Leadership Strategies Exemplary Unified School District Superintendents Use to Create a Culture of Inclusiveness

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Leadership Strategies Exemplary Unified School District Superintendents Use to Create a Culture of Inclusiveness

A Dissertation by

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Irvine, California
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Leadership Strategies of Exemplary Unified School District Superintendents to Create a

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God is good; God is healing; God is empowering…and God is the ultimate includer!

Many years ago, my brother said I did not understand “real life” because I was born under a lucky star. And in tribute to him, I acknowledge with immense gratitude all that I have been given. Thank you to the 7 Days... my kick booty chef of a husband (who has become excellent at laundry and mopping), and my five remarkable kids: Aubrey Lynn, McKenzie Anne, Michael Henry, Delaney Elizabeth, and Alexandria Christle Lena Day. Each of you have majorly contributed to my joyful life and are so beautiful in your differences.

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Additionally, thank you to my chair, Dr. Peterson, for your incredible patience and impeccable expertise. And to Dr. Larick, I will forever tell the story of your support in my transition to superintendent of schools. Dr. Greenberg, thank you for making me feel special and supported...your authentic positivity is a model for all of us. It is with much appreciation that I acknowledge the six exemplary superintendents in this study, “Wow!” I am inspired.
Thank you, Lord, for the greatest gift-- those I serve as friends like Becky, Gram, Sharon, and ST; those I serve in my field like Chris, DCH, MK, the Super 6, Ontario 007, and dear friends in Covina, Whittier, Riverside, and Upland. And for all the amazing human beings in my life like Kyle, Mark, Lex, Alexander, Benjamin, and to those whose path I shall cross in the future, none going unnoticed…May I minister as well as I administer, and may we all pay forward gratitude, kindness, joy, expectation, empathy, and love. May we all include!
ABSTRACT

Leadership Strategies Exemplary Unified School District Superintendents Use to Create a Culture of Inclusiveness

by Lynn J. Carmen Day

Purpose: The purpose of this explanatory mixed-method study was to identify and describe the leadership strategies unified school district superintendents used to create an organizational culture of inclusiveness through the lens of Kennedy’s five distinctive qualities of leadership.

Methodology: This mixed-methods study identified strategies exemplary public school superintendents used to create an organizational culture of inclusiveness. The study collected quantitative data from 17 superintendents via a survey and qualitative data from six of those superintendents via one-on-one interviews. Respondents were purposely chosen for their esteemed service in the field of education and based on specific criteria, including a recommendation from the County Office Superintendents of Schools.

Findings: Examination of the data revealed eight major findings. Superintendents saw others in the organization by valuing perspectives, diversity, and stories. They were intentionally curious about those they served by listening and learning, and involved others through shared leadership. Additionally, the superintendents demonstrated and modeled empathy and cared for individuals on the team. They fostered a sense of ownership and belonging across the organization, and ensured expectations, structures, and systems aligned to inclusiveness. Superintendents also sought expertise and provided professional learning to their staff. The final finding revealed exemplary superintendents exhibited authentic leadership vulnerability.
**Conclusions:** Based on and supported by this study’s findings and connected to the research, seven conclusions were revealed to strengthen the understanding of strategies used by superintendents to create a culture of inclusiveness in San Bernardino and Riverside Counties.

**Recommendations:** Further research was recommended to expand and deepen the knowledge and description of strategies used by leaders to create a culture of inclusiveness, including exploring the perspectives of superintendents from elementary and secondary districts and from other geographical regions.
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PREFACE

Following discussions and considerations regarding the opportunity to study the strategies exemplary leaders used to create a culture of inclusiveness, 10 peer researchers in collaboration with seven Brandman faculty members, who shared a common interest across a wide spectrum of industries, from education to healthcare, organized to form this thematic research study. This explanatory mixed-methods study was designed using the five leadership qualities of cultural differences as identified in *Putting Our Differences to Work: The Fastest Way to Innovation, Leadership, and High Performance* (Kennedy, 2008). Each peer researcher identified 15-17 exemplary leaders to survey from within their industry. The researchers then interviewed five leaders who completed the survey. To ensure consistency and reliability across the thematic team, the 10 peer researchers worked collaboratively to develop the purpose statement, research questions, definitions of terms, survey questions, interview guide, and research study protocols.

Throughout the study, the term *peer researchers* was used to refer to the 10 doctoral candidates who conducted this thematic study. The following is a complete list of the doctoral candidates, along with their chosen field used in this research study, hereafter referred to as peer researchers: Marisol Alaniz, deans in nonprofit colleges; Toloue Aria, chief nurse executives; Lynn Carmen Day, K-12 superintendents; Leila Dodge, elementary school principals; Kelly Kennedy, K-12 superintendents; Martha Martin, Latina school superintendents; Stephanie K. Smart, elementary dual immersion principals; Nicole Tafoya, school counselors; Tonia Watkins, human resource leaders in K-12 schools; and Themiya Withana, finance leaders in banking.
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

For years, the term *melting pot* described the cultural amalgamation of many who ventured across the globe to the United States of America. Once well received, the melting pot metaphor implied a merging of cultures, languages, folkways, and traditions forming the American culture. Today, nearly every country is represented in the United States, which is home to the largest and most diverse number of immigrants globally (Ortman & Guarneri, 2009; Radford & Noe-Bustamante, 2019). However, today, every individual brings his or her own identity and story; the expectation is no longer that people melt into a homogeneous country. In many instances, the uniqueness of cultural backgrounds are celebrated in varying traditions, rituals, and activities. Nevertheless, this diversity brings about tensions, resulting in an increase in hate crimes for three straight years (Eligon, 2018).

California reflects the United States’ changing diversity and was ranked the most diverse state in the country regarding economic, cultural, household, socio-economic, and religious diversity (Jennewein, 2017). According to U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.) estimates, California’s population in 2015 was 39% Hispanic/Latino, 37% White, 14.0% Asian, 6% Black, 3.8% multiracial, and less than 1% Native American or Pacific Islander. In the same way, organizations are comprised of an ever-increasing number of employees with different cultures, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, ages, beliefs, and abilities (Burns, Barton, & Kerby, 2012).

As diversity grew across California, public schools experienced racial and ethnic changes in their teaching force, employee base, and student population (Camp, Klau, Perry, Romero, & Cherry, n.d.; Freedberg, 2018). Furthermore, the U.S. Department of
Education (2016) reported one in five teachers are of color across the nation, whereas in California, one in three teachers are of color. Leadership is more critical in these times of shifting demographics. The superintendent must have the ability to navigate these changes, mitigate the tensions reflected in greater society, increase the diversity of teachers and school administrators, and grow culturally sensitive schools (Freedberg, 2018; Harvey, Cambron-McCabe, Cunningham, & Koff, 2013; Rendon & Hope, 1996).

In this way, the superintendent role is similar to the head or chief executive officer (CEO) of a company. The superintendent reports to a board of trustees and is provided authority through Education Code to serve as the CEO and represent the district as a whole (Kowalski, 2005). The superintendent is a liaison to the Board of Education and is expected to advocate for the needs of the district, schools, students, families, and community in relation to education (Björk, Browne-Ferrigno, & Kowalski, 2014; Hoyle, Björk, Collier, & Glass, 2004; Kowalski, 2005). Additionally, the superintendent navigates political circumstances and pivots in times of change, often without a playbook.

In the last 10 years, the superintendent role became consumed with myriad crises, such as school shootings, egregious employee misconduct, and fiscal mismanagement. The most recent 2020 COVID-19 pandemic forced extensive school closures and significant adjustments within the educational system to distance, hybrid, and small group learning models. Additionally, national political and racial tension escalated in the same year. Despite these challenges, the superintendent remained tasked with developing a positive culture and expectations of respect that permeate across the organization (Benzel & Hoover, 2015). It is imperative the superintendent be a leader and champion of diversity and create a culture of inclusiveness throughout the organization, which
makes it beneficial to examine the strategies superintendents employ to create a culture of inclusiveness that honors and leverages individual and cultural differences.

**Background**

Understanding the past helps people understand the present. In concept, equality was at the heart of the United States’ founding principles. All men are created equal according to the U.S. Declaration of Independence drafted at the beginning of the American Revolution in 1776; yet for years, and arguably now, many individuals were not guaranteed social justice, equitable treatment, and inclusion in the workplace. As some argue the country came a long way since those early years; others would argue progress has been a slow dance.

In 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) initiated a commission to establish laws, via the Fair Employment Practice Committee (FEPC), prohibiting hiring discrimination by race, creed, color, or national origin (Kersten, 2000). In 1942, the War Production Board, also established under FDR’s leadership, took oversight of the FEPC. A few short years later, following WWII in 1946, President Harry S. Truman dissolved the FEPC (Hickox, 2020). Following the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was established in 1965 under President Lyndon B. Johnson. To this day, the EEOC protects employees against the same threats of discrimination, expanding the protected classes to include sex (identity, status, and orientation), pregnancy, age, disability, and genetic information (EEOC, n.d.). However, even with these regulated expectations for opportunity and inclusivity, there are no guarantees organizations will go beyond compliance to establish an authentic culture of inclusivity in the absence of intentional leadership strategies.
Organizational Culture

Culture is dynamic. It is deep-rooted and significantly drives the behaviors and outcomes across an organization. Research defined organizational culture in different ways, such as shared experiences, values, and beliefs or perceived patterns of basic suppositions created or known to the group (Schein, 1990); shared vision, norms, and symbols (Nikpour, 2017); and how things were done (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). It appears organizational culture is an elusive, underlying construct in the organization; however, a more direct dynamic should be noted, which is how culture impacts employee behaviors. An organization’s culture influences behavior and how individuals see their role in the organization (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). It creates interplay among employees and in groups in assumed patterns (Schrodt, 2002).

The K-12 education system’s organizational culture reflects these same patterns of behavior influencing employee and district dynamics. Culture is at the center of what drives educator actions and behaviors. The Harvard Graduate School for Education described culture during The National Institute for Urban School Leaders meeting, which included connections to core beliefs and behaviors (Shafer, 2018). A related example is when leaders and teachers believe all students can learn at high levels, it impacts individual actions and organizational culture (Hord, 1997). Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) explored organizational culture with the purpose of getting individuals to adapt to expected ways of behaving and forming mental patterns. Referred to as collective programming and unique to the school or district setting, organizational culture is influenced by employee adaptations. The educational system cannot effectively function
without a supportive and collaborative environment inclusive of employee shared beliefs (Fullan, 2011, 2016; Marzano, 2012; Marzano & Waters, 2009).

Educational leaders are expected to set the culture as a responsibility of the job (Kirtman & Fullan, 2016). Elements of culture for which leaders influence are direction, climate, and collaboration (DuFour, 2004; Fullan, 2011, 2016; Marzano, 2012; Marzano & Waters, 2009); therefore, leadership becomes the lynchpin for ensuring culture is developed. Organizational culture is a function of leadership, as is creating an inclusive culture. Kennedy (2008) posited, “by putting our differences to work, we can…lead people whose backgrounds and values may be radically different…requiring new skills for leaders at this time” (p. 15).

Leadership

Leadership is relational, whether the task is directing, facilitating, or sharing with others (Northouse, 2021; Yukl, 2013). Although leadership theory dates as far back as the 1700s (A. King, 1990), more recent theories classify leadership into two categories: transactional, referring to influencing others in exchange for their following, or transformational, referring to motivating the follower through a relationship and shared purpose (Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010; Burns et al., 2012; Tischler, Giambatista, McKeage, & McCormick, 2016). Regardless of the classification, a leader’s goal is to influence others to accomplish goals and outcomes. Specific to education, leaders influence of others directly impacts school and district success (Fullan & Quinn, 2015; Hattie, 2015; Waters & Marzano, 2006). Top leaders such as superintendents vary in traits, processes, and styles, but their inclusive strategies are critical in educational change, especially those prompted by diversity (LaSalle & Johnson, 2018).
Theoretical Foundations

Understanding people’s differences provides the underpinning for district leaders to leverage the relationship between their leadership and dimensions of diversity, which informs decision-making, policy, and organizational behaviors (LaSalle & Johnson, 2018). Influential leaders comprehend the significance of leveraging diversity to build an organizational culture (Kennedy, 2008). A review of the foundations enabled the peer researchers to examine the strengths and weaknesses to be leveraged by diversity in the workplace. The following diversity theories set the foundation for understanding how educational leaders create a culture of inclusiveness in the workplace.

**Identity diversity theory.** Identity diversity theory, sometimes referred to as demographic diversity, is divided into two groups, essentialist and constructionist. Essentialists assert identity comes from within whereas constructionists assert identity is influenced by external factors (Hearn & Louvier, 2015). Essentialists believe identity is characterized by demographic data, such as age, race, and gender (Harrison, Price, Bell, 1998; Jackson, May, Whitney, Guzzo, & Salas, 1995; Riordan & Shore, 1997).

**Cognitive diversity theory.** Cognitive diversity theory highlights the value of diversity in the organization, exploring the types of rational thinking related to cognitive processes and decision-making (Meissner & Wulf, 2017). Connections are made between demographic and cognitive diversity theory as a result of the influence one has on the other (Horwitz & Horwitz, 2007). Cognitive differences provide constructive variability related to intellectual expertise, knowledge, and experiences, which fuel productivity in an organization and team (Miller, Burke, & Glick, 1998). This is in contrast to schema theory that categorizes others based on their stored pattern of thinking.
and relating, which contributes to the potential for discrimination, bias, or prejudice in the workplace (DiMaggio, 1997; Fiske & Taylor, 1991).

**Social identity theory.** A social-cognitive approach to diversity may limit the benefit of diversity in an organization by automatically categorizing people based on their visible characteristics (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). This concept applies to social identity theory in which individuals identify themselves by the groups to which they belong (Mcleod, 1970); this is differentiated by the compartmentalizing of the in-group and out-group (Hogg, 2001; Tajfel, 1974). This theory contributes to potential bias.

Both social inclusion and exclusion theories are related to social identity and how individuals are viewed by themselves and others. Social inclusion theory describes how an individual or people feel part of and valued by society or others (Robo, 2014; Veerbeek & Peters, 2018), whereas social exclusion theory describes how individuals or people feel excluded from or denied participation (Hoff & Walsh, 2018).

**Critical race theory.** The immediate, unconscious categorization of others based on demographic diversity is the provocation for understanding critical race theory (CRT), which examines systematic racism. CRT intentionally promotes combating practices and beliefs, allowing racism to persist by deconstructing the race’s history and experiences (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). CRT is not limited to race, but embraces the interplay with other identifications or dimensions of diversity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

**Diversity management theory.** To move from demographic diversity to the convergence of diversity and inclusivity, employees’ sense of belonging in the organization must exist. The foundation of diversity management theory aligns with
studies conducted by Thomas and Ely (1996) and Bilimoria, Joy, and Liang (2008) who examined whether employees felt included and to what degree. Diversity has a direct link to the need for inclusivity.

Optimal distinctiveness theory. The foundation of optimal distinctiveness theory connects inclusion in a continuum considering the strength of the variables (Brewer, 2011; Shore et al., 2011). The level of inclusion can be defined by exclusion that depicts low belonging and value, assimilation that depicts high belonging and low value, differentiation that depicts low belonging and high value, and inclusion that depicts high belonging and high value (Shore et al., 2011). Each level of inclusiveness strengthens the understanding of the optimal balance between inclusion and individuality, informing social dynamics and group interactions in the workplace (Brewer, 2011; Leonardelli, Pickett, & Brewer, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

Kennedy (2008) provided a process for putting the theory of workplace inclusivity into practice. Her theoretical framework guided this research and rendered meaning to the optimal distinctiveness theory by delineating steps necessary to realize the concept of inclusion and provide suggested steps at a time wherein foundational research on diversity and inclusion needs to be expanded (Travis, Nugent, & Lengnick-Hall, 2019). Additionally, Kennedy (2008) recommended developing an inclusive culture in the workplace, utilizing the model of five characteristics of leaders, and suggested leaders who embrace diversity improve innovation, leadership, and achievement. The following are the characteristics Kennedy (2008) identified as the five leadership qualities to put people’s differences to work.
Diversity as an organizational priority. Kennedy (2008) suggested to achieve a culture of inclusivity, diversity must be an organizational priority. Intentional strategies should be prioritized to embrace each individual’s unique differences, perspectives, and talents as an identifier for organizational success (Kennedy, 2008; Winters, 2015). Additionally, the leader’s intentionality is linked to embracing a culture of inclusiveness. That same culture has a positive impact on team performance (Bourke & Espdido, 2019).

Knowing people and their differences. Kennedy (2008) further suggested leaders must prioritize knowing people and their differences to intentionally develop in-depth knowledge, expertise, and empathy about diversity through curiosity, experiences, and daily practice. Honoring all employees’ uniqueness mirrors social inclusion theory and optimal distinctiveness theory, developing a sense of belonging and engagement in team members. This sense of affinity for the organization impacts job performance (Bourke & Espdido, 2019).

Rich communication. Leaders must prioritize rich communication, resulting in a personal connection between individuals (Jensen, Moynihan, & Salomonsen, 2018; Kennedy, 2008; Russ, Daft, & Lengel, 1990). Consequently, the transfer of information with the intent to understand the meaning and broaden one’s perspective deepens the connection. Communication discourse is a consistent strength for leaders who value diversity, ensuring strong communication and raising the level of leadership responsibility regarding listening (Gee, 1999; Miller, Ryan, & Porter, 2002; Zúñiga, Naagda, & Sevig, 2002). To build more inclusive cultures, leaders should proactively invite team members to communicate ideas and feedback.
**Personal responsibility.** In cultures that embrace inclusivity, Kennedy (2008) recommended personal responsibility as a core value. Personal responsibility is defined as conscious ownership of one’s actions and their impact on others (Kennedy, 2008; Tausen, Miles, Lawrie, & Macrae, 2018). It challenges the leader to look within when circumstances necessitate. Responsibility involves mindset and entails a mix of values and attributes that impact all individuals in the organization (Zenger, 2015).

**Mutualism as the final arbiter.** Kennedy (2008) argued people should prioritize mutualism as the final arbiter, creating organizational cultures in which everyone benefits and no one is harmed by the team or organization’s decisions and actions. Mutualism establishes trust in organizations through a deep sense of shared purpose, a thoughtful inspection of each member’s ideas and interests, and interdependence when performing roles and responsibilities (Harvey & Drolet, 2006; Mishra, 1996). More importantly, the intersection between identity and trust is leveraged by a formed construct of mutualism.

**Culture of inclusion.** Finally, Kennedy (2008) suggested a culture of inclusion incorporates diverse individuals in an environment of mutual respect and acceptance that recognizes and values their unique contribution to organization success. To achieve this, leaders tended to the four cultural intelligence (CQ) capabilities: motivation, cognition, meta-cognition, and behavior (Ang, Van Dyne, & Rockstuhl, 2015; Earley & Ang, 2003). Dimensions of diversity are encompassed in a culture of inclusiveness (Kennedy, 2008).

**Culturally Intelligent Leadership**

Ramirez (2014) defined CQ as the ability to relate with others in a diverse setting. Livermore (2015) explained, “CQ is the capability to function effectively across national, ethnic, and organizational cultures“ (p. 4). Thus, the connection between leadership and
effective approaches to engaging others is leveraged through the inclusive cultural capabilities of drive, knowledge, strategy, and action. Ramirez (2014) described CQ similarly to how Livermore termed cultural competence: the ability to interact, comprehend, and accept those with different cultural backgrounds. Livermore (2015) extended the thinking as an intuitive ability to solve problems and make decisions in a culturally diverse work environment. Educational researchers discussed the need for cultural competence (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Lindsey, Nuri-Robbins, & Terrel, 2018), but made less reference to CQ until recently. La Salle (2018) invited educators to practice strategies of empathy and love in relation to developing a culture of inclusion.

**Role of Superintendents**

The changing demographics in K-12 education require a leader with the ability to develop culturally inclusive work environments. Research noted the most significant strategy for inclusion in the workplace was for leaders to value, accept, and respect each of their employees (Grafstein, 2019). Additionally, employee uniqueness must be recognized as a competitive edge; each employee’s background, ethnicity, style, ability, orientation, and age is an asset to the organization. Despite copious conversations in school settings about strategies to achieve equity for students, a gap in comprehensive research pervades when it comes to building inclusive cultures in districts for employees, despite the necessity for educational leaders to focus on student and employee needs.

**Unified school district.** Unified school districts (USDs) typically have schools with T.K. or K through 12th-grade students (California Department of Education [CDE], 2020). CDE (2016) provided a historical perspective on the formation of school districts in California in 1849 when the territory experienced a population boom from the Gold
Rush. From then, district formation increased to over 3,500 by 1935. Subsequently, state law encouraged elementary and high school districts to combine, creating USDs. Ten years later, the Optional Reorganization Act reduced school district numbers from 2,568 to 2,111. The total number of school districts was reduced to 1,068 by the early 1970s (CDE, 2016). Fingertip Facts on Education in California (CalEd Facts, 2020) suggested the decline in school districts continued, noting a decrease in elementary and high school districts while USDs increased by over 100 to 346 in California.

**Statement of the Research Problem**

The Pew Research Center highlighted demographic trends impacting the United States, underscoring race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, generation, gender, and age (Cohn & Caumont, 2016; Fingerhut, 2018). In this time when diversity continues to grow nationally and statewide, creating a culture of inclusiveness is a necessity. Expanding diversity in the workplace brings a variety of different experiences, ideas, and voices to organizations. If appropriately managed, diversity can lead to productivity and innovation in the workplace as leaders leverage dimensions of diversity (Brimhall & Mor Barak, 2018; Kennedy, 2018); however, tension, dysfunction, and low performance are risks in organizations where leaders do not intentionally include all staff. A lack of cultural competence by the leader can create intense conflict.

A leader’s ability to create and build on diversity within the organization can provide a strong sense of belonging and value for all employees. Foundational research on diversity and inclusion continues to evolve (Travis et al., 2019). Research on the dynamics regarding inclusivity in the workplace exists; however, the body of research
indicated a need for an in-depth look into this topic, specifically regarding the educational environment (Travis et al., 2019).

The superintendent’s role is to lead the district, setting and developing the culture and expectations (Benzel & Hoover, 2015; Meador, 2019). Culture goes beyond fulfilling the needs of employees and impacts students, validating the need to provide supportive and collaborative environments within the educational system and structure (Fullan, 2011, 2016; Marzano, 2012; Marzano & Waters, 2009). However, little is known about the strategies exemplary superintendents employ to build inclusive work cultures for school district employees.

Although a growing number of resources provide recommendations to school principals on actions to create cultures of inclusiveness (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Lindsey et al., 2018), few intentionally target superintendents or district leaders. Educational leaders began to address student diversity in school districts specific to achievement (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; DuFour, 2004; Fullan, 2016; Howard, 2010; Marzano, 2012; Marzano & Waters, 2009). However, the need to address growing diversity and inequities districtwide exists and is stymied by a deficiency in information (Howard, 2010; Putnam, 2016). A pressing need for district leadership to champion diversity and equity for all in the organization and across the system is crucial (LaSalle & Johnson, 2018). Unfortunately, there is limited knowledge of intentional strategies a school superintendent, who is at the district’s helm, should use to develop a culture of inclusiveness in a school district.
Purpose Statement

The purpose of this explanatory mixed-methods study was to identify and describe the leadership strategies unified school district (USD) superintendents in San Bernardino and Riverside Counties used to create an organizational culture of inclusiveness using Kennedy’s (2008) five distinctive qualities of leadership.

Research Questions

Six research questions guided this study:

1. What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to make diversity an organizational priority?
2. What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to get to know people and their differences?
3. What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to enable rich communication?
4. What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to make personal responsibility a core value?
5. What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to establish mutualism as the final arbiter?
6. What do exemplary USD superintendents perceive as the most important advantages of creating an organizational culture of inclusiveness?

Significance of the Problem

Increasing diversity across the nation, state, and communities calls for leaders with the ability to create culturally inclusive environments in all sectors, including education (Bilimoria et al., 2008; Holvino, Ferdman, & Merrill-Sands, 2004; Thomas &
Ely, 1996). The complexities and challenges diversity brings to the role of school superintendents is growing significantly. Superintendent success depends on creating a positive culture where people are engaged and have a voice. A superintendent’s ability to create an environment where all individuals feel valued and a sense and belonging is necessary to the success of the students, staff, and families served by the district.

Today, it is critical leaders have the skills and strategies necessary to create an organizational culture of inclusiveness. Exclusionary organizations miss the opportunity to fully engage staff at all levels (Grafstein, 2019). Likewise, the entire system suffers if the superintendent is not skilled in creating a culture of inclusiveness. Researchers such as Earley and Ang (2003) asserted CQ provides a foundation for change among diverse populations, building on Göksoy’s (2017) premise a culture cannot be separate from leadership. Furthermore, exploring the assertion a direct relationship exists between leadership and school culture development accentuates the importance of a school leader’s role in developing culture (Gökoşy, 2017).

Ample evidence suggested school site leaders who used strategies assuring all team members feel they are treated respectfully and fairly yield a higher performance level (Fullan, 2016; Howard, 2010; Marzano, 2012; Marzano & Waters, 2009). All students are afforded the opportunity to master learning in this environment. However, this same clarity on what strategies an effective superintendent can use to create a culture of inclusiveness is far less prevalent.

