Review Board. This approval grants permission for you to proceed with data collection for your research. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If any issues should arise that are pertinent to your IRB approval, please contact the IRB immediately at BUIRB@brandman.edu. If you need to modify your BUIRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at the following link: https://irb.brandman.edu/Applications/Modification.pdf.

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

Thank you,

Doug DeVore, Ed.D.
Professor
Organizational Leadership
BUIRB Chair
ddevore@brandman.edu
www.brandman.edu
APPENDIX G

Research Participant’s Bill of Rights

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Research Participant’s Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.

2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.

3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.

4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.

5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.

6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.

7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.

8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.

9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.

10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.
APPENDIX H

Informed Consent

INFORMATION ABOUT: Servant Leadership: Patterson’s Seven Constructs and the Perceived Impact of Superintendents on Establishing a Culture of High Performance.

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Robin Stout, M.A.

PURPOSE OF STUDY: You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Robin Stout, a doctoral student from the School of Education at Brandman University. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore and describe public school district administrators' perceived impact of Patterson’s seven servant leadership constructs on establishing a culture of high performance.

The interview(s) will last approximately 45 – 60 minutes and will be conducted in a one-on-one virtual interview setting via Zoom.

I understand that:

a) There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. I understand that the Investigator will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes and research materials in a locked file drawer that is available only to the researcher.

b) I understand that the interview will be audio recorded. The recordings will be available only to the researcher. The audio recordings will be used to capture the interview dialogue and to ensure the accuracy of the information collected during the interview. All information will be identifier-redacted and my confidentiality will be maintained. Upon completion of the study, all recordings will be destroyed. All other data and consents will be securely stored for three years after completion of data collection and confidentially shredded or fully deleted.

c) The possible benefit of this study to me is that my input may help add to the research regarding servant leadership and the impact it has on establishing a culture of high performance. The findings will be available to me at the conclusion of the study and will provide new insights about this study in which I participated. I understand that I will not be compensated for my participation.

d) If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Robin Stout at rstout@mail.brandman.edu or by phone at (916) 316-3508, or Dr. Doug DeVore (Advisor) at ddevore@brandman.edu or Dr. Lisa Simon (Secondary Advisor) at lsimon2@brandman.edu.

e) My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide to not participate in the study and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide
not to answer particular questions during the interview if I so choose. I understand that I may refuse to participate or may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the Investigator may stop the study at any time.

f) No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent re-obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the “Research Participant’s Bill of Rights”. I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

______________________________
Signature of Participant

______________________________
Signature of Principal Investigator

______________________________
Date