

2020

## Principals Managing the Expectations of Instructional Leadership

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*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Shonda Ham Collins-Richey

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University

2020

Abstract

Principals Managing the Expectations of Instructional Leadership

by

Shonda Ham Collins-Richey

MEd, George Mason University, 2008

BA, Livingstone College, 1994

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

December 2020

## Abstract

Researchers have shown that principals are second only to teachers in their impact on student learning. The problem studied was principals' abilities to balance their responsibilities as operational managers while placing primary focus on instructional leadership. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the processes established by school principals to balance the expectation of managing their buildings while being instructional leaders and how their sense of self-efficacy influenced their ability to establish and adhere to those processes and structures. The theories of complexity self-efficacy guided this study. Data were collected using structured and semistructured interviews with six elementary and middle school principals from one district in a midAtlantic U. S. state. A combination of in vivo and value coding was used to support thematic analysis. Themes included shared vision/responsibility, setting priorities, shared leadership, continued professional learning, and organizational procedure. Results indicate that principals need a stable sense of self-efficacy to be the conduit through which continuous adaptation of processes and structures necessary to accommodate the needs of a complex organization like a school. Key findings indicated that principals need to establish structures that ensure they are not the only instructional leader within their schools and they need to develop processes that ensure they are not the only managers within their schools. Recommendations include a system of continuous authentic feedback for school leaders through supervisors or a principal mentorship program. The findings of this study inform social change by identifying the ways in which principals meet the expectation of maintaining priority focus on instructional leadership while being efficient organizational managers of their schools.

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## Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation to my husband, Shawn Richey; the accomplishment of this goal is shared with you. Thank you for supporting me while I put me and my goals at the forefront for this period in our lives. To my children, Trey, Tyler, Ian, and Kendall, thank you for your sacrifice. I know having mommy right there but often out of reach was hard for you, but we did it! Without your love, encouragement, and support, this accomplishment would not have been possible. I also dedicate this work to my loving parents, Keith and Regina Ham; your unconditional love and confidence in me not just through this process but throughout my life is the foundation on which I stand as I move from blessing to blessing.

This dedication extends to my brother, sister-in-law, Keith, and Myrna Ham and my Sister Squad, Tanya, Donna, Kim, and Michelle, for your ongoing support and encouragement throughout this process. You will never know how your inquiries about the process and my progress pushed me forward time after time.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The role of public education is to be more responsive to the ever-evolving learning needs of students. The United States Department of Education's (USDE) reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) requires that states, school districts, and schools commit to equal opportunities for all students. There is an expectation that schools provide learning opportunities that prepare all student, for success beyond high school. As affirmed by McBrayer, Jackson, Pannell, Sorgen, Gutierrez De Blume, and Melton (2018), federal accountability policies such as Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and state policies in the mid-Atlantic state where the study took place require that school districts lead to increased attention to institutional and individual accountability. When schools do not improve and students do not make adequate annual academic progress, school principals are held accountable to identify the instructional deficiencies that are leading to the lack of student achievement within their schools, charged to implement professional learning within their context to address those instructional deficits, and required to monitor how teachers carry out those pedagogical structures within the classroom (McBrayer et al., 2018).

My study might lead to positive social change by providing answers to principals on how to meet the expectation to place their primary focus on instructional structures, which in turn leads to increased student learning and achievement and secondly reduces principal turnover rate. "Given the centrality of the principal within a school on overall student performance, principal turnover is a significant problem and has been found to negatively influence student achievement" (Boyce & Bowers, 2016, p. 237). Principal

turnover includes a principal exiting the career, a school, or being replaced by a new principal.

### **Background**

Quinn, Deris, Biscoff, and Johnson (2015) found that school leaders are expected to increase achievement and ensure substantial academic growth for all students; however, there is limited research that has explored how principals achieve that goal in this age of increased accountability for school improvement while managing the day-to-day responsibilities of their administrative workload. While there is current research that explores the tenets and expectations of an instructional leader who positively influences student learning within the context and studies that outline the managerial responsibilities of an effective school principal, there is little research that explores how principals effectively manage both.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem that I addressed in this study was the contemporary school principals' ability to balance their time in order to be the school's organizational manager while giving primary attention to being the instructional leader. While there is current research that explores the tenets and expectations of an instructional leader who positively influences student learning within their context and studies that outline the managerial responsibilities of an effective school principal, there is little research that explores the structures, and processes principals employ to manage the dichotomy of their roles effectively.

Traditionally, the principal of a school resembled the middle manager of a business organization; the person who carried out the duties as assigned by district

leadership; the connection between the district office and the local school. In that role, the principal functioned as an overseer of buses, school lunches, facility upkeep, textbooks, and student discipline (Lemoine, Greer, McCormack, and Richardson, 2014).

In this era of standards-based reform and accountability, the role of responsibility of the school principal has changed. Principals are viewed more like contemporary business executives in that leadership must focus with great clarity on what is essential, what needs to be done, and how to get it done. Principals can no longer function simply as building managers by just adhering to district rules and carrying out regulations. They must become leaders of learning who can develop a team delivering effective instruction (The Wallace Foundation, 2019).

Avolio (2011) and Vogel (2018) affirmed that the principal has a critical role in working with teachers, students, and parents to provide a better education for students indicating that instructional leadership is a primary task of school leaders. Within the local context, principals are finding it increasingly difficult to balance the expectation of maintaining a primary focus on their role and responsibilities as instructional leader while also effectively addressing the day-to-day responsibilities that maintain organizational stability within their buildings. Principals today engage in a multitude of different tasks daily, 30% of the day supervising students and discipline-related task; 20% organizational management, and less than 10% engaging in instructional tasks such as classroom observations and planning and implementing professional development (Lemoine et al., 2014). When students do not achieve the expected outcomes, the burden is on school leaders to develop improvement initiatives to attain school reform (McBrayer et al., 2018). One of the pressures of the school administrators' position is

understanding and managing the dichotomy of their roles. For principals to effectively lead their schools, they must determine the balance between these competing priorities.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the processes established by school principals to balance the expectation of managing their buildings while being instructional leaders and what influence if any, their sense of self-efficacy had on their ability to establish and adhere to those processes and structures.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the structures and daily routines principals employ to balance the managerial responsibilities as opposed to the instructional leadership responsibilities?
2. What self-organization structures and processes do principals put in place to maintain their primary focus on instructional leadership?
3. What self-organization strategies do principals employ to address the managerial (non-instructional) responsibilities of the principalship?
4. What role does a principal's sense of self-efficacy play in their ability to create those processes and structures?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study included the theory of complexity and Bandura's study of self-efficacy. According to Morrison (2002), the theory of complexity finds its roots in a couple of other theories, such as Katz and Kahn's (1966) open systems theory and Edward Lorenz's chaos theory. "The complexity theory is a collection of interacting parts which, together function as a whole" (Morrison, 2002, p.). The intricacy

between the interactions makes it impossible to maintain predictability in the system due to there being so many variables that affect the management of the system (Morrison, 2002). The constructs of the theory of complexity are outlined as (a) dynamical interaction of elements, (b) self-organization in connected networks, and (c) emergence. As asserted by Watkins, Earnhardt, Pettenger, Rietsema, and Cosman-Ross (2017) and Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey (2007), the theory of complexity intersects with organizational theory and theories of leadership because complex systems are also learning systems.

Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, which is rooted in Edward Tolman's expectancy theory (Van der Putten, 2017), is defined as the optimistic self-belief or lack thereof in one's competence to execute the behaviors necessary to accomplish a task to produce the desired result successfully. According to Bandura (1997), a person's self-efficacy influences how that person approaches a task or goal. He asserted a person's level of self-efficacy determines what they believe their level of control is over their environment. Bandura found that a person's self-efficacy is influenced by their thoughts as it relates to their ability to influence a result or whether they possess a growth or fixed mindset as it relates to their ability.

Leaders in complex environments, such as schools being part of larger school divisions within vast communities, must be focused on adaptive leadership style and possess the confidence in their ability to put structures in place to achieve organizational goals. Watkins et al. (2017) indicated that to respond to the complexity of a system, a shared governance model must be established, but in order to develop those structures, leaders, principals in this context must possess the belief in themselves to achieve the



desired result. Treating a school as a large complex adaptive system, I used the features of the theory of complexity and the theory of self-efficacy to determine how school principals balance the responsibilities and expectations of their job.

### **Nature of the Study**

According to the National Association of Elementary School Principals (2019), a school principal assumes complete responsibility for the school and its students' academic performance. In this qualitative case study, I identified the structures and strategies principals employ to be their school's organization manager while giving primary attention to their role as the instructional leader. The participants included three elementary and three middle school principals. I selected the methodology because the aim of qualitative research is to acquire an in-depth understanding of the participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I identified participants and invited them to participate in the study using purposeful sampling because, in order to take part in my study, the participants needed to possess in-depth knowledge about the role and responsibilities of a school principal in the modern era of increased accountability. As such, I only invited principals with at least 4 years of experience to be participants. I used in-person and virtual face-to-face interviews to gather the data. In the initial structured interview, I focused on understanding the participants' level of self-efficacy. In the second semistructured interview, I delved into the principals' perspectives on the structures and strategies they use to efficiently manage their schools while maintaining primary focus on instructional leaders.

### **Definitions**

*Accountability:* According to Argon (2015), "accountability is a tool that ensures

organizational managers have appropriate conduct in line with the law and its regulations during the administration of organizational goals” (p. 926).

*Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*: Is the primary law for K-12 public education in the United States. It replaced No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The main purpose of ESSA is to make sure public schools provide a quality education for all kids. ESSA gives states more of a say in how schools account for student achievement to include the achievement of disadvantaged students who fall into four student groups: students in poverty, minorities, students with disabilities, and second language speakers (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

*Instructional Leader*: Gurley, Anast-may, and O’Neal (2016) defined instructional leadership as “an influence process through which leaders identify the direction for the school, motive staff and coordinate school and classroom-based strategies aimed at improvements in teaching and learning” (p. 2).

*Motivational forces (MF)*: According to Zimmerman, Schunk, and DiBenedetto (2017), motivational forces are internal and external variables affecting an individual’s performance and effort.

*Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL)*: Standards that articulate the scope of the work and the values that building-level leaders stand for and how they can achieve the outcomes that the profession demands and the public expects. They are created for and by the profession to guide the professional practice, and educational leaders are hired, developed, supervised, and evaluated. The standards inform government policies and regulations that oversee the profession (National Policy Board for Educational Leader, 2015).

### **Assumptions**

In this study, I assumed that principals understood the questions as they are posed to them and have an appropriate level of foundational or background knowledge to then answer the questions accurately. This assumption was based on my understanding that all principals view their role through a lens of complexity and view the duality of their role in similar ways. I also assumed that principals have processes and structures in place that they can articulate how they balance their daily tasks and responsibilities. Finally, I collected and coded the data accurately to reflect the processes and structures employed by the school principals to meet the expectations of their role as organizational managers and instructional leaders.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

In this study, I detailed principals' perceptions of the structures and processes they employ to balance their responsibilities as both instructional leaders and organizational managers. I collected data from principal interviews and reflections from school principals with varying levels of experience who were selected from elementary, middle, and high schools within one district within a mid-Atlantic state over a 2-month period.

### **Limitations**

A limitation of my study was the transferability and generalizability of the findings due to its limited context. The principals within this study were only able to speak to their practices and structures within their local context and based on the mandates and resources therein. These limitations could be addressed by expanding the study beyond its current context to include principals from neighboring school districts.

Another limitation of the study is its small sample size, but the findings were reflective of the moderate suburban school district in a mid-Atlantic state in the United States.

### **Significance**

In this qualitative study, I addressed the problem of the contemporary school principals' ability to balance their time in order to be the school's organizational manager while giving primary attention to being the instructional leader. "Effective principals are responsible for establishing a schoolwide vision of commitment to high standards and the success of all students" (The Wallace Foundation, 2013, p.7). According to Heffernan (2018), a principal has a significant effect on school performance. Principals influence student achievement through their leadership in areas of learning climate and teacher behaviors. The Wallace Foundation (2013) found a connection between high principal turnover and lower student performance in core content areas. They also determined that a principal would have to be in place for more than 5 years in order to have a beneficial influence on student performance.

### **Summary**

Since 2000, substantial changes in federal and state policy governing public schools have placed the accountability and responsibility of increased student achievement on the shoulders of the school principal. Sebastian, Camburn, and Spillane (2018) found that the increased expectations have placed a considerable expectation on how principals should spend their days. Current literature proposes that principals make the shift from building manager to the role of instructional leader; the expectation of managing the school building has not diminished. According to Onorato (2013), effective school principals need to achieve systematic harmony between instructional leadership

and school management tasks to see their schools attain a level of success. This balance allows principals to effectively lead their schools and position them to impact increased student learning (McBrayer et al., 2018). In this study, I explored the processes established by school principals to balance and manage their time to meet the expectation of managing their buildings while being instructional leaders and what influence, if any, their sense of self-efficacy had on their ability to establish and adhere to those processes and structures.

## Chapter 2: Review of Literature

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the processes established by school principals to balance and manage their time to meet the expectation of managing their buildings while being instructional leaders. Literature and research on the evolution of principals from middle managers to instructional leaders have largely neglected the topic of the practice and strategies principals must employ to operationalize the responsibilities of both roles simultaneously (McBrayer et al., 2018) and the impact of their personal self-efficacy and ability to do so.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

I conducted an exhaustive review of the literature to determine what research has outlined as the key factors necessary for principals to meet the expectations of the dichotomy of job responsibilities. The search terms used to identify the conceptual contributors, historical components, and current research in the field of education leadership research were *the history of the principalship*, *history of principal as a building manager*, *principal as the middle manager*, *instructional leadership*, *principal accountability*, *and instructional leadership*, and *the principal's role as leader of learning*. The chapter is organized by the components that inform a school principal's decision making and actions. Those topics are self-efficacy, principal self-efficacy, the modern principal, duality of the role of principal, principal as instructional leader, principal as organizational manager, and principal time management. The primary databases that yielded the best results of peer-reviewed scholarly journals were ERIC, Education Source, Emerald Insight, and SAGE Journals.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Theory of Complexity**

Fullan (2001) posited that all schools if they are to survive, must understand complexity science (p.70). According to Keith (2002), complex adaptive systems are continuously adapting their processes and structures to accommodate for emerging predication, recent experiences, and new learning. Stacey et al. (2000) pointed out that human relations lie at the heart of the complexity theory for organizations like schools. Stacey et al. saw the complexity theory as more of a process of human interactions than a system, a process of people relating to and interacting with each other over time. This interplay between people cannot happen without the exchange of thoughts, opinions, and information, which is why communication is at the core of the complexity theory. Other key components of the complexity theory that are part of any complex organization are (a) dynamical interaction of elements, (b) self-organization in connected networks, and (c) emergence.