This study filled a gap in what was known about strategies school superintendents employed to build inclusive cultures to benefit employees. The data could inform school superintendents on how to intentionally create a culture of inclusiveness through a
purposeful focus on diversity and the professional and personal actions necessary to influence the district through policy, practices, and procedures. Additionally, the study could be used by professional organizations, universities, and credential programs responsible for training superintendents, foundations, and school boards.

**Definitions**

**Cultural intelligence.** CQ is “an individual’s ability to relate and work effectively in culturally diverse settings” (Ramirez, 2014, p. 22).

**Culture.** Culture refers to learned and shared human patterns or models that distinguish members of one group of people from another (Damen, 1987).

**Culture of inclusiveness.** A culture of inclusiveness is the incorporation of diverse individuals in an environment of mutual respect and acceptance that recognizes and values their unique contribution to the success of the organization (Azmat, Fujimoto & Rentschler, 2014; Kennedy, 2008; Mak, Daly, & Barker, 2014; Tawagi & Mak, 2015).

**Diversity is an organizational priority.** Diversity as an organizational priority is an intentional action to embrace individuals’ unique differences, perspectives, and talents as an identifier for organizational success (Kennedy, 2008; Winters, 2015).

**Exemplary.** According to Goodwin, Piazza, and Rozin (2014), exemplary refers to people who distinguish themselves from colleagues through appropriate behaviors, principles, or intentions that can be emulated.

**Know people and their differences.** Knowing people and their differences is intentionally developing deep knowledge, expertise, and empathy about diversity through curiosity, experiences, and practice (Hesselbein & Goldsmith 2009; Kennedy, 2008; Travis et al., 2019).
**Mutualism as the final arbiter.** Mutualism as the final arbiter denotes that everyone benefits and no one is harmed by the decisions and actions within the team or organization (Kennedy, 2008). Mutualism establishes trust in organizations through a deep sense of shared purpose, a thoughtful inspection of each member’s ideas and interests, and interdependence when performing roles and responsibilities (Harvey & Drolet, 2006; Mishra, 1996).

**Personal responsibility as a core value.** Personal responsibility as a core value is a leader’s conscious ownership of his or her actions and the impact on others (Kennedy, 2008; Tausen et al., 2018).

**Rich communication.** Rich communication is the transfer of information with the intent to understand the meaning and broaden one’s perspective, resulting in a personal connection between individuals (Jensen et al., 2018; Kennedy 2008).

**Delimitations**

The study was delimited to 17 exemplary USD superintendents in San Bernardino and Riverside Counties for the quantitative portion and within that group, six who volunteered for the qualitative interviews. For this study, exemplary leaders were defined as those who distinguished themselves from peers in the highest manner and who met at least four of the following traits:

- Participation in organizational and community activities with diverse individuals
- Evidence of leading a culturally inclusive organization
- A minimum of five years of experience in the profession
• Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings about cultural inclusion
• Recognition by peers as a leader who gives respect to all people
• Membership in professional associations in his or her field

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter I presented an overview of the problem, purpose, and research questions that guided the study, and explained the significance of the study and included definitions and delimitations. Chapter II is a comprehensive review of the literature relevant to the purpose and research questions. Chapter III describes the methodology used and the rationale for choosing an explanatory mixed-methods research design for this study. Chapter IV is an analysis of the data collected. Chapter V presents conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for future research related to culturally intelligent leadership.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

With growing diversity across the workplace and schools, this literature review examined leadership and its impact on organizational culture related to diversity. It provides foundational information regarding diversity and inclusiveness in organizations, building the context to inform the role of public school superintendents in the field of education. Additionally, the review provides insights into Kennedy’s (2008) framework for leveraging diversity in the workplace, which supports the research on strategies superintendents utilize to create a culture of inclusiveness.

**Organizational Culture**

Culture is crucial to organizational success. *Corporate Cultures* (Deal & Kennedy, 1982) explored the concept of organizational culture. It presented organizational culture as a key to achieving a competitive edge on other businesses and suggested it yields desired outcomes when culture is aligned to strategy. Many experts as far back as the late 1960s provided multiple approaches to examining culture, some stemming from observed behavior, regularities in interactions, group norms, espoused values, formal philosophy or policies, implicit rules of the game, climate, embedded competency skills, shared ways of thinking, linguistics standards, shared understanding, formal celebrations and traditions, and patterns of existing in the organization (Ashkanasy, Wilderom, & Peterson, 2000; Hofstede, 1991; Martin, 2001). In the mid-1980s, the examination of culture suggested its study was within the social sciences, focusing on people and their ways. The literature suggested culture is dynamic and accentuates its complexity in how multiple organizational variables have a causal effect on the entire organization. Anderson et al. (2017) and Burke and Litwin (1992)
suggested culture is one of the top factors influencing change and performance within an organization, yet little agreement exists on the definition of culture.

**Definition of Organizational Culture**

Researchers defined organizational culture in various ways, such as shared experiences or attitudes, values, and beliefs or perceived patterns of basic suppositions created or known to the group (Moua, 2011; Schein, 1990, 2010). Others held slightly different thoughts and presented culture as the vision, norms, and symbols of an organization, or more simply, the way things were done (Anderson et al., 2017; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Nikpour, 2017). Most agreed organizational culture is an underlying social construct in the organization; culture impacts employee behaviors and employee behaviors influence culture. Consequently, the organization’s culture is an underpinning to behavior and how individuals see their role in the organization (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Self-perceptions of roles and relationships establish an interchange among employees and groups within assumed patterns, which impacts the coherence and outcomes of the organization (Schein, 2010; Schrodt, 2002; Weick, 1995).

**Organizational Culture in Education**

Patterns of behavior reflect the organizational culture in the field of K-12 education and the substantive movement toward desired results. The study of culture suggested educator actions and behaviors were driven by the ideals, beliefs, and shared understandings developed in the organization. However, for years education focused more on practices and procedures focused on structures and practices leading to school success (Gonder & Hymes, 1994; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Waters & Marzano, 2006). As early as 1993, Marzano, Pickering, and McTighe
identified culture as a significant influence on educational outcomes throughout school districts. In 2009, Jones emphasized a direct connection between culture and student outcomes at the site level but did not refer to the district level. In 2016, Fullan acknowledged the value of culture and climate as a primary factor for effective school district leadership. In Coherence, Fullan and Quinn (2015) also provided explicit examples of districts that significantly impacted outcomes by leveraging culture. Researchers widely agreed the educational system cannot effectively function without a supportive and collaborative environment inclusive of employee shared beliefs (Fullan & Quinn, 2015; Marzano, 2012; Marzano & Waters, 2009). Additionally, Kirtman and Fullan (2016) drove this point home by suggesting educational leaders are responsible for creating culture as an expectation of the job.

**Leadership**

The definition and evolution of leadership provide context for examining its relationship to culture, which drills down to leadership and education. Diversity and inclusion theories offer understandings of how exemplary unified school district (USD) superintendents develop an inclusive culture. Leadership types, characteristics, and behaviors influence organizational culture in many fields, including education.

Leadership is central to the success of organizations and was defined with a breadth of descriptors. Multiple researchers explained leadership as influencing others to a common outcome (Northouse, 2021; Yukl, 2013). Furthermore, some insisted it could be described using traits (Dinh & Lord, 2012; Zaccaro, 2007), whereas others described a process (Hughes, 1993; Wood & Dibben, 2015). However, it is widely agreed that
leadership consists of traits, styles, tasks, strategies, and philosophy (Rowe & Guerrero, 2012). The nuances to leadership evolved, factoring in a wide range of influences.

**The Evolution of Leadership**

Leadership has significant power in creating culture. Leadership theories emerged over four centuries ago, with the concept of leadership evolving from pre-biblical times (Horner, 1997; A. King, 1990). Landis, Hill, and Harvey (2014) and Stone, Russell, and Patterson (2004) reviewed leadership theories from a historical perspective, affirming multiple eras of theories established the foundations for today’s leadership. Within the personality era in the 1800s, great man theory was established, depicting the leader as a hero and expanding into a period of power relations and persuasion. By the early 1900s, the focus shifted toward traits as a determining factor in leadership. Behavioral theory filled the gap of subsequent theories, claiming behaviors determined leadership more than traits, inclusive of McGregor’s Theory X and Y (Stone et al., 2004). The transition brought about the concept that a leader can learn traits versus being born with them, which involves task versus relationship orientation and follower engagement.

The contingency era began in 1964, as both situational theory and normative theory fostered because the prior trait and behavioral theories lacked consistency in leadership actions and situations (Northouse, 2021; Richmon & Allison, 2003). During this timeframe, it was first suggested managerial relations, structures, and power formed successful leadership. The emergence of transformational leadership in the early 1990s started the leader-follower era (Stewart, 2006; Yukl, 2013). Leader-follower theory encompasses the concept of servant leadership, which established leadership as a form of service to those with needs or without privilege (Greenleaf, 1998). Leader-follower
theory focuses on relationships inclusive of respect and trust (Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997; Sheer, 2015). Relational theories revealed better organizational outcomes (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Iles, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007).

Into the last decade, transformational leadership was established through James Burns’ (2004) pivotal notion provoking intentional change in people and systems. Although Burns acknowledged transactional leadership, he affirmed intrinsic motivation is cultivated for both followers and leaders by connecting follower identity to the mission and organizational identity (Stewart, 2006). The leader is considered an inspirational role model who understands the distinctiveness of employees, as well as their strengths and weaknesses, which maximizes performance and innovation (Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010; Bass, 1995; Burns, 2004; Horner, 1997; Tischler et al., 2016). Bass (1988, 1995) and Burns (2004) agreed thinking, modeling, visioning, varying vantage points, and values are of a greater good to the organization. In the last decade, contextual factors were considered in leadership, such as technology, biosciences, and diversification, paving the way for more intentional leadership (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009; Schartz, 2010). In short, leadership evolved over centuries, transforming from a more directive to a more collaborative approach.

**Types of Leadership**

Researchers established leadership styles evolved, influencing the outcomes of an organization. In 1939, Kurt Lewin described four leadership types: laissez-faire, autocratic, authoritative, and participative. These classical leadership types are still utilized; however, recent theories classify leadership within Lewin’s more democratic type of leadership (Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010; Burns, 2004; Smith, 2001;
Two common types of leadership described in the literature were transactional and transformational.

- **Transactional**, referring to influencing others in exchange for their following through guidelines, clear boundaries, and explicit direction
- **Transformational**, describing motivating the follower through relationship and common purpose, trust, inspiration, and respect

### Leadership and Culture

Regardless of styles, types, or categories, most researchers agreed the intent of leadership was to influence others to accomplish goals or outcomes. Leaders influence the culture and culture influences organizational outcomes (Schein & Schein, 2018). Martin (2001) communicated a shared set of empirical assumptions within organizations, deciphering various levels of integration, differentiation, and fragmentation, all of which impact outcomes and leadership. Kennedy (2008) suggested multi-layered impact occurs through a leader’s role in the organization and his or her responsibility to develop a culture that impacts productivity, innovation, and results.

Leaders influence elements of culture such as direction, climate, and collaboration (DuFour, 2004; Fullan, 2015; Marzano, 2012; Marzano & Waters, 2009); therefore, a leader’s ability and strategy for developing culture is essential. Schein and Schein (2018) acknowledged leaders create the conditions to develop culture and asserted culture is influenced by what the leader recognizes and pays attention, how resources are allocated, how urgent matters are addressed, criteria used for hiring or removal, and how conflict is managed. Schein (2010) stated cultures originated from three sources: (1) the beliefs, values, and assumptions of organization founders, (2) the learning experiences of group
members as the organization evolves; and (3) new beliefs, values, and assumptions brought in by new members and leaders.

**Leadership in Education**

In education, it is generally agreed upon that leadership influences others and culture, and that culture directly impacts the success of schools and districts (Fullan, 2016; Gonder & Hymes, 1994; Hattie, 2015; Waters & Marzano, 2009). Like organizations across fields, top leaders in a school district often select, develop, or cultivate the organization’s vision and mission. The focus on culture in *District Leadership that Works* (Marzano & Waters, 2009) underscored the importance of culture in the educational setting and asserted districts advance site leadership responsibilities within elements of culture by promoting collaboration, well-being, coherence, and a common purpose and vision. Additionally, top leadership set the vision and kept the district-level goals and priorities in place. Simply stated, what the leader paid attention to impacted how the district responded, grew, and reached outcomes (Fullan, 2016; Hattie, 2015; Waters & Marzano, 2006). Thus, how leaders form and impact culture must be understood to study how superintendents create a culture of inclusiveness (Terrell, Terrell, Lindsey, & Lindsey, 2015).

Leader roles in developing culture must consider those within the organization if culture is the “shared beliefs, values, and assumptions of a group of people who learn from one another and teach others that their behaviors, attitudes, and perspectives are the correct ways to think, act, and feel” (Moua, 2011, p. 8). In doing so, the uniqueness and diversity of the team impacts the behaviors and outcomes of the organization. Researchers of culture and leadership viewed the unique organizational processes of rites
and rituals, behaviors, and personal styles central to understanding cultural assumptions (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Trice & Beyer, 1984). Moving forward, educational leaders must recognize the interplay of diversity as a factor in developing culture (Moua, 2011; Schein & Schein, 2018).

Diversity

*America has been a never-ending hamster wheel of groups coming in and affecting American society and one another over and over.*

– Angelica Goldman

A varied dimension of diversity accompanies each American citizen, influencing and impacting society, the workplace, and the educational system. America was built on the right to freedom for all, meaning every diverse citizen. Before the nation was founded, many Native American tribes inhabited the land and interacted with settlers from France, Spain, the Netherlands, and England (VanAlstine, Cox, & Roden, 2015). African cultures integrated into the new population via the trading of slaves. America’s development was proudly built on immigration, with multiple waves of cultures and people coming into the country throughout the years. British, French, Spanish, and Dutch continued to populate the land (Goldman, 2017). Next, German, Scottish, Irish, and Scandinavian groups entered America and were the more prevalent in the West expansion. With the industrial revolution, Chinese, Italian, and Eastern Europeans migrated in, and after WWII, Latin Americans, Mexicans, and East Asians (Chin & Trimble, 2015; Goldman, 2017). With each group came myriad cultural traditions, views, ideas, and beliefs.

Chin and Trimble (2015) noted many diverse individuals continue to enter the country and contribute to American culture. Many other dimensions of diversity surfaced
over time, some of which linked to ancestry (i.e., heritage, national origin, race); culture; ability; social status; age; and religion. More recently, additional facets of diversity surfaced, such as sexual orientation and gender (Burns et al., 2012; Chin & Trimble, 2015). Parrilo (1994) suggested diversity is predicted to vastly increase by the middle of the 21st century, and trends validated this projection.

**Diversity in the Workplace**

Consistent with overall national and state diversity, the workplace is also diverse, exhibiting ever-increasing numbers of employees with different cultures, ethnicities, genders, orientations, ages, beliefs, and abilities (Burns et al., 2012). Diversity in the workplace evolved throughout American history and it is considered difficult to identify an origin (McCormick, 2007). Hirschman and Mogford (2009) noted the majority of U.S. immigration started in an agricultural wave of work. In 1865, following the Civil War, work shifted from farms to factories and moved into a second industrial revolution, drawing others to the United States throughout the 20th century (Hirschman & Mogford, 2009; Williams-Gualandi, 2020). Currently, the workplace entered the digital age, consistent with the science and technology revolution, blurring workplace lines internationally (Walsh & Volini, 2017). The development of the nation’s demographics is framed in multiple waves of diverse people coming to the United States, which brought meaning to the concept of the U.S. being a land of immigrants (Chin & Trimble, 2015; D. King, 2009).

**Background of diversity theory in the workplace.** In 1987, William Brock, the Secretary of Labor, called for a study of demographic and economic trends that resulted in *Workforce 2000: Work and Workers in the 21st Century* (Johnston & Packer, 1987).
The report identified five themes for the future: (1) slow growth of the population and workforce, (2) an increase in the average age of the workforce as the pool of young workers was predicted to shrink, (3) an increase in the number of women in the workforce, (4) a significant increase in the number of minorities in the workforce, and (5) a large increase in the population and workforce among legal and illegal immigrants.

Published 10 years later, Judy and D’Amico wrote a follow-up called *Workforce 2020: Work and Workers in the 21st Century*, which updated projections and continued to note an aging population and workforce. The authors claimed Johnston and Packer initiated the diversity industry by writing *Workforce 2000*. Roberson, Ryan, and Ragins (2017) agreed workforce diversity was termed in the early 1990s, but found the topic was inconsistently noted in research for many organizational sciences. They further stated diversity theory was not widespread until the 1990s. Multiple diversity theories set the foundation for leaders to understand the strengths and weaknesses brought forth by diversity (Chin & Trimble, 2015; Shawver, 2004).

**Types of Diversity**

In a study by the *Harvard Business Review*, diversity was delineated in three categories examining the impact of diversity on identity; authors De Anca and Aragon (2018) suggested a unique perspective on the types of diversity (Table 1).
Table 1

Types of Diversity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Impact on Identity</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Diversity</td>
<td>Based on characteristics such as origin, race, gender, and sexual orientation</td>
<td>Identity of origin</td>
<td>From birth, these are carried for life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiential Diversity</td>
<td>Based on abilities, interests, affinities</td>
<td>Identity of growth</td>
<td>Shapes emotions and for whom there is affinity or connection; builds emotional communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Diversity</td>
<td>Based on patterns of thinking and problem-solving</td>
<td>Identity of aspiration</td>
<td>Creates a unique way of understanding and contributing to a common purpose</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Leadership and Diversity

According to Kennedy (2008), effective leaders understand how to leverage diversity to build a productive, innovative organizational cultures. Randall et al. (2018) and Day and Antonakis (2011) built on this idea and suggested diversity and inclusion in the workplace promoted a sense of acceptance and value, which led to stability, low turnover, and high productivity. Trimble and Chin (2015) asserted a need for shifts in leadership training to prepare them for a diverse workplace. Few scholars or researchers documented this need, partially due to the previously accepted concept that demographic groups are uniform, prompting the need for leaders to understand the interrelation of diversity, inclusion, and leadership (Roberson, 2006; Trimble & Chin, 2015).

A leader must contemplate a variety of dimensions of diversity when dissecting a situation. Shein (2010) asserted a critical function of leadership is recognizing the impact of culture on various ways of differentiating situations. Day and Antonakis (2011) and Livermore (2015) noted national culture, demographics, and dimensions of diversity either empower or diminish the positive effects of leadership on the team or the entire organizational system.
Leadership encompasses recognizing the interconnectedness of the world, the bio and neurosciences of leadership, and the rapidity of changing and varying values, perspectives, and backgrounds of new generations (Day & Antonakis, 2011; Senge, Hamilton, & Kania, 2015). Consequently, Chin and Trimble (2015) described leadership theory in the 21st century as involving adapting and accepting thinking. The leader’s role in influencing and meeting goals promotes an understanding and recognition of the relationship between leader and follower (Northouse, 2021). Chin and Trimble (2014) asserted a leader’s need to maximize a relationship framed on understanding diversity.

**Impact of Diversity**

Florida and Tingali (2004) claimed greater diversity in society precedes a more creative and innovative workforce. People with unique complementary strengths, abilities, and experiences led to greater productivity. Lazear (1999) and Kennedy (2008) affirmed high levels of diversity prompt innovation through numerous problem-solving ideas and more robust resolution strategies. Ridley (2012) maintained and extended the concept by averring the positive historical relationship between diverse individuals and inventiveness through the concept of collective intelligence.

At one time, some researchers focused on how diversity enhanced the workplace as others provided numerous examples of conflict due to diversity. Easterly and Levine (1997) wrote about cultural and racial diversity leading to conflict and political unrest, and Shleifer and Vishny (1993) pointed out ethnically diverse societies had more exploitation of people. Collier (2000) further contended cultural difference was an obstacle to growth by dividing and polarizing people. Desmet and Wacziarg (2018) expanded on this concept and stated barriers were created by religious diversity, which
heightened ambiguity, stress, and conflict. Similarly, Davidson (2011) asserted a simple increase in diversity did not ensure improvement in performance or productivity. Research indicated individuals preferred to work with others with whom they identified (Shore et al., 2011). Furthermore, nearly two-thirds of employees felt their leaders did not create a workplace that empowered individuals through a sense of belonging (Davidson, 2011). Kennedy (2008) shared diversity alone does not guarantee a highly productive and engaging work environment. Instead, the growing workforce demands a need for effective leadership strategies, which secures a culture of inclusiveness and would ensure maximizing the positive outcomes suggested as possible with diversity in the workplace (Kennedy, 2008).

**Theoretical Foundations**

Various theories set the foundation for leaders to understand the strengths and weaknesses to be leveraged by diversity in the workplace, which showed the significance of leaders using strategies to develop a culture of inclusiveness. This foundation set the stage for understanding how educational leaders created a culture of inclusiveness in the workplace. Understanding people’s differences provides district leaders the opportunity to reflect on the relationship between their leadership and multiple dimensions of diversity, informing decision-making and practice (LaSalle & Johnson, 2018).

**Identity Diversity Theory**

Thomas (1992) suggested primary functions of diversity include visible dimensions such as race, ethnicity, age, gender, and ability. Secondary elements referred to items that can be changed, like religion, marital status, education, or socio-economic status (McKormick, 2007). In education, school districts have collect data on
demographic diversity for years. Demographic diversity is the most frequent global essentialist theory characterized by statistical data, such as age, race, or gender. Demographic trends became a topic of focus when the Workforce 2000 study was released, and interest continued to increase as researchers explored workforce issues (Roberson et al., 2017).

Leader understanding of diversity theory is crucial. To understand the construct of diversity, researchers conceptually refer to diversity in several ways. Harrison et al. (1998) and Jackson et al. (1995) referred to visible diversity attributes versus less evident or deep-level characteristics. Williams-Gualandi (2020) referred to a division in identity diversity theory, with authors using different terms: identity diversity and demographic diversity, or representational diversity for those with lived experiences and represented by evident characteristics. The alternative reference is described as cognitive diversity, encompassing a variety of dimensions of difference.

**Cognitive Diversity Theory**

Tajfel (1985) acknowledged cognitive and social identity brought meaning to diversity principles through a convergence of research and theory. Miller et al. (1998) delineated how varied individual thinking brought value to others and the organization, and productive differences in knowledge, experiences, and expertise added significant value to others, the team, and the organization. Meissner and Wulf (2017) referred to cognitive diversity theory as rational thinking related to the cognitive process and noted the potential for positively impacting organizations. In school districts, a need for this exploration exists beyond students to staff: the way staff think provides insights into how they work, collaborate, and produce outcomes.
Reynolds and Lewis (2017) explained cognitive diversity as a style of information processing or perspective differences. It was not predicated on demographic diversity. However, Horwitz and Horwitz (2007) considered the interconnectedness of demographic and cognitive diversity theories concerning the influence one had on the other; experiences form cognitive traits based on an individual’s lived experience or background. Hearn and Louvrier (2017) defined bringing types of diversity together as intersectionality, which developed multi-dimensional forms of diversity. Knowledge of cognitive diversity allowed leaders across fields to enhance team dynamics, productivity, retention, and the ability to increase individual capacity (Reynolds & Lewis, 2017). Reynolds and Lewis (2017) acknowledged a correlation between high cognitive diversity and productivity in two areas of cognition related to new situations: (1) knowledge processing (how knowledge was gathered, distributed, or generated) and (2) perspective (how individuals deploy their expertise or organize the expertise of others).

Cognitive diversity is less visible than demographic diversity. Like other forms of diversity, cognitive diversity is impacted by obstacles or biases, which were coined as functional bias. Often, employers or peers preferred to hire or work with others who thought in a similar way, which created low cognitive diversity and failed efforts (Dobbin & Kalev, 2020). Tsui et al. (1992) suggested homogeneous groupings or affinity based on demographics, termed as the similarity-attraction paradigm, led to those who were part of a diverse workgroup to have more engagement and less absenteeism.

Schema theory. Fiske and Taylor (1991) discussed schema theory, which is common in cognitive psychology and denotes categorizing others based on stored patterns of thinking and the relationship of those patterns. DiMaggio (1997) explained
individuals have different mental models that lead to inconsistent actions. Mental structures of preconceived thoughts and ideas about the world impact the workplace. Schema theory was examined by Cherry (2019), who described the benefits of schemas as interpreting information more efficiently. Conversely, it was noted schemas can limit the ability to interpret information because pre-existing thought patterns focused on information supporting those patterns. Stereotypes, bias, prejudice, and discrimination may be developed within this advanced cognitive frame (Cherry, 2019).

Social Identity Theories

Social identity theory asserts individuals identify themselves by the groups to which they belong (Mcleod, 1970), which is by compartmentalizing the in-group and out-group (Hogg, 2001; Tajfel, 1974). Tajfel and Turner (1985) claimed in the workplace, employees showed strong favoritism to their group; however, Goldberg (2011) and Simons, Friedman, Liu, and McLean (2007) noted some demographic or marginalized groups did not favor members of their group. The social construct influenced which group was viewed as in or belonging (DiAngelo, 2011; Hornsey & Jetten, 2004). Baumeister and Leary (1995) claimed human beings need to belong or be part of a group at the most foundational level, which complimented the significance of an individual’s relational identity at work (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Stum (2001) reexamined Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and connected a fundamental need to belong with commitment in the workplace. Social identity played a role in whether individuals felt included or excluded.