### **Dynamical Interactions**

The interacting elements of a system must be seen and understood holistically by the leaders of an organization in order for that organization to thrive. Schools find themselves at the intersection of several stakeholders: federal government regulations, state government regulations, district office policies and regulations, socioeconomic conditions, educational research, and parent expectations. The interplay of separate elements converging within the same time frame cause new elements, new phenomena, new structures, and new rules of behavior and engagement to occur (Keith, 2000). The convergence of separate elements interacting and resulting in new elements, makes

predictability difficult in a complex organization like a school. According to Stacey et al. (2001), static organizations usually fail because the nature of an organization that exist to provide a product or service has to have the ability to change and adjust based on the needs, opinions, current trends, and expectations of those they serve. “Change and unpredictability are requirements if an organization is to survive” (Keith, p. 27). In schools, there are external and internal elements that are continuously at play. To lead an organization like a school, the principal has to maintain an awareness of those external and internal elements and how, although separate in their functioning, can inform one another and through their interaction create additional elements that require adjusting current processes and structures (Morrison, 2001). According to Watkins et al. (2017), school principals have to have the ability to sense environmental cues, adapt to changing contexts, and thrive in uncertainty while adhering to their primary responsibility of creating a strategic plan for their schools that lead to academic success for all students.

**Self-organization.** According to Morrison (2001), self-organization is a bottom-up process (p. 29). He determined that “complex systems, order emerges through self-organization of the interacting elements and the constant self-readjustment of the system” (p. 27). Pollock, Wang, Hauseman (2015) outlined the continuous factors that influence a principal’s work as instructional leadership, administrative or managerial responsibilities, budgeting, personnel, building maintenance, occupational health and safety, community partnerships, and policy. The constantly changing environments in schools are caused by the interactions between these internal and external components which as a result require a response of change by the school. The interplay of cause and effect usually results in the principal having to make decisions to address situations. According to Morrison



(2001), moments of compromise happen at the introduction of problems, situations, or the point at which the current practice or situation becomes unstable. Such exchanges occur on a continuous basis within complex organizations, such as schools. Even though most schools are part of a division of schools, the day-to-day interactions and decision making at the local school is not imposed from an exterior influence; it happens within the school using district policies, usually lead by the principal. This requires the principal to have the capacity for self-organization. Morrison (2001) determined that “self-organization within an organization is the ability to develop, extend, replace, adapt, reconstruct, or change their internal structure” (p. 28). At the moment of instability in a school-based system or process, the school principal has to have the ability to sense or identify the point of vulnerability and respond accordingly to address the situation, in addition, the principal has to identify the issue and make the adjustments necessary for the school process to evolve from within.

Morrison (2001) identified feedback, both positive and negative, as an imperative aspect of a complex organization that is positioned to make the necessary adjustments to meet the needs of those with a vested interest in that organization. Morrison determined that feedback is essential for the organization to be aware of itself and its environment. Although all schools are structured in similar ways and have a shared goal, each school is its own unique organism that is constructed to meet the needs of its individual stakeholders and community. A school principal must maintain an awareness of their particular internal and external communities in order to ensure decisions are made in accordance with the beliefs and needs of that community. For there to be feedback, there must be a system of open exchange between stakeholders. Relationships that are

established on the grounds of mutual respect and trust allow for all stakeholders to be equal partners in the organization's success. Morrison (2001) suggested that "leadership is not the preserve of the senior figure of the school; everyone everywhere can exercise leadership. The leader is simply the one who goes first and shows the way, not necessarily the boss!" (p. 34). Morrison's (2001) position was that "self-organization cannot be mandated—it emerges spontaneously and of its own accord" (p. 37).

**Emergence.** The word "emerge" is defined as: to develop or evolve as something new or improved. Emergence is the system that promotes change within an organization. What causes systems or organizations to emerge are the results of old systems breaking down or not meeting the needs of its stakeholders. It is the ability of components of a large complex structure or organization breaking down and restructuring to create something new and different. According to Morrison (2001), "self-organization emerges of itself as the result of the interaction between the organism and its environment and new structures emerge that could not have been envisioned initially" (p. 37). The importance of feedback within a complex organization underpins the structure of emergence; through listening to the positive and negative feedback, leaders learn how problems and issues are being framed, they understand the other side of the coin and are better equipped to respond through new structures of self-organization. Morrison (2001) outlined a few key features of schools that make them complex adaptive systems: "they must adapt in response to macro- and micro-societal changes and the environments in which they operate are largely unpredictable and mutable" (p. 41). Morrison contended that the closer one is propelled towards the edge of chaos, the more creative, open-ended, imaginative, and diverse are the behaviors, ideas, and practices...of organizations..." (p.

38). Constantino (2020) suggested multiple opportunities for reform through the mandated schools' closures during the COVID-19 global pandemic of 2020. Schools across the world were required to close their doors to brick and mortar classrooms. Globally, but individually, schools had to adapt to new processes of teaching and accountability to meet their primary mandate of educating children. The changes that schools underwent happened because of being on the edge of chaotic situation that required schools to emerge and create a new way to deliver instruction to children and engage their communities during a global pandemic.

### **Principal Self-Efficacy**

It is important to acknowledge that school leaders' perceptions and thoughts about their role and their ability to successful do the job have a significant influence on their schools (Kelleher, 2016). Bandura (2012) defined self-efficacy as "a judgement of capability" (p. 29). As part of Bandura's seminal work, on social cognitive theory, he identified self-efficacy as an important aspect (1986) of the overall theory which posits that learning occurs in a social context; he determined the influence of individual experiences, the actions of others, and environmental factors can influence an individuals' behaviors (Rubenstein, Ridley, Callan, Karami, and Ehlinger, 2018). The literature on how teacher self-efficacy influenced student learning and achievement lead to new avenues and possible connections as it related to school leadership. In the late 20th century, researchers began to explore how the leadership practices and behaviors of school principals were informed by their level of self-efficacy (Dimmock & Hattie, 1996; Keith, 1989).

According Bandura (1997), there are four major sources of self-efficacy:

(a) mastery experiences, which are successes build a robust belief in one's personal efficacy; (b) vicarious experiences, which are appraising one's capabilities in relation to the attainments of others; (c) verbal persuasion, which is significant others expressing faith in one's capabilities; and (d) psychological and affective state, which is reading of one's somatic indicators of environmental stressors. Bandura found mastery experiences to be the most influential source of self-efficacy because they provide the most authentic evidence of a person's ability to pull together whatever is needed to attain success. When people successfully maneuver through a stressful situation, they become convinced that they possess the ability to persevere through all difficulties with which they are faced.

Although school principals are viewed as the leaders within their school context, they are middle-level leaders positioned between the district office and the teachers in the classroom. Viewed through this lens, principals' actions and decisions are accountable to, responsible for, and influenced by policymakers, district-level leaders, teachers, students, parents, and community leaders. According to Bandura, the person who is at the intersection of multiple external and internal determinants will have their self- efficacy influenced either positively or negatively based on the exchange between those internal and external factors (1997). "Perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3).

Self-efficacy influences a person's choice of action, the level of persistence they exert, and their behavior when faced with difficulty (Lambie, Hayes, Griffith, Limburg, & Mullen, 2014). According to Bandura (2012), general self-efficacy is measured across a host of performance indicators as opposed to one specific task. Murphy and Johnson

(2016) presented leadership self-efficacy as a personal self-judgment in one's ability to act as the leader by setting the course and direction, build relationships with stakeholders and working together to overcome obstacles. As such, principals who are charged to lead complex learning organizations require aptitude in varied arenas, they are faced daily with opportunities to examine their competency which can positively or negatively influence their thoughts about their work and the concept of their personal ability. A principal's belief in their ability to develop or acquire the skills necessary to successfully create the processes and structures to balance the multiple aspects of their role as the principal can have a profound impact on their ability to successfully achieve that goal.

### **Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variables**

#### **The Role of the Modern Principal**

Principals are called upon to meet a barrage of requirements from myriad segments of society and confront an array of expectations imposed upon the school from outside sources (Lemoine et al., 2014). Schools are tasked with identifying the varied needs of students that are impeding their successful access to their education and respond by creating additional avenues to the school's instructional program and resources to meet needs previously addressed by other community organizations. A 2013 MetLife Survey reported, "Among the responsibilities that school leaders face, those that teachers and principals identify as most challenging results from conditions that originate beyond the school doors" (p. 3). Historically, most educational services provided to children were provided by the home and the church, in conjunction with the school. Due to the decline of traditional home structures, the traditional preparation that students receive at home is not currently in place in many homes, leaving the school to meet those needs in

conjunction with addressing student's academic needs. Celoria and Roberson (2015) asserted that these changes require the school leader to manage situations that arise with children and families traditionally handled by community organizations, churches, social workers, and school counselors. These societal expectations being placed on schools are an additional responsibility that infringes on the time principal's need to focus on instruction and resources.

For the past 25 years, many state-level personnel have sought to develop rigorous ways to improve schools through effectively-trained principals (Williams & Welch, 2017). Researchers have suggested that effective school leadership is second only to teaching among school-related factors that impact students learning and high-quality principals are vital to the effectiveness of schools. With school leadership playing the second most influential role in improving students' educational outcomes, government and local policies have desired to hold principals accountable for the academic success of their students (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015). According to Oplatka (2017), there is an increasing number of principals who face the dilemma of how to focus on both matters related to teaching and learning while also providing the necessary focus on the also increasing administrative workload. Gentry (2018) compiled a list of some of a modern principal's non-managerial duties which included the following:

- Serve as the lead learner of the school
- Be an expert in all areas of content and pedagogy
- Serve as the instructional coach for teachers
- Be the driving force between all stakeholders with the school community

with the goal of raising student performance

- Possess the leadership skills and knowledge to exercise autonomy and authority regarding new initiatives (p.14).

Cisler and Bruce (2013) found that principals perceived their primary responsibilities as (a) community relations (b) maintaining the safety of the campus (c) hiring/ managing personnel, (d) evaluating personnel, (e) creating a safe school climate for students and staff. It is not a question of which role to focus on but how to focus on both; how to balance multifaceted key roles and responsibilities of being the principal. Kouali and Pshiaridis (2015) separated the roles of the school principal into four categories, administrative which they identified as those tasks that encompass the organization and management of the school, pedagogical, which included more instructional, school climate, and safety matters, which include strategic planning, action plans, community outreach responsibilities, and lastly personal time which they described as those things that principals do for self-care or rest. The knowledge gained through this study will explore the practice and perspectives of school principals and how they balance the demands of being an instructional leader and organizational manager.

The seminal work of Hallinger and Murphy (1985) affirmed that with the federal legislation and policy changes, the school principal's priority role became that of instructional leader. Modeste, Hornskov, Bjerg, and Kelley (2020) found that "the expectations for the functional role of the school leader has expanded, due to the changing policy, from a managerial position to a role of instructional and transformational leaders in schools" (p. 327). This role shift arose due to increased accountability for teachers and principals which resulted in extensive evaluation systems that mandated the expected level of student achievement of performance standards.

Although the role of an instructional leader has become the principal's primary focus, the responsibilities that come along with managing the operations of the school have not decreased to allow more time for instructional leadership. This speaks to the need for principals to see their role through the lens of complexity. Watkins et al. (2017) advise that leaders who see their role in their organization through the lens of complexity, as opposed to predictable and limited, are more likely to question, interpret, and respond than to force easy but meager solutions.

School principals have a direct influence on their school's academic and achievement capacity through their indirect impact on student achievement. A recent international study of principal's perspectives of their roles and responsibilities by Chan, Jiang, and Rebisz (2018) found that principals see their most significant role as being the instructional leader and ensuring achievement gains for students. Lewis, Asberry, and DeJarnett (2016) said that teaching and learning are not separate entities operating divorced from one another. They found, "the key to improving student learning is to ensure more good teaching in more classrooms most of the time" (p. 59). In order to ensure the level of rigor that is necessary for student achievement is taking place in classrooms most of the time, the principal must be in those classrooms, in planning meetings, and having formal and informal conversations with their teachers on a consistent basis. For this reason, more information needs to be gathered on a principal's ability to manage their time between the many competing priorities.

### **The Duality of the Role of Principal**

The vast and multifaceted job responsibilities with which modern-day school principals are faced make time a limited resource resulting in the principal's ability to



balance their work as both the instructional leader and the school manager an everyday challenge (Chan et al., 2018). Principals' experience large and unrelenting workloads, and the time it takes to engage in the increased demands of the job increase concerns about the sustainability of workload (Pollock et al., 2015).

In summarizing early literature in this research, Cuban (1988) found that a principal's responsibility could be divided into two categories: administrative and supervisory. Administrative included those tasks which focused on maintaining the order and structure of the building, such as developing mastery schedules, creating disciplinary guidelines and protocols, meeting with parents, budgeting, management of the facility, cafeteria, and custodial staff. According to Cuban (1988), the role of the principal as supervisor involved monitoring instruction and the application of the approved curriculum; evaluating teachers; analyzing assessment data for instructional decision making; reviewing report cards; as well as planning and leading professional learning for teachers. McBrayer et al. (2018) described the duality of the responsibilities of the school principal in terms of teaching and learning task and school management tasks. Cuban (1998) described it as the DNA of principaling.

Positioned between their superiors who want orders followed and the teachers who do the actual work in the classrooms, principals are driven by imperatives over which they have little control. Their responsibility to act far exceeds their authority to command; their loyalties are dual: to their school and to headquarters; the professional and political expectations for what should occur in the school conflict; they are maintainers of stability and agents of change. (p. 61)

Like Cuban (1988), McBrayer et al. (2018) defined the teaching and learning task as

those job responsibilities that deal directly with the instruction that is happening in the classroom and monitoring student achievement while school management responsibilities focus on maintaining the organizational efficiency and stability.