Social inclusion theory. Robo (2014) stated people feel a sense of belonging in a society where individuals are valued and respected. Social inclusion denoted actively involving individuals or groups in society regardless of their identity or group (World
Bank, n.d.). Additionally, social inclusion theory examined the psychological experience of being included. It considered the impact on an individual’s sense of belonging and well-being on the organization as a whole (Verbeek & Peters, 2018). The history of inclusion efforts in the workplace displayed substantial effort in creating more inclusive work environments.

**Social exclusion theory.** Social exclusion describes how individuals or groups are denied participation or inclusion in relationships, activities, and memberships. For years, social exclusion existed in the nation and workplace (Hoff & Walsh, 2018). In circumstance where individuals are excluded, organization members felt less belonging, value, and worth, which impacted personal welfare (Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005; Shore et al., 2011). O’Reilly and Banki (2016) explained exclusionary social practices led to less engagement and the possibility of relational and team dysfunction.

**Critical Race Theory**

Understanding critical race theory (CRT) provides the underpinnings to a current heightened topic of controversy-race. Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) described CRT as theorizing race to understand inequities. Unconscious bias, judgment, or categorization was provocation for understanding CRT. The antecedent to exploring racism was understanding the dominant culture’s systemic racism and acknowledging structures and systems as obstacles to those not acknowledged or appreciated within the dominant social construct (Crenshaw et al., 1995; DiAngelo, 2011; DiMaggio & Garip, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). Leaders need to recognize potential limitations for inclusiveness based on this foundation. Furthermore, CRT enabled researchers to analyze inequities in
the K-12 educational system, which probed racism and bias in schools (Lynn & Parker, 2006), and explain varying views of race, inequity, privilege, and power (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). Rather than solely addressing race, CRT embraces the interplay with other dimensions of diversity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

**Diversity Management Theory**

Gilbert, Stead, and Ivancevich (1999) asserted the development of diversity management (DM) provided specific policies, programs, and strategies to ensure diverse individual inclusivity through organizational decisions and actions. DM theory recognizes if and to what degree employees felt included in their work environment and supports an inclusive work environment by implementing opportunities for employees to understand and value individual differences (Bilimoria et al., 2008; Sabharwal, 2014; Thomas & Ely, 1996). Formal organizations are deploying DM strategies as a response to increased diversity in the workplace.

Intentional organizational actions to initiate DM strategies set formal expectations for inclusion. Otherwise, at times employees group with those who are similar and avoid those who are different, adversely affecting collaboration, productivity, and innovation (Goldberg 2011; Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Diversity has a direct connection to the need for leaders to intentionally manage toward inclusivity. DM in education responds to the discrepancy in the number of diverse employees compared to the demographics of student groups (Maxwell, 2014). As further research was conducted on DM and inclusivity, the need for related information extended to the K-12 education workplace (LaSalle & Johnson, 2018).
**Optimal Distinctiveness Theory**

Shore et al. (2011) and Brewer (2011) expanded diversity theory and moved toward application. They contended the value of an individual’s identity such as culture, ability, orientation, and age contributed to a feeling of belonging within the organization, which invited employees to feel included and engaged. Optimal distinctiveness theory was developed to explore workplace inclusiveness depicted through a matrix (Shore et al., 2011), which examined inclusion on a continuum depending on each variable’s strength (Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Inclusion Framework*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low Belonging</th>
<th>High Belonging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Value of Uniqueness</td>
<td>Exclusion - Not treated as an insider with unique value to the group, while others are insiders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Value of Uniqueness</td>
<td>Differentiation - Not treated like an insider, but uniqueness is valuable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Adapted from Shore et al. (2011).

Depicted by this model, the level of inclusiveness can be defined by exclusion (low belonging, low value); assimilation (high belonging, low value); differentiation (low belonging, high value); and inclusion (high belonging, high value; Shore et al., 2011). The research suggested a need for leaders to ensure employees are treated as insiders, meaning part of the organization, and retain their unique identity (Brewer, 2011; Leonardelli et al., 2010). A leader’s ability to explicitly develop an inclusive workplace was crucial and contributed to employee engagement, involvement, healthful relationships, and transparency (Englelen, Kube, Schmidt, & Flatten, 2014; Kennedy, 2008).
Theories of identity diversity, cognitive diversity, social identity, schema, social inclusion, social exclusion, critical race, DM, and optimal distinctiveness were foundational in providing insights regarding Kennedy’s (2008) framework for leveraging diversity in the workplace and strategies superintendents utilized to create a culture of inclusiveness. Organizations make more effective decisions if they learn to leverage diversity to their advantage. This begs the question of how leaders create a culture that values diversity and aligns values with operations. Building on the literature review of diversity, other authors focused on the concept of inclusivity.

**Inclusiveness**

The literature widely supported that effective leaders build inclusive cultures (Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010; Bass, 1985; Burns, 2004; Schein & Schein, 2017; Tischler et al., 2016). Inclusion in the workplace means obstacles preventing employees from contributing are removed (Miller et al., 1998; Roberson, 2006). Complementing this definition, Wasserman, Gallegos, and Ferdman (2008) asserted inclusiveness involves employers encouraging all employees’ involvement, asking for input, and placing value on the input. The idea multiple styles, cultures, perspectives, abilities, and genders powerfully frame the organization’s strategies, systems, values, and work emphasizes a human element to change (Holvino et al., 2004). The historical background of extending inclusion in the workplace provides insight into inclusiveness.

**Historical Background**

Although immigrants labored in the fields, far less diversity existed in the formal workplace in early U.S. history. In 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) initiated a commission to establish laws, via the Fair Employment Practice Committee
(FEPC). This group’s landmark legislation prohibited hiring discrimination by race, creed, color, or national origin (Kersten, 2000). In 1942, the War Production Board, also established under FDR’s leadership, took oversight of the FEPC. Congress introduced equal opportunity initiatives that did not take hold for 20 years (Dobbin, 2009). In 1948, Truman signed Executive Order 9981 to require fair treatment and desegregation in the armed services, which was considered the first diversity initiative in the workplace. By 1953, desegregation occurred for people of color in the armed services (Kersten, 2000)

The Civil Rights Act was passed on July 2, 1964, and Title VII explicitly targeted workplace discrimination. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC; n.d.) was established in 1965, nearly 20 years after the first workplace diversity efforts. The passage of the Civil Rights Act prohibited discrimination based on race, religion, color, sex, and national origin. Title VII pushed for diversity. To this day, the EEOC protects employees against threats of discrimination and was expanded to include sex (identity, status, and orientation), pregnancy, age, disability, and genetic information (EEOC, n.d.). Over time, inclusiveness in the workplace was advanced through major amendments noted in Table 3.
Table 3

**Amendments to Inclusive Legislation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amendments</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Synopsis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age Discrimination in Employment Action</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Prohibited employees from being discriminated against, including as related to retirement and benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal Opportunity Act</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Directly focused on discrimination against African Americans, allowing the EOCC to act against employers, unions, or any person not following the 1964 Title VII legislation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnancy Discrimination Act</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Prohibited sex discrimination based on pregnancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Rights Act</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Expanded protective rights to employees who were in employment discrimination cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Americans Disability Act</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Prohibited discrimination based on disability status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Child Left Behind Act</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Act, to apply to disadvantaged students to close the achievement gap for all kids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Determined compensatory discrimination of protected employees was unlawful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite years of legislation to protect diversity and laws regulating expectations for opportunity and inclusivity, there is no guarantee organizations intentionally go beyond compliance to establish a culture of inclusivity (Pedriana & Stryker, 2004; Powell, 2012). In the absence of intentional strategies, the leader risks diminished opportunity of cultivating leadership, innovation, and achievement (Engelen et al., 2014).

**Inclusiveness in Education**

The concept of inclusiveness was applied within the field of K-12 education; however, the term inclusive practices in the workplace is not commonplace for employees, but in reference to students with special needs (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2004; Katz, 2015). K-12 inclusive leaders who remove barriers and invite employees into a space of collaboration are often coined collaborative. Collaborative site leaders listen to employees and include them in setting direction, creating strategy, decision-making, and capacity building (Fullan & Quinn, 2015). This inclusiveness involves other
factors of leadership, such as authenticity, humility, and engagement, all of which contribute to a sense of belonging and involvement in the school district or site. Schein (2010) stated, “individuals have the right to be fully themselves at work, to express their personality and uniqueness, to be different” (p. 254).

**Theoretical Framework**

Various diversity theories set the groundwork for leaders to understand the strengths and weaknesses to be leveraged by diversity in the workplace, which provided strategies for leaders to use to develop a culture of inclusiveness. The foundational theories set the stage for understanding how superintendents create a culture of inclusiveness in the workplace to improve innovation, leadership, and performance. Comprehending people’s differences provides school district leaders the opportunity to reflect on the relationship between their leadership and the multiple dimensions of diversity, informing decision-making and practices (LaSalle & Johnson, 2018). In this section, the framework is expounded upon, providing a clear frame of reference to deeply research the topic of superintendents and strategies for creating a culture of inclusion.

Deb Kennedy’s (2008) book, *Putting Our Differences to Work: The Fastest Way to Innovation, Leadership, and High Performance*, provides a theoretical framework for educational leaders to build a culture of inclusivity. As such, this theoretical framework served as the support and structure of the study and grounded research questions and variables. The framework guided this research and elucidated diversity and inclusiveness in school districts, wherein foundational research on diversity and inclusion needs to be expanded (Travis n.d., 2019). Kennedy (2008) delineated five distinct qualities of leaders crucial to creating a culture of inclusiveness:
1. Make diversity a priority in the organization by welcoming differences
2. Learn about people and their differences, honoring the uniqueness of all employees
3. Ensure strong communication, raising the level of leadership responsibility around listening
4. Hold personal responsibility as a core value with an emphasis on inclusivity
5. Establish mutualism as the final arbitrator to increase self-awareness of the leader’s impact on others in all circumstances

In her book, Kennedy (2008) advocated for the development of an inclusive culture in the workplace. She suggested leaders who embraced diversity improved innovation, leadership, and outcomes. These five qualities provide insight into the strategies superintendents used to create a culture of inclusiveness.

**Kennedy’s Five Qualities**

**Make diversity an organizational priority.** Kennedy (2008) suggested to achieve a culture of inclusivity, diversity must be an organizational priority. The idea of diversity itself positively affecting organizational outcomes has proven ineffective (Lazear, 1999). Patrick and Kamur (2012) asserted diversity was essentially understanding each individual is different and unique.

For organizational success, intentional strategies embrace everyone’s unique differences, perspectives, and talents (Kennedy, 2008; Winters, 2015). Additionally, the leader’s intentionality was linked to embracing a culture of inclusiveness. That same culture had a positive impact on team performance (Bourke & Espdido, 2019). Kennedy (2008) advocated for diversity as a priority to develop an inclusive culture in the
workplace. She affirmed leveraging diversity maximized outcomes and prompted innovative thinking and productivity, which was crucial in the field of education as well. Furthermore, she noted the importance of inclusion as a catalyst for a culture of engagement, collaboration, and new ideas.

**Learn about people and their differences.** Kennedy (2008) asserted the need for leaders to know others and understand varying dimensions of diversity. The 21 dimensions of diversity include experiences, ethnic origins, cultural backgrounds, nationality, sexual orientation, age, race, gender, religion, physical abilities, competencies, work habits, and thinking styles (Figure 1).

![Dimensions of difference](image)

*Figure 1. Dimensions of difference. Source: Kennedy (2008, p. 47).*

These dimensions were depicted in a wheel diagram without categorization, unlike other research that categorized types of diversity. Kennedy (2018) further suggested leaders must prioritize knowing people and their differences to intentionally
develop deep knowledge, expertise, and empathy about diversity through curiosity, experiences, and daily practice.

The concept of valuing the uniqueness of all employees was supported by social identity theory, including social inclusion and optimal distinctiveness theory, which encouraged development of a sense of belonging and engagement in teams and groups. This sense of affinity for the organization impacted job performance (Bourke & Espdido, 2019; Logan, King, & Fischer-Wright, 2008). Kennedy (2008) claimed leader needs to develop deep curiosity about others, applying their knowledge in daily practice by valuing varying perspectives rooted in diversity.

**Ensure strong communication.** Communication is an exchange between individuals through a common system. Prioritization of strong communication is crucial to a flourishing organization, resulting in a personal connection between individuals and teams (Jensen et al., 2018; Kennedy 2008; Logan et al., 2008; Russ et al., 1990). Strong communication represents a transfer of information with the intent to understand the meaning and broaden one’s perspective, which deepens understanding and relational connection.

Generally, more effective leaders establish communication through high-level listening and increased responsibility (Gee, 1999; Miller et al., 2002; Zúñiga et al., 2002). To build more inclusive cultures, leaders must proactively invite team members to communicate ideas and feedback. Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, and Flowers (2005) described the benefit of intentional communication through active listening and the concept of presence. Kennedy’s (2008) concept of enabling rich communication referred to the value placed on listening for improved levels of outcomes.
Hold personal accountability as a core value. Kennedy (2008) recommended holding personal responsibility as a core value to embrace inclusivity. Personal responsibility related to self-accountability and was defined as conscious ownership of one’s actions and their impact on others (Kennedy, 2008; Tausen et al., 2018). The leader is thus challenged to look within when circumstances necessitate.

In education, values have been taught for years, expecting students to take personal responsibility for behavior and decisions (Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn, & Smith, 2003). Similarly, school and district leaders need to take personal responsibility as a core value. Kennedy (2008) asserted leaders need to commit to encourage, motivate, and expect others to hold themselves accountable. An advancement from traditional to agency loyalty promotes a leadership mindset, which influences problem-solving, decision-making, and actions in others through modeling and explicit coaching (Kennedy, 2008). Responsibility involves mindset and entails a mix of values and attributes impacting self and others in the organization (Zenger, 2015).

Establish mutualism as the final arbiter. Kennedy (2008) defined mutualism as a “doctrine that mutual dependence is necessary for social well-being” (p. 50), underscoring the significance of mutualism for organizational health. Mutualism establishes trust in organizations through a deep sense of shared purpose, a thoughtful inspection of each member’s ideas and interests, and interdependence when performing roles and responsibilities (Harvey & Drolet, 2006; Mishra, 1996).

The leader’s role in establishing mutualism is to inspire the best in the group and each individual. The concept embraces understanding decisions are shared and consider the impact on everyone involved in the process and outcome. Arbinger Institute (2016)
discussed the benefit of an outward organizational mindset with individuals who value others’ needs, objectives, stories, and challenges. Mutualism as a final arbitrator is positive for everyone involved (Kennedy, 2008). Effective leaders form a construct of mutualism that leverages diversity.

**Culture of Inclusiveness**

In addition to the five qualities, Kennedy (2008) introduced the concept of a culture of inclusion. The literature widely established organizational culture as shared attitudes, values, beliefs, and patterns of common assumptions known to the group (Moua, 2011; Schein, 1990, 2010). Given the interplay between employees and groups creates assumed patterns, it makes sense culture impacts employee behaviors, which shapes the culture (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Kennedy (2008) suggested leaders need to intentionally act and consistently renew their leadership to develop a culture of inclusiveness and show they value others. Incorporation of diverse individuals in an environment of mutual respect and acceptance seeks and values their unique contribution to the success of the organization (Azmat et al., 2014; Mak et al., 2014; Tawagi & Mak, 2015).

**Deploy cultural intelligence.** Ramirez (2014) referenced cultural intelligence as “an individual’s ability to relate and work effectively in culturally diverse settings” (p. 22). Earley and Ang (2003) and Ang et al. (2015) sought to understand how some individuals better navigated culturally diverse circumstances. Additionally, they referred to culturally intelligent leaders as those who tended to the four cultural intelligence capabilities: motivation, cognition, meta-cognition, and behavior. Earley and Ang (2003) elaborated on the framework to inform leaders’ multicultural interactions (Table 4).
Table 4

Four Domains of Cultural Intelligence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive</td>
<td>Refers to the level of awareness during cross-cultural exchanges and interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Refers to the experience of norms, practices, protocols in different cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational</td>
<td>Refers to directing attention and energy toward learning about different cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral</td>
<td>Refers to behaving appropriately in cross-cultural interactions, verbally and non-verbally</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Van Dyne, Ang, and Livermore (2010) and Van Dyne, Ang, and Tan (2016) suggested culturally intelligent leaders could be successful in diverse, multicultural organizations. They asserted leaders can globally develop a perspective and strategies, regardless of understanding each culture’s details. Livermore (2015) described four domains of cultural intelligence and steps for improving cultural intelligence (Table 5).

Table 5

Four steps to Enhancing Cultural Intelligence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Cultural Intelligence Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Motivational</td>
<td>Direct attention, energy, and self-confidence toward learning about different cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Cognitive</td>
<td>Obtain a basic understanding of cultural cues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Metacognitive</td>
<td>Strategically use awareness of cultures to understand social interaction during cross-cultural exchanges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Behavioral</td>
<td>Behaving appropriately in cross-cultural interactions, verbally and non-verbally</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Through these steps, leaders become aware of behaviors and actions required to negotiate diversity and build inclusivity in the workplace.
Perpetual cycle of action. The dimensions of diversity are encompassed in a culture of inclusiveness (Kennedy, 2008). Kennedy also provided a process for putting the theory of workplace inclusivity to practice (Table 6). This scaffold provided structured cultural intelligence and related to optimal distinctiveness theory by further delineating steps necessary to realize the concept of inclusion.

Table 6

Putting Our Differences to Work, Perpetual Cycle of Action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Assessment</td>
<td>Defining the current realities in the organization. It is an ongoing process that provides consistent clarity on progress and points of celebration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Acceptance</td>
<td>Developing support for change. An environment of inclusion and acceptance provides stability to individuals and the group. Support the trust and openness needed to accept and serve others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Action</td>
<td>Moving Forward. It takes time for new ideas to unfold, and movement is accelerated through the concept of “learning by doing”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Accountability</td>
<td>Establishing shared ownership. Commitment is key to accountability, assessing progress. Additionally, focus on people, eliminate obstacles, and note inconsistencies with what is said and what exists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: Achievement</td>
<td>Measuring progress and celebrating success. Express celebration through the diverse, inclusive environments and let the results speak for themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6: More Action</td>
<td>Keeping momentum alive. Recognize and reiterate the five qualities of leadership by building a refreshed team, discussion, and approach.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kennedy’s (2008) model suggested steps at a time wherein foundational research on diversity and inclusion necessitated expansion. Kennedy made recommendations for moving toward the development of an inclusive culture in the workplace. Best practices for leveraging diversity and inclusion in changing the culture expanded Kennedy’s model by recognizing empathetic leadership with respect to understanding diversity.

Role of District Superintendents

With an understanding of the growing changes and power in diversity, a school district superintendent can leverage diversity in their organization. A new imperative for
school leaders is urgent. At the most basic level, the role superintendent is considered the staff leader and is expected to advocate for the needs of the district, schools, students, families, and community in relation to education (Björk et al., 2014; Harvey et al., 2013; Hoyle et al., 2005; Kowalski, 2005). Van Deuren, Evert, and Lang (2015) presented the superintendent role in relation to the board of education. The superintendent technically is titled the secretary to the board of education and reports to a board of trustees.

The superintendent is granted authority through the Education Code (Article 3 enacted by Stats. 1976, Ch. 1010), serving as the chief executive officer and representative for the district as a whole. The superintendent is also considered part of the governance team, which comprises the superintendent and board. Furthermore, there is an expectation the superintendent is to maneuver political circumstances and high-pressure decision-making (Harvey et al., 2013). The board’s connection may be complicated if the superintendent’s values are not in alignment with the board, especially if the board embraces competing values or political aspirations. At a higher level, the superintendent role is to provide non-policy leadership to the school district. As such, broader leadership theory applies to this unique role.

Multiple authors suggested with a constantly changing, more dynamic, culturally diverse workplace, leaders must be adaptable (Hesselbein, Goldsmith, & Somerville, 1999; Lumby & Coleman, 2007). With changing demographics and growing political tensions across the nation, superintendents are called to develop culturally inclusive work environments. Recent hate crimes and racial unrest are likely impacting the workplace and school cultures, especially for Blacks (Neal-Barnett, 2020). With increased tension related to differences, the importance of inclusion in the workplace increases. In
education, the superintendent is at the helm of navigating changes and mitigating tensions reflected across the nation and school district.

To effectively lead during challenging times, leaders who value, accept, and respect each of their employees are vital (Grafstein, 2019). Multiple dimensions of diversity must be leveraged for innovation and improved outcomes (Kennedy, 2008). School district leaders must create and employ strategies to build cultures of inclusiveness to improve achievement outcomes and work environments.

The superintendent is tasked with developing a positive culture and expectation of respect permeating the organization (Benzel & Hoover, 2015). Superintendents are responsible for improving teacher and administrator diversity to achieve culturally representative and sensitive schools. To meet these challenges, the superintendent must be a leader and champion of diversity and create a culture of inclusiveness throughout the organization. To work toward this aim, it is beneficial to examine strategies exemplary superintendents use to create a culture of inclusiveness that honors and leverages individual and cultural differences toward a school district’s success.

Research highlighted the need for awareness, preparation, and action related to diversity (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Howard, 2010; LaSalle & Johnson, 2019; Lindsey et al., 2018). Additional research explored the human dynamics of diversity, explicitly calling for maturity, responsiveness, and grace when leading in diverse circumstances (LaSalle & Johnson, 2018). Little research drilled down to the intersection between leadership, inclusivity, and culture in unified school districts (USDs). In 2015, Banks identified cultural diversity as a reform in education, establishing that all educational outcomes are reachable regardless of race if the culture shifted to be more
inclusive. However, he stopped short of referring to the leadership needed at the district level to achieve these results. Although much of diversity and inclusion theory relate to K-12 leadership, and more specifically to the superintendent position, limited research specifically addressed the strategies employed by exemplary superintendents who intentionally sought to build more inclusive work cultures for district employees.

**Summary**

With increasing diversity and a rise in racial tensions across the nation, there is a growing need for leaders with the ability to create culturally inclusive work environments (Bilimoria et al., 2008; Holvino et al., 2004; Thomas & Ely, 1996). Grafstein (2019) affirmed leadership strategies engage employees in the organization. School district leaders must exhibit the strategies necessary to create an organizational culture of inclusiveness. This study explored the strategies used by exemplary USD superintendents to create a culture of inclusiveness in K-12 education.

An in-depth review of organizational culture and leadership provided context to foundational diversity theories. Kennedy’s (2008) work was nestled in these foundations as a framework for exploring strategies USD superintendents use to create a culture of inclusiveness and clarified the benefits of innovation, leadership, and productivity in intentionally embracing cultural differences. She asserted understanding these qualities would best support leaders in navigating the impact of increased workplace diversity.

Chapter III provides the methodology for this explanatory mixed-methods study and details the data collection and analysis process. Chapter IV describes the data collected and denotes the study’s findings. Chapter V reports the culminating findings, conclusions, and implications, leading to recommendations for future study.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

A common African proverb states knowledge is like a garden and if not cultivated, it cannot be harvested. Research and inquiry provide the ability to deepen knowledge, strengthen hypotheses, and broaden the potential for others to understand and cultivate action (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Additionally, research provides the opportunity to examine processes, support policy, provoke public involvement, secure evidence, and support accountability within the field of education. An evidence-based inquiry is facilitated through qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approaches (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Chapter III describes the methodology used to conduct this research. The chapter opens with restating the purpose statement and research questions. Then, the explanatory mixed-methods research design, population, and sampling plan are delineated. The chapter describes the instrumentation, followed by data collection and analysis methods. The chapter states the research limitations and how participants were protected throughout the research process. A thematic team studied the same topic from varying perspectives and consequently used the term peer researchers, which refers to the 10 doctoral students working collaboratively in the area of inclusion. The peer researchers worked as a thematic team to study leadership strategies exemplary leaders used to create an organizational culture of inclusiveness, framed by Kennedy’s (2008) five distinctive qualities of leadership. The thematic team was advised by seven faculty members in collectively designing and implementing the study.
Purpose Statement

The purpose of this explanatory mixed-methods study was to identify and describe the leadership strategies unified school district (USD) superintendents in San Bernardino and Riverside Counties used to create an organizational culture of inclusiveness using Kennedy’s (2008) five distinctive qualities of leadership.

Research Questions

Six research questions guided this study:

1. What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to make diversity an organizational priority?
2. What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to get to know people and their differences?
3. What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to enable rich communication?
4. What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to make personal responsibility a core value?
5. What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to establish mutualism as the final arbiter?
6. What do exemplary USD superintendents perceive as the most important advantages of creating an organizational culture of inclusiveness?

Research Design

The research design frames what types and how data will be collected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Additionally, the research design must align with the research questions. The research questions in this study centered on describing the strategies used
by exemplary USD superintendents in creating a culture of inclusiveness. An explanatory mixed-method research design was used to identify these strategies using Kennedy’s (2008) five distinctive qualities of leadership.