### **Principal as Instructional Leaders**

Over the past 2 decades, the literature on educational leadership has offered research on several models of effective school leadership. Of those studied, instructional leadership as the means of influence has garnered the most attention due to its proven effect on improved student learning (Hallinger & Lee, 2014). Edmonds (1979) sought to determine the factors that influenced the achievement of students who lived in poverty. His study was conducted in schools where students were making achievement gains as opposed to those students who were not; he concluded that children who live in poverty can achieve at high levels with the determining factor being the correlation between the level of instructional engagement displayed by the principal. This was further supported by the research of Hitt and Tucker (2016) and Keith (1989) who revealed that as it relates to the principal selection and professional development, instructional leadership behaviors are at the core of those processes. When a school principal functions as the instructional leader, they influence students, staff, and community which results in measurable increases in student achievement.

Argon (2015), Gurley, Anast-May, O'Neal, and Dozier (2016), and Brown (2016) found that the role of the instructional leader has taken precedence in recent years due to the increasing emphasis on educational accountability policies. These policies have taken instructional leadership from being an educational leadership choice to an essential component of the job for a school principal. According to Argon (2015), accountability is

crucial to the realization of student learning expectations; the goal of these accountability policies is to increase student achievement by improving the instructional programs within schools. Argon (2015) acknowledged that although accountability in education should encompass all stakeholders involved in the process of student learning (teachers, parents, district-level administrators, and build level administrators) it has largely been focused on the quality of instruction that takes place in classrooms on a daily basis and the school principal's ability to impact change in the school's culture and pedagogical structures within those classrooms. With these changes, principals are expected to possess increased competency with gathering data, data analysis, curriculum development, instructional planning, human capital development, and pedagogical expertise (Alvoid & Black, 2014). As noted by Kouali and Pashiardis (2015), in this time of accountability, principals have new and more demanding roles that require an increased focus on instructional leadership. For example, in the state of Virginia, in 2016 the General Assembly approved the Profile of a Graduate, which identifies the five core skills students who graduate from high school in the state will possess. For this goal to be met, an obligation has been placed on principals at all levels to ensure their school's instructional programs are providing students with learning opportunities that will garner those core skills. Principals in Virginia are required to report in their building level strategic plans how those career readiness competencies are addressed at their schools.

Researchers have found it difficult to identify or define instructional leadership (Pollock, Wang, & Hauseman, 2015). The empirical works of Hallinger and Murphy (1985), Hallinger and Lee (2014), and Gurley et al. (2016) outlined the three key dimensions in the instructional leader role: defining the school's mission, managing the

instructional program, and promoting a positive school climate. Pollock et al. (2015) defined instructional leadership by identifying the discrete tasks under each of those key dimensions “developing, supervising, evaluating, and being accountable for instructional programs; hiring, supervising, evaluating, and providing professional development opportunities for school staff; supporting student advancement; and evaluating student performance and progress” (p. 539). Hallinger and Lee (2014) included “frames the school’s goals and communicates the school’s goals” (p.10) under defining the school’s mission. Salo et al. (2015) characterized instructional leadership as “leadership practices aimed at enhancing teachers’ professional learning and various mediating educational and organizational practices by which principals are to support successful teaching practices and share the responsibilities of instruction” (p. 491). To work from a point of influence in all these areas, a principal must be present and engaged in these tasks on a perpetual basis.

Liu and Hallinger (2018) came to two conclusions about the principal’s role as an instructional leader. A principal’s effect on student learning is indirect (Brown, 2016; Salo, Nylund, & Stjernstrom, 2015) because although the principal may not work directly with students on instructional content, it is the responsibility of the school principal to create a learning environment that allows for and supports effective teaching and learning within their school. Secondly, schools where personnel maintain focus on continuous school improvement have principals who place a deliberate priority on building the instructional capacity of teachers through professional learning. As defined by the Coalition of Essential Schools (2016), continuous school improvement is “the process cycle of school improvement with the major components of creating the vision, gathering

data related to that vision, analyzing the data, planning the work of the school to align with the vision, implementing the strategies and action steps outlined in the plan, and gathering data to measure the impact of the intervention” (para. 1). The role of the school principal as the instructional leader places responsibility and the accountability for the continuous school improvement process with the school principal.

In every way the construct of instructional leadership has been defined, the first aspect of a principal functioning as an instructional leader is the construction of the school’s vision. According to Mombourquette (2017), vision speaks to the expectation for the principal to lead the process of establishing a school vision, the beliefs, a principal’s ability to see and articulate a compelling future for the school. The process of determining the school’s vision is not a journey that the principal undertakes in isolation; using the school’s achievement data, the principal frames the questions that lead the school community (students, teachers, and parents) to determine its areas of continued growth.

According to Randles (2015) and Culatta (2019), getting people on board with your vision is a critical component to keeping the organization moving together in the right direction. Modeste’ et al. (2017) recognized that in schools or educational organizations, leadership requires various people regardless of their official roles within the school or organization. For vision to transform or move an organization forward, it must become the shared vision of all the stakeholders. One way a principal achieves this is by using distributed leadership, leadership that is shared within. Distributed leadership does not mean that everyone within an organization is a leader, only that everyone within the organization is represented by a leader who is part of the decision-making team

within the organization (Harris & Deflaminis, 2016). These leadership groups are not static; those best equipped, skilled, and positioned to lead do so to fulfill the goals of the organization (p. 144). Within a school, putting the people who are best at a skill or task would make up that team, and it is not always the same people.

According to Lewis et al. (2016), the key to improving schools and the process of teaching and learning is for the principal to establish a structure that allows and ensures teachers participate in the process in the planning of professional learning. Liu and Hallinger (2018) affirmed the importance of the instructional leader in establishing an instructional program that motivates, engages, places a priority on the development of teachers, and quality instruction within a school.

### **Principal as the Operational Manager**

McBrayer et al. (2018) defined the school manager's roles and responsibilities as "work necessary to maintain organizational stability" (p. 600). According to Kouali and Pashiardis (2015), these responsibilities include building maintenance, allocation of budget and resources, implementation of school policy and rules, school safety and security to include student discipline, transportation, and food preparation. Kouali and Pashiardis (2015) found through their research a commonality, "managers appear to be busy all the time; their working day is characterized by various, short and interrupted activities; they prefer oral communication and unplanned face to face meetings" (p. 493). For any organization to run efficiently, it requires a manager who plans, organizes, directs, controls, and evaluates the effectiveness of day-to-day operations (Farah, 2013); schools are no different. The person who is tasked with those responsibilities within a school is the principal.

Stein (2017) determined the difference between a principal who manages and one who leads is the ability to look beyond the task of the current day and focus on plans that will lay the foundation for the future. “In order to become more competitive with their global counterparts, American schools need to be led rather than managed” (Stein, 2016, p. 15). The Wallace Foundation (2019) described these responsibilities as establishing a healthy school environment, one in which the organizational structures function seamlessly, allowing both adults and children to put learning at the forefront of their thinking. Farah (2013) determined that culture, ethnicity, gender, and religious backgrounds that make up the diversity of most school populations require the principal to be an apt politician, economist, psychologist, and sociologist. According to Hauseman et al. (2017), when a principal’s attention is focused on areas that require these skills and attributes, they are being pulled away from their primary role as an instructional leader.

### **Principal Time Management**

An empirical study on time management of instructional leaders found that principals who invest time in instructional-related task experience improved student learning outcomes (May et al., 2012). “Time management is a form of decision making used by individuals to structure, protect, and adapt their time to changing conditions” (Aeon & Aguinis, 2017 p. 315). However, Hallinger, Dongyu, and Wang (2016) determined that principal’s ability to allow the time necessary to the teaching and learning priorities within their buildings is a constant challenge as Lemoine et al. (2014) attested. Although how principals spend their time during the school day is vital to student achievement goals, it is also essential that principals spend time engaged in activities and community functions. This level of commitment is an indicator to the

community that the school principal is invested in the community's well-being, which is imperative to building trust and maintaining an effective working relationship with all stakeholders, both inside and outside of the school building.

Kouali and Pashiardis (2015) defined time management as an interrelation of the following five independent variables: “task of principals; frequency of tasks; degree of accomplishment of tasks; use of time management techniques; and time management style” (p. 495). They also drew a contrast between time management and time allocation by defining time allocation as a choice to manage and plan one’s time by purposeful involvement in certain activities at a pre-determined time. Time management is about making decisions, setting goals to achieve predetermined goals, and prioritizing the necessary action steps. The literature on time management across multiple disciplines of study and its contribution to employee’s well-being and performance is vast. Aeon and Aguinis (2017) found through the study of the sociology domain, an understanding of how environmental factors influence time management; through the psychological domain, the knowledge of how the differences in individuals influence their time management; and lastly, how temporal decision-making reveals the undercurrents that inform their time management competencies. They concluded that all the studies centered around two key effects of time management, well-being and performance. Compton and Hoffman (2019) defined well-being as “the experience of pleasant emotions, low levels of negative moods, and high life satisfaction” (p. 50). Aeon and Aguinis (2017) found that effective time management has implications for improving a person’s quality of life by lowering their stress and causes a lift in their overall job satisfaction. Conversely, their research found the connection between time management and job performance to be



more intricate, concluding that time management results in effects on performance behaviors rather than performance results.

Kouali and Pashiardis (2015) examined the time management models of Macan and Claessens and found that both models examined the effects of perceived control of time; a leader's perceived control of time can have an impact on their level of job tension, job satisfaction, and overall performance. Principals who successfully manage their time or perceive that they may not experience better results as it applies to student achievement. Still, by virtue of the performance behaviors will be more effective in their role as an instructional leader. Sackett, Lievens, Van Iddekinge, and Kuncel (2017) found that differences in an individual's personality and time attitudes can determine the effects of their individual time management outcomes. While examining time management structures of principals, it is key to be aware of the individual's beliefs and preferences and how those aspects may inform a principal's temporal decision making.

Horng, Klasik, and Loeb (2010), in their empirical study on principal time use and its effect on school effectiveness, and Salo, Nylund, and Stjernstrom (2015) found that the principals' impact on overall school operations comes through more than just their day-to-day instructional leadership but through their comprehensive management of the school's instructional program. This highlights the expectation that principals who endeavor to lead their schools effectively and positively influence teacher instructional capacity and student learning must have the necessary skills to maintain the operational management of their school while being the instructional leader.

McBrayer et al. (2018) determined that principals know the importance and show a strong preference to spending their time as instructional leaders more than spending

time on the management task but acknowledge the factors that impede the principal's ability to give instructional leadership the time and attention necessary to influence student outcomes. Those impeding factors identified in Cuban's (1988) early work were administrative, student discipline, budget work, building and facilities work, required paperwork and reports. Other impeding factors to principals acting primarily as instructional leaders were identified by Halliger and Murphy (2012) as the expertise to lead learning, time to lead learning, and the normative environment of the principalship. Horng et al. (2010) found that principals spend much of their day, up to twenty percent, on what they defined as administrative duties. Those responsibilities include tasks that involve reports and compliance, managing school schedules, discipline, student services, attendance, special education, supervising students. While only being engaged with instructional responsibilities, be them day-to-day instructional tasks or implementing the comprehensive instructional program, only 12% of their day.

Hauseman et al. (2017) introduced a job expectation that is not new but one that is becoming more prevalent in the list of impending expectations of school principals; establishing and maintaining school-community partnerships. Partnership or involvement are defined as collaborative endeavors that are imperative for building relationships with community organizations and agencies connected with the students and/or the school to generate additional revenue, fostering connections to resources or supplemental education services. Hauseman et al. (2017) found that although most principals believed that a student's educational experience extends beyond classroom academics and saw the benefit of establishing these community partnerships, they also indicated that placing priority in this area gave them less time to be instructional leaders in their schools.

Hauseman et al. (2017) also found the time it requires to establish and maintain those school-community partnerships obligated school staff to time that extended beyond their workday, and a lack of staff willingness to lead these initiatives left it up to the principals to lead, implement, and monitor any internal or external programming of these school-community partnerships.

As affirmed by Hallinger and Murphy (2012), there is a disconnect between the rhetoric and reality in terms of the known importance and impact of instructional leadership and the principal's ability to meet the expectation of that role with the presence of the previously outlined impeding factors. Pollock et al. (2015) found that principals are braving mounting expectations as it relates to the dichotomy of their roles, the number of tasks they are required to implement, monitor, and evaluate as well as the amount of time both during working hours and non-work hours it takes to complete those tasks. This study will examine how principals secure the time necessary to lead learning. Principals work within a hectic task environment where the priorities of the day are often dictated and initiated by others. According to Liu and Hallinger (2018), like the middle manager in the corporate setting, the school principal finds it challenging to allow time for the primary focus on key instructional leadership tasks due to the constant request, crises, and bureaucratic entanglements. Hallinger and Murphy (2012) found that when principals attempt to become more intentional at self-management, they encounter "pushback" from the culture of the school.

Hoyle and Wallace (2005) and Tyler (2016) affirmed that principals' leadership expectations are different; however, instructional leadership is still more important than management. For school principals to effectively lead the learning in their schools, the

goal is for them to spend their time in the role of instructional leader to help the teachers reach their full instructional potential, which will result in all students making expected instructional gains (Dewitt, 2017).

According to Grissom, Loeb, and Matani (2015), time management and its relationship to outcomes in educational leadership have been largely ignored. They define time management as “behaviors that aim at achieving effective use of time while performing certain goal-directed activities” (p. 775). Liu and Hallinger (2018) and Grissom et al. (2015) found that time management intersects with effective instructional leadership; however, the degree to which it impacts it has yet to be determined. Liu and Hallinger’s (2018) findings indicated that if principals endeavor to improve student learning and achievement, they should be focusing most of their time motivating and supporting the professional learning of teachers. Their results suggest that principals who can manage their time effectively may feel more confident in addressing challenges in their dual roles. Grissom et al. (2015) posited that principals fail to meet the expectations of their role as instructional leaders due to an inability to organize themselves with focus and skill in doing the right things at the right times. Lemoine et al. (2014) asserted,

Instructional leadership requires vision, a willingness to experiment, a capacity to tolerate messiness, the ability to take the long-term view, and a desire to revise systems when needed. Management leadership, on the other hand, requires oversight, the use of proven methods, orderliness, and daily attention (p. 22).