Both qualitative and quantitative research have systems for collecting and examining data. Qualitative data are presented in terms of trends about themes or categories whereas quantitative research captures data on a larger population, using numerical information. Quantitative research tests a theory based on a relationship between variables whereas qualitative research focuses on understanding perceptions, values, and meanings of actions of groups or individuals (Creswell, 2014). Converging quantitative and qualitative methods into mixed-methods research imparts a better understanding of the findings by providing the researcher with a deeper knowledge of the why behind the quantitative results (Creswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). The explanatory mixed-methods design was chosen for this study to allow the researcher to gather quantitative data with a larger group of superintendents, which was expanded upon through in-depth, qualitative interviews. This combined use of data magnified the depth of findings and provided a more comprehensive story of the data. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) also noted the potential limitation of a single method of data in reducing the credibility of the information.

The quantitative research conducted in this study used a survey instrument (Appendix A) provided to the participants through the SurveyMonkey® platform. The survey asked each participant their willingness to participate in a follow-up interview. After completion of the survey, qualitative research was conducted via an interview with six of the exemplary USD superintendents identified from the survey. Finally,
quantitative data and coded qualitative themes were analyzed. The utilization of quantitative and qualitative data supported the triangulation of the results and increased the credibility of the findings.

**Quantitative Research Design**

Quantitative research looks for patterns and relationships through objective measurements (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Additionally, the analysis is statistical using numerical data collected through specific tools or instruments. A quantitative method is used to either test a hypothesis or respond to the research question through quantifiable patterns or relationships in data. Due to the statistical nature of the study, the sample size is extremely important to the validity of the study (Sheldon, 2016). A quantitative researcher collects data through structured questionnaires with quantifiable answers or existing numerical data. The goal of quantitative research is to compare or determine if a relationship exists between two or more variables.

**Qualitative Research Design**

Qualitative research is a process by which narrative data are collected to garner a deeper understanding of social phenomena within a natural setting (Patton, 2015). Here, the researcher seeks to interpret the meaning and extend understanding about perceptions, values, or feelings (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative methods are used when numbers do not provide a complete story of the data and more in-depth information is optimal.

Qualitative research uses data collected in a systematic, objective way, with varying systems of inquiry. Interpersonal interviews, field observations, and documentation are three kinds of qualitative data (Patton, 2015). Core strategies in design, data collection, fieldwork, analysis, and reporting collectively provide a complete
framework for qualitative methods. Additionally, within this method researchers use professional judgment in the interpretation of the data to understand group perspectives (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

**Mixed-Methods Research Design and Rationale**

Mixed-methods research incorporates both numerical and narrative data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). Additionally, it provides an opportunity to examine the *what* and *why* of the study, which means it strengthens the information a researcher obtains from a quantitative study by examining the human element of the numbers, including opinions, values, and perceptions. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) explained mixed-methods research integrates quantitative and qualitative methods. Mixed-methods are used when quantitative data and analysis do not provide enough information about the research question. The study is strengthened by adding a more in-depth examination of the topic. An explanatory mixed-methods design collects quantitative data followed by qualitative data to further explain the numeric results (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

An explanatory mixed-methods design was beneficial in extending thoughts about the definitions of the Kennedy’s (2008) five distinctive qualities of leadership. Within the process, the superintendents were provided the opportunity to preview the definitions, which potentially deepened the interview reflection and dialogue. The explanatory mixed-methods design supported and effectively identified and described strategies USD superintendents used to create an organizational culture of inclusiveness.
Population

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined a population as a group of individuals who met a specific criterion, enabling generalization of research results. The population for this explanatory mixed-methods study was public USD superintendents throughout California. In 2018-19, the California Department of Education (CDE; n.d.) documented 1,037 school districts in the state, each being led by a superintendent. The 1,037 superintendents were further narrowed to a population of 346 USD superintendents based on the number of USDs reported on the CDE website (https://www.cde.ca.gov). USDs serve students from transitional kindergarten through 12th grade (TK-12; CDE, 2020).

Target Population

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined a target population as a smaller group within the population used to generalize the information obtained to the larger group. Target populations must be clearly identified for a study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Additionally, time constraints, expense, and accessibility to participants make it challenging to study large groups, which compelled the peer researchers to choose a target population from within the larger group. The 346 USD superintendents identified in the population was too large to effectively study and further narrowing was necessary. According to the CDE Dataquest, there are 20 USDs in Riverside County and 18 in San Bernardino County. This provided a target population of approximately 38 USD superintendents from within these two counties.

Sample

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described a sample as a smaller group from whom data are collected. A sample is selected from within the target population to
generalize the findings to the larger population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). Criterion-based and purposeful sampling techniques were used to identify participants for this explanatory mixed-methods study. Criterion-based sampling requires participants meet predetermined criteria to be eligible for the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015).

Qualitative researchers select a small number of individuals to get more depth from each individual. A larger number of individuals provide less detail and depth, which is contrary to the purpose of qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). A qualitative research sample size is best determined by the available time and resources, and study objectives (Patton, 2015). No specific rules are provided when determining the appropriate sample size.

For this study, the quantitative sample included 17 exemplary USD superintendents, which was further narrowed to six superintendents who volunteered to participate in the qualitative process (Figure 2). The participants were selected based on the exemplary criteria of the study. Individuals who met the study criteria provided rich data through their experience and expertise in the field.

Figure 2. Delineation of population, target population, and sample.
The peer researchers, in collaboration with faculty advisers, created a list of criteria to distinguish the exemplary leaders. To be considered exemplary, the leader needed to meet at least four of the following criteria:

- Participation in organizational and community activities involving diverse individuals
- Evidence of leading a culturally inclusive organization
- A minimum of five years of experience in the profession
- Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings about cultural inclusion
- Recognition by peers as a leader who gives respect to all people
- Membership in professional associations in his or her field

**Sample Selection Process**

The following steps were performed to select the sample of exemplary USD superintendents:

1. A list of USD superintendents was compiled from the county websites

2. Meetings were held with the Riverside County and San Bernardino County superintendents to discuss USD superintendents who meet the exemplary criteria (the researcher’s previous relationship with county superintendents provided access to these individuals), which resulted in a list of 17 superintendents

3. Using that list, the researcher verified membership in related associations, such as the Association of California Administrators, California Association of Latino Administrators, School Superintendents Association, California
Association for African American Superintendents, California Association for Bilingual Education, and National Association of School Superintendents

4. From the list of identified exemplary participants, the researcher contacted the participants by email (Appendix B) and phone to explain the purpose of the study and request their participation.

Instrumentation

The mixed-methods design guided the instrumentation of the study. Both the quantitative survey and qualitative interview questions and procedures were formed by the peer researchers and supported by the faculty advisers. The quantitative survey utilized structured questions to establish basic background data about the exemplary superintendents. Each survey question was framed by the study variables and aligned to Kennedy’s strategies for creating an organization of cultural inclusiveness. The definition for the variables was developed by the peer researchers and reviewed by the faculty advisers.

Similar to the quantitative instrument, the qualitative interview questions were developed based on the research questions and defined variables. Participants were provided the definitions for reference. Again, the questions were developed by the peer researchers and reviewed by faculty advisers. The interview questions expanded upon the data gathered in the quantitative portion of the study to investigate and deepen the understanding of strategies USD superintendents utilized to develop a culture of inclusiveness.
Quantitative Instrumentation

Peer researchers and faculty advisers constructed the quantitative survey instrument (Appendix A) for this explanatory mixed-methods research study. The survey was administered utilizing SurveyMonkey®. The survey was delivered by email to 17 exemplary USD superintendents. The survey required consent before asking about demographics, including the number of years in the field, gender, age range, and ethnicity. The exemplary USD superintendents were asked to reply to survey questions utilizing a Likert scale, measuring the range of their use of leadership strategies for creating a culture of inclusiveness based on Kennedy’s (2008) framework.

Qualitative Instrumentation

The quantitative results were expanded upon through qualitative data collection and analysis. Like the survey instrument, the interview questions and process were created by the peer researchers in collaboration with faculty advisers. For this study, six virtual, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Semi-structured denotes the fact the interviewer was not limited to predetermined questions (Patton, 2015). A semi-structured interview permitted the researcher to explore for more in-depth responses to the interview questions through clarifying inquiry.

The first draft of interview questions was developed by the peer researchers and faculty advisers. Each question was crafted by partnered peer researchers in alignment with the study’s variables. Multiple meetings were held to review and modify the interview questions based on input from the peer researchers and faculty. A final meeting was held to approve the finished questions. Next, the interview protocol (Appendix E) was developed, which included the script for an introduction and a set of
probing questions to clarify responses and seek additional information. The peer researchers aligned the language in the script to ensure consistent responses from the participants. The researcher was the principal data collection instrument during the qualitative portion of the study, seeking to expand understanding and clarity of strategies exemplary USD superintendents used to create a culture of inclusiveness.

Field Testing

Subsequent to the quantitative and qualitative instrument revision process, each peer researcher conducted field testing of the survey, script, and interview questions. Participants in the field test met the exemplary criteria defined in the study and were recently retired or practicing leaders. During the field test, each peer researcher surveyed at least two participants within their specified population using SurveyMonkey®, followed by an interview with one participant previously surveyed. The field test responses were not included in the study.

For the field test, participants were invited to participate through email (Appendix F) with a link to the survey, the Research Participant’s Bill of Rights (Appendix C), a copy of the informed consent form (Appendix D), and the interview questions (Appendix E). Following completion of the survey, participants were asked for feedback on the effectiveness and clarity of the instrument (Appendix G). Following the interview, the participant completed a form (Appendix H) to provide feedback, including questions, thoughts, and reflections regarding the interview. To support the effectiveness of the interview, an experienced observer was present and oversaw the process during the interview portion of field testing. Additionally, the observer completed a feedback form immediately following the interview (Appendix I). The observer discussed the
effectiveness of the interview process and provided feedback. Following the peer researchers’ completion of all the interviews, a team of faculty members met to determine the survey instrument’s reliability and validity. Additionally, once the peer researchers completed their one-on-one interviews, they met to collectively discuss the observer and participant feedback. The peer researchers revised the interview questions based on the feedback. Following the field testing process, all revisions were made prior to the administration of the final versions utilized in this study.

Validity

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) referred to test validity as the “appropriateness of a measure for specific inferences of decisions that result from generated scores” (p. 173). Validity is beyond the alignment between the instrument and its measure of what it was targeted to measure (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Kuman (2015) noted effective development of an instrument proves valid through the following stages of quantitative tool development:

- Piloting the tool
- Analyzing items for clarity, relevance, and theoretical importance
- Assessing instrument reliability
- Determining face, content, concurrent, discriminant, or predictive validity

To establish the instrument’s content validity, the faculty advisers acted as experts via their involvement in the thematic dissertation and their contribution to developing and assessing the instruments. The faculty had experience with and knowledge of instrument development. The faculty panel revised the quantitative instrument based on feedback and suggestions. Each peer researcher reviewed feedback and recommendations from the
analysis of the instruments. The researchers collaboratively edited and revised the instruments based on the feedback and suggestions. The faculty team modified the instruments to meet the highest standard of expectations.

**Reliability**

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described reliability as the ability of an instrument to produce the same results every time (i.e., consistency of scores). Sources of errors in reliability are test development, the environment, and participant attitude and behavior. “Reliability is the degree to which your instrument consistently measures something from one time to another” (Roberts, 2010, p. 151).

The researchers used the same interview instrument with each participant to increase reliability in the qualitative portion of the study. A script was developed to assure consistency. The same core questions were asked of each participant. Each of the 10 peer researchers piloted the survey with two participants, resulting in 20 data points. The peer researchers and faculty team analyzed the pilot test feedback. Revisions were made to increase reliability. The faculty panel determined the quantitative instrument was internally reliable. Based on the field test analysis, items were revised. These changes were made to increase reliability. Cronbach’s alpha (or coefficient alpha) measures reliability, analyzing how well a test measures what it is expected to measure. On a scale of 0 to 1, the coefficient alpha determines how consistently a set of items measures a particular construct. It is generally accepted an alpha of 0.7 or above indicates acceptable reliability. The Cronbach alpha for the survey was .708, indicating it was a reliable instrument.
Intercoder reliability was used to ensure consistency in the coding and analysis of the qualitative data. Intercoder reliability is a process involving two or more researchers separately evaluating the data and comparing their findings (Roberts, 2010; Tinsley & Weis, 2000). Coding requires a high degree of judgments, which may vary among researchers (Tinsley & Weis, 2000). For this study, 10% of the qualitative data were coded by a peer with a minimum of 80% agreement for reliability on the coding.

**Data Collection**

Data collection involves gathering information through a systemic process (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Several interrelated steps comprise the data collection process: sampling, obtaining permission and recruiting participants, determining data sources, recording the data, and administering the data collection procedures. Creswell and Plano Clark (2017) stated, “In mixed-methods research, the data collection needs to proceed along two strands: qualitative and quantitative. Each strand needs to be fully executed with rigorous approaches” (p. 170). The researcher engaged in collecting both quantitative and qualitative data.

Prior to data collection, the researcher completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) training on social-behavioral educational research to protect human subjects’ privacy (Appendix M). Next, approval was received from the Brandman University Institutional Review Board (BUIRB) to conduct the study. All data collection practices were carefully reviewed and followed during the data collection process. Email attachments were sent to all potential participants for both the survey and interview process, inviting them to participate in the study and summarizing the data collection and confidentiality protocols. Each participant signed and returned all necessary documents.
and forms. Signed documents and forms were kept in a password protected file by the researcher.

To ensure anonymity, each participant was assigned an identification number rather than using their name. All interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed through the Zoom application. Transcriptions were electronically stored and accessed through password entry only. Member checking was employed; interview participants were provided a draft of the transcript to confirm accuracy and provide feedback, edits, or elaboration. Once the transcripts were verified, corrected, and finalized, the recordings and hard copies were held for three years from the conclusion of the study and then permanently shredded and destroyed.

Following BUIRB approval, participants were invited to respond to the survey via email communication, which included a study description. A link to the survey instrument was also provided to participants via electronic communication. Additionally, a copy of the informed consent form (Appendix D) was provided to the participant.

Quantitative Data Collection

The quantitative data collection process was established collectively by the peer researchers with support from faculty advisers. Steps for data collection were:

- Email invitations to participate in the study were sent to eligible participants
- Each participant was provided a copy of the Bill of Rights and informed consent was verified at the opening of the survey
- A SurveyMonkey® link was sent via email
- As part of the survey instrument, each participant read and confirmed the consent document by clicking a security box affirming they consented and
received and reviewed all associated documents, at which time they could access and complete the survey

Qualitative Data Collection

The qualitative data collection process was developed jointly by the peer researchers with support from faculty advisers. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted on the Zoom platform. The interviews were semi-structured, enabling the researcher to probe for clarification and deeper understanding. Steps for the qualitative data collection were:

- Participants indicated their willingness to participate in the interview as they completed the survey; those interested provided their contact information
- Those participants who agreed to participate in an interview were contacted via email to schedule a date and time for the interview
- The opening to the interview requested a verbal consent, again verifying participation in the study
- Each participant was asked for permission to record the interview through the informed consent process and the researcher’s introduction to the interview
- Individual interviews were conducted digitally via Zoom; questions were asked in the same order, using probing questions as needed
- The researcher made observations and took notes in addition to recording the interview
- Following the interview, the recording was transcribed and sent to each participant for review or additional thoughts prior to finalizing the transcript and commencing the coding process
Data Analysis

Patton (2015) explained how essential an accurate analysis of data is to the integrity of the findings. In this explanatory mixed-methods study, quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques were used. Both analyses are reliant and related to one another in a mixed-methods study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The quantitative and qualitative data analysis included:

- The organization, understanding, and evaluation of the survey results
- Transcription of the Zoom interview recordings
- Coding of data
- Categorization of codes
- Theme development

The final step in the data analysis process was identifying themes to describe the leadership strategies exemplary USD superintendents used to create an organizational culture of inclusiveness using Kennedy’s (2008) five distinctive qualities of leadership.

Quantitative Data Analysis

For the quantitative process, this study utilized an electronic survey to gather data. Seventeen exemplary USD superintendents were surveyed using SurveyMonkey®. The survey requested demographic information, including ethnicity, gender, age-range, and number of years in the field. The superintendents were asked to reflect on their leadership based on Kennedy’s (2008) five distinctive qualities of leadership. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were conducted for each item.
Qualitative Data Analysis

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) pointed out the most significant benefit of qualitative research is the narrative account captured through interviews. The researcher must effectively record the interview. Use of Zoom allowed the researcher to transcribe the interview through the application. Participants were sent the interview transcriptions for verification of accuracy.

Coding for themes and frequency of references to the themes was conducted using the Excel, which supported identifying and grouping themes in alignment with the research questions. Codes and themes were captured in frequency tables to ensure multiple occurrences were considered. Creswell (2014) affirmed the number of occurrences of a given score in a data set indicates frequency. A frequency table organizes and condenses data through a series of scores expressed in order from high to low, and includes frequencies in the data set (Creswell, 2014). In this study, frequency tables were used for the themes developed from coding. The researcher was able to see which themes were more prevalent, leading to the determination of findings.

Limitations

The needs, values, perceptions, and feelings that influence behaviors are explored in qualitative research and use data collected in a systematic, objective way, with varying systems of inquiry by the researcher. Researchers are expected to be transparent about study factors that may negatively impact results or the ability to generalize (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Roberts, 2010). The following limitations potentially affected this explanatory mixed-method study: researcher as an instrument, small sample size, timing, and limited geographic area.
A qualitative researcher looks for trends and themes in the data collected (Patton, 2015). The researcher is also a limitation to the study. Biases found in a researcher’s background, experiences, culture, and other facets may be informative to the reader (Creswell, 2014). The researcher’s tenure in the field of education as a coach, teacher, counselor, and site administrator, as well as over 11 years as a district-level administrator and current superintendent, may carry bias for the role of the superintendent. Additionally, experiences, long-time networking knowledge, and relationships with participants potentially led to bias. A conscious effort of objectivity and open-mindedness decreased the risk of the researcher as an instrument creating a limitation. Additionally, ethical standards remained a priority throughout the research process. Participants remained the focus of the researcher.

The sample size was a limitation of the study. The thematic team collectively decided 15-17 exemplary leaders from each peer researcher would participate in the study. This minimal sample size limited the ability of the researcher to take a broad view of the findings to the general population. Seventeen exemplary USD superintendents provided a narrow reflection of the experiences of all exemplary USD superintendents. Conducting in-depth, meaningful interviews helped validated the data.

Time was a limitation of this study. During this study, school districts were forced to adjust operations. The COVID-19 pandemic forced superintendents to adjust structures, procedures, and timelines to ensure students and staff were adequately supported. Superintendent time was devoted to providing rigorous learning in a new way, keeping staff safe, and planning for re-opening. Any shift in the superintendents’ behaviors or strategies, which may have been impacted by the pandemic, was not
accounted for in the interview questions. Additionally, superintendent time limitations were respected in this study by conducting 60-minute interviews.

Each thematic researcher was limited to assigned geographical areas. The specific geographical location of this research study limited its generalization to two counties in southern California: San Bernardino and Riverside. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these interviews were scheduled via a virtual meeting, which ensured adherence in state safety guidance.

**Summary**

An overview of the methodology used for the research in this study was provided in Chapter III. The chapter delineated the purpose of this explanatory mixed-method study: to understand and describe the leadership strategies exemplary USD superintendents used to create an organizational culture of inclusiveness, through the lens of Kennedy’s (2008) five distinctive qualities of leadership. Chapter III presented the research questions, population, sample, instrumentation, validity, and reliability, and described the data collection, analysis, and limitations. Chapter IV integrates and describes the findings of the study. Chapter V explores the significance and impact of the findings and presents conclusions.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

In an increasingly diverse nation, there continues to be an urgent need for unified school district (USD) superintendents to provide a culture of inclusiveness across the system. The role of the superintendent is dynamic and demands a leader who thrives in the operation of a district and flourishes in their ability to unite the organization for the common purpose of meeting desired outcomes. Respecting diversity becomes a crucial factor in the leader’s effectiveness. To leverage diversity throughout the system, the exemplary superintendent must utilize strategies to positively impact culture.

This chapter presents the findings from this explanatory mixed-methods study by reviewing survey data from 17 exemplary superintendents, which was expanded upon by six superintendents who participated in an interview. The data were organized around six research questions, revealing themes and patterns. The emerged themes directly connected to Kennedy’s (2008) five distinctive qualities of leadership. The purpose statement and research questions, a review of the population and sample, a description of those who participated, and the data collection process is restated. A detailed description of the themes and patterns, alignment of those themes to Kennedy’s (2008) framework, and a summary of the significant findings conclude the chapter.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this explanatory mixed-methods study was to identify and describe the leadership strategies USD superintendents in San Bernardino and Riverside Counties used to create an organizational culture of inclusiveness using Kennedy’s (2008) five distinctive qualities of leadership.
Research Questions

Six research questions guided this study:

1. What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to make diversity an organizational priority?
2. What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to get to know people and their differences?
3. What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to enable rich communication?
4. What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to make personal responsibility a core value?
5. What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to establish mutualism as the final arbiter?
6. What do exemplary USD superintendents perceive as the most important advantages of creating an organizational culture of inclusiveness?

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

To address the research questions, an explanatory mixed-methods design was used. This design was chosen to extend the thinking about Kennedy’s (2008) five distinctive qualities of leadership and inclusiveness, effectively identifying and describing strategies USD superintendents used to create an organizational culture of inclusiveness. Seventeen superintendents were selected based on meeting pre-established criteria.

Emails were sent to all potential participants for both the survey and interview process, inviting them to participate in the study and summarizing the data collection and
confidentiality protocols. Seventeen USD superintendents took the survey, which was comprised of 40 questions rated on a Likert scale. Subsequently, six of the superintendents participated in semi-structured qualitative interviews utilizing open-ended questions and probes. The interview questions were developed based on study framework.

The data collected from the qualitative portion of this mixed-method study were carefully coded and scrutinized for themes and patterns within each of the research questions. The data were contemplated in alignment to Kennedy’s (2008) five distinctive qualities of leadership and a culture of inclusiveness.

**Population**

In California, 1,037 superintendents lead school districts, of which 346 were USD superintendents, meaning they served kindergarten through 12th grade students. With the 346 USD superintendents identified as the population, time constraints and accessibility to participants made it challenging to study such a large group. Rather, the researcher chose a target population from within a larger group. According to the California Department of Education’s Dataquest, there are 20 USDs in Riverside and 18 in San Bernardino Counties, providing a target population of 38 USD superintendents.

**Sample**

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described a sample is a smaller group from which data are collected, with the intent of generalizing findings to the population. For this study, the sample for this explanatory mixed-method study was criteria-based and used purposeful sampling.
The sample for this study was 17 exemplary USD superintendents in the quantitative portion and six superintendents who volunteered to participate in an interview. The participants were selected based on meeting the exemplary criteria of the study. Each provided rich data about their stories, experiences, and expertise in the field.

**Participant Demographics**

Of the 17 exemplary USD superintendents participating in the survey, 12 (71%) were male. Two participants (11.8%) were in the age range of 41-50, 11 (65%) were between 51-60, and four (23.5%) were 61 or older. Twelve (71%) participants were Caucasian (non-Hispanic), three (17.6%) Hispanic/Latin-X, one (5.8%) was Asian, and one (5.8%) was African American. Tenure in the position varied with seven (41.1%) participants having 0-5 years of experience, eight (47%) with 6-10 years, and two (11.7%) with 11 or more years (Table 7).

Table 7

*Participant Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>12</td>
<td>70.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age Range</strong></td>
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<td>41-50</td>
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<td>11.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
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<tr>
<td>African American</td>
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<td>5.9</td>
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<td>Hispanic/Latin-X</td>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>70.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years in Current Position</strong></td>
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</tr>
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<td>0-5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>41.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>47.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11+</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* n = 17
Presentation and Analysis of Data

This section provides an analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative responses by each research question. A narrative description of the quantitative survey results proceeds a narrative description of the themes that emerged during the qualitative interviews. Each theme was validated by participants’ detailed descriptions of the strategies used to create a culture of inclusiveness by the six superintendents.

Findings for Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was: What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to make diversity an organizational priority? The survey included five questions and the interview protocol included two questions related to making diversity a priority.

Part I of the survey consisted of five questions related to making diversity a priority; responses were on a six-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Within the quantitative data, the highest rating was for communicating the importance of cultural differences, with a mean of 5.82, which was followed by providing coaching to develop talent within the organization with a mean of 5.76. The lowest rating was for modeling diversity as an organizational priority, but with a mean of 5.65, this was still an activity in which the superintendents engaged. Table 8 outlines the means and standard deviations for all five survey questions designed to probe for strategies used to make diversity a priority. All the mean scores in Part I of the survey were high and indicated the actions were important in making diversity a priority.
Table 8

Average Ratings for Making Diversity a Priority

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicate the importance of culture differences</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide coaching to develop talent within the organization</td>
<td>5.76</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take personal responsibility for inclusion of all people</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide opportunities for people to develop new skills</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model diversity as an organizational priority</td>
<td>5.65</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Rating</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.73</strong></td>
<td><strong>.56</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. n = 17*

Two questions were asked during the interviews related to making diversity a priority. The first asked about ways in which superintendents made diversity an organizational priority. The response referenced most often by the superintendents was through professional learning, which was mentioned 16 times by five of the interviewees. This was followed by professional caring and empathy, which was referenced 11 times by four superintendents. All six interviewees described changing structures and systems to show diversity was a priority and five discussed the importance of involving others through collaboration (Table 9).