School principals must be productive, which means finding ways to balance dichotomies of their responsibilities given limited time.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

The literature on the duality of the role of the school principal is vast. There are legitimate explanations and research to support why the school principal must be equipped to allow time and attention to both their role as an instructional leader and organizational manager. The literature is replete with the importance of the varied roles of the school principal. Still, there was very little research available that detailed the processes and structures a principal must employ in order to balance the time required to accomplish both efficiently and effectively while providing maximum attention and priority to their role of instructional leader. My study explored the processes established by school principals to balance and manage their time to meet the expectations of their schools' organizational management while also being instructional leaders. In Chapter 3 I detail the methodology used to identify the patterns in principals' perceptions of the structures and processes they use to balance the responsibilities of their role as the school principal.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

I studied the problem of school principals' ability to balance their time in order to be the school's organizational manager while giving primary attention to being the instructional leader. The qualitative case study was designed to answer the research questions; I explored the processes established by school principals to balance and manage their time to meet the expectation of managing their buildings while being instructional leaders and what influence, if any, their sense of self-efficacy had on their ability to establish and adhere to those processes and structures. To examine the lived experiences and perspectives of the school principal, I used the case study qualitative tradition to develop an in-depth analysis of the participant's experiences.

In this qualitative study, I sought to examine the experiences of participants experiencing a shared phenomenon and gaining a deeper understanding of how those experiences inform the processes and structures they employ. My study's focus was not to just understand the common experiences of the principals or to lessen their lived experiences into broad generalizations, but to identify any patterns in structures or systems that might exist in their practice. I considered grounded theory because, according to Creswell (2018), grounded theory research aims to develop a theory by researching several people who share the same experiences. I determined that a grounded study was not appropriate due to its intention to discover a theory to provide reasons for the participants' lived experiences. Creswell (2018) defined a case study as "the exploration of several cases within a connected system" (p.73). A case study requires data to be collected over time through multiple sources of information to understand the lived experiences of the participants. The participants of my study were bound by a

shared job responsibility within a particular school district and had different perspectives on the problem.

While there is current research that explores the tenets and expectations of an instructional leader who positively influences student learning in their school, there was little research that explored the structures, and processes principals employ to manage the dichotomy of their roles of organizational manager and instructional leader. Creswell (2018) considered case study research as “a methodology: a type of design in qualitative research” and defined a case study as “a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information” (p. 96). The purpose of this chapter was to detail the research methods, the chosen methodology, as well as the role the research occupied in the study. Brinkman (2012) asserted that phenomenology was developed to shed light on the human experience, an attempt to understand how they think, feel, act, learn, and develop. My goal was to explore the processes established by school principals to balance and manage their time to meet the expectation of managing their buildings while being instructional leaders; a case study tradition was used.

Through the use of a case study research approach, I gained an understanding of the choices principals make daily and their perspectives on why those choices are made. I used a qualitative case study to closely examine principals’ lived experiences. This case study also provided insight into principal participants’ thinking that informs their daily decision making.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

Through this study, I sought to answer the following four research questions:

1. What are the structures and daily routines principals employ to balance the managerial responsibilities as opposed to the instructional leadership responsibilities?
2. What self-organization structures and processes do principals put in place to maintain their primary focus on instructional leadership?
3. What self-organization strategies do principals employ to address the managerial (non-instructional) responsibilities of the principalship?

The reality of any group of people cannot be directly measured but constructed through the experiences and observation of those within that group (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The nature of qualitative research dictates that the data collected be obtained through observations, interviews, documents, and artifacts of those being studied (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The theory of complexity guided this study, which holds that “organisms deliberately seek information from its environment in order to learn” (Morrison, 2010, p. 377). The theory of complexity suggests that it must involve emergent self-organization and autocatalysis for school leaders to be change agents within their organization. The dichotomous roles of the contemporary school principal are the product of modern-day schools' complex environment; however, the principal has to act as the catalyst that creates the structures necessary to regulate the complexity of their environment. Through this study, I aimed to determine if Bandura's theory of self-efficacy has a role in how principals establish and maintain the structures and processes to efficiently run their schools. Bandura (1997) held that a person's self-efficacy influences how that person approaches and carries out the responsibilities of their job.



### **Role of the Researcher**

Lincoln and Guba (2000) defined reflexivity as the process of reflecting critically on the self as the researcher, “the human as the instrument” (p.183). Holding a position of school principal within the school division where the study took place, I defined my relationship with the participants as colleagues, indicating that I possess no power relationship with them. I worked as a school administrator (administrative intern, assistant principal, and principal) within the school division for 12 years prior to the start of this study. According to Galdas (2017), being aware of my partisan opinion requires me to be reflexive about the process used to collect, analyze, and present my findings.

Having worked as a high school and middle school teacher prior to becoming a school administrator, my preconceived opinion or bias that elementary principals’ ability to balance the competing responsibilities of an organizational manager and instructional leader surpasses secondary school principals. Secondly, I believe, and contemporary research supports, that the primary role of the school principal is that of the instructional leader due to its documented influence on student learning and achievement. With student learning being the primary purpose for public schools, it should be the school leader's primary role and focus.

During the data collection process, my role as the researcher was that of an interviewer. Data were gathered using both structured and semistructured interview protocols. I allowed for flexibility with the open-ended questions I asked of participants based partly on their responses to the first self-efficacy interview.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection**

Ten principal participants from each level of schooling represented in the school district and one principal of a specialty center were invited to participate in the study. I invited participants using purposeful sampling. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), purposeful sampling requires research participants who are experienced and knowledgeable about the phenomenon being studied; as such only principals who had served in their role as school principal for 3 years or more were invited to participate in the study. Of the 10 principals who were invited to participate in the study, only six accepted the invitation. To increase the validity of my study, the research participants selected possessed a depth of knowledge about the role and the responsibilities of a school principal in the modern era of increased accountability. Using this method of sampling, it was my plan to interview each principal at their school location, but due to extended school closures during the COVID-19 global pandemic, this plan had to be adjusted.

As stated previously, I only selected participants who had served in their role as principal for 3 or more years. Although novice principals bring knowledge and new perspective to their role as school leader, there may be multiple variables that could impede the implementation of their chosen structures that are more aligned with a newer principal's inexperience than the identification of successful practice.

According to Seidman, "if the goal of the researcher is to understand the meaning, people involved in education make of their experiences, then interviewing provides a necessary avenue of inquiry" (2019, p.10). By selecting participants who represent two

levels of schooling that were available within the school district where the study took place allowed for a cross-sectional representation of leadership practice within the local context

### **Instrumentation**

Fusch, Fusch, and Ness (2018) confirmed Denzin's (2011) point that triangulation, the use of multiple sources of data, is "somewhat like looking through a crystal to perceive all the facets and viewpoints of the data" (p. 20). To get in-depth answers to my study's research questions, mitigate the bias that I bring to the study, and establish the study's credibility, I used multiple data sources. This further allowed for the triangulation of data gathered. According to Fusch et al. (2018), each data point represents different data of the same phenomenon.

Using Bandura's four sources of self-efficacy, I developed the Self-Efficacy Interview Protocol (Appendix A); I used it to answer Research Question 4; it was used to determine each principal's sense of self-efficacy and if their perceived sense of self-efficacy had any influence on their ability to establish the organizational and instructional structures within their schools. Bandura found that a person's sense of self-efficacy determines what they believe their level of control is over their environment (1997). With this understanding in mind, the influence principals' sense of self-efficacy could have on their performance was a critical variable. It was imperative that self-efficacy be examined in conjunction with other data. This additional information could hold influence on the structures and processes a principal uses to balance the dual responsibilities of their job.

The semistructured interview, *Balancing the Responsibilities of the Principalship* Interview Protocol (Appendix B) was used to answer Research Questions 1, 2, and 3.

Rubin & Rubin (2012) described the structure of responsive interviews as “main questions, follow up questions, and probes that together elicit the rich data that speak to your research question” (p.116). A conversational partnership was established between participant and me through the initial phases of data collection that led to establishing the trust, understanding, and mutual respect necessary to garner in-depth, thoughtful responses from the participant. The goal of the interviews was to get the participants' perspectives on their experience and practice. The nature of the open-ended interview questions required the participants to think deeply about their practice; for this reason, I provided participants a copy of the semistructured interview questions for review before the scheduled interviews.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

To avoid any harm to the participants through all phases of the study, I started by securing approval from the school district IRB to conduct the research study. As part of that process, all aspects and components of the study were shared and discussed with the IRB representative and any suggested revisions made. Approval was granted without the need to redesign any components of my research study. Once district IRB approval was obtained, I completed the necessary processes to secure Walden’s IRB approval.

To determine who within my organization met the criteria established for my study, I sent an email to principals within the school district detailing the goal of the research study and the criteria necessary to be accepted into the study participant pool. As I received interest responses, I scheduled a time to meet with research participants to provide a more in-depth understanding of the study and gain informed consent. The consent form had information such as that recommended by Miles et al. (2014), which

included (a) time requirements, (b) types of data to be collected, (c) my role as the researcher, (d) confidentiality of participants and information gathered, (e) participants' right to review and critique interim summary, and (f) plausible benefits of the study within the field of education.

During the first stage of data collection, principals participated in structured interviews. Two of these interviews were held at the participants' school as planned, but the remaining interviews were held over a virtual in-person format due to the extended closure of schools during the COVID-19 global pandemic.

The second component of data collection looked at balancing the responsibilities of the principals. During the 30- 45 minute interview session in the participant's school or during the virtual interview experience, I collected participants' responses using written notes and digital recordings. After the transcription of both interview protocols, participants were asked to review their interview transcripts for accuracy.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

According to Miles et al. (2014), data collection and data analysis should take place concurrently. This practice allows the researcher to remain active in the research process by cycling between what they are learning through the data to allow it to inform their next steps in the data collection process. This speaks to the reason data on each principal's sense of self-efficacy were collected prior to conducting the second interview. The data gathered about each principal's self-efficacy informed my understanding and reflections during the follow-up semistructured interview. Saldaña (2016) asserted, "coding as the critical link between data collection and their explanation of meaning" (p. 4). Keeping this critical link in mind required me to be reflective throughout the data

collection process to continually analyze the information I was gathering as well as its role in answering the research questions.

Saldaña (2016) maintained that “specific coding method decisions may happen before, during, and/or after an initial review of the data corpus” (p. 71). For the first cycle of coding, I employed the InVivo and values coding methods. With the primary goal of qualitative research being to gain insight and an in-depth understanding of the participants' lived experiences, using the InVivo coding method allowed me to honor the voices of my participants by using the terms used to describe their experience.

In addition to the InVivo coding method, I also used value coding during *Balancing the Responsibilities of the Principals Interview Protocol*, Appendix B. With the use of value coding allowed me to discover the underlining values, beliefs, and attitudes of my participants' responses. According to Saldaña (2016), value coding assesses the participants' integrated value, attitude, and belief systems at work” (p. 124). During my second cycle of coding, I applied pattern coding. Pattern coding is “a way of grouping or pulling together from the first cycle of coding into more meaningful and succinct units of analysis” (Saldaña, 2016). As such, after the initial cycle of coding of the interview transcripts and field notes using InVivo and value coding, I conducted a second cycle of coding to identify any emerging patterns of self-organization employed by principals to balance the separate aspects of their jobs.

The process to meet the expectations of these coding cycles required the use of my transcripts, audio recordings, and field notes, which I continually analyzed for developing patterns and themes to allow those findings to inform the continued information gathering. This was achieved by completing each phase of the data collection

process prior to moving on to the next. The reflections and conclusions gathered at one phase of data collection will inform the interactions that are noted, as well as the questions asked at the next phase.

Data were obtained using my transcribed interview responses and digital recordings. In order to use that information to answer the research questions, it had to be organized in a way that allowed me to identify the patterns and themes. Miles et al. (2014) defined codes as “labels that assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (p. 71). The process of coding itself is analysis, according to Saldana (2016). Although all coding is the process of looking for patterns that the data reveal, the lenses and filters through which the researcher views can also inform the pattern that emerges. During the planning process, a computer software program designed to assist with the coding of qualitative data was going to be used to make the data more manageable. The quality of my central and related questions and the answers they garner revealed the themes and the specific coding choices (Saldana, 2016); as such, I did not use the computer software.

### **Trustworthiness**

Qualitative studies take place in the real world and, as such, can have real-world consequences on the lives of the research participants; for this reason, I had to take special care to protect and represent the lived experiences of the participants accurately. Miles et al. (2016) described the credibility of a qualitative study as “creating an authentic picture of the people or phenomenon being studied” (p. 312). Through prolonged contact with research participants, several methods of trustworthiness will be used. These include (a) the assurance of confidentiality of the participants’ identity, (b)

the triangulation of data collected, (c) member checking, and (d) conscience awareness of the researcher of every point in the collection of data using member checks it is anticipated that credibility “internal validity” and the confirmability will be strengthened. By examining the data collected from the two data sources, I confirmed or denied the existence of similar trends or patterns in the principals’ practice. To establish if the findings of my study are transferable “externally valid” to a broader population or context of principals, the descriptions of the settings, processes, and participants are rich, and any perceived limitations to the study’s transferability were clarified.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Ethical considerations were rigorously monitored as outlined in Walden University’s IRB requirements. Research participants were assured of their confidentiality. I used pseudonyms, and all data collected were only for the purpose of the study. All research data were and are secured in a locked filing cabinet to protect the participants during the data collection process and will be kept for 5 years. Participants were selected based on their years of service and the level of school leadership; in order to keep their pseudonyms confidential, school locations and other identifying information were not used during data collection or when reporting on the study’s findings.

### **Summary**

The problem being studied was the contemporary school principals’ ability to balance their time in order to be the school’s organizational manager while giving primary attention to being the instructional leader. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the processes established by school principals to balance the expectation of managing their buildings while being instructional leaders and what influence their



sense of self-efficacy had on their ability to establish and adhere to those processes and structures. To answer the research questions associated with this problem, data were collected using structured interviews and semistructured interviews with six principals from the elementary and middle school levels of public education within a suburban school district on the east coast of a mid-Atlantic state.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the processes established by school principals to balance and manage their time to meet the expectation of managing their buildings while being instructional leaders and what influence if any, their sense of self-efficacy has on their ability to establish and adhere to those processes and structures. Although there is a vast body of research that explores the tenets and expectations of an instructional leader who positively influences student learning within their context and studies that outline the managerial responsibilities of an effective school principal, there is little research that explores the structures, and processes principals employ to manage the dichotomy of their roles effectively. The aim of this study is to add to the literature the structures and processes principals employ to balance the expectations of the job. I used open-ended interview questions were developed to incorporate insights from the literature (see Appendices A and B). The questions answered through the interview process were (a) What are the structures and daily routines principals employ to balance the managerial responsibilities as opposed to the instructional leadership responsibilities? (b) What self-organization structures and processes do principals put in place to maintain their primary focus on instructional leadership? (c) What self-organization strategies do principals employ to address the managerial (non-instructional) responsibilities of the principalship? (d) What role does a principal's sense of self-efficacy play in their ability to create the necessary processes and structures to balance the expectations of their role?

### **Setting**

The setting of this study was a school district in a suburban area in the mid-Atlantic United States. During the process of data collection, all schools in the state

where the study took place were closed for the remainder of the academic year due to COVID-19. This unprecedented and unexpected event caused tremendous hardships on all school staff, chiefly district leadership, and building principals. Schools are institutions that have functioned as face-to-face interactions and exchanges since the beginning of schooling. All school staff had to quickly and efficiently learn how to do school remotely. In the school division where this study took place, the school principals become the liaison between their school division, the school staff, and the communities their schools were serving. Attempting to interview principals during this time became more complicated than initially expected as they were all learning to maintain their roles as leaders of learning while managing all the other aspects of the uncharted circumstance the world was experiencing.

During the collection phase of this research, in addition to the COVID-19 global pandemic, the school district, county government, and state government where the study took place were in the budget negotiation process, and the onset of the pandemic further stressed the negotiation process. School funds were frozen, restraining principals' access to resources necessary to support their students and communities during the extended school closure. The trauma of the global situation, the level of responsibility placed on building principals, and the lack of access to resources may have contributed to or influenced the data collection and interpretations.

The school district where the study took place was composed of more than 25 elementary, middle, and high schools and some special program high school centers. Student enrollment in the school district is over 20,000 students and there were approximately 3,000 staff members. Student demographic breakdown of the school

district at the time of the study was over 50% Caucasian, less than 20% African American and Hispanic, and less than 15% of students who identify themselves as an ethnicity other than those outlined.

Ten principals from elementary, middle, and high school levels were invited to participate in the research study, and six accepted the invitation. I interviewed six principal participants who were currently serving as elementary or middle school principals. There were three middle school principals, two Caucasian and one African American, and three Caucasian elementary principals. They had an average of 16.5 years of experience as a building level principal at either the elementary, middle, or high school level. All the principals had served all their professional career as building-level principals within the school district they were currently serving. One principal served all 18 of her years in one school, while others had served at more than one school during their principal tenure (see Table 1). Of the six participants, five had master's degrees, and one participant earned a doctorate.

Table 1

*Participant Career Experience*

Career	Range	Average
Years in current school district	15-35	18
Years at current school as the principal	3-18	6
Years spent as an assistant principal	2-5	5
Years spent as the building principal	3-22	13

### **Data Collection**

IRB approval from Walden University had to be secured and the school district where the study was conducted did not have an IRB approval process. The paperwork needed for IRB approval was submitted for permission to proceed with the study. As soon as IRB approval was granted (# 02-25-20-0753293), the school district gave permission for the study to begin. My study's data collection phase began by emailing 10 elementary and middle school principals from my Walden email account; I briefly outlined the purpose of my study and requested their participation. I received responses from nine of the ten principals affirming their agreement to participate. As principals responded, I emailed the Informed Consent Form, and upon receipt of the signed or statement of consent, I scheduled the interview.

Due to my study's scope, I used two interview protocols, one structured, (see Appendix A: Self-Efficacy Interview Questions) and a second, semistructured interview (see Appendix B: Balancing the Responsibilities of the Principalship). The semistructured interviews began with questions to understand each principals' years of experience and their interpretations of how or if their jobs have changed during their time as school principals. In addition to those background questions, I posed follow-up questions to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' lived experiences related to the structures and processes they employ to balance varied aspects of their jobs. All participants elected to complete both interviews in a single session, causing the interviews' duration to be between 46 minutes to 102 minutes.

I conducted the two initial interviews at the school sites of the principal participants. However, when schools closed due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, the remaining four interviews had to be held through a virtual video format. Each interview was audio-recorded, and I kept a journal of insights during the interview sessions. I transcribed the audio recordings using TEMI, a transcription application. Once transcriptions were complete, I shared them with the principal participants for any corrections or clarifications. I conducted all interviews between March 13, 2020 and May 16, 2020.

### **Data Analysis**

When principal participants confirmed that the transcriptions of our interviews were correct, I began the coding process of one transcript at a time. I coded each transcript by highlighting keywords and phrases. I repeated this process at least twice for each transcript when the interview was over. When I concluded all the interviews, I recorded the highlighted words and phrases from the transcripts to an Excel spreadsheet to record the keywords used to respond to the research questions from each of the research participants. This process allowed me to move from keywords and phrases to patterns and commonalities in the participants' responses. I identified the patterns as they existed for each research question from which the themes emerged. Because there were two interview protocols, the coding processes were different based on the interview questions' purpose, and those differences are outlined here.

According to Versland and Erickson (2017), a principal's sense or level of self-efficacy is critical because a principal's actions are guided by their belief that they possess the ability to design a course of action to address the areas necessary affect the

process of school improvement. For this reason, the first three questions in the self-efficacy interview were designed to determine the principal participant's perspective of their self-efficacy. The remaining five questions were crafted to reveal the possible link between Bandura's self-efficacy sources and the principal's personal experiences.

Bandura (1997) determined that

organizational managers must understand how their decisions affect the motivation and the performance of others and how to structure their efforts toward the desired outcomes"...“many of the critical decisional rules governing the productivity of an organization must be discovered through exploratory means (p. 451).

The interview questions posed to the principal participants provided a glimpse into their lived experiences as the organizational managers of their schools, and if those experiences shaped their personal sense of self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) found that those with an optimal sense of efficacy can remain task-oriented while being besieged with the complexities of running the organization.

Before answering Research Question 4 (How does a principal's sense of self-efficacy play a role in their ability to create and maintain those processes and structures to balance expectations of the role?) I had to assign a value to their sense of self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1997), there are four major sources of self-efficacy:

1. mastery experiences- experiencing success increases a person's belief in themselves.
2. vicarious experiences- looking at your personal success in relation or as compared to the processes and successes of others.

3. verbal persuasion-others with influence expressing verbal belief in your capabilities
4. psychological and affective state- determining environmental stressors based on your somatic responses

The data obtained from Interview Protocol A: Self-Efficacy informed Research Question

4. I designed the questions in the interview protocol to gain perspective on each participants' belief about their sense of self-efficacy, as well as determining the degree to which Bandura's identified sources of self-efficacy played a role. See Table 2 for the alignment of interview questions to the conceptual framework elements.

Table 2

*Alignment of Interview Questions to the Conceptual Framework*

Interview Questions	Personal Perspective and Sources of Self-Efficacy
1-Describe your level of achievement in most goals you set for yourself.	Personal Perspective
2- When you are faced with a difficult circumstance, how do you address it?	Personal Perspective
3- Describe your level of confidence in your ability to perform effectively on the multi-faceted responsibilities you have as a school principal.	Personal Perspective
4-Describe a time in your career as a principal when you were faced with a significant challenge or barrier that you successfully resolved and how did that experience shape your growth as a principal?	Mastery Experiences
5-Describe a time in your career when you were faced with a significant challenge or barrier that did not meet with a successful resolution, and how did you move beyond that experience?	Mastery Experiences
6-Share the aspects of your job that cause you to have a physiological response (knots in your stomach, sweaty palms, headaches, etc.) and why do you think it happens?	Physiological and Affective States
7-How have your observations of or interactions with other principals shaped your thinking and how you address challenges with which you are faced?	Vicarious Experiences
8-In your role as school principal, what influence has feedback had on your thoughts and feelings about your effectiveness/ capacity to do your job?	Verbal Persuasion



The first cycle of coding was completed by highlighting keywords and phrases used by each principal participant. Miles et al. (2014) defined coding as using words or short phrases from the participants' own language. This coding method allowed me to use the personal words of the participants as they described their sense of self-efficacy. The second coding cycle was when I started looking for developing commonalities and patterns emerging from the interviews using pattern coding. Through this process, I was looking to determine if the principal's sense of self-efficacy and their experiences aligned with Bandura's sources of self-efficacy; this process would become key when determining if each principals' sense of self-efficacy would inform the structures and processes they established to maintain a balance between their responsibilities as their school's organizational manager and instructional leader.

### **Interview Protocol B- Balancing the Responsibilities of the Principalship**

The data obtained from Interview Protocol B: Balancing the Responsibilities of the Principalship, informed Research Questions 1, 2, & 3. The questions asked were: (a) What are the structures and daily routines principals employ to balance the managerial responsibilities as opposed to the instructional leadership responsibilities?, (b) What self-organization structures and processes do principals put in place to maintain their primary focus on instructional leadership?, and (c) What self-organization strategies do principals employ to address the managerial (non-instructional) responsibilities of the principalship? The questions were constructed to explore each principal participants' background, personal experience, and perspectives about the principalship as well as the processes and structures they employ to balance the expectations of their job. See Table 3 for alignment of interview questions and research questions. The first coding cycle for interview

protocol B took place while interviewing participants and was immediately reflected on after receiving confirmation from the participant that the interview was correct as transcribed.

During the interview, I took journal notes that focused on value coding. Saldaña (2016) said value coding assesses the participants' integrated value, attitude, and belief systems at work. As suggested by Miles et al. (2014), data collection and data analysis should take place concurrently. The use of value coding required me to pay attention and take note of the participants' reactions, attitudes, and beliefs as we discussed how they balanced their principal responsibilities.

During the second cycle of coding, I also used NVivo to assist with coding. Using these methods, the quality of my follow up questions asked during the semistructured interview process became more deliberate in their focus as I moved from one interview to the next. This allowed me to identify better the themes that were developing in the research as I started the third cycle of coding.

The third cycle of coding is when I started looking for developing themes and patterns emerging from the interviews using pattern coding. Saldana (2016) defined pattern coding as “a way of grouping or pulling together more succinct units of analysis” p. 75. This process started after all the interviews had concluded, and participants had provided verification of transcripts. During the initial planning process, I thought I would use a computer software program to assist with pattern coding; however, it was not necessary. Through the first and second coding cycles, I was better able to identify those patterns due to my familiarity with the literature and the content of the interviews.

Table 3

*Alignment of Interview Questions and Research Questions*

Research Question	Interview Questions
RQ1- What are the structures and daily routines principals employ to balance the managerial responsibilities as opposed to the instructional leadership responsibilities?	<p>10-Recent trends in educational research suggest that school principals' primary role must be as the instructional leader for them to positively impact student achievement; What are your thoughts on the need to balance one aspect of your responsibility as principal over the other?</p> <p>11-Describe any structures and processes you have in place to maintain the necessary balance.</p> <p>12-Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your role as your school's instructional leader and organizational leader that my questions did not allow you to share?</p>
RQ2- What self-organization structures and processes do principals put in place to maintain their primary focus on instructional leadership?	<p>7-How do you define your role as the instructional leader of your school?</p> <p>8-On average, what percentage of your day would you say you spend giving attention to the task you consider instructional?</p> <p>9-What organizational structures and processes do you employ to maintain a primary focus on your role as an instructional leader?</p>
RQ3- What self-organization strategies do principals employ to address the managerial (non-instructional) responsibilities of the principalship?	<p>4-How do you define your role as the organizational manager of your school?</p> <p>5-On average, what percentage of your day do you spend giving attention to the tasks that you consider more managerial?</p> <p>6-What organizational structures and processes do you employ to stay abreast and up to date with the managerial aspects of your job?</p>

## Results

### Results for Research Question 1

What are the structures and daily routines principals employ to balance the managerial responsibilities as opposed to the instructional leadership responsibilities?

Theme 1: Shared vision and shared responsibility. Each of the six principals discussed the importance of balancing the expectations of their role as both organizational manager and instructional leader and shared some of the structures and strategies they use to achieve that balance. All of them emphasized every person's involvement in the school, whether or not the employees worked in the classrooms. Principal 1 expounded on the importance of shared responsibility to make sure instruction stays at the forefront of the work in schools.

The principal sets the instructional tone...It truly takes everyone to keep instruction at the forefront of our purpose... I need everyone placing student learning as the priority. If my school resource officer does not have student learning as his priority, he may think it is ok to pull me out of a classroom to discuss the particulars of a traffic flow problem, but that would not happen because he knows.

Principal 2 shared how even though the teachers are at the front line in the classroom, everyone in the school building has a part in making sure they do the jobs they are hired to do in support of student learning.

When the organization is working as a cohesive unit because everyone is doing their part, then I can place my time and energy on instruction and support of

instructional systems that are supportive of my teachers' development and students' achievement.

Principal 3 discussed the many people who are needed in school to meet the vast needs of the students to make sure they are ready and available to learn. When those specialists are not a part of the structure, it often leaves the principal to function in those roles.

When the principal must act as the counselor, the nurse, the social worker, the behavior specialist, or take on any other role consistently that is necessary to meet the needs of our students, there is no way they can balance the responsibilities that are outlined as the principal's responsibilities.

Principal 4 explained that even though the teaching and learning process that takes place at school is not everyone's job, everyone has the responsibility to make sure it is at the core of why schools operate. "Instruction is not just my job; it is everyone's job. Even those employees who never step into the classroom."

Principal 5 discussed how the leadership team or administrative team in a school share the same responsibilities and the importance of the principal setting those structures in place so the group operates in that way. "Working with my assistant principal, instructional coordinator, and teacher leadership team, together we get it done. It is ultimately my responsibility, but it takes all of us working together to get the desired results from students and teachers alike."

Principal 6 shared the importance of everyone understanding the connection between their job and the work that is happening in the classroom.

As the principal, I have the responsibility of making sure everyone believes in the importance of their role and influence they have on the teaching and learning

process; my secretary, the custodians, the cafeteria monitor—everyone has a role.

When everyone knows their part, and they learn to perform their job effectively and efficiently, I can place my primary focus on building teacher capacity and student achievement.

All six principals agreed that shared leadership and collective efficacy are structures they rely on to make sure they are available to give primary focus to instruction in their school buildings. Some of the principals shared their daily routines or thought processes they employ to maintain that structure within their schools.