Table 9

How Superintendents Made Diversity a Priority

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th># of Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Caring and Empathy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in Structures and Systems</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involving Others through Collaboration</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. n = 6*

**Professional learning.** Five of six participants referred to professional learning, which encompassed multiple forms. Eleven references were made to the internal training of staff. The superintendents spoke in depth about the need for making diversity a
priority through professional training. For example, Participant 5 said, “Professional development was purposeful, very specifically to build the organization’s muscle around cultural diversity and inclusion.” Participants 3, 4, 5, and 6 specifically mentioned professional learning opportunities related to unconscious bias, cultural proficiency, diversity, and/or equity training. Two participants utilized books to support training, although four described different books they personally used as a resource. A crucial aspect to making diversity a priority was bringing outside support into the district. Five participants responded by naming experts who supported the professional learning in the organization. For example, Participant 4 noted bringing in a representative from ACSA, Participant 5 mentioned specific consultants used in the district and Participant 6 described bringing in authors to talk with the staff after they studied the book during the year. The superintendents supported the claim training provides employees with the opportunity to understand each individual is different and unique.

**Professional caring and empathy.** La Salle (2018) invited all educators to practice strategies of empathy and love in relationships, developing a culture of inclusiveness. Four participants (66.6%) responded with professional caring and empathy as a means to create organizational diversity. Listening was a component of caring mentioned by Participant 2 who expressed the need to “listen and empathize…you need to be able to say in your own words, ‘I care about you.’” The desire to have “a greater sense of empathy for one another” was stated by Participant 3 and built on by Participant 6 who added, “we want to value and honor each other.”

**Change in structures and systems.** Kennedy (2008) noted effective leaders understand how to leverage diversity. All six participants noted particular structures or
systems as ways to make diversity a priority in the organization. Participant 1 noted different races and cultures within school boundary areas, saying, “We worked on different boundaries, which put a structure in place even though it was very easy to talk about diversity and inclusivity.” Participants 1 and 2 discussed intentionally scheduling to bring student voice into the system, which was “the hook for employees.” Three participants referred to meeting structures or employee placement practices. Participant 5 noted, “The way we make it a priority is by hardwiring the work into our leadership and professional development systems.” Participant 6 described the substantial effort to structure inclusivity in the workplace, sharing, “To get rid of the silos between our classified staff and our certificated and teams…simple things for how we put leadership meetings in place and K-12 principals’ meetings. Just to get in the room, and we start talking.”

**Involving others through collaboration.** Five participants involved others through collaboration as a way to make diversity a priority in the organization. “You can never be too inclusive” was emphatically stated by Participant 1. An example from Participant 5 was provided as a story, which told about collaboratively developing a response to remedy an issue with a disproportionate number of citations by student groups. The superintendent noted, “I very deliberately included my chief of police, who was African American, into my cabinet. He actually became a member of the cabinet and sat in all meetings and walked all schools with us.” This collaboration yielded a transformed system with exceptional results. Participant 6 added the thinking behind collaboration, saying, “We are all very diverse and we’re all part of the same organization, and all part of the same team.”
The second interview question related to making diversity a priority asked about ways in which superintendents educated their organization about diversity. The response referenced most often by the superintendents was through professional learning, which was mentioned 10 times by six of the interviewees. This was followed by getting to know others and their stories, which was referenced 10 times by five of the superintendents. Four superintendents described creating a safe space by valuing perspectives, setting expectations and following through, and sharing data to educate their organization about diversity (Table 10).

Table 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Superintendents Educated their Staff about Diversity</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting to Know Others and their Stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating a Safe Space by Valuing Perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting Expectations and Following Through</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sharing Data</td>
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</table>

Note. n = 6

**Professional learning.** All participants discussed professional learning. Each described training to varying degrees. Participant 1 brought in a poignant speaker, saying, “I’ve had Hardy Brown come out and do a dignity display.” It was later mentioned “it wasn’t just a sit and get, it wasn’t another study, but it was actually what I would call a movement.” Participant 2 searched to “find who really believed in inclusive excellence and was able to invite Dr. Derek Greenfield to support the learning.” Participant 3 mentioned, “Unconscious bias training has made people uncomfortable. I think it is good…they are probably challenged by White privilege.” Three participants read the book *White Fragility* with their staff. Additionally, it was recognized bringing
individuals from the outside for the topic of diversity may be needed. Participant 6 explained, “we brought individuals from the outside to get us started.”

**Getting to know others and their stories.** Five superintendents discussed the importance of getting to know others and their stories to educate their organization about diversity. Each superintendent described different examples of getting to know people. Participant 1 stated, “My educational service person has been doing what they call empathy interviews,” which were described as interviews that compelled a deep knowledge of others by seeing and hearing the perspectives. Participant 2 noted, “We see and hear everyone in our organization...we believe as a team that listening and understanding is important.” Another example was provided by Participant 5, who said,

> We really worked in our meetings to have folks do a lot of think pair-share at their tables. When we were doing the training and talking about cultural proficiency, we would have folks share their own stories and then folks report those stories back out. It went from research theoretical to my practical lived experience, to an individual story that applied to us in our context and even students’ stories.

One superintendent added, “Getting those personal stories out was a key mechanism to help us think about our neighbor and the people we live and work with every day and what their actual experiences were.”

**Creating a safe space by valuing perspectives.** De Anca and Aragon (2018) suggested creating a safe space for varying perspectives was an asset. Four participants created a safe space by valuing perspectives. Participant 2 provided an example of the benefits, saying, “Creating a space where everybody's point of view and everybody's
opinion matters. And when they saw the outcome, they saw their opinions in that
document, so this mindset is what's helped us move along.” Participant 4 added,

They’ve been empowered, they feel good about the work that they're
doing and that's spreading enthusiasm…the district has become a
psychologically safe space to have the conversations, and so I think many
more people are realizing that it's okay to talk about this stuff. We can do
this.

A need for understanding and patience was expressed by Participant 4, who said,

“They think I’m going to judge them if they don’t have this rich discussion about equity
and diversity, but I keep telling them it’s a process, it’s a journey.” Participant 6 said
employees expressed thanks for “creating a safe space to share concerns and opinions.”
The superintendent added, “We’ve tried to create a safe environment to have these
conversations.”

**Setting expectations and following through.** Four participants made eight
references to setting expectations and follow through. The superintendents described the
need to be clear about expectations and the importance of monitoring expectations are
adhered. Participant 1 expressed, “What you ask them to look at and what you say we’re
looking at is crucial.” Participant 2 said it took two years to build the expectation.
Participant 3 provided an example of an expectation, sharing, “It is a requirement that
everybody go through training.” An example of follow-up was expressed by Participant
4, “I follow up with them…and how it’s being addressed and what’s happening.”

**Sharing data.** Four participants described sharing data as a way to educate their
organization about diversity. Data were often a compelling factor for change. Participant
1 used data to educate staff about disproportionate data, saying, “We realized that 97% of kids late for school were Hispanic,” which provoked a change in practice. Participant 6 explicitly mentioned, “We’ve shown the data. It tells a compelling story…And then you tell the stories, show the data and begin to make some changes in the system.” Data were also used to ensure growth occurred. Participant 3 explained, “Evidence is that we're attracting more diverse opinions to the discussion.”

To examine the connection between the survey and interview responses within Research Question 1, the researcher examined and ordered the quantitative responses from the highest mean to the lowest (Table 11). Additionally, the researcher noted the themes from the qualitative interviews and listed them based on the greatest number of references.

Table 11

Research Question 1: Summary of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Survey Findings</th>
<th>Interview Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to make diversity a priority? | - Communicate the importance of culture differences  
- Provide coaching to develop talent within the organization  
- Take personal responsibility for inclusion of all people  
- Provide opportunities for people to develop new skills  
- Model diversity as an organizational priority | - Professional learning  
- Professional caring and empathy  
- Change in structures and systems  
- Involving others through collaboration  
- Getting to know others and their stories  
- Creating a safe space by valuing perspectives  
- Setting expectations and following through  
- Sharing data |

Findings for Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was: What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to get to know people and their differences? The survey included five questions and the
interview protocol included two questions to probe how superintendents worked to align with Kennedy’s quality of knowing people and their differences.

Part II of the survey consisted of five questions related to knowing people and their differences section. The highest rating was for listening without judgement to understand diverse cultures, with a mean of 5.82, followed by embracing interaction with others from different cultures and standing up for others if they were being treated unfairly, both with a mean of 5.76. The lowest rated item was encouraging open dialog about controversial issues, but with a mean of 5.53, this was still an activity in which the superintendents engaged (Table 12). All mean ratings were high and indicated the actions were important in knowing people and their differences.

Table 12

Average Ratings for Knowing People

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listen without judgement to understand diverse cultures</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embrace Interaction with others from different cultures</td>
<td>5.76</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stand up for others if they are being treated unfairly</td>
<td>5.76</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervene when intolerance is present</td>
<td>5.65</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage open dialog about controversial issues</td>
<td>5.53</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Rating</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.71</strong></td>
<td><strong>.55</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. n = 17*

Two questions were asked during the interviews related to knowing people and their differences. The first asked about ways in which superintendents got to know people in their organization on a personal basis. The response referenced most often by superintendents was through intentional interactions, which was mentioned 17 times by all six of the interviewees. This was followed by professional listening and learning, which was referenced 13 times by the six superintendents (Table 13).
Table 13

*How Superintendents got to Know People in their Organization*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th># of Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intentional Interactions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen and Learn</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* n = 6

**Intentional interactions.** Every participant discussed intentional interactions at least twice. Actively seeking interaction supported getting to know others in the organization. Participant 1 stated, “You try your best. You make all the connections that you can.” Participant 2 shared, “I like to spend a lot of time with our union leaders. I like to spend time in classrooms…I am probably on campus two to three times per week because I enjoy getting to know teachers.” Participant 3 echoed the intentional effort, saying, “When I am visiting school sites, I make it a point to try not to let someone in my path go unnoticed…You have to create the space where those rich conversations can take place.” Paying attention to when the need for connection became more important during the pandemic, Participant 4 described,

I set up Zooms with all the principals, you know individual meetings ... I can spend 30 minutes to an hour - it’s up to them, but some don’t want to do it as much, but for the most part they start talking and they really enjoy it …There’s 42 principals, but I said, “We don’t get to see each other that much right now, and I just wanted to see and hear you.”

Two participants noted the importance of building relationships. Participant 5 planned time prior to meetings or events, and said, “I schedule 30 minutes early to walk around and talk to everybody.” Participant 6 built office hours “where staff could come and connect...it is easy for classified and certificated staff, virtually.”
Listen and learn. Kennedy (2008) emphasized the value placed on listening for improved levels of outcomes. All six superintendents discussed the importance of listening and learning about employees. Participant 1 stated, “You have to go out and it has to be with individuals…talk with them.” Participant 2 specified, “I know their kids and families…some employees I would not see for a year and I would be able to say, ‘how’s your son doing on the East Coast?’ or ‘how’s your wife doing in her new job?’” More so, Participant 3 expanded on how listening and learning showed up in leadership:

Curiosity takes me all kinds of places I never would have thought I would have wound up, but it’s everything from if one of our plumbers is working on something awesome, “hey what are you doing, what kind of a valve is that?” Or if the AC guy is around “what are you doing with that, what’s that do?” It’s the same thing with the teachers if I hop on a Zoom. To me, it’s not only having an authentic interest in what people are doing in those conversations, it’s about getting to know people. It goes back to that idea that, how can you really lead if you can’t connect, and so at this point I’ve had the honor of knowing our people… I think that it’s hard to hold negative thoughts for somebody if you really know them.

Three participants reinforced the importance of listening and learning to know people and their differences. Participant 4 stated, “I really listen to people when they talk to me…listening to them and supporting and identifying with what they're experiencing.” Similarly, Participant 5 noted, “We would spend the time building relationships with the leaders, getting to know their experiences and hear their stories.”
The second question on the interview protocol related to knowing people and their differences asked how the superintendents interacted with people in the organization to gain a better understanding of their cultural differences. The response referenced most often by the superintendents was valuing perspectives with empathy, which was mentioned 16 times by six of the interviewees. This was followed by being curious to seek understanding, which was referenced 11 times by five of superintendents. All six interviewees made a total of nine references to being present and active listening as a way to know people and their differences (Table 14).

Table 14
How Superintendents Gained an Understanding of Cultural Differences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>n</th>
<th># of Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valuing Perspectives with Empathy</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Curious to Seek Understanding</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Present and Actively Listening</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. n = 6*

Valuing perspectives with empathy. La Salle (2018) made multiple references to the value of empathy for others. In accordance with this thought, 16 references were made by five superintendents noting the importance of valuing perspectives with empathy. Participant 2 said, “I get to know the personal stories of the teachers.” It was later added, “People just want to feel heard” when they have differing perspectives. Participant 3 noted,

When we get food now, we ask people “what kind of food would you prefer? What are you comfortable with?” or “What would you like to explore today?” Making note in terms of their clothing, their jewelry, their interest, the things they're doing outside of work, and I think those are all
the kinds of interactions that help us to have an appreciation for the
differences and honor those differences, but also realize that you know
we’re one in the same.

Participant 4 shared, “People handle things differently depending on their culture
or their experiences…I think we have to encourage people to discuss things when we
have conflict.” He then shared a story about a conflict with individuals with two different
religious foundations. Participants 5 and 6 both affirmed the benefit of understanding
cultural differences. As a leader, Participant 1 understood not everyone would value
others through empathy, so an effort was made to “watch for different ways people
interact with other people, where they sit sometimes and not being judgmental.”

**Being curious to Seek understanding.** Nugent and Lengnick-Hall (2019)
referred to the significance of leaders intentionally understanding employees through
curiosity. Five superintendents suggested to understand people and their differences, be
curious and seek to understand. Additionally, the five participants gave examples of how
they asked questions. Questions included, “Are you experiencing these difficulties with
your students,” “How are you doing,” or “I saw a certain bill passed? Thank you so much
for being an advocate.” Participant 5 reinforced the concept, saying, “Ask the questions
to understand more,” and later said, “Holding hands and talking…I joined the hands in
the circles. They’d be telling their stories about their experiences as families, as leaders.”
Participant 6 claimed, “Reading their emails, returning phone calls, that’s how you better
understand cultural differences and individual differences.”

**Being present and actively listening.** All six superintendents made a total of
nine references to being present and actively listening, each with different examples.
Participant 2 provided the example of “setting appointments with different stakeholders throughout the month…time with the union leaders, cabinet and principals…and try to make two to three civic groups a month.” A slightly different strategy was referenced by Participant 4, who shared, “I tried to be very visible at everything, attend all the different events within the district…I tried to be a very good listener and be very kind.”

Participant 5 emphatically stated one way to interact with people in the organization to gain a better understanding of their cultural differences was to “create space to listen and the second is to listen. You know there’s a whole art to listening…this idea of being fully present and listening to someone deeply where they are, and you don’t have an agenda.”

Many superintendents opened their tenure like Participant 6 who added, “When I started, I met with 100 people in 100 days.”

To examine the connection between the survey and interview responses within Research Question 2, the researcher examined and ordered the quantitative responses from the highest mean to the lowest (Table 15). Additionally, the researcher noted the themes from the qualitative interviews and listed them based on the greatest number of references.

Table 15

*Research Question 2: Summary of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Survey Findings</th>
<th>Interview Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to get to know people and their differences? | • Listen without judgement to understand diverse cultures  
• Embrace interaction with others from different cultures  
• Stand up for others being treated unfairly  
• Intervene when intolerance is present  
• Encourage open dialog about controversial issues | • Intentional interactions  
• Listen and learn  
• Valuing perspectives with empathy  
• Being curious to seek understanding  
• Being present and actively listening |
Findings for Research Question 3

Research Question 3 was: *What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to enable rich communication?* The survey included five questions and the interview protocol included two questions related to enabling rich communication.

Part III consisted of the five questions related to rich communication. The highest rating was for remaining accessible to others, with a mean of 5.94, which was followed by remaining open to feedback to develop a deeper understanding of different perspectives, with a mean score of 5.82. Approaching conflict by looking at all sides and creating a culture where people feel safe to share controversial ideas both had a mean of 5.76. Although the lowest rating was for sharing honestly when the chips were down, it was just slightly lower than other factors with a mean of 5.71 (Table 16). All mean scores in Part III of the survey were high and indicated all actions were important in enabling rich communication.

Table 16

*Average Ratings for Rich Communication*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remain accessible to others</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remain open to feedback to develop deeper understanding of different perspectives</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a culture where people feel safe to share controversial ideas</td>
<td>5.76</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach conflict by looking at all sides</td>
<td>5.76</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share honestly what is going on when the chips are down</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Rating</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.80</strong></td>
<td><strong>.40</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* n = 17

Two questions were asked on the interview protocol related to enabling rich communication. The first question probed ways in which superintendents foster a deeper cultural understanding within the organization. The response referenced most often by
the superintendents was through authentically connecting as individuals, which was
mentioned 16 times by five of the interviewees. This was followed by involving others
and soliciting their feedback, which was referenced 11 times by six of the
superintendents. All six interviewees made a total of nine references to building
structures and systems as a means to foster a deeper cultural understanding within the
organization to enable rich communication (Table 17).

Table 17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Strategies Used to Deepen Cultural Understanding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentically Connecting as Individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involving Others and Soliciting their Feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Structures and Systems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. n = 6*

**Connecting as individuals.** Five participants made 16 references to authentically
connecting as individuals or people. Participant 2 responded with “transparency,
honesty, and consistency…I try to gauge the domino effect of any communication.”
Participant 3 acknowledged, “I get lots of diverse and rich ideas on the table” when
connecting. Additionally, Participant 5 discussed the importance of connecting during
the pandemic, “You don’t realize how your voice just soothes, you’re calm, the way you
talk, how it makes people feel.” Participant 5 revealed

> When we talk, things are heard differently based on language experiences,
cultural experiences, personal and professional experiences, the trauma, the
drama. The challenges you might face are whatever’s in your head at the moment.
You listen differently…communication is very deep and rich…and we cannot
expect anybody to hear anything if I just say something one time.
Participant 6 acknowledged connecting with purpose “to foster the deeper cultural understanding within the organization that we’re not all the same. We all look different. Our diversity is our strength and that’s a good thing.” Participant 6 also mentioned starting yearly Ted Talk-like sharing to “learn each other’s stories.”

**Involving others and soliciting their feedback.** Fullan and Quinn (2015) highlighted the importance of listening to employees and including them in decision-making and building their own capacity. All six superintendents discussed involving others for feedback. Participant 2 provided a specific example, sharing, “The other thing that we did is we posted in every meeting a plus/delta chart…a parking lot to express questions, concerns, or kudos.” The superintendent proceeded to describe the many responses provided by staff and how eventually there were very few concerns expressed. Participant 3 advised, “Promote collaboration and get lots of diverse and rich ideas” to improve the organization and deepen cultural understanding. “People could say what was really going on around here, and you’re able to listen” strengthened the importance of involving others and soliciting feedback. This thought extended to external stakeholders by Participant 4, “I get a lot of feedback from the community.”

**Building structures and systems.** All participants referenced building structures and systems to foster a deeper cultural understanding through communication strategies. Participant 1 mentioned, “It is about prioritizing how to communicate.” Participant 3 noted, “We’ve worked hard to have systems and structures for communication in place throughout the organization, the way we collaborate with our Labor Associations, internal stakeholders, principals, teachers.” Participant 4 sent Friday messages and noted, “I do a phone call to all the staff and community…they depend on it and need it.”
superintendent explained the message was an opportunity to provide information and bond stakeholders with the decisions being made. Additionally, the communication provided psychological safety to the recipients, a need in a time of uncertainty.

Participant 5 stated a “communication system is important…We had site visits as a cabinet. We would walk and talk with the leader and get a real front and center view of how things are really going.” Participant 6 expressed the power of calendaring different cultural and religious events, saying, “We have speakers now at almost every board meeting highlighting something in a different culture.”

The second interview question related to enabling rich communication asked about ways in which superintendents developed a personal connection with individuals. The response referenced most often by the superintendents was presence and active listening, which was mentioned 17 times. This was followed by engaging in caring interactions, which was referenced 13 times (Table 18).

Table 18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Superintendents Used Communication to Connect with Others</th>
<th>n</th>
<th># of Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presence and Active Listening</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage in Caring Interactions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* n = 6

**Presence and active listening.** Senge (2005) affirmed the importance of presence in leadership. All six superintendents discussed presence and active listening. Participant 2 noted, “Some of it is just acknowledging people when you’re in the hallways… ‘good morning, how are you?’ I really had to be intentional and get out of my office and walk the entire office.” Participant 2 added, “We want to be about people. I like to sit down and eat lunch with folks in the different departments.” Participant 4
detailed a story wherein annual employee recognition awards were unable to be given to recipients because of the pandemic, so he hand delivered the awards. In reference to one employee’s reaction, he shared “She goes ‘Oh my God, I can’t believe you’re here,’ and I said, ‘Well, I can’t believe you didn’t get this award ‘till June.’” The employee and others bonded with the superintendent. Participant 5 mentioned staff “would build relationships with each other and we would walk around and talk with folks…being present and transparent about my challenges and family and giving opportunities for others to do the same. The storytelling was important.” Participant 6 interacted similarly by being present and visiting school sites.

**Engage in caring interactions.** All superintendents discussed engaging in caring interactions as a strategy to use communication to connect with others. Participant 1 said, “It’s just one-on-one conversations.” Participant 2 noted, “I just want to be somebody who’s part of the organization on equal footing” and asked caring questions, such as “How’s it going? How’s your family? How’s your kids?” Participant 3 acknowledged, “You have to be able to care and connect with people; otherwise, how can you lead them? Lots of different communication.” Participant 5 described attempting to speak Spanish to the parent council members without a background in the language, saying,

> We opened up and invited other administrators to an information sharing time for us to learn Spanish and them to learn English. We just met with each other to exchange language and stories, sometimes food…it really opened up and bridged a divide.
Participant 6 said, “I make it a point not to let someone in my path go unnoticed. Whether it is the custodian, cafeteria worker, or secretary, I am shaking hands, talking, or taking a knee and talking to kids.”

To examine the connection between the survey and interview responses within Research Question 3, the researcher examined and ordered the quantitative responses from highest to lowest (Table 19). Additionally, the researcher noted the themes from the qualitative interviews and listed them based on the greatest number of references.

**Table 19**

*Research Question 3: Summary of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Survey Findings</th>
<th>Interview Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to enable rich communication? | • Remaining accessible to others  
• Remain open to feedback to develop deeper understanding of different perspectives  
• Create a culture where people feel safe to share controversial ideas  
• Approach conflict by looking at all sides  
• Share honestly what is going on when the chips are down | • Authentically connecting as individual  
• Involving others and soliciting their feedback  
• Building structures and systems  
• Presence and active listening  
• Engage in caring interactions |

**Findings for Research Question 4**

Research Question 4 was: *What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to make personal responsibility a core value?* The survey included five questions and the interviews included two questions related to making responsibility a core value.

Within the quantitative findings, the highest rating was for taking ownership of personal behavior that supports respect of others, with a mean of 6.00, indicating all superintendents strongly agreed with the importance of this action. This was followed by promoting a culture where everyone sees themselves as an important part of the
organization, with a mean of 5.88. The lowest rating was for the importance of diversity is shown in organizational hiring practices, but with a mean of 5.35, this was still key to superintendents making personal responsibility a core value. All the mean scores on the survey were high and indicated the actions were important in making personal responsibility a core value (Table 20).

Table 20

*Average Ratings for Personal Responsibility*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Take ownership of personal behavior that supports respect of others</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote a culture where everyone sees themselves as an important part of the organization</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote organizational culture that values inclusion</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to take personal risks to see that others are valued</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The importance of diversity is shown in organizational hiring practices</td>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Rating</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.78</strong></td>
<td><strong>.50</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. n = 17*

The first interview questions asked about ways in which superintendents intentionally incorporated personal responsibility in decision-making. The response referenced most was modeling personal responsibility, which was mentioned 10 times by five of the interviewees. This was followed by seeking professional expertise and guidance, which was referenced 7 times. Four interviewees made seven references to showing vulnerability as a strategy to incorporate personal responsibility in decision-making (Table 21).

Table 21

*How Superintendents Incorporated Personal Responsibility*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th># of Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modeling Personal Responsibility</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking Expertise and Guidance</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showing Vulnerability</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. n = 6*
Modeling personal responsibility. Responsibility involves a combination of values and characteristics impacting all individuals in the organization (Zenger, 2015). Five superintendents discussed the importance of modeling personal responsibility. Participant 1 said, “I want to lead by example.” Participant 2 provided an example of a conflict with another individual in the organization wherein that person was made to feel uncomfortable and the superintendent made a point to apologize publicly, sharing, “I have to model that it’s okay to say you’re sorry.” Participant 5 discussed diversity related training and several strategies, approaches, and tools that could positively affect the organization, saying, “I believe that I needed to model those things and do those things, so I did… and I want to send a message that I believe in it. We live and model these things.” Participant 6 definitively stated, “You talk the talk, and you walk the walk,” and explained, “I try to be that person, that role model who tries to take responsibility in decisions that we make.” Modeling was clearly how the superintendents incorporated personal responsibility.