**Theme 2: Priorities.** Four of the six principals discussed a part of their ability to balance the expectations between the dichotomous roles of the school principal as an awareness of the daily and overall priorities as well as scheduling the time necessary to address those priorities. Each of the principals shared the importance setting priorities and time allocation.

Principal 1 discussed the importance of setting priorities to address both aspects of their job as principal.

I do this through scheduling my instructional responsibilities and all the managerial things that can be scheduled. Whatever is planned takes priority unless it cannot. One thing that makes managerial tasks so tricky in my experience is that they are usually things that cannot be scheduled; things just happen, and they have to be addressed when they happen. Having scheduled things I can schedule, allows me a little more time in most days for the scheduled and nonscheduled instructional things that require my attention.

Principal 3 explained how being intentional through scheduling of those tasks they know must be completed ensures that those things are priority, and they get done.

One thing about instructional tasks is that they are usually not a surprise.

Principals know which classrooms they need to get into, they know what professional learning needs to be planned or executed, which is vastly different from much of the managerial task we are faced with. Those things can and usually do just drop out of the sky and when they do, they have to be dealt with. I make sure my digital daily calendar includes all the instructional things I am planning to do on any given day. My secretaries and my assistant principal can access that calendar and they know which managerial task “emergencies” warrant an interruption from any instructional task I am engaged in. The same is true for my assistant principal. This allows us both dedicated time on the instructional stuff.

Principal 5 discussed the difference in responsibilities and expectations at different times of the day and scheduling the day in a way that leaves flexibility at those times.

I know being visible in the morning when students and staff are arriving and instruction is starting is important so for that reason, I almost never schedule any type of managerial meeting (discipline, budget, facilities, etc....) at that time of day. That is not to say that I am never in meetings in the morning, but if I am it is a meeting with an instructional focus like IEP, 504, or PLC meeting.

Principal 6 discussed that she is not the only person in her school who needs to know what the priorities are—everyone in the school does. She explained seeing

instructional priorities scheduled out on the school-wide calendar will let all school personnel know what is important.

Everything I know about as it relates to scheduling out the school year, I place it on my and our school-wide digital calendar. ... I think this lets our entire staff know that the instructional structures are priority in our school. There are times when I or my assistant principal cannot make it to those instructional meetings, but we usually try to cover one another if one of us needs to address a managerial issue or situation. Use being in attendance also lets staff know, instruction is our priority.

Being the person responsible for the daily processes of a complex organization, requires a level of organization for self but also the structures within that organization. Through their responses it was clear that understanding the organization's priorities is necessary before determining time allocation. Each of the principals discussed the strategies they have in place to schedule time that allows room for the school's priority, which is the instructional processes within their schools.

### **Results for Research Question 2**

What self-organization structures and processes do principals put in place to maintain their primary focus on instructional leadership?

**Theme 1: Shared leadership.** The utilization of all instructional personnel to support the principal in being able to place primary focus on instructional leadership is a belief and system of trust that the principals have to set in place to ensure that all instructional staff teacher leaders, instructional coaches, and administrative teams share in the instructional leadership role.



Principal 1 explained that even though the principal is ultimately responsible for it all, the principal cannot do it alone.

I realized early in my career as a principal that I could not do it all that I was not the master of my fate. In my role as principal, there are too many other responsibilities that had the potential to pull me away from the daily interaction with the work of monitoring student learning and teacher practice. One of the structures I have put in place is my Team. The team is made up of my assistant principal, reading specialist, special education department chair, English as a second language teacher, gifted resource teacher, school counselor, and instructional technology resource teacher. This team meets every week to discuss and problem-solve school-wide instructional priorities. In these meetings, we maintain an ongoing agenda; we talk about reading instruction and data, math instruction and data, ESOL students and instruction, special education supports and structures. Through this team of building specialist, I am no longer the only person with an eye on the school vision and instructional practice.

Principal 2 discussed the collaborative relationship that is necessary between the principal and assistant principals. She discussed the shared responsibility, ownership, and leadership in their role as instructional leaders.

My assistant principal and I have developed a system of shared leadership that allows for each of us to balance the expectations of being the instructional leader. We use a professional learning (PLC) structure in our building that we both participate in on alternating days. When she is working with the reading PLCs, I am available to address any other aspects of our role and when I am meeting with

PLCs on an alternate day, she is available to address other situations. This keeps us both engaged in the responsibilities of instructional leadership and the organizational management.

Principal 3 discussed the shared learning that is necessary to establish a collaborative culture within schools.

As the principal, we must do more than just establish the collaborative structures within our buildings, we have to be part of those collaborative structures. By working with our PLCs, grade level teams, and leadership teams, we gain an understanding of our staff's capacity and are better able to identify areas of collective strength and continued growth. Having that working knowledge of our teachers/staff grants us a first-hand understanding of both broad and individual learning needs. Possessing this awareness is what allows us to plan the learning opportunities that are needed to further student learning.

Principal 5 discussed that collaboration does not just happen; it has to be planned for by establishing an agenda that requires persons to collaborate.

Making sure every instructional conversation that I plan with individuals or a team has an agenda. Putting this structure in place is how I make sure those collaborative conversations are purposeful and intentional. With the limited time that we all have in education, I cannot plan meeting opportunities that are viewed as a waste of time—our collaborative time is priceless and has to be managed well.

Principal 6 discussed how their PLC structure is designed to encourage the collaborative structure.

Our PLC structure is really where the rubber meets the road. It is where student learning is discussed, achievement data is shared, and plans to address learning deficits are constructed. Someone of my administrative team is usually there to make sure we are kept in the loop on student learning data and how grade level teams are addressing any areas of concern. Additionally, I have a leadership team that is comprised of teacher leaders within the building to take a broader look at our school structures, improvement goals, and student achievement.

Self-organization is a bottom-up process that adds some structure to their otherwise constantly changing environment. Each of the six principals shared how collaboration and shared leadership are one of the self-organization structures they have established. According to three of the six principals, that shared leadership and collaboration expands beyond their administrative team to include other specialists and teacher leaders within their schools.

**Theme 2: Continued professional learning.** Three of the principals discussed personal, school-wide, or needs-based professional learning as a self-organization structure they use to maintain their focus on instructional learning within their schools.

Principal 1 discussed the importance of her own professional learning and how she moves from learning herself to the model that she employs with her school when an area of need has been identified.

I learned a long time ago, that even though the principal does not need to know everything, the principal has to know a lot about what they expect their staff to know. When I realized that writing was an area of deficit in my building, across grade levels, before I could start to give teachers the necessary feedback and place

expectation on them in that area, I needed a clear understanding of what I wanted them to do to address it. That required me to do my own professional learning in that area and I did that through conducting my own research. I attended conferences, webinars, read books, talked to colleagues for an entire year before I started the professional learning with my staff.

Principal 4 shared that another job of a principal that is very rarely discussed in the job description is the expectation that principals continue their own learning. As quickly as the educational system changes and expectations are placed on states, school districts, and schools, the school principal is required to keep up with the new research and continue learning. She explained having been a school principal for over 20 years, things have changed, and how she has to change with it.

There is always new research being released about the process of teaching and learning, how students learn best, the effect size of different instructional methods. If I, as the school principal, do not stay abreast of that new information, I am letting my staff and my students down. As the principal, I must do more than just do my job, I must keep learning and planning ways to put that learning in front of my teachers. We have to keep learning together to make sure we are meeting the needs of the students we serve.

Principal 6 discussed staying up to date with new research and instructional practice that is designed to meet the challenges we are facing in today's classrooms.

I have always believed that good instruction was good instruction and that there were no new tricks under the sun, but I was wrong. The students we teach today are very different from the students we taught 15 years ago. To meet the needs of

these students, the adults who teach them have to think differently, respond differently, and engage differently. Our students today do not need answers to questions, they can Google answers; they need to learn how to think, collaborate, problem solve. As the principal of my school, I am responsible to bring the learning opportunities to my teachers that they need to expand on the content we are teaching our students to include those 21st century skills that are so important for the learners in our classrooms.

These principals agreed that another self-organization structure they have had to put in place is a system of professional learning for themselves and their staff. As instructional leaders, it is expected that school principals identify the learning needs of their teachers and plan opportunities for them to engage with that learning, which is why these three principals determined professional learning as a self-organization structure that has to be in place in their buildings.

### **Results for Research Question 3**

What self-organization strategies do principals employ to address the managerial (non-instructional) responsibilities of the principalship?

**Theme 1: Organizational procedure.** Each of the principals outlined organizational procedures they have designed and implemented as a result of analyzing the needs and dynamics of their school's internal and external communities. Principal 1 noted

Although no day in a school looks like another day, there are some commonalities in the type of things that principals and schools are tasked to address on an ongoing basis. Once I figured that out, every year I worked with my office staff,

cafeteria manager, head custodian, to design procedures that we follow to address those situations. We revisit those structures on a yearly basis, sometime, depending on if an issue arises, we revise them more often. My front office staff, bookkeeper, registrar, school nurse, and greeter all know how to address an unscheduled parent meeting, substitutes in the building, an irate parent, bus arrival and/or dismissal issues, or an urgent telephone call. My cafeteria manager knows how to address a last-minute hiccup with food supply, lunch times, or personnel issues. When those situations arise, I am usually told about it after it has already been addressed. These procedures which were predetermined, help to keep my focus on instructional processes. It is noticeably clear when these structures have not been established or there is a new member of the team.

Principal 2 noted

I have daily check-ins with the organizational leaders of the building with my assistant principal, front office secretary, school nurse, cafeteria manager, and head custodian. Except for my custodians, I try to be the first person to enter the building in the morning and the last person to leave the building in the evening. This allows me the time to touch base with my organizational managers to determine if there are situations that I need to make aware of or to address. I think that by keeping that open line of communication with my internal stakeholders on a daily basis, I make sure everything operational is running smoothly.

Principal 3 noted,

Much of the unscheduled organizational things that tend to steal my time come through email or telephone communication My emails are mine to manage and I

have a system in place to keep my day from being swallowed by emails. I get to school before staff and teachers arrive to give myself time to review any emails that have come in overnight. In addition to that morning email check, I check it once again during the school day and again at the end of the day. As I check my emails throughout the day, I am determining action steps and those things are placed on my to-do list. For telephone calls, my office staff knows how to manage those to keep my day from being inundated with unscheduled telephone conversations. Even though I understand the importance with communication with community stakeholders, I try not to spend too much time during the actual instructional hours with those type of task. If it is an issue that has arisen that I need to address while students are in the building, my office staff will let me know about it so I can place priority on that issue. Anything that is not an emergency, those telephone calls are returned before I leave for the day.

Principal 4 noted,

In my years as principal, I have come to understand the processes that must be established to address those situations that can steal time from instructional responsibilities. I will usually make sure those structures are in place. What I have come to notice that processes that use to help to address those managerial responsibilities are no longer as successful as they have been in the past. With the way trauma has impacted our school, I have had to become more involved in helping to manage those processes or manage student behavior. My realization of how trauma is impacting our daily structures and processes I am in the process of

working with my counseling department to create additional structures to support our students and teachers as those issues arise.

Principal 5 noted,

I am starting to put more responsibility on or delegating more managerial things to my front office staff, with three clerical personnel, I have come to realize there are a lot of things that can manage without my input and I need to work with them to establish some processes to make processes more systemic no matter who is addressing the situation.

Principal 6 noted,

I have come to realize that I can be in every meeting that takes place in the building be a meeting with an instructional focus or a managerial issue. I have established a shared drive where meeting agendas and meeting minutes can be shared with me and my assistant principal. This system has allowed us to stay abreast of the discussions and decisions that are taking place in our building when we are not in attendance. This google shared drive is organized by month and date so at the end of every day, I can go into that shared drive and review the agendas and meeting minutes of any meetings that have taken space that day. I will usually provide some feedback to the team or teacher after reviewing the meeting minutes.

Based on the data gathered through the Protocol A- Self-Efficacy Interview, in Table 4 I present the influence Bandura's sources of SE had on each principal's sense of self-efficacy. The degree to which each of Bandura's sources of efficacy influenced the principal participants' sense of SE are characterized using the terms positive, negative,



and neutral. If through their responses to the interview questions it was determined that the SE source as defined by Bandura (1997) had a positive influence, it is marked positive; if the influence was determined to be harmful, it is marked negative. If it could not be determined that that source of SE had an influence or not, it is marked as neutral.

Table 4

*Sources of Self-Efficacy*

Participant	Mastery Experiences	Verbal Persuasion	Vicarious Experiences	Physiological & Affective Strategies
P-1	Positive	Neutral	Positive	Positive
P-2	Positive	Negative	Positive	Positive
P-3	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive
P-4	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive
P-5	Positive	Positive	Neutral	Negative
P-6	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive

**Results for Research Question 4**

What role does a principal's sense of self-efficacy play in their ability to create the necessary processes and structures to balance the expectations of their role?

**Theme 1: Expertise.** All the principals were given the opportunity to speak to their level of confidence in their ability to perform the responsibilities of their role as the school principal. Each of the principals described a level of certainty in their ability to lead their school buildings. Mastery experiences are the avenue through which the principals interviewed grew their sense of self-efficacy. Each of the principals shared

how situations that were resolved and resulted in a positive step forward for them or their organizations had a vital role in advancing their sense of self-efficacy.

Principal 1 described her level of personal achievement as optimal, considering the ever-changing nature of school policy, accountability expectations, and student/community populations she serves. She expounded on her role in the complex organization she leads, "...as long as I'm continuously engaged, and I'm continuously learning, I know that I bring substance and value to my school and community". She detailed the importance of shared leadership and collaboration and her role in establishing the framework necessary for her organization to thrive. "Understanding the key role every person plays in the success of our students, our school, and our goals is paramount; co-leadership and collective efficacy are the cornerstones of any organization and it is my job make sure those structures are in place in my school". She also shared her personal experiences with leading her school through a state re-accreditation process that resulted in positive outcomes for her school and how successfully negotiating that process both with her internal and external communities gave her a level of expertise that she continues to inform her practice several years later.

My school losing our state accreditation was the most disheartening experience I think I have ever had in my career. The ups and downs that I had to navigate for my teachers, my students, my community, and myself were at times unbearable. We did the work to move our school out of that standing in one year. When I look back on it today though, it was one of the best things to happen for me as a school leader; what I learned through that process would not have been a part of my story

without that experience. I still reflect on and make decisions today because of the knowledge I gained during that process.

Principal 2 described her level of achievement as success and she likened it to the terms used in her school division's principal evaluation system, exceeding expectations. She explained that she places a significant amount of pressure on herself and often only experiences that level of satisfaction with her achievement when it is acknowledged or noted by her supervisor as exceeding the expectation.

Although, I feel good and accomplished in my daily role as school principal and the accomplishments of myself, my staff, and my students, at the end day, there is another level of pride in my achievements when they are noted by my supervisor. She also discussed changing schools. She shared the challenge of having to work with a new community and lead a new staff, who had not anticipated that their former principal would be leaving and that they did not have a voice in who the new principal would be. She shared that although the decisions that caused this situation were not hers, she was the one left to steer her new internal and external communities through it.

I had to adjust my approach, it did not matter that I had been a principal for several years prior to this assignment, it was not about me it was about the way the change had taken place. Even though I had great confidence in my ability to lead a school, if I am honest, the backlash from the community and especially the staff caused me to question myself as a leader. I had to remind myself in those difficult moments that I knew how to do this job. The progress we have been able to make as a school is amazing. The importance of and my ability to build relationships grew to another level through this growth producing opportunity.

Principal 3 reflected on her professional achievement from her personal lens, the school principal lens, and the student achievement lens. She shared that her personal, professional goals are always aligned with her school improvement goals, which are determined by student learning and achievement goals. “Although the goals are aligned in purpose, the level of achievement determined or felt can be vastly different depending on the lens I am viewing it through.” She expounded on seeing student growth even if goal attainment has not been realized; from the lens of student learning, there is a sense of achievement and the belief that the goal is within reach, but at the same time, through the lens of the school principal and the school improvement goals desired level of achievement has not been realized. “I can feel over the moon with the growth the nuts and bolts numbers show in student achievement, but still feel that same level of achievement is not enough when compared to the school improvement goals.” This principal talked about the opportunity she had to have a powerful conversation with a staff member who she thought may have had some mental health challenges. She shared that one of the aspects of her job that can still, at times, cause a physiological response is having to have those difficult conversations with stakeholders; as such, regardless of the topic of conversation, the principal had to address the situation.

...it was a very tricky situation to try and hold the staff member accountable for the responsibilities of her job, while at the same time being supportive of her illness. I successfully negotiated the situation through collaboration with district-level personnel in human resources and health services.

The principal described how she grew through that experience in her understanding of and acceptance that, as a principal, she does not have to address those exceedingly

difficult situations on her own. She explained that since that time, when she is faced with difficult situations, the successful resolution of that past situation gives her confidence, and she determines what collaborative supports she can activate, and she does not try to solve every situation in isolation.

Principal 4 discussed her structure to ensure the professional goals she sets for herself are accomplished. She discussed the close connection between her identified areas of growth at her school and her professional goals as a principal.

I look at my school-wide data to determine our areas of strength and areas of continued growth. Once those areas are identified and support with multiple sources of data, I work with my leadership team to identify a school-wide or grade-level goal in that area then I determine my instructional leadership goal that aligns with that area of focus. The way I look at it, if it is a goal that my school is working toward, there is something that I should be doing to support our work in that area, and I set my goal accordingly.

Principal 4 explained that she organizes her professional goals by creating action steps for herself, short term and long term. She does this to ensure she is intentional as it relates to what she needs to do to support her school's growth in the identified areas of need. "I set manageable, meaningful action steps to hold myself accountable to the school-wide goal, and I am usually successful with achieving those goals." She also reflected on being the principal during some redistricting within the school division and how, as the principal of the receiving school the school parents did not want to move to, she had to build some bridges to reconcile strained relationships once the redistricting took place.

It started out as the tale of two schools. The community that had joined our school family was used to a certain way of engaging with the school, and our school was and had been run differently. I had several meetings with the parents joining our school to negotiate how to make the transition less painful and how we could work together to do what was in the best interest of the children. Although some of the things we had to do just to calm the situation were so far out of my comfort zone, better judgment and had little to do with educating children. I realized it had to be done just to settle the environment and get our focus back on children; I would have to lay down my pride and hear what those new to my school wanted. Our school, internal school community, would have to work with both communities in many ways separately until we could rebuild or merge our purpose the following year.

Principal 4 reflected on how it actually took the entire school year for things to settle down and for the communities to start to come together, and although it was an extremely difficult year for her and her staff, they experienced tremendous growth in their ability to engage their community and that the school continued to thrive in the area of community engagement for several years following that experience.

Principal 5 spoke in general terms about the challenge of engaging with parents who are, for one reason or another, enraged about a situation with their child. She described herself as nonconfrontational, and so when faced with a situation where level heads are not prevailing, it is an extremely difficult place for her to be. She explained that as she grows in her experience with these situations, they are becoming less of a

challenge and just uncomfortable. “Experience with these situations have served to settle my nerves, so they are less challenging, but still uncomfortable.”

Principal 6 described her level of professional achievement of the goals she sets for herself as exemplary. She viewed her goal achievement through the lens of personal achievement as it relates to her career. “I would say I have reached every one of the career goals I have wanted to achieve over my career.” When her lens changed to look at her career as a principal and goal achievement from year to year, she explained that her level of achievement depended on the year she reflected upon.

When I look at the goals I set for myself and my school from year to year; I would change the word from exemplary to proficient. Every year we experience progress, and I see progress and growth for my students and my school, but we have not arrived at a place that would make me comfortable saying we have arrived.

Principal 6 explained that she sees progress and achievement as fluid in a school.

There are so many moving parts within a school, and while you can be experiencing progress in one area, there is another area that there is not progress, so I do not think you can ever say we have made it or arrived. There will always be an area where more growth can be experienced, but I am confident that I am the right person leading my school in the direction of great.

She discussed a time in her career when she had to lead a full school structural change from traditional class scheduling to block scheduling. She shared the reason this experience with a difficult situation stands out in her mind is that it was her very first year as a building principal. She talked about the challenge in school culture when there

is an anticipated change on the horizon and it being the role of the principal to get their people on board.

Because I was new and working with them as a collective body was new, we really walked through the change process together. We studied, learned, and prepared for this change together. As a result, my staff did not feel like this change to block scheduling was happening to them; they felt they were part of crafting what the change would look like for our school. I learned that year that as the school principal, I cannot stand apart from my staff, that we walk through things together.

Each of the principals described their professional achievement in terms of the goals they set for their school and for themselves. They each had a perception of confidence in the achievement thus far, and some expressed certainty as they lead their school forward. Bandura (1997) identified master experience as being the primary source of self-efficacy. As these principals reflected on the expertise they have gained through those mastery experiences, it was evident that though each of them viewed their career challenges as opportunities for professional growth, which resulted in increasing their sense of self-efficacy.

**Theme 2: Feedback/validation.** Each of the principal participants recognized the role feedback has in their sense of self-efficacy. Although they perceived the sources of feedback coming from different stakeholders, they all agreed that feedback is essential. Four of the principals shared how vicarious experiences provide a sense of confirmation or endorsement of one another's thinking, structures, and processes. Like other specialists who work in individual schools, the principal operates as a singleton within their school



building. Although there are assistant principals in most schools, that person is often newer to the role of principal, and the job to assist the principal is in many ways different from that of the principal.

Principal 1 discussed that in her role as the school principal, she does not feel that she has consistently received the level of growth-producing feedback necessary to improve her principal practice. Having been a principal for several years with the same school district, she reflected on different supervisors and differing levels of feedback she had received and how it did or did not move her capacity as school principal forward.

I have learned the importance of growth-producing feedback and how purposeful feedback can move teacher practice forward. As I reflect on the feedback that I receive, depending on who my supervisor was, I have not always received the level of feedback that I strive to provide my teachers.

She discussed the difference between providing feedback to teachers who principals have ongoing opportunities to observe and interact with versus a principal supervisor who rarely sees the principal in their principal leadership environment. However, expounded with the significant influence a principal can have on teacher capacity and student achievement, it is important that principals receive quality feedback too. She discussed how the daily operations of a school and the responsibilities of the principal is a job that is carried out without oversight or direction. She shared how the principal is employing their best judgment or negotiating situations based on experience, school mission, and what is in the best interest of children. There are not those opportunities for collaboration between people who do the same work on a daily basis.

I maintain relationships with current principals and even some principals who have retired, and I am constantly bouncing ideas off them. We [principals] need that type of support. It does give me a boost or a level of confidence in addressing my circumstance when I speak with another principal, and they have had a comparable situation and resolved it in a similar fashion or when I am contemplating how to address something and that principal's advice is in line with my thinking.

Principal 2 shared that she did not think that principals receive commendation feedback; usually, it is just recommendation feedback after an issue has reached the attention of district leadership. She described this as a cloudy lens through which principals are viewed.

As a principal, I do not believe I have received much feedback except when it is in reaction to an issue that has taken place. As principals, we work through situations and issues daily; some of those situations are resolved without issue, other situations require another level of support or intervention, and those are the situations we usually receive feedback on because someone from the district office is involved.

She went on to explain that solicited feedback about a particular situation or circumstance is usually provided and, in those situations, can be helpful; however, those are usually the “accolades or the feedback that lets us know what we are doing right and when a situation has been managed well, principals do not usually get that type of feedback.”

Principal 3 discussed the importance even as a principal of feeling safe and comfortable with your supervisor. She shared the difference between ongoing growth-

producing feedback and “gotcha” feedback, and even though, as principals, we may receive both types of feedback, the gotcha feedback doesn’t feel good. It does not lead to principal growth, just discomfort, and a strained relationship with the supervisor.

When the conversation with my supervisor has been established as a collaborative conversation where questions are posed and answered, and discussion is stemming from the responses to the questions, which is a situation where feedback can be a positive experience that results in principal growth. On the other hand, when the supervisor has all the answers, even when they are not fully aware of the whole situation or circumstance, that sets up a conversation built on defensiveness. There will be no growth-producing feedback coming from that interaction.

Principal 3 shared that she has received both types of feedback, and there is no benefit to anyone when it is the ladder. She talked about those vicarious opportunities from the lens of principals with whom she had the chance to work with prior to becoming a principal herself. She felt that her observations of those principals over her career had had more of an impact on the principal she is today.

... several leaders in my career before becoming a principal myself have shaped who I am as a principal more than any other experience or my coursework. In my work on a daily basis, I reflect on those learning opportunities to help me navigate certain situations. Sometimes, I may even call those leaders and ask for their advice.

Principal 4 described feedback as essential. She discussed that when principals receive feedback, it sets them up to become better principals. She described the pitfalls

that principals could get caught in, but with a supervisor whose intent is to help you grow, they can make the difference between a principal growing and staying in their career or feeling disenfranchised and leaving it.

I see the principal supervisor's role as one who does not just meet with you during your summative at the end of the school year to complete a form, but one who comes to spend time with you in your building, seeing you in your principal element and being able to provide meaning feedback from those real experiences. There are so many things principals can get wrong, especially new principals. Still, if the supervisor is not keeping a close eye on their practice, there is minimal opportunity for feedback for that principal. In my experience, I had so many supervisors who only provided me meaningful feedback when there was a problem or only show up on the summative evaluation day. If that is the extent of the interaction, the supervisor cannot provide the principal with feedback that produces growth and longevity.

She explained that because feedback is essential to anyone's growth, a principal should seek feedback for themselves. Principals have to be reflective about their practice, and if there is something a principal wants feedback on, they should reach out to their supervisor to discuss the situation. She also shared that feedback does not have to come from the supervisor. "Principals have to learn to hear the feedback they receive from all their stakeholders, their students, their teachers, and their community. Those are the people principals interact with regularly, so what they think about the work a principal is doing speaks volumes." She shared the importance of having those principal colleagues to call on when faced with circumstances that either you have never dealt with before or

just to help with thinking through the action steps. Having worked with several principals over her career, she discussed the importance of maintaining those relationships and knowing the strength of your colleagues. Hence, you know who can help with situations that arise.

I know my colleagues, and I am aware of who has strengths areas of practice, so I know who to talk to depending on the situation. When I am dealing with an issue, I will usually think through my action steps, and if there is an aspect of the situation that makes me uncomfortable or unsure, I might reach out to a colleague and share with them the specifics of the problem and what my thoughts are—I will then ask, can you think of anything I have not considered or that you would do differently? This question will usually yield an earnest conversation that is always invaluable, not only in the current situation but in my capacity to address future circumstances.

Principal 5 described the process he has in place to receive feedback from his staff and parent community. He explained that he intentionally receives the feedback that he knows he needs to be a better principal. He explained the importance of seeing the perspectives of others, even when you may disagree, but if that is their perspective, you have to look at yourself to determine the part you play in that perspective.

Feedback is essential for a principal's growth and development, and principals must set up structures to receive feedback. Feedback has made me work harder in the areas that I have perceived through staff, and community surveys are areas of continued growth for me. Even when I did not necessarily agree with the

feedback, I looked at myself to determine why my actions might be perceived in that way.

He also addressed the importance of principal collaboration and how the monthly principal meetings are a time that she looks forward to because of the opportunity to talk practice with colleagues. “As a school district, we share the same mission; however, when we have a chance to come together to talk about how each of us carries that mission out in our individual buildings is a learning opportunity that I welcome.” He explained that in those meetings is where he feels he is on the right track and doing exactly what he should be doing, that his thinking and actions are in line with how other principals are managing the expectations. “When I am at a principals’ meeting, and I hear that my colleagues are having similar struggles or that they also had uncertainty about a process or an expectation too, it renews my confidence in myself and what I am doing at my school.”

Principal 6 explained that feedback, both positive and critical are valuable in a principal’s development in that it allows the principal to broaden their lens beyond the way they look at and perceive things. She also described the annual summative as a “forced opportunity” for feedback and less effective than feedback that is ongoing and continuous.

I have been in situations where there was an issue at my school and in my community that required time and energy to resolve. Although my supervisor was aware of the situation and on some occasions even assisted with resolving the situation, the feedback to me didn’t happen at that time, but at my summative at the end of the year. As an evaluator myself, I understand the need to document

situations, but that does not mean that the feedback should be delayed. When feedback is given like that, it is not a positive experience; it does not feel like it is coming from a place of support.

She went on to expound on the importance of feedback and how some feedback has made her feel empowered to do this job another day. “I have received feedback that although I may not have felt good about a particular situation, the feedback I received made me feel empowered like I was moving my school in the right direction.” She discussed that every principal needs that opportunity for continuous ongoing feedback because “sometimes it may be just what that principal needs to stay in the fight.”