Seeking expertise and guidance. Five superintendents discussed seeking expertise and guidance, which aligned with Chin and Trimble’s (2015) assertion that preparation is necessary for leaders to meet organizational outcomes in a diverse workplace. All four participants discussed bringing in experts to support personal responsibility about progressing the work of equity, inclusiveness, or diversity. Participant 3 mentioned working with a consultant regarding media. Participant 3 also acknowledged the benefit of having a professional network because, “Leaders feel like they’re all alone and this is not the time to isolate.” Participant 6 highlighted the benefit of seeking expertise to work with the board and having the board trained on cultural bias.
**Showing vulnerability.** Schein (2016) found leaders must be authentic to support a positive culture. Participant 3 stated, “I have discovered...vulnerability equates to authenticity.” Further, a story was shared about the power of showing vulnerability in understanding differing perspectives with how others see law enforcement, with one person who called police to seek help and one who would never call the police unless “someone is shot or dead.” With openness and vulnerability, the superintendent empathized and understood the reason for differing perspectives, which resulted in improved collaboration around decisions. Two participants verbalized the importance of humility to show vulnerability and both referenced apologizing for mistakes.

The second interview question asked about ways in which superintendents influenced others to take personal responsibility. The response referenced most often by the superintendents was involving others and collaboration, which was mentioned 12 times. This was followed by modeling and vocalizing personal responsibility, which was referenced 11 times. Three of the interviewees made six references to setting expectations and follow through, and creating buy-in and ownership (Table 22).

Table 22

*How Superintendents Influenced Others to be Personally Responsible*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th># of Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involving Others and Collaboration</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling and Vocalizing Personal ...</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting Expectations and Following ...</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating Buy-in and Ownership</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* n = 6

**Involving others and collaboration.** Leader must take ownership of their actions and the impact on others (Tausen et al., 2018). The superintendents seemed to agree with the importance of this concept. As a new superintendent, Participant 2 invited
staff to think on their own and be responsible for taking risks. Additionally, a reference was made to a story in which a veteran principal was receiving complaints. The superintendent “encouraged her to take a chance and sit down and be on equal ground with teachers and paraprofessionals and just own up when you’ve made people angry or unsettled. She took the chance and I get very little complaints.” By involving her in the conversation, the superintendent influenced the veteran principal to take personal responsibility for her behavior. Another example of creating responsibility through collaboration was when Participant 4 visited an advanced class and let the teacher know a group of students was not represented, saying, “I don’t see any African American males.” The teacher was asked to reflect on this. Later, the superintendent took the principal to the feeder middle school where they noticed the same issue. The teacher asked, “Aren’t you going to tell the principal here?” The superintendent’s response was, “No, you are because I’m not the only one that’s going to share this message.”

**Modeling and vocalizing personal responsibility.** Bass (1995) reinforced the significance of modeling for effective leadership. Participant 3 made a connection to personal responsibility, saying, “It’s just modeling it and it is having conversations about it.” The importance of modeling was further emphasized by Participant 4 who shared, “I try to develop or give permission for [staff] to have these conversations,” which highlighted the superintendent’s support for teachers taking responsibility to develop a class specifically to support an under-supported student group.

**Setting expectations and following through.** Setting expectations and following through on those expectations was highlighted as a strategy to create an inclusive culture. Participant 2 set the mindset in the district so managers take responsibility for their
actions and behavior. Participant 3 described setting expectations regarding a “focus on building personal and organizational responsibility” and discussed the benefits of delineating individual and organizational responsibility for student success.

**Creating buy-in and ownership.** Participant 2 spoke to the benefit of creating buy-in, saying, “The five-year vision that I shared got done in two and a half years, and it was because people bought into the system. They felt safe, they’ve tried new things. Many things have now become systemic.” Participant 3 described buy-in, saying, “We have people that want to be part of what we’re doing…former students want to come back because they felt part of this and want to be part of it as an adult.” Two participants mentioned ownership through values and a common purpose relating to personal responsibility. Participant 5 stated, “We talked about the idea of us working to become owners, rather than renters in the organization,” and proceeded to discuss the importance of leaders owning responsibility, saying, “I want you as leaders to be kept awake by the things that keep me awake and I want you to own things as much as I do.” Participant 5 proceeded to describe an ideal progression of shared ownership and responsibility, saying, “There were often times when decisions needed to be made…that necessitated us engaging folks in the kind of conversation, that is a shift in the culture from power, a power over organization to a power with organization.”

To examine the connection between the survey and interview responses within Research Question 4, the researcher examined and ordered the quantitative responses from the highest mean to the lowest (Table 23). Additionally, the researcher noted the themes from the qualitative interviews and listed them based on the greatest number of references.
Table 23

Research Question 4: Summary of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Survey Findings</th>
<th>Interview Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to make personal responsibility a core value? | • Take ownership of personal behavior that supports respect of others  
• Promote a culture where everyone sees themselves as an important part of the organization  
• Promote organizational culture that values inclusion  
• Willing to take personal risks to see that others are valued  
• The importance of diversity is shown in organizational hiring practices | • Modeling personal responsibility  
• Seeking expertise and guidance  
• Showing vulnerability  
• Influence others to be personally responsible  
• Involving others and collaboration  
• Modeling and vocalizing personal responsibility  
• Setting expectations and following through  
• Creating buy-in and ownership |

Findings for Research Question 5

Research Question 5 was: What strategies do exemplary USD school district superintendents use to establish mutualism as the final arbiter? The survey included five questions and the interview protocol included two questions related to mutualism as the final arbiter.

Within the quantitative findings, the highest rated item was to insist on fairness as a core value and encourage new ideas benefiting all stakeholders. Both these items had a mean of 5.82. The next highest rated item was creating a deep sense of shared purpose, with a mean of 5.71. The lowest rated item was lead with intentional collaboration where no one is harmed, but with a mean of 5.59, this was still a strategy used by the superintendents (Table 24). All the mean scores on the survey for this section were high and indicated the actions were important in ensuring mutualism as the final arbiter.
Table 24

*Average Ratings for Mutualism*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insist on fairness as core value</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage new ideas that benefit all stakeholders</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a deep sense of shared purpose</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivate a thoughtful inspection of diverse thinking</td>
<td>5.59</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead with intentional collaboration where no one is placed at risk</td>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Rating</strong></td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. n = 17*

Two questions were asked during the interviews related to mutualism as the final arbiter. The first asked about ways in which final decisions were made in the organization. The response referenced most often by the superintendents was through involving others in decision-making, which was mentioned 17 times. This was followed by considering others’ values and perspectives, which was referenced 13. Five interviewees made eight references to governance/school board as how final decisions were made (Table 25).

Table 25

*Ways in which Final Decisions were Made*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th># of Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involving Others in Decision-Making</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considering Others’ Values and Perspectives</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance/School Board</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. n = 6*

**Involving others in decision-making.** Each superintendent mentioned collaborative decision making. For example, Participant 1 referred to providing open dialog with employees and gauging where they were at on the issue contributed to final decision-making. Four superintendents talked about the structures in place to involve
others, such as advisory teams, committees, or councils. Three participants mentioned involvement was necessary to create ownership. Participant 2 conjectured that whatever the group, “the stakeholders who are going to be affected by those decisions or the plan [must] have input.” The superintendent stated, “When people feel that they have had input to the final product, then they live the final product.” A connection to mutualism was made by Participant 3, who stated, “True mutualism is when decision-making becomes shared. People have agency. They feel a responsibility to it… a shared sense of responsibility and ownership over the collaborative path forward that we’ve all bought into together.”

Considering others’ values and perspectives. Considering others showed up in different ways. When making decisions, all five of the participants referred to embracing different points of view. Participant 1 asked multiple questions when making decisions, saying, “I really thoughtfully think through how people are going to receive it.” Participant 3 expressed pride about his “cabinet having really good relationships with each other, but very different perspectives,” which provided more robust decisions at the cabinet level. The superintendent further expressed how cabinet members reacted to this environment, sharing, “They were saying, ‘I can’t believe that I can actually express an opposing opinion and I don’t get the side eye or the stink eye over it. You actually listen to my perspective.’” Two participants also mentioned the humility behind considering others’ values and perspectives. One said, “I love hearing different points of view and it goes back to being humble.” Participant 4 recalled a story about a pastor who was part of decision process; the pastor said, “I’m so glad we have this meeting and it reminded me how kind and compassionate you are.”
**Governance/school board.** Superintendents are expected to maneuver high-level decision-making (Harvey et al., 2013). The superintendent is part of the governance team. Five of six superintendents mentioned the board in their responses, but only Participants 5 and 6 noted the board made final decisions in the district. Participant 6 commented, “The final decisions are made by the school board,” which was described as a potential challenge to creating buy-in. Both mentioned a decision-making process to avoid silos. The remaining four superintendents referred to the board contributing to the decision-making process. For example, Participant 4 noted when the district was deciding on distance learning during the pandemic, “The board wanted to know how people felt. Even when deciding, the board wanted input from others.”

The second interview question related to mutualism as the final arbiter asked about the most important advantage of creating a culture of inclusiveness. The response referenced most often by the superintendents was the benefit of valuing perspectives, which was mentioned 11 times by five of the interviewees. The other theme that emerged was ownership and personal responsibility, which was referenced seven times by four of the superintendents (Table 26).

Table 26

*Advantages of a Culture of Inclusiveness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th># of Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valuing Perspectives</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership and Personal Responsibility</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* n = 6

**Valuing perspectives.** As leaders learn about others, applying their knowledge in daily practice is part of valuing varying perspectives (Kennedy, 2008). Participant 1 underscored the importance of allowing others to express their differences within the
organization and helping people to stretch their thinking to respect others’ perspectives. Two participants discussed the importance of including as many perspectives as possible, which aligned with collaboration and shared decision-making.

**Ownership and personal responsibility.** Participant 4 provided an example of how ownership can be increased by including others’ perspectives in decisions, saying, “There is something really powerful about feeling like I’ve got a seat at the table. I am part of this.” Ownership becomes evident, as one participating stated, “They take pride in their willingness to put so much energy and effort when it’s something they can feel a personal connection to the work.” Four superintendents mentioned ownership and personal responsibility as an important strategy. Other concepts presented within the idea of ownership and personal responsibility were trust and respect. Participant 4 said, “Trust is built. It is very important for people to trust the organization and trust each other so when their voices are heard, they are more inclined to not participate, but you have ownership of what happens.” Participant 6 stated, “It’s about respect. It’s about developing a culture of inclusiveness, as we unify around respect for diversity...we really foster that inclusive environment by really unifying around everyone.”

To examine the connection between the survey and interview responses within Research Question 5, the researcher examined and ordered the quantitative responses from the highest mean to lowest (Table 27). Additionally, the researcher noted the themes from the qualitative interviews and listed them based on the greatest number of references.
Table 27

Research Question 5: Summary of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Survey Findings</th>
<th>Interview Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to establish mutualism as the final arbiter? | • Insist on fairness as core value  
• Encourage new ideas that benefit all stakeholders  
• Create a deep sense of shared purpose  
• Cultivate a thoughtful inspection of diverse thinking  
• Lead with intentional collaboration where no one is placed at risk | • Involving others in decision-making  
• Considering others values and perspectives  
• Governance/School Board  
• Valuing perspectives  
• Ownership and personal responsibility |

Findings for Research Question 6

Research Question 6 was: What do exemplary USD superintendents perceive as the most important advantages of creating an organizational culture of inclusiveness?

The survey included five questions about culture and 10 questions about the culture of inclusiveness, and the interview protocol included two questions related to the advantages of creating an organizational culture of inclusiveness.

Within the quantitative findings related to culture, the highest rated item was to embrace interaction with people of different cultures with a mean of 5.88, followed by see things from others’ points of view and encourage open dialog with stakeholders, both with a mean of 5.76. The lowest rating was challenge intolerance in others with a mean of 5.35 (Table 28). All the means on the survey items were high, indicating the actions were important in relation to culture.
Table 28

*Average Ratings for Culture*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Embrace interaction with people of different cultures</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See things from other people’s point of view</td>
<td>5.76</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage open dialog with stakeholders</td>
<td>5.76</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider diverse perspectives when making decisions</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge intolerance in others</td>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Rating</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.69</strong></td>
<td><strong>.56</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* n = 17

Within the quantitative findings related to culture of inclusiveness, the highest rated item was interacting respectfully with different people in the organization with a mean of 6.0, followed by showing respect by helping others and treating people with genuine regard regardless of position, both with a mean of 5.94. The two lowest ratings were for holding others accountable for inclusion with a mean of 5.53 and collecting regular employee feedback with a mean of 5.35 (Table 29). All the mean scores were high, indicating the actions were important in creating a culture of inclusiveness.

Table 29

*Average Ratings for Culture of Inclusiveness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interact respectfully with different people in the organization</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show respect by helping people</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treat people with genuine regard regardless of position</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen carefully to make people comfortable</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value the contributions of people through positive recognition</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrate the unique contributions of diversity to the success of the organization</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage everyone to be themselves</td>
<td>5.65</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold others accountable for inclusion</td>
<td>5.53</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote policies that ensure cultural participation</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect regular employee feedback</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Rating</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.72</strong></td>
<td><strong>.57</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* n = 17
Two questions were asked during the interviews related to the most important advantages of creating an organizational culture of inclusiveness. The first asked about ways in which the superintendent was able to create a culture of inclusiveness within the organization. The response referenced most often was involving others, which was mentioned 10 times by four of the interviewees. This was followed by setting expectations and following through, which was referenced six. Three participants referenced professional learning six times, modeling a culture of inclusion five times, and valuing perspective four times (Table 30).

Table 30

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Superintendents Created a Culture of Inclusion</th>
<th>n</th>
<th># of Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involving Others</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting Expectations and Following Through</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling a Culture of Inclusion</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing Perspectives</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* n = 6

**Involving others.** When creating a culture of inclusiveness, four participants discussed involving internal and external stakeholders. Participant 3 involved others with purpose and discussed the importance of “creating the systems and structure for people to connect so there’s many more nodes on the diagram to create a psychological safe space to be involved in the conversation.” Additionally, Participant 4 mentioned the impact of involving others, saying, “If you’ve got a culture of inclusiveness and people feel responsibility to the total organization, you can move very quickly because there’s a high degree of trust.” Participant 5 provided an example of engaging every employee in a large district by involving them in creating common value statements.
Setting expectations and following through. A superintendent’s role includes setting and developing district expectations (Benzel & Hoover, 2015; Meador, 2019). Setting expectations was described by four superintendents. Participant 1 highlighted the importance of expectations, saying, “It is creating a common investment for all to care about inclusivity.” Participant 2 stated directly, “It goes back to setting the expectations.” An example was provided by Participant 5, who extended involvement to every employee. The superintendent collectively set the expectation for “how we want to do things around here in terms of what we always want to see and never wanted to see.”

Professional learning. As a reiteration of the most common response to how to make diversity a priority, three participants mentioned professional learning as a way to create a culture of inclusiveness. Four mentioned inviting experts and trainers into the organization, such as Participant 2 who created an “organization with common language that everyone can use for consistency, providing opportunities to continue to learn.” Participant 5 provided an example of learning from a non-educational organization; the Ritz Carlton’s process for managing hotels across the planet was described and purposefully related to developing employee basics. This learning was carried on in two districts in which the superintendent served.

Modeling a culture of inclusion. Another way superintendents created a culture of inclusiveness was to model it, which was referenced by three superintendents with five responses. Participant 4 provided an example of a dilemma involving a student of color potentially not graduating. The superintendent investigated multiple routes to help the student, all of which yielded no solution. The participant created a solution that pushed against the system and the people in the system and ensured the student graduated by
personally showing up for the student. The superintendent noted, “When I am here in the district, I try to model inclusiveness.” The other two participants expressed the significance of modeling by explicitly. Participant 1 said, “Your actions speak it,” and Participant 2 said, “I just think it goes back to modeling.”

Valuing perspectives. Three superintendents expressed valuing perspectives as helping create a culture of inclusiveness. Participant 1 described careful actions taken to value perspectives by understanding others, such as including their pasts and heritage. Participant 4 described the foundation of developing inclusiveness in the organization, saying, “Inclusiveness comes out of the idea of being open to ideas and listening to people.” Participant 5 noted, “These are diverse employees, what do you want to see, hear and feel in the organization?”

The second interview question related to creating a culture of inclusiveness asked about advantages of creating an environment of mutual respect and acceptance. The response referenced most often by the superintendents was mutual respect, which was mentioned 11 times by five of the interviewees. This was followed by unifying teams, which was referenced 11 times by four superintendents. Four superintendents referenced building confidence in the organization and creating ownership (Table 31).

Table 31

Advantages of Creating an Environment of Mutual Respect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th># of Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mutual Respect</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unifying Teams</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Confidence in the Organization</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating Ownership</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. n = 6
**Mutual respect.** An environment of mutual respect and acceptance values individual’s unique dimensions and contributes to positive results in the organization (Azmat et al., 2014; Mak et al., 2014). Participant 1 underscored the importance of showing respect for an individual’s unique dimensions, sharing, “Healthy organizations are really about taking care of one another, so that you can take care of others.” Participant 2 provided an example of how to develop mutual respect in an inclusive organization, saying, “People will respect that you’re willing to show them respect by telling them the true story...When you’ve been consistent, your community feels respected like they are truly part of the district...they engage with you, and in a respectful manner."

**Unifying teams.** In an inclusive organization, one advantage was how unified teams became. Participant 2 shared, “People like to feel they are part of the organization. The advantage of that is you build a sense of team beyond the walls of your office and it just doesn’t get better than that.” Participant 3 talked about building “not only an individual legacy but being part of a collective legacy.” Participant 6 suggested when individuals come together in an inclusive environment, it creates teams. A story was told about how members of the district discussed how infighting had gone away under the superintendent’s leadership. Participant 6 added, “When we started discussing equity, I really started hearing for the first time this inclusiveness, this culture and climate of inclusiveness, but this really is about unifying and valuing perspectives.”

**Building confidence in the organization.** An advantage of inclusiveness was that “builds confidence, not only in the individuals but it builds confidence in the organization that you can step out and try something that might be a little different,”
noted Participant 3. Additionally, “The organization that I work with has been known to be a kind of innovative organization to the point that they’re willing to step out and try something different.” In addition to building internal confidence, the strength of building the inclusive culture extended to external confidence; according to Participant 6, “Now, City Hall and the Chamber like us, colleges like us, and most parents are happy.”

**Creating ownership.** Ownership went beyond the role of the leader. Participant 3 noted, “It is not about me. It’s about seeing the people in the organization grow and take responsibility and feel they are part of the team.” Three participants related ownership to responsibility. “When you’re given much, much is expected of you...and you need to give it.” Participant 5 referred to a book indicating the basic desire of everybody across the planet is the same: they want to provide for their families and do well. With that comes authentic engagement. It was added, “We would build their ideals and action so that they own the district. We could then step back and watch the workplace.”

To examine the connection between the survey and interview responses within Research Question 6, the researcher examined and ordered the quantitative responses from highest mean to the lowest (Table 32). Additionally, the researcher noted the themes from the qualitative interviews and listed them based on the greatest number of references.
Table 32

Research Question 6: Summary of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Survey Findings</th>
<th>Interview Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| What do exemplary USD superintendents perceive as the most important advantages of | • Embrace interaction with people of different cultures  
• See things from the other people's point of view  
• Encourage open dialog with stakeholders  
• Consider diverse perspectives when making decisions  
• Challenge intolerance in others  
• Interact respectfully with different people in the organization  
• Show respect by helping people  
• Treat people with genuine regard regardless of position  
• Listen carefully to make people comfortable  
• Value the contributions of people through positive recognition  
• Celebrate unique contributions of diversity to organization success  
• Encourage everyone to be themselves  
• Hold others accountable for inclusion  
• Promote policies that ensure cultural participation  
• Collect regular employee feedback | • Involving others  
• Setting expectations and following through  
• Professional learning  
• Modeling a culture of inclusion  
• Valuing perspectives  
• Mutual respect  
• Unifying teams  
• Building confidence in the organization  
Creating ownership |
| creating an organizational culture of inclusiveness?                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

Summary

The purpose of this explanatory mixed-methods study was to identify and describe the leadership strategies USD superintendents in San Bernardino and Riverside Counties used to create an organizational culture of inclusiveness using Kennedy’s (2008) five distinctive qualities of leadership. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed to answer the research questions. Chapter IV presented the results
of the data analysis. Quantitative findings for each research question were ordered from highest mean to the lowest. Subsequently, the researcher considered the themes from the qualitative interviews and listed them based on the greatest number of references. Two to six themes were found within each interview question for a total of 43 themes (Table 33).

Table 33

Summary of Findings by Research Question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Survey Findings</th>
<th>Interview Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to make diversity a priority? | • Communicate the importance of culture differences  
• Provide coaching to develop talent within the organization  
• Take personal responsibility for inclusion of all people  
• Provide opportunities for people to develop new skills  
• Model diversity as an organizational priority | • Professional learning  
• Professional caring and empathy  
• Change in structures and systems  
• Involving others through collaboration  
• Getting to know others and their stories  
• Creating a safe space by valuing perspectives  
• Setting expectations and following through  
• Sharing data |
| What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to get to know people and their differences? | • Listen without judgement to understand diverse cultures  
• Embrace interaction with others from different cultures  
• Stand up for others if they are being treated unfairly  
• Intervene for intolerance  
• Encourage open dialog about controversial issues | • Intentional interactions  
• Listen and learn  
• Valuing perspectives with empathy  
• Being curious to seek understanding  
• Being present and actively listening |
| What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to enable rich communication? | • Remaining accessible to others  
• Remain open to feedback to develop deeper understanding of different perspectives  
• Create a culture where people feel safe to share controversial ideas  
• Approach conflict by looking at all sides  
• Share honestly what is going on when the chips are down | • Authentically connecting as individual  
• Involving others and soliciting their feedback  
• Building structures and systems  
• Presence and active listening  
• Engage in caring interactions |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to make personal responsibility a core value?</strong></th>
</tr>
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</table>
| • Take ownership of personal behavior respecting others  
• Promote a culture where everyone sees themselves as an important part of the organization  
• Promote organizational culture that values inclusion  
• Willing to take personal risks to see that others are valued  
• Diversity is shown in organizational hiring practices  |
<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to establish mutualism as the final arbiter?</strong></th>
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</table>
| • Insist on fairness as core value  
• Encourage new ideas that benefit all stakeholders  
• Create a sense of shared purpose  
• Cultivate a thoughtful inspection of diverse thinking  
• Lead with intentional collaboration where no one is placed at risk  |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>What do exemplary USD superintendents perceive as the most important advantages of creating an organizational culture of inclusiveness?</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Embrace interaction with people of different cultures  
• See things from the other people's point of view  
• Encourage open dialog  
• Consider diverse perspectives when making decisions  
• Challenge intolerance in others  
• Interact respectfully with different people in the organization  
• Show respect by helping people  
• Treat people with genuine regard regardless of position  
• Listen carefully to make people comfortable  
• Value the contributions of people through positive recognition  
• Celebrate unique contributions of diversity to organization success  
• Encourage everyone to be themselves  
• Hold others accountable for inclusion  
• Promote policies that ensure cultural participation  
• Collect regular employee feedback  |
| **Actions:**  
• Modeling personal responsibility  
• Seeking expertise and guidance  
• Showing vulnerability  
• Influence others to be personally responsible  
• Involving others in collaboration  
• Modeling and vocalizing personal responsibility  
• Setting expectations and following through  
• Creating buy-in and ownership |
The key findings were aligned to Kennedy’s (2008) five distinctive qualities of leadership. Considering the quantitative and qualitative findings, the researcher reviewed the survey results then grouped and synthesized the 43 interview findings. Eight significant strategies USD superintendents used to create a culture of inclusiveness surfaced. The eight key findings were:

1. See others by valuing perspectives, diversity, and stories
2. Intentionally get curious, listen, and learn to build relationships
3. Involve others through shared leadership
4. Demonstrate and model empathy and care for others
5. Develop a sense of ownership and belonging across the organization
6. Ensure expectations, structures and systems are aligned to inclusiveness
7. Seek expertise and provide professional learning
8. Exhibit authentic leadership vulnerability

Chapter V further expands on the major findings presented in Chapter IV. Additionally, conclusions, implications, unexpected findings, and recommendations for further research are delineated, followed by closing thoughts and reflections.
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The United States is one of the most diverse countries in the world and the pace of diversification continues to grow (Radford & Noe-Bustamante, 2019). As a result, more than ever before leaders must adapt their approaches to meet the needs of their followers. Individuals bring their unique identity, cultural backgrounds, and perspectives to the organization. As diversity grew across California, public schools experienced the same changes (Camp et al., 2020; Freedberg, 2018), which made it necessary for superintendents to be able to navigate the impact of these changes. Whether such impacts were positive or challenging, the superintendent must develop a positive culture and expectations of respect permeating the organization (Benzel & Hoover, 2015). Diversity is a crucial element in a leader’s ability to collectively establish and nurture an exceptional school district. Research suggested exemplary superintendents must utilize strategies to positively impact culture by leveraging diversity throughout the educational system.

This research study aimed to identify and describe the leadership strategies unified school district (USD) superintendents in San Bernardino and Riverside Counties used to create an organizational culture of inclusiveness using Kennedy’s (2008) five distinctive qualities of leadership. Chapter I introduced the background for the study along with the purpose and research questions. A thorough review of the literature was discussed in Chapter II. Chapter III presented the methodology and data collection procedures used to conduct the study. The findings were detailed in Chapter IV. Chapter V reiterates the purpose of the study, research questions, methodology, and data collection process and presents a description of the major findings, unexpected findings,
conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for further research. It concludes with closing thoughts and reflections from the researcher.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this explanatory mixed-methods study was to identify and describe the leadership strategies USD superintendents in San Bernardino and Riverside Counties used to create an organizational culture of inclusiveness using Kennedy’s (2008) five distinctive qualities of leadership.

**Research Questions**

Six research questions guided this study:

1. What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to make diversity an organizational priority?
2. What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to get to know people and their differences?
3. What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to enable rich communication?
4. What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to make personal responsibility a core value?
5. What strategies do exemplary USD superintendents use to establish mutualism as the final arbiter?
6. What do exemplary USD superintendents perceive as the most important advantages of creating an organizational culture of inclusiveness?
Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

An explanatory mixed-method design was used to guide the research to evoke in-depth responses. This mixed-method design deepened the thoughts regarding the research questions related to Kennedy’s (2008) five distinctive qualities of leadership and inclusiveness, and identified and described strategies exemplary USD superintendents used to create an organizational culture of inclusiveness.

Seventeen superintendents were selected based on meeting pre-established criteria for exemplary. Email attachments were sent to all potential participants for both the survey and interview processes, which summarized the data collection process and informed potential participants about confidentiality protocols. The survey was completed by 17 exemplary USD superintendents. Thereafter, six of the 17 superintendents participated in qualitative interviews utilizing open-ended questions. Development of the semi-structured interview questions was based on the framework and research delineated in the study.

The data collected from the qualitative portion of this mixed-method study was coded and scrutinized for themes and patterns within each of the questions. Themes surfaced and were considered in alignment to Kennedy’s (2008) five distinctive qualities of leadership and a culture of inclusiveness.

Population

California has 1,037 superintendents leading school districts in the state. USD superintendents comprise 346 of those superintendents, meaning they served kindergarten through 12th grade students. The population of 346 USD superintendents was too large to study due to time constraints and accessibility of the superintendents for the study.
Therefore, a target population was used. According to the CDE website, there are 20 USDs in Riverside County and 18 in San Bernardino County. Within the two counties, 38 USD superintendents formed the target population.

**Sample**

The sample for this study included 17 exemplary USD superintendents for the quantitative survey portion and six who volunteered to participate in the qualitative process as well. All participants were from Riverside and San Bernardino Counties and met the study criteria. All participants were selected based on meeting the criteria and provided rich data through their stories, experiences, and expertise.

**Major Findings**

Based on the quantitative survey and qualitative interview results, major findings were synthesized across all research questions. This section is organized and summarized based on the major findings. Subsequently, a connection to Kennedy’s (2008) qualities of leadership is made.

**Finding 1. Superintendents see Others by Valuing Perspectives, Diversity, and Stories**

Holvino et al. (2004) explained varying dimensions of diversity, such as styles, cultures, abilities, perspectives, and genders, strongly frame an organization’s mission, strategies, systems, and values. In this study, it was evident the superintendents discussed the significance of seeing others by valuing their perspectives. The strategies used to accomplish this varied, but usually involved an exchange of communication specific to perspectives and differences. Valuing stories was the strongest example. Understanding and valuing an individual’s or group’s story was referenced to establish
mutual respect, organizational strength, and improved relationships. This finding was noted by all participants and was threaded across multiple research questions.

**Finding 2. Superintendents Intentionally get Curious, Listen, and Learn to Build Relationships**

The second major finding flowed out of the first. Superintendents in this study claimed it took willful action to see others. Senge (2005) delineated the benefits of intentional communication through active listening or the concept of presence. The superintendents all provided examples of how they intentionally sought out their employees and made inquiries to get to know them. Some superintendents described intentional ways they scheduled time with staff, from going to meetings early to driving and delivering awards to the homes of employees. Intentional actions were described as necessary when the role of the superintendent offered many time constraints. Getting curious about employees was a way to connect and display value for the team. Focused listening provided the participants the opportunity to learn about backgrounds, families, needs, and objectives. The idea of needing to know employees to lead them surfaced repeatedly.

**Finding 3. Superintendents Involve Others through Shared Leadership**

Most responses provided by study participants referred to the value of involving others, which employees, students, families, and community members. Inclusive K-12 leaders who removed barriers and engaged employees into collaboration were considered collaborative (Fullan & Quinn, 2015); furthermore, collaborative leaders invited others to be part of setting direction, creating strategy, making decisions, and growing leadership. The exemplary superintendents described involving others as a way to share leadership in
many instances, meaning decisions were made, operating standards were formed, and resources allocated based on involvement from others. Involving others also encouraged buy-in to topics, plans, and actions set forth by the district.

**Finding 4. Superintendents Demonstrate and Model Empathy and Care for Others**

Travis et al. (2019) proposed the need for leaders to intentionally develop deep knowledge, expertise, and empathy in their organizations. The superintendents in this study discussed modeling as a strong factor to develop a culture of inclusiveness. Going beyond modeling, superintendents acknowledged the deep desire to care for those they served, including students, staff, and the community. They undoubtedly believed the best way to teach empathy was to be an example by displaying deep concern for others and attempting to walk in their shoes.

**Finding 5. Superintendents Develop a Sense of Ownership and Belonging across the Organization**

The desire to belong or feel included is a psychological need impacting the workplace (Shore et al., 2011). Superintendents expressed the importance of ownership for developing and unifying teams. Ownership provided individuals a connection to the work. Additionally, several superintendents referenced ownership as a compelling sense of belonging, pride, or loyalty, and was described as the result of meaningful involvement or connection to a purpose in the work.

**Finding 6. Superintendents Ensure Expectations, Structures, and Systems are Aligned to Inclusiveness**

Superintendents affirmed the need to bring strategy into building a culture of inclusiveness by describing the importance of setting expectations and creating structures
and systems aligned with intended outcomes. They described the operational side of leadership by discussing the foundational need to express and model organizational expectations. The structure of meetings was an example of how several superintendents reduced the barrier of silos. Practices and procedures were shifted to better include all stakeholders in conversations. One superintendent explained hiring practices were an example of how consistent practices led to systems changes. Additionally, systems alignment improved inclusiveness through operations, protocols, or resource allocations, such as how curriculum may be vetted for diverse representation.

**Finding 7. Superintendents Seek Expertise and Provide Professional Learning**

Every superintendent expressed the importance of professional learning as a channel to bring inclusiveness, diversity, cultural bias awareness, cultural proficiency, and related topics to the district. All superintendents also sought experts to improve personal or team knowledge about the same topics. Experts provided teaching, motivation, lived experiences, and research as means to contribute to equity and inclusivity efforts. Finally, participants also referenced the use of related media, materials, and books in structured trainings or informal settings.

**Finding 8. Superintendents Exhibit Authentic Leadership Vulnerability**

Inclusiveness involves other factors of leadership, such as authenticity, humility, and engagement (Fullan & Quinn, 2015). Participants discussed being themselves and the value of showing others who they were as individuals. Being humble was discussed, which led to the concept of vulnerability. Most participants shared challenging information clearly and honestly, not hiding the facts. This direct communication was vital to build trust. The superintendents related humility and trust, contending that
authentic leadership developed greater connections, which inevitably built greater trust throughout the organization.

**Findings in Relationship to Kennedy’s Framework**

Each major finding was synthesized across the survey findings and frequency with which qualitative findings were referenced by the participants during the interview. Both instruments were designed to provide responses to the research questions, which aligned to Kennedy’s (2008) five distinctive qualities of leadership. The major themes that emerged related to Kennedy’s framework.

**Make diversity a priority.** Kennedy (2008) stated to achieve a culture of inclusiveness, diversity must be an organizational priority achieved through intentional strategies. Similarly, the superintendents in this study expressed the importance of valuing other’s perspectives and stories through collaboration. Additionally, intentionality was linked to embracing a culture of inclusiveness. Superintendents said to make diversity a priority, expectations, structures, and systems must align to the goal.

**Know people and their differences.** Kennedy (2008) suggested leaders must honor people and their differences by taking action to understand them by developing in-depth knowledge through curiosity, experiences, and daily practice. This allowed leaders to develop a sense of belonging in the organization. Superintendents agreed intentional curiosity, caring interactions, and valuing perspectives with empathy were significant ways in which they got to know people and their differences.

**Enable rich communication.** Ensuring high level, effective communication loops resulted in a personal connections among individuals (Jensen et al., 2018; Kennedy, 2008). Superintendents focused on building structures and systems for better
organizational communication. On an individual level, superintendents noted presence and active listening deepened connections with others. Some superintendents also proactively invited team members to communicate ideas and feedback.

**Make personal responsibility a core value.** Kennedy (2008) recommended personal responsibility as a core value, wherein leadership takes conscious ownership of their actions. Superintendents felt showing vulnerability regarding risk and error was a way to model personal responsibility. To help others take personal responsibility, setting expectations was key to ownership. Involving others in decision-making empowered the team to buy into the values and culture of the organization.

**Establish mutualism as the final arbitrator.** Kennedy (2008) recommended leaders create cultures in which everyone benefits and no one is harmed by decisions and actions within the organization. Additionally, trust is established through mutualism, which is strengthened by sharing a purpose, knowing one another, and interconnecting roles and responsibilities (Harvey & Drolet, 2006). Superintendents described sharing leadership and including others to create a deep sense of shared purpose and thereafter, develop ownership through respect and trust.

**Unexpected Findings**

Multiple unexpected findings surfaced during this explanatory mixed-method study. The following were surprises to the researcher:

- Mentoring
- Size of district
- Self-deception
- Feedback
• Hiring practices
• Breadth of diversity
• Outcomes

In the quantitative survey, mentoring had one of the highest mean scores; yet in the interview, there was only one mention of the use of mentoring as a strategy for building a culture of inclusiveness. Rather, participants referenced modeling. A second unexpected finding was specific to two superintendents who led substantially large districts having the ability and muscle to effectively include all employees in a collectively developed common purpose. Additionally, one superintendent described self-deception as a potential obstacle for seeing the effectiveness of his leadership, whereas the lowest quantitative mean involved collecting regular employee feedback.

Through the rich examples provided by the participants, informal feedback was being collected, but there was no mention of any formal feedback process. Also, little information surfaced about hiring practices or diversity management. The diversity discussed by the participants was primarily about ethnicity, race, and socioeconomics, whereas there was little mention of cognitive, social identity, age, gender, or other types of diversity. Superintendents described excellent strategies for creating a culture of inclusiveness; meanwhile, only one superintendent connected inclusiveness to outcomes like innovation and performance.

Conclusions

This study focused on the strategies USD superintendents used to create a culture of inclusiveness. Both quantitative and qualitative analysis of data surfaced major findings, which were synthesized and aligned to Kennedy’s (2008) five distinctive
qualities of leadership. Seven conclusions surfaced based on the findings and literature. The following conclusion were made based on the framework and major findings: get to know others by valuing their perspectives, diversity, and stories; intentionally be curious, listen, and learn to build relationships; involve others through shared leadership; demonstrate and model empathy and care for others; develop a sense of ownership and belonging across the organization; ensure expectations, structures, and systems are aligned to inclusiveness; seek expertise and provide professional learning; and exhibit authentic leadership vulnerability

**Conclusion 1. Superintendents who Value, Accept, and Respect Staff, and Provide Meaningful Opportunities for Staff to Share Perspectives and Differences through Storytelling, will have a Positive Impact on Inclusiveness**

Based on the findings of this study and as supported by the literature, it was concluded superintendents who value, accept, and respect staff, and provide opportunities to share perspectives and differences through storytelling will have a positive impact on inclusiveness. The conclusion was supported by Kennedy’s (2008) assertion leaders who see others by valuing their perspectives accelerated innovation and high-level performance. Livermore et al. (2015) asserted differences can empower the positive effects of leadership on the team or the entire organizational system. Additionally, research asserted the most significant strategy for inclusion in the workplace was for leaders to value, accept, and respect each of their employees (Grafstein, 2019). Understanding and valuing an individual or group was referenced as means to mutual respect, organizational strength, and improved relationships (Holvino et al., 2004). The Arbinger Institute (2016) recognized organizations wherein people value others’ needs,
objectives, stories, and challenges as much of their own were likely to have four times better outcomes.

**Conclusion 2. Superintendents who Practice Curiosity, Openness, and Empathy in Interactions Create a Sense of Belonging and Engagement across the Organization**

Based on the findings of this study and as supported by the literature, it was concluded superintendents need to establish a sense of value, belonging, and engagement across the organization by scheduling intentional interactions with staff, consisting of curiosity, openness, and empathy. The conclusion was supported by social inclusion theory, which considers the impact on the individual’s sense of belonging and well-being on the organization as a whole (Verbeek & Peters, 2018). Shore et al. (2011) and Brewer (2011) confirmed how an individual’s identity contributed to feelings of value and belonging within the organization, inviting employees to feel included, cared for, and engaged. Optimal distinctiveness theory denotes only individuals with a sense of high belonging and high value of uniqueness experience inclusion (Shore et al., 2011).

Further, research suggested the need for leaders to ensure employees retain their uniqueness as an important part of the organization (Barak & Daya, 2014; Brewer, 2011; Leonardelli et al., 2010). A leader’s ability to develop this inclusive workplace contributes to employee engagement, involvement, healthy relationship, and transparency (Englelen et al., 2014; Tedla, 2016).

**Conclusion 3. Superintendents who Embrace Diversity of Perspectives and Ideas in Decision-Making will Strengthen Decisions and Create Organizational Ownership**

Based on the findings of this study and as supported by the literature, it was concluded that superintendents who embrace diversity of perspectives and ideas in
purposeful decision-making will strengthen decisions and create organizational ownership. This conclusion was supported by research, which confirmed inclusiveness involves leaders encouraging employee involvement, asking for input, and valuing the input (Wasserman, 2008; Xiaotao et al., 2018). Collaboration in education encourages employee feedback and includes them in setting the direction, creating priorities and indicators for success, forging strategy, and decision-making (Fullan & Quinn, 2015). Kennedy (2018) asserted establishing shared ownership leveraged commitment in developing team and meeting outcomes. Additionally, ownership evoked personal responsibility for actions and group contributions (Melaard, 2016; Tausen et al., 2018). The experience of inclusion is psychological, deepening the impact of intentionally involving others (Verbeek & Peters, 2018); thus, it involves mindset, values, and attributes impacting all individuals in the organization (Zenger, 2015). This deep sense of connection with the organization impacts job performance (Bourke & Espdido, 2019).

**Conclusion 4. Superintendents who Lead with Authenticity and Vulnerability will Create Trust to Leverage Organizational Innovation, Leadership, and Performance**

Based on the findings of this study and as supported by the literature, it was concluded superintendents who lead with authenticity and vulnerability will create trust in the organization. Trust, personal vulnerability, and mutual respect anchors the ability to leverage differences for organizational innovation, leadership, and performance. This conclusion was supported by Schein (2016), who asserted leaders must be authentic to support a positive culture, giving themselves and others the right to freely reveal or express themselves and their differences at work. Fullan and Quinn (2015) considered authenticity, humility, and engagement as significant factors in leadership. More so, if
society’s greatest issues come from people feeling unseen and unknown, leaders must develop the ability to see one another more deeply and, in turn, allow themselves to be seen, honoring the uniqueness of all employees (Kennedy, 2008).

**Conclusion 5. Superintendents who Align Expectations, Policies, Practices, Systems, and Structures to District Equity Efforts Remove Obstacles and Create District Coherence regarding Improved Inclusiveness**

Based on the findings of this study and as supported by the literature, it was concluded superintendents who align expectations, policies, practices, systems, and structures to district equity efforts remove obstacles and create district coherence regarding improved inclusiveness. This conclusion was supported by research, which confirmed it is the responsibility of the superintendent to develop a positive culture and expectation of mutual respect across the district (Benzel & Hoover, 2015). Fullan (2016) discussed the importance of coherence in the organization for garnering collective engagement and to effectively operationalize organizational goals; additionally, building capacity and systems is key in sustainable change. Holvino et al. (2004) noted the need to alignment in an organization’s mission, strategies, systems, and values with a focus on diversity. A system aligned with structures, policies, and practices is a path to improve inclusiveness. Building a culture of equity and inclusion in the workplace means barriers preventing employees from contributing and being involved are recognized and removed (Miller et al., 1998; Roberson, 2006). Additionally, the board of education must also be responsible for developing an inclusive culture and must ensure alignment in collaboration with the superintendent.
Conclusion 6. Superintendents who Create a Safe Place to Value others’ Differences through Intentional Conversations and Structured Learning Experiences about Diversity will better Obtain Organizational Outcomes

Based on the findings of this study and as supported by the literature, it was concluded superintendents who create a safe place to value others’ differences through intentional conversations and experiences about diversity will better obtain organizational outcomes. Formalized training, like diversity management (DM) efforts, is needed to implement opportunities for employees to understand and value individual differences (Bilimoria et al., 2008; Sabharwal, 2014; Thomas & Ely, 1996). Additionally, DM can be a catalyst for change in the development of organizational inclusiveness and equity through hiring practices and onboarding. Complimentary to training, Ragins and Verbos (2007) described the impact of mentoring in the workplace to improve positive work relationships across the organization. Additionally, mentoring provides ongoing support to those who learned new ideas and are practicing applications of the ideas. Chin and Trimble (2015) asserted the need for organizations to be culturally competent and inclusive of diversity. Additionally, they discussed the need for effective training and preparation for a diverse workplace specifically to reach organizational outcomes.

Conclusion 7. Superintendents who Engage in Active Listening will Enhance Collective Problem-Solving and Accelerate Transformational Change

Based on the findings of this study and as supported by the literature, it was concluded superintendents who engage in active listening and collective problem-solving will accelerate transformational change across the organization. This conclusion was supported by research, which asserted those who embrace diversity communicate through
high-level listening (Gee, 1999; Miller et al., 2002; Zúñiga et al., 2002). Similarly, Senge (2005) reiterated the benefit of intentional communication by actively listening through a process of being present and focusing on what others say with discipline and genuine curiosity. Kennedy (2008) contended a heightened need for rich communication is needed to improve outcomes, explicitly referencing accelerated change and improved problem-solving. Kennedy (2008) further denoted truly knowing people and their differences, challenges, and objectives is an activator for ownership, engagement, and performance. Randall et al. (2018) and Day and Antonakis (2011) extended this idea by affirming diversity and inclusion in the workplace compels a sense of value and acceptance, which leads to a stable and highly productive workplace.

**Implications for Action**

Data collected in this study were intended to inform school superintendents how to intentionally create a culture of inclusiveness through a purposeful focus on diversity, and inform the professional and personal actions necessary to influence the district. In reviewing the data, several implications for further action were identified. Superintendents are provided a great privilege in serving their school districts, inclusive of every staff member. Superintendents are also responsible for leveraging differences to bring about optimal organizational outcomes for students. Superintendents in this study provided rich examples of embracing diversity and advancing inclusiveness in their districts. All the superintendents also referred to creating a culture of inclusiveness as a journey. The recommendations for advancing this journey follow:

1. **Establish a nonprofit to increase understanding of the many dimensions of diversity impacting organizations and school districts.** The nonprofit
could be founded by members of Brandman’s culture of inclusiveness thematic team and solicit community partners who desired to expand the understanding of the many dimensions of diversity with the goal to unite school districts and communities. Resources should be provided by grants and major donors who expressed a desire to connect diverse individuals. The nonprofit should lead the development of the following:

- **A Dimensions of Diversity app.** Informed by research and professional organizations, an electronic app should be developed to support the awareness and knowledge of the many dimensions of diversity in school districts. The electronic app, with badging functions, would serve as a quick reference to understanding highlights and uniqueness of other cultures, generations, socioeconomic groups, and other differences. The app would be a resource for district leaders and employees to understand others’ perspectives. The app should be launched through the superintendent’s office. Ideally, the app could eventually be used at the student level and throughout the community.

- **A model diversity immersion program.** The nonprofit should collectively develop a diversity management program modeled after evidenced-based best practices in business. The program would immerse employees in relevant scenarios, provoking reflection, growth, and application of inclusive concepts such as formal mindset, cultural proficiency, empathy, and bias and equity. The modules should be launched by the local educational agency’s personnel
division and tailored to the district through consultation with the nonprofit. This model would integrate student voice to create a compelling need for inviting staff to reflect on inclusiveness. The diversity management model would include modules for training, hiring, and onboarding with immersion expectations, such as shadowing and mentoring. Mentoring should be structured to include district values, beliefs, and expectations about inclusiveness.

2. **Organize diversity hack-a-thons.** Designed to be an optional, annual district event, promoted by the superintendent with a facilitator and norms, staff come together and identify challenges with inclusiveness in the district. The group should be trained on examining problems and conflicts through a lens of action planning. Groups would deconstruct problems and establish recommended solutions, which should be presented to the cabinet.

3. **Expand CSBA’s Master in Governance Program.** Conduct an annual workshop for the board and superintendent to discuss inclusiveness, outward mindset, cultural proficiency, and culture intelligence, which concludes with an inclusive leadership self-assessment reflection. The board should integrate related information into annual goals to be shared with the community.

4. **Launch storytelling events.** Connect the district and build trust by providing opportunities for storytelling throughout the school district by launching several events:

   - **Ted-like talks.** At the district or leadership level, diverse staff share their stories to a larger group in a formal setting. The storytellers
provide information about their background and purpose, including one leadership lesson they learned through their journey. Storytelling should become a standard practice at districtwide events. Storytellers would initially be selected by the cabinet and then moved to a nomination process to participate.

• “Get curious with the superintendent” meet-and-greets. The superintendent should hold monthly small group sharing events, allowing for multi-directional questioning. These optional meetings should be rotated across school sites as an opportunity to honor and learn about the diversity of individuals at each school.

• Campfire storytelling. Hold quarterly storytelling events for all staff to share their stories. Unite the district by introducing a variety of topics for discussion, including individual and group stories related to culture, background, aspiration, and perspective.

5. Develop an empathy and inclusiveness self-assessment instrument. At the district level and initiated by the superintendent’s office, create a self-assessment to provide managers and the board a reflection tool, encouraging personal growth related to diversity and inclusion. The tool should focus on strengths and qualities of an inclusive leader rather than unconscious bias. The tool should be implemented yearly and serve as an annual diagnostic tool with aligned learning modules to stimulate personal growth. The results and planned growth actions should be shared with supervisors to goal set.
6. **Integrate inclusiveness, empathy, and mindset training in higher education.** Superintendent training needs an element of character development as much as strategy development. Professional training should include Arbinger’s (2016) *Outward Mindset*, cultural proficiency and intelligence, optimal distinctiveness theory, inclusive leadership self-assessment reflection, and Kennedy’s (2008) five distinctive qualities of leadership. This training should integrate simulations, fieldwork, and professional contributions to improve inclusiveness in education. The relevant training should be implemented in the leadership strand of master- and doctoral-level programs, as well as introduced in the ACSA Superintendent’s Academy.

7. **Engagement in a wide variety of cultural events.** The superintendent and leadership should immerse themselves in other cultural settings and environments with the intentional purpose of building cultural capacity through different experiences. Religious ceremonies, professional organizations, and cultural events and celebrations are examples of opportunities to learn about differences. On an annual basis, the superintendent and managers should report on the experiences and how those experiences helped their leadership and the district.

8. **Measure superintendent inclusiveness characteristics.** Across the district, launch an organizational culture and climate survey specific to the superintendent that includes items for empathy, respect, and related factors. This tool should originate from the personnel division and provide specific
feedback to the superintendent. Following the survey, the superintendent should obtain feedback from advisory groups to set priority areas and develop solutions. A plan for growth should be developed and shared across the district, with progress assessed annually.

9. **Adjust district resources based on an audit of practices, structures, and systems.** At the district level with the support of an equity expert, diverse stakeholder groups should develop and use an equity rubric to assess the effectiveness of district practices, structures, and systems. Within California, the local control accountability plan (LCAP) director should lead planning and implementation of the audit, determine gaps or obstacles requiring adjustments, and set and communicate a timeline for changes. The audit should be implemented at different tiers: district, site, and classroom. Disproportional results should be monitored.

10. **Establish a national network of equity champions.** Build an electronic platform grounded in clear aspirational principles related to inclusiveness and shared operational goals. The platform would allow people to blog, meet virtually, and post lived experiences. Membership should be marketed or initiated through ACSA, CALSA, AASA, CAAASA, CABE, and NASS. This platform should be maintained by a university equity division for consistency and supported by university communications interns who would maintain and further develop the mission of the diversity efforts.
Recommendations for Further Research

This explanatory mixed-methods study was limited to 17 superintendents for the survey and six for the qualitative interview. Based on findings and limitations of the study, recommendations for future research follow:

1. Replicate study with elementary or high school district superintendents to compare to the results to USD superintendents
2. Replicate the study with a comparison of results based on gender and ethnicity to determine if similarities and differences based on these two dimensions of diversity
3. Conduct a qualitative study exploring the specific strategies USD superintendents use to build capacity of district leaders regarding inclusiveness at the student, classified staff, and community levels
4. Conduct a phenomenological study to explore leadership and self-deception among superintendents, including what it looks like, its impact, and how to mitigate the phenomenon, which subsequently would provide insights into improving an organizational culture of inclusiveness
5. Conduct a quantitative study on the empirical connection to inclusive work environments and outcomes, such as productivity and retention, and compare the findings to other sectors to determine best practices in the workplace
6. Conduct a case study examining the impact of mentoring on culturally inclusive leaders to inform superintendents on the strengths and weakness of investing in mentors to make diversity a priority in the organization
Concluding Remarks and Reflections

As a new superintendent in a global pandemic, the timeliness of this study obliged me well. More than ever, those I serve felt isolated, disconnected, and in some cases, marginalized. It took many years for me to understand my contribution to this world, and now my contribution as a leader. In every interaction, I have the ability to impact others’ lives in a positive way. Over the last six years, this urge to serve at such a micro level was formally identified as the strength of *includer*. From this calling, I find the boldness to ensure every individual served under my watch will be included regardless of their demographics, personality, cognitive abilities, or social identity – regardless of our differences. The foundations of this study anchored my resolve as a leader and built upon Kennedy’s (2008) five distinctive qualities of leadership, in which I fully believe could improve the way educators currently go about their equity work. The idea of making others a priority, honoring others, seeing others, hearing others, and respecting others has such incredible power for improved organizational outcomes, more so than dividing or diminishing others by the wrongdoings of our own or other groups.

This study was fashioned for me, because I have personal experience and understanding of what it looks like and feels like to be excluded because of differences, yet, not to the degree many horrifically suffered over the last year. Whether it be demographic, cognitive or social identity, or experiential diversity, we must all acknowledge our uniqueness. As leaders, we have a moral imperative to deeply care for and see others with respect, nurturing others in these differences. The superintendents in this study are remarkable leaders, doing noteworthy work in their districts. Their resolve
to include was inspiring and validating, which encouraged me to stand fast on my values and strengths.

This study also provided a powerful lens to see the strategies being employed to create a culture of inclusiveness in two ways, one from an operational vantage point and the other from a relational vantage point. Regardless of which way leaders led in the moment (administering or ministering), the actions taken can be done to place more value on ourselves (inward), or can be done by placing as much value on others as we place on ourselves (outward). Deep reflection ensued from this study about two seemingly ancillary concepts. The first point that cannot be forgotten in the midst of this inspiring work stirs my boldness more than ever. Our work can be done inwardly, self-focused, or all of the work we do can be done outwardly, focused on others. What happens if leaders head the work and are self-focused? What about those who shapeshift not for protection, but to attack those who do not agree with them, think like them, or act like them? The term microaggression emerged from critical race theory. It is understandable in this case, leaders know their own hearts and intentions, but I surmise those they serve feel the negative impact. Through the literature and data collected from the incredible superintendents in this study, I feel empowered to speak out, in my loving style, against those who attack or exclude others for their differences.

The complex concept of self-deception was contemplated. It provoked the idea we must consider caution about how we perceive ourselves, our leadership, and work. There is no assurance feedback provided is authentic even if intended to be so. Remember, we as leaders potentially carry our own biases, lived experiences, or privilege that form who we are and potentially impact how we serve others.
REFERENCES


Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.


Sheldon, R. (2016). Qualitative or quantitative — which method is for you? Retrieved from http://www.marketingdonut.co.uk/marketing/market-research/qualitative-or-quantitative-which-method-is-for-you-. 


Cultural Inclusive Leadership 2.0

The success of any organization depends in large part on the interactions among the leader and team members. What determines the quality of these interactions is tied closely to the commitment of leaders. Positive perceptions are closely tied to the leader’s commitment to integrating diversity, equity, and inclusion into the organization. This study of cultural inclusive leadership is based on Debbie Kennedy’s five qualities of inclusive leadership. This survey is intended to solicit the expert perceptions of leaders regarding strategies used to implement the five qualities. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

PURPOSE OF STUDY: You are being asked to participate in a thematic research study conducted by Martha Martin, Stephanie Smart, Toloue Aria, Tonia Watkins, Marisol Alaniz, Kelly Kennedy, Nemo Withana, Nicole Tafoya, Leila Dodge, and Lynn Carmen Day, doctoral students from Brandman University. The purpose of this explanatory mixed method study to identify and describe the leadership strategies that exemplary leaders use to create an organizational culture of inclusiveness using Kennedy’s five leadership qualities of cultural differences.

I understand that:

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

b) The possible benefit of this study to me is that my input may help add to the research regarding the strategies that exemplary leaders use to create an inclusive organization.

c) If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact the researcher using the information provided in the invitation to participate.

d) 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. In addition, the Investigator may stop the study at any time.

e) No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that 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.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Lynn J. Carmen Day at [lcarmend@mail.brandman.edu] or by phone at [_______] or Dr. Cindy Petersen (Dissertation Chair) at [_______].

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.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below.

Clicking on the “agree” button indicates that you have read the informed consent and the information in this document and that you voluntarily agree to participate.

If you do not wish to participate in this electronic survey, you may decline participation by clicking on the “disagree” button. The survey will not open for responses unless you select agree to participate.

○ Agree - I acknowledge receipt of the complete “Informed Consent” packet and “Bill of Rights.” I have read the materials and give my consent to participate in this study.

○ Disagree - I do not wish to participate in this survey
Cultural Inclusive Leadership 2.0

Demographics

Please choose the pass code provided to you by the researcher from the drop down list.

Please indicate your gender

Please indicate the number of years you have been in your current position

Please select your age range from the list below

Please choose the ethnicity in which you identify (Mark all that apply)
* Please choose the pass code provided to you by the researcher from the drop down list.
Cultural Inclusive Leadership 2.0

Directions: For purposes of this research, cultural inclusiveness is defined as the incorporation of diverse individuals in an environment of mutual respect and acceptance that recognizes and values their unique contribution to the success of the organization.

6 = Agree Strongly
5 = Agree Moderately
4 = Agree Slightly
3 = Disagree Slightly
2 = Disagree Moderately
1 = Disagree Strongly

Listed below are the strategies that research suggests that leaders use to create cultural inclusive leadership in organizations. Using the following descriptions, to what degree do the strategies reflect your cultural inclusive leadership.
**Cultural Inclusive Leadership 2.0**

**Part I - Making Diversity a Priority**

Diversity as an organizational priority is an intentional action to embrace individuals’ unique differences, perspectives and talents as an identifier for organizational success. (Kennedy, 2008 and Winters, 2015).

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<tr>
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<th>Agree strongly</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model diversity as an organizational priority</td>
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<td>Take personal responsibility for inclusion of all people</td>
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<td>Communicate the importance of culture differences</td>
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<td>Provide coaching to develop talent within the organization</td>
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<td>Provide opportunities for people to develop new skills</td>
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</table>
PART II - Knowing People

Knowing people and their differences is intentionally developing deep knowledge, expertise and empathy about diversity through curiosity, experiences and practice (Hesselbein & Goldsmith 2009; Kennedy, 2008; Travis, Nugent, & Lengnick-Hall, 2019).

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<tr>
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<th>Agree strongly</th>
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<tr>
<td>Listen without judgement to understand diverse cultures</td>
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<td>Embrace Interaction with others from different cultures</td>
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<td>Stand up for others if they are being treated unfairly</td>
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<td>Encourage open dialog about controversial issues</td>
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<td>Intervene when intolerance is present</td>
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</table>
**PART III - Communication**

Rich communication is the transfer of information with the intent to understand meaning and broaden one’s perspective, resulting in a personal connection between individuals (Daft & Lengel 1986; Armengol et al 2017; Kennedy 2008; Jensen, Moynihan, & Salomonsen 2018).

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agree strongly</th>
<th>Agree moderately</th>
<th>Agree slightly</th>
<th>Disagree slightly</th>
<th>Disagree moderately</th>
<th>Disagree strongly</th>
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<tr>
<td>Remain open to feedback to develop deeper understanding of different perspectives</td>
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<td>Approach conflict by looking at all sides</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remain accessible to others</td>
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<td>Share honestly what is going on when the chips are down</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create a culture where people feel safe to share controversial ideas</td>
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PART IV – Personal Responsibility

Personal responsibility as a core value is a leader’s conscious ownership of their actions and the impact on others (Kennedy, 2008; Molenmaker, De Kwaadsteniet, & Van Dijk, 2016; Tausen, Miles, Lawrie, & Macrae, 2018).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Promote organizational culture that values inclusion</th>
<th>Agree strongly</th>
<th>Agree moderately</th>
<th>Agree slightly</th>
<th>Disagree slightly</th>
<th>Disagree moderately</th>
<th>Disagree strongly</th>
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<td>Take ownership of personal behavior that supports respect of others</td>
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<td>The importance of diversity is shown in organizational hiring practices</td>
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<td>Willing to take personal risks to see that others are valued</td>
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<td>Promote a culture where everyone sees themselves as an important part of the organization</td>
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</table>
PART V – Mutualism

Mutualism as the final arbiter is where everyone benefits and no one is harmed by the decisions and actions within the team or organization (Kennedy, 2008). Mutualism establishes trust in organizations through a deep sense of shared purpose, a thoughtful inspection of each member’s ideas and interests, and an interdependence when performing roles and responsibilities (Harvey & Drolet, 2006; Rau, 2005; Mishra, 1996).

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agree strongly</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create a deep sense of shared purpose</td>
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<td>Insist on fairness as core value</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourage new ideas that benefit all stakeholders</td>
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<td>Cultivate a thoughtful inspection of diverse thinking</td>
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<td>Lead with intentional collaboration where no one is placed at risk</td>
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**Cultural Inclusive Leadership 2.0**

**PART VI - Culture**

Culture is all learned and shared human patterns or models that distinguishes the members of one group of people from another. (Damen, 1987, p. 51).

Cultural Intelligence is “an individual’s ability to relate and work effectively in culturally diverse settings. (Ramirez, 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>See things from other peoples’ point of view</th>
<th>Agree strongly</th>
<th>Agree moderately</th>
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<tr>
<th>Consider diverse perspectives when making decisions</th>
<th>Agree strongly</th>
<th>Agree moderately</th>
<th>Agree slightly</th>
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<tr>
<th>Encourage open dialog with stakeholders</th>
<th>Agree strongly</th>
<th>Agree moderately</th>
<th>Agree slightly</th>
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<th>Challenge intolerance in others</th>
<th>Agree strongly</th>
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<th>Disagree moderately</th>
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<th>Embrace interaction with people of different cultures</th>
<th>Agree strongly</th>
<th>Agree moderately</th>
<th>Agree slightly</th>
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Cultural Inclusive Leadership 2.0

PART VII - Culture of Inclusion

A culture of inclusion is the incorporation of diverse individuals in an environment of mutual respect and acceptance that recognizes and values their unique contribution to the success of the organization. (Azmat, Fujimoto & Rentschler, 2014; Mak, Daly & Barker, 2014; Tawagi & Mak, 2015; Kennedy, 2008).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Agree strongly</th>
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<th>Disagree slightly</th>
<th>Disagree moderately</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promote policies that ensure cultural participation</td>
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<td>Interact respectfully with different people in the organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourage everyone to be themselves</td>
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<tr>
<td>Listen carefully to make people comfortable</td>
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<td>Collect regular employee feedback</td>
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<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>Show respect by helping people</td>
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<td>Value the contributions of people through positive recognition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treat people with genuine regard regardless of position</td>
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</table>
Celebrate the unique contributions of diversity to the success of the organization

Hold others accountable for inclusion

Thank you for your participation. If you are willing to participate in a follow up interview to be conducted on Zoom please check the box and provide your contact information. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

I would be willing to participate in an interview.

Please provide the following information so that a researcher may contact you regarding an interview.

Please provide your name

Please provide the best contact number

Please provide the best email address for you
APPENDIX B - CONTACT EMAIL

Exemplary Unified School Superintendent,

My name is Lynn J. Carmen Day and I’m a doctoral candidate at Brandman University in the Department of Organizational Leadership. I am part of a thematic dissertation team conducting research to determine what strategies are used by exemplary leaders to create an organizational culture of inclusiveness. This letter serves as an invitation for you to participate in a research study.

Purpose: It is the purpose of this explanatory mixed-method study to identify and describe the leadership strategies that exemplary leaders use to create an organizational culture of inclusiveness using Kennedy’s five distinctive qualities of leadership.

Procedures: If you choose to participate in this study, you will be invited to participate in a questionnaire and an optional 60-minute, one-on-one interview conducted on Zoom. I will ask a series of questions designed to allow you to share your experience as an exemplary superintendent in a unified school district. The survey questions will assess your inclusive leadership. The interview questions will assess specific strategies used to create a culture of inclusiveness. The interviews will be recorded for transcription purposes.

Risk, Inconveniences, and discomforts: There are no major risks to your participation in this research study. The interview will be at a time and place, which is convenient for you.

Potential Benefits: There are no major benefits to you for participating; nonetheless, a potential benefit may be that you will have an opportunity to identify strategies superintendents use to create a culture of inclusiveness. The information in the study is intended to inform researchers and leaders about building an inclusive, which leads to innovation, leadership, and high performance.

Anonymity: If you agree to participate in the survey and interview, you can be assured that it will be completely confidential. No names will be attached to any notes or records from the survey or interview. All information will remain in locked files, accessible only to the researchers. No employer will have access to the interview information. You will be free to stop the survey or interview and withdraw from the study at any time. You are also encouraged to ask any questions that will help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. Feel free to contact the principal investigator, Lynn J. Carmen Day at [email protected] or by phone at [redacted], to answer any questions or concerns you may have. If you have questions, comments, or concerns about the study or your rights as a participant, you 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.

Sincerely,

Lynn J. Carmen Day
Doctoral Candidate, Ed.D.
APPENDIX C - BRANDMAN 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 D - INFORMED CONSENT

Information About: Leadership Strategies Exemplary Unified School District Superintendents Use to Create a Culture of Inclusiveness

Responsible Investigator: Lynn J. Carmen Day

The following will be Included in the Electronic Survey:
You are being asked to participate in a thematic research study conducted by Martha Martin, Stephanie Smart, Toloue Aria, Tonia Watkins, Marisol Alaniz, Kelly Kennedy, Nemo Withana, Nicole Tafoya, Leila Dodge, and Lynn Carmen Day, doctoral students from Brandman University. The purpose of this explanatory mixed-method study to identify and describe the leadership strategies that exemplary leaders use to create an organizational culture of inclusiveness using Kennedy’s five distinctive qualities of leadership.

I understand that:

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

b) The possible benefit of this study to me is that my input may help add to the research regarding the strategies that exemplary leaders use to create an inclusive organization.

c) If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact the researcher using the information provided in the invitation to participate.

d) 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. In addition, the investigator may stop the study at any time.

e) No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that 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.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Lynn J. Carmen Day at [redacted] or phone at [redacted] or Dr. Cindy Petersen (Dissertation Chair) at [redacted].
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.

**ELECTRONIC CONSENT:** Please select your choice below. Clicking on the agree button indicates that you have read the informed consent and the information in this document and that you voluntarily agree to participate.

If you do not wish to participate in this electronic survey, you may decline participation by clicking on the disagree button. The survey will not open for responses unless you select agree to participate.

- [ ] AGREE. I acknowledge receipt of the complete “Informed Consent” packet and “Bill of Rights.” I have read the materials and give my consent to participate in this study.

- [ ] DISAGREE: I do not wish to participate in this electronic survey.
APPENDIX E - INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction
My name is Lynn J. Carmen Day and I’m a doctoral candidate at Brandman University in the Department of Organizational Leadership. I’m a part of a thematic dissertation team conducting research to determine what strategies are used by exemplary leaders to create an organizational culture of inclusiveness.

I want to thank you for expressing your agreement to participate in this interview on culturally intelligent leadership and for completing the survey prior to this interview. This interview is intended to explore further information and provide depth to what was provided in the electronic survey.

As a leader in, you are responsible for providing strategies and directions that create a positive organizational culture. The purpose of this study is to identify and describe the strategies that you utilize to create a culture of inclusiveness. We are framing our research around the five qualities of culturally inclusive leadership as defined in Kennedy’s book, “Putting Our Differences to Work”. Those five leadership qualities are: making diversity a priority, getting to know people and their differences, empowering rich communication, making accountability a core value, and establishing mutualism as the final arbiter. Together these qualities are believed to create an organizational culture of inclusiveness. During this interview, please feel free to refer to the document sent to you by e-mail that gives specific descriptions of these qualities.

I am conducting 5 interviews with leaders like you. The information you give, along with the others, hopefully will provide strategies that exemplary leaders, such as yourself, have identified to create an organization of inclusiveness that will add to the body of research currently available.

Incidentally, even though it appears a bit awkward, I will be reading most of what I say. The reason for this to guarantee, as much as possible, that my interviews with all participating exemplary leaders will be conducted in the same manner.

**Informed Consent (Required for Dissertation Research)**
I would like to remind you 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).

Did you receive and read the Informed Consent and Brandman Bill of Rights I sent you via email and do you agree to participate in this research? I need to hear your affirmative
answer so it is recorded as confirmation of consent to participate. Do you have any questions or need clarification about either document?

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. For ease of our discussion and accuracy I will record our conversation as indicated in the Informed Consent.

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

**Introduction- Establish a comfortable environment with the interviewee.**

**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

**Organizational Priority**

1. As you reflect about your work as a leader, what are some ways you make diversity an organizational priority?
   - Probe: What are some examples?

2. In your role as leader, how do you educate your organization about the significance of diversity?
   - Probe: Why do you think that this was effective? worked well?

**Personal Responsibility**

3. In your role as leader, how have you intentionally incorporated personal responsibility in your decision making?
   - Probe: Can you give me an example of a time when that happened and how behavior changed?

4. As leader, how do you influence others to take personal responsibility as a core value?
   - Probe: Give me an example of a time when that happened and how behavior changed?

**Rich Communication**

5. What communication strategies do you use to foster a deeper cultural understanding within your organization?
   - Probe: Can you share an example?

6. How do you use communication to develop a personal connection with individuals?
   - Probe: Can you share and example?

**Know People and their Differences**

7. How do you get to know the people in your organization on a personal basis?
   - Probe: Can you tell me about a time when this worked very well in establishing a personal connection?
8. How do you interact with people in the organization to gain a better understanding of their cultural differences?
   • Probe: Describe some of the things that you do to gain a better understanding?

**Mutualism as the Final Arbiter**
9. As you think about your work as a leader how are final decisions decided in your organization?
   • Probe: How do you engage members of your organization in conversations that are respectful of all ideas and interests?
10. What do you perceive are the most important advantages of creating a culture of inclusiveness within your organization?
   • Probe: Can you give me an example of how this created a culture of inclusiveness in your organization?

**Culture of Inclusiveness**
11. In your role as a leader, how have you been able to create a culture of inclusion within your organization?
    • Probe: Can you provide an example of what have you implemented to increase cultural inclusion in your organization

12. In your experience as a leader, in what ways do you believe there are advantages in creating an environment of mutual respect and acceptance?

That concludes my questions. Is there anything else that you would like to share at this time?

Thank you very much for your time. If you like, when the results of our research are known, I will send you a copy of my findings.
APPENDIX F - EMAIL FOR FIELD TEST

Hello,
Hope you are well!
I appreciate that you are willing to take this short survey. Attached you will find the most important part of our field test process, which is the survey validation feedback. Please be bold in your responses so that we can refine our tool. On Thursday, I am hoping that 10:00 am will work for the field test interview. I will be taking a “lunch” at that time to conduct the survey. Also, a professor will be on the Zoom with us to evaluate my interviewing skills as an “instrument” of the study.

To take the survey portion of the field test click on the link below:
[URL for Cultural Inclusive Field Test for Participant passcode name: Lcarmend2]
https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BranCultInclFT

Let me know if you have any questions or if you would like me to document your responses to the field test survey validation feedback attachment.

Thank you for taking the time to support me, Lynn

This is the information for the actual study previously discussed:
July 12, 2020

Exemplary K-12 Superintendent,

My name is Lynn J. Carmen Day and I’m a doctoral candidate at Brandman University in the Department of Organizational Leadership. I am part of a thematic dissertation team conducting research to determine what strategies are used by exemplary leaders to create an organizational culture of inclusiveness. This letter serves as an invitation for you to participate in a research study.

Purpose: It is the purpose of this explanatory mixed-method study to identify and describe the leadership strategies that exemplary leaders use to create an organizational culture of inclusiveness using Kennedy’s five distinctive qualities of leadership.

Procedures: If you choose to participate in this study, you will be invited to participate in a questionnaire and a 60-minute, one-on-one interview conducted on Zoom. I will ask a series of questions designed to allow you to share your experience as an exemplary superintendent in a unified school district. The survey questions will assess your inclusive leadership. The interview questions will assess specific strategies used to create a culture of inclusiveness. The interviews will be recorded for transcription purposes.
**Risk, Inconveniences, and Discomforts:** There are no major risks to your participation in this research study. The interview will be at a time and place, which is convenient for you.

**Potential Benefits:** There are no major benefits to you for participating; nonetheless, a potential benefit may be that you will have an opportunity to identify strategies to inform best practice with different political styles of board members. The information for this study is intended to inform researchers and leaders of strategies used by exemplary leaders to work successfully with the different board member political styles.

**Anonymity:** If you agree to participate in the survey and interview, you can be assured that it will be completely confidential. No names will be attached to any notes or records from the survey or interview. All information will remain in locked files, accessible only to the researchers. No employer will have access to the interview information. You will be free to stop the survey or interview and withdraw from the study at any time. If you have questions, comments, or concerns about the study or your rights as a participant, you 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.

Sincerely,

Lynn J. Carmen Day
Doctoral Candidate, Ed.D.
APPENDIX G - FIELD TEST FEEDBACK ON SURVEY FIELD TEST FORM

SURVEY CRITIQUE BY PILOT PARTICIPANTS

As a doctoral student and researcher at Brandman University your assistance is so appreciate in designing this survey instrument. Your participation is crucial to the development of a valid and reliable instrument.

Below are some questions that I appreciate your answering after completing the survey. Your answers will assist me in refining both the directions and the survey items.

You have been provided with a paper copy of the survey, just to jog your memory if you need it. Thanks so much.

1. How many minutes did it take you to complete the survey, from the moment you opened it on the computer until the time you completed it?__________

2. Did the portion up front that asked you to read the consent information and click the agree box before the survey opened concern you at all? _____
   If so, would you briefly state your concern ________________________________

3. Was the Introduction sufficiently clear (and not too long) to inform you what the research was about? ______ If not, what would you recommend that would make it better? ________________________________

4. Were the directions to, and you understood what to do? _____
   • If not, would you briefly state the problem ________________________________

5. Were the brief descriptions of the rating scale choices prior to your completing the items clear, and did they provide sufficient differences among them for you to make a selection? ______ If not, briefly describe the problem______________________________

6. As you progressed through the survey in which you gave a rating of # through #, if there were any items that caused you say something like, “What does this mean?” Which item(s) were they? Please use the paper copy and mark those that troubled you? Or if not, please check here:_____

   Thanks so much for your help

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APPENDIX H - FIELD TEST FEEDBACK ON INTERVIEW FORM

Interview Feedback Reflection Questions

Conducting interviews is a learned skill set/experience. Gaining valuable insight about your interview skills and affect with the interview will support your data gathering when interviewing the actual participants. As the researcher you should reflect on the questions below after completing the interview. You should also discuss the following reflection questions with your ‘observer’ after completing the interview field test. The questions are written from your prospective as the interviewer. However, you can verbalize your thoughts with the observer and they can add valuable insight from their observation.

1. How long did the interview take? _____ Did the time seem to be appropriate?
2. How did you feel during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous?
3. Going into it, did you feel prepared to conduct the interview? Is there something you could have done to be better prepared?
4. What parts of the interview went the most smoothly and why do you think that was the case?
5. What parts of the interview seemed to struggle and why do you think that was the case?
6. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would that part be and how would you change it?

What suggestions do you have for improvement?
APPENDIX I - FACULTY FEEDBACK FORM

Conducting interviews is a learned skill set based on experience and feedback. Gaining valuable insight about interview skills and affect with the interview will support the collection of data gathering when interviewing actual participant. As the interview observer you should reflect on the questions below after the interview is finished. You should provide independent feedback at the conclusion of the interview field test. As observer you should take notes that will assist the interviewer to be successful in improving their interview skills.

1. How long did the interview take? _______Did the time seem appropriate?

2. Did the interviewer communicate in a receptive, cordial, and encouraging manner?

3. Was the introduction of the interview friendly with the use of commonly understood language?

4. How did the interviewee feel during the interview?

5. Was the interviewer prepared and relaxed during the interview?

6. Did the interviewee understand the interview questions or did they require clarification?

7. What parts of the interview went smoothly and why?

8. What parts of the interview seem to struggle and why do you think that was the case?

9. Did the interviewer maintain objectivity and not interject value judgements or lead the interviewee?

10. Did the interviewer take opportunity to discuss or request artifacts that support the data gathered from the interview?

11. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would that part be and how would you suggest changing it?

12. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?

*Conducting interviews virtually is different than face-to-face and requires more attention to number 2 & 3 above. As an observer give specific feedback on these items*
APPENDIX J - CITI CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that:

Lynn Carmen Day

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

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify?we4910778-fc7c-4c3c-a2e6-fb0f879d3a55-31745142
Dear Lynn J Carmen Day,

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
www.brandman.edu