According to Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2007), “capturing a principals’ sense of efficacy is difficult. They determined that “principals’ efficacy beliefs are influenced by their level of effort and persistence they put forth in their daily work” (p. 582). For the purpose of this case study, I assigned a level of efficacy to each principal participants’ sense of self-efficacy based on their responses to the interview questions. There will be three responses to identify the principals’ sense of self-efficacy based on the responses they provided. Principals’ sense of self-efficacy was labeled as high, moderate, or low, as outlined in Table 5.

Table 5

*Principal Sense of Self-Efficacy*

Principal Participant	Sense of Self-Efficacy
P-1	High
P-2	Moderate
P-3	High
P-4	High
P-5	Moderate
P-6	High

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness of a study refers to the trust or confidence there is in the data gathered and the methods used to ensure the quality of the study (Miles et al., 2016). The trustworthiness of this case study was established by analyzing the study's credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

To ensure the credibility of this case study, I triangulated the data obtained from the structured and semistructured interview protocols from face-to-face, audio-recorded interviews, with member-checked transcriptions. After conducting each interview, audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed, and transcriptions were sent to the participants to validate the accuracy of the transcription. All the principals responded to the request for corrections and clarification of my interpretations of their responses. They all responded within one week, but none of them offered clarification or modification of transcription.

To establish the dependability of my case study, I used strategies to increase my accountability through the data collection process. I used participant transcripts and researcher journal through the data collection process in which I used no identifiable information about the participants. During the initial planning process, each of the interview sessions were to be held in the school of each principal participant, but due to extended school closures during the COVID-19 global pandemic, four of the six interviews were not conducted in the principal's schools. Still, by a virtual video format, after each interview, the interview transcripts were sent to each participant to check for accuracy.



Transferability is defined as the degree to which the results of a study can be generalized to other settings outside of the context the research was conducted.

Transferability was attempted through the use of purposeful sampling within a school district that is comparable to suburban school districts within the same region, as well as the use of a structured interview protocol that provided continuity to the scope of the interview. However, due to the small number of participants, transferability has been recognized as a possible limitation.

Confirmability within qualitative research is the assurance that the findings of the research are the representation of the participants' lived experiences and not the researcher's biases. The focus of my study was not to just understand the shared experiences of the principals or to lessen their lived experiences into broad generalizations, but to identify any patterns in structures or systems that may exist in their practice. Creswell and Poth (2018) determined that using an audit trail is a validation strategy researchers can use to document their thinking process throughout data collection. By employing In vivo and pattern coding, I captured each principal participants' narrative of their own experience. Confirmability was established through the use of an audit trail by keeping reflective journal notes to document each step of the research and data collection process, in addition to providing explicit detail of the research methods and procedures in Chapter 3 of this study.

### **Summary**

The problem studied was school principals' abilities to balance their time as the school's organizational manager while giving primary attention to being the instructional leader. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the processes established by

school principals to balance the expectation of managing their buildings while being instructional leaders and what influences their sense of self-efficacy had on their ability to develop and adhere to those processes and structures.

The following themes emerged as the answer to the questions that guided this case study:

Research Question 1- What are the structures and daily routines principals employ to balance the managerial responsibilities as opposed to the instructional leadership responsibilities? Two themes emerged, collective efficacy/ shared responsibility and scheduling of priorities and time allocation. The themes that were revealed for research question 2- What self-organization structures and processes do principals put in place to maintain their primary focus on instructional leadership were collaboration and shared leadership as well as professional learning. One theme, organizational procedures, surfaced for research question 3- What self-organization strategies do principals employ to address the managerial responsibilities of the principalship. Research question 4- What role does a principal's sense of self-efficacy play in their ability to create those processes and structures? This question yielded several themes, self-certainty, expertise, feedback, and validation. In Chapter 5, I will review the interpretations of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications for social change, and the conclusion of the study.

## Chapter 5: Discussions, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Previous researchers identified the correlation between teacher capacity and increased student achievement. More recent research has delved into the positive influence school principals who prioritize instructional leadership can have on increased teacher capacity and, as a result, growth in student achievement (Heffernan, 2018). While there is an abundance of research investigating the importance and the influence of instructional leadership, there is very little research that examines how principals maintain the balance necessary to place primary focus on being the instructional leaders in their schools. I used a qualitative case study to identify the processes established by school principals to balance and manage their time to meet the expectation of managing their school buildings while placing primary focus on their role as instructional leaders of their schools. I also considered how a principals' sense of self-efficacy influenced their ability to establish and maintain those structures. I collected data using in-person and virtual in-person participant interviews with the use of two interview protocols. The four research questions that informed this study and the themes that emerged from those questions are as follows:

Research Question 1 looked at the structures, and daily routines principals employ to balance the managerial responsibilities as opposed to the instructional leadership responsibilities.

Themes included creating a *shared vision*, and principals balance the expectations of their role as both organizational manager and instructional leader. *Determining priorities* inform the structures the principals employ to balance the expectations of their dichotomous roles.

The goal of research question 2 was to identify self-organization structures and processes principals put in place to maintain their primary focus on instructional leadership.

Theme 1: Through shared leadership structures, the principal establishes beliefs and systems of trust to ensure that all instructional staff teacher leaders, instructional coaches, and administrative teams share in the role of instructional leadership.

Theme 2: Maintaining opportunities for *personal, school-wide or needs based professional learning* is a process principal employ to maintain their focus on instructional learning within their schools.

The goal of research questions 3 was to pinpoint the self-organization strategies principals employ to address the managerial (non-instructional) responsibilities of the principalship.

Theme 1: Establishment of *organizational procedures* are designed and implemented because of the principals' analysis of the needs and dynamics of their school's internal and external communities.

The aim of research question 4 was to determine how a principal's sense of self-efficacy plays a role in their ability to create those processes and structures?

Theme 1: The principal's sense of *expertise* determines their ability to perform the responsibilities of their role as the school principal. The principals that have that self-certainty have gained it through many mastery experiences they have had and played a vital role in advancing their sense of self-efficacy as it relates to their job as the school principal.

Theme 2: Receiving positive and affirming feedback, which acts as *validation*, has had an influence on the principals' sense of self-efficacy, and although feedback may come from different stakeholders, the feedback was confirmed to be an essential source of a principal's sense of self-efficacy. Affirming feedback provides the validation necessary for confirmation or endorsement of the principals' thinking, structures, and processes.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The conceptual framework for this qualitative case study was Morrison's work on the complexity theory linked with Bandura's research on self-efficacy. Morrison (2002) informed my study's purpose by exploring how the leaders, the principals, within a complex organization have to continuously adapt their processes and structures to accommodate for emerging predictions, recent experiences, and new learning. The process through which complex organizations like schools establish order in their structures is through a bottom-up process called self-organization (Morrison, 2002). The theory of complexity also accounts for the school principal being the person within the organization responsible for putting those self-organization structures in place because self-organization is not a mandated process. Morrison (2002) called this *emergence*, which is another construct of the theory of complexity.

Bandura's identified self-efficacy as an important aspect of his social cognitive theory (1986). Bandura determined that an individual's experiences, the actions of others, and environmental factors have a significant influence on an individuals' belief in their capacity to influence change within their setting. Together, the key components of the

theory of complexity and the theory of self-efficacy inform the responsibilities placed on a school principal and the internal construct necessary to carry out those expectations.

### **Results for Research Question 1**

The two themes that emerged were shared vision/ shared responsibility and setting priorities. All the principals in the study spoke of the importance of maintaining a shared vision. A school vision that values equity and student achievement across all groups cannot be held by the principal alone; that vision must be the core belief of all within that organization; shared by everyone. Both Randles (2015) and Culatta (2019) held that the principal's ability to get their stakeholders on board with their vision is a critical component to keeping the organization moving in the direction of growth.

Although every school's vision is about student learning and achievement, to maintain that as the focus, all other school systems must be running efficiently. The principals in the study agreed that it requires everyone in the building to do the jobs they were hired to do in a way that supports the overall instructional focus. McBrayer et al. (2018) defined the principal's managerial role as the work necessary to maintain organizational stability. An organization that runs efficiently requires a manager who plans, organizes, directs, controls, and evaluates the effectiveness of the day-to-day operations. To maintain this structure, the principals in this study set the processes in place and relied on members of their staff to take leadership in areas where their competencies applied.

Each of the principals who participated in the study expounded on making student learning the focus of the school as part of everyone's job. They saw the importance of everyone doing their individual jobs to make it possible for staff members

involved with instruction to stay focused on instruction. Regardless of what your role in the building is, keeping student learning at the core of their purpose is the way everyone should see themselves as part of the team. Ensuring that there is a shared vision and putting structures in place that keep everyone invested in that vision was identified by every principal as a way they balance their managerial responsibilities.

According to Aeon and Aguinis (2017), decision making is a form of time management. It is by looking at how managers structure their time that their priorities are revealed. Kouali and Pashiardis (2015) saw a difference between time management and time allocation in that time allocation is an intentional choice to place emphasis on a specific activity based on the importance of that task. This aligns with my study's findings in that most of the principals in the study discussed the setting of priorities and scheduling of time to focus on those priorities as an aspect of how they balance their responsibilities. Two of the principals discussed the differences between instructional task and their managerial responsibilities, as instructional tasks were rarely a surprise; principals know which classes they need to visit, which professional learning opportunity needs to be planned, and which individual education plan meeting they must attend.

The instructional responsibilities are usually scheduled in advance. For this reason, two of the principals in this study discussed the importance of scheduling or blocking out time in the day for unplanned tasks, those that are more managerial. Hornig et al. (2010) found that principals spend much of their day given attention to administrative duties, which the researchers identified as compliance and reporting, managing the school schedule, student discipline, attendance, and supervising students. Based on the findings of my study, this holds true. Because the managerial task cannot

usually be scheduled, they are tasks that have to be addressed as they arise. According to the principals in my study, those tasks can and often do spend unplanned time addressing those issues. Hauseman (2017) identified a new managerial expectation of school principals, establishing and maintaining school-community relationships. In my study, I found this to be in line with the experiences of the principal participants. Several of them spoke to the community relations aspect of every responsibility they hold. "It is not enough to just do the job well; I have to make sure how the work is shared and communicated to our internal and external communities is also part of the management of the situation." All the principals in the study defined managerial responsibilities as things that deal with the organizational management of the building, such as transportation, food service, budgetary responsibilities, community outreach, personnel issues, and building safety.

The structure the principals employed to mitigate those daily responsibilities was to schedule times in the morning, prior to student arrival, and after school, after dismissal, as times when the managerial task would get their attention. They spoke of setting priorities in terms of setting a building-wide list of instructional priorities by scheduling them into the school calendar. Hallinger and Murphy (2012) and Pollack et al. (2015) affirmed that with the escalation of expectations being placed on principals, there is a disconnect between the rhetoric and reality as it relates to the importance of the principals' instructional role and the mounting expectations of their managerial position. The principals in this study balance that disconnect by placing the responsibility of making instruction a priority on everyone in the building. In one way or another, each principal shared the insight that what gets scheduled gets done. With that thinking in



mind, placing instructional priorities, such as school improvement, team meetings, professional learning community meetings, grade level planning meetings, faculty meetings, professional learning days, on the school-wide calendar at the very beginning of the school year, lets everyone know instruction is a priority.

The key component of the complexity theory that was revealed as the principals shared the structures and routines they employ to maintain balance of their managerial responsibilities was human interaction. This is the process of people relating to and interacting with each other and self-organization through emergence as well as the constant readjustments of a system-change that emerges from within. Each principal discussed how they work with the human resources within the building to develop, extend, adapt, reconstruct, and change the school's structures to maintain the organization's stability.

### **Results for Research Question 2**

Two themes emerged in response to Research Question 2: shared leadership and continued professional learning. Keith (1989) and Tucker (2016) stated that instructional leadership behaviors of the principal are at the core of professional learning structures within a school building. One of the discrete tasks that principals are charged to supervise, as outlined by Pollock et al. (2015), is providing professional development opportunities for their instructional staff. Liu and Hallinger (2018) determined that it is the principal's responsibility to maintain focus on continuous school improvement by placing deliberate attention on building their teachers' capacity through professional development. The study's findings confirm that the planning of professional learning for teachers is a self-organization structure the principals in the study put in place to focus on

instructional leadership. The planning of professional development is a self-organization process; it grows from the identified areas of need identified within a school instructional practice.

According to the Coalition of Essential Schools (2016), a part of the principal's responsibility in the school improvement process is that of gathering student achievement data, analyzing that data, identifying the strategies necessary to address the deficits revealed by the data, and implementing a plan to employ those learning strategies within the classrooms. The principals in the study spoke about the importance of and their role in identifying areas of continued growth and developing a plan to address those areas through instructional practice within the classroom. None of the principals identified these as tasks that they handle in isolation of their school team. In three of those situations, the principals addressed those learning needs through building-wide or individual professional development opportunities for their staff and the decisions about what that would be was a team effort, not something they did in isolation.

According to Keith (2000), one of the aspects that makes schools complex organizations is the intersection of both internal and external stakeholders who all have influence over what happens in schools. These stakeholders can be parents, community members, and state government policies, to district procedures or teachers within the building. This intersection of elements makes it essential that there be an exchange of thoughts, opinions, and information from all parties involved. This process of conversing corroborates the study's finding that collaboration is at the core of the complexity theory and structures principals maintain focus on their instructional leadership. As Stacey et al. (2000) pointed out, human relations lie at the heart of complex organizations like schools.

The principal participants outlined the components of the collaboration that they employ to maintain their primary focus on their instructional leadership structures, those were *trust*, *shared leadership*, and *shared ownership*, all of which come through establishing structures that allow the collaboration to take place on a continuous basis. Some of the structures the principals mentioned were professional learning communities, administrative teams, instructional coaching teams, vertical teams, school improvement teams, grade-level teams, and content teams. With these teams working in their buildings, the principals revealed that maintaining primary focus on instruction is a shared responsibility that makes the goal attainable.

### **Results for Research Question 3**

The theme that emerged related to Research Question 3 was organizational procedure. Organizational procedure is a broad term that defines the structures and processes that are put in place to ensure an organization runs smoothly. Although each principal in the study may have shared a different structure or myriad of processes they employ to address their managerial responsibilities, they all referred to a series of actions they have taken to ensure their organization run efficiently. This is confirmation of Farah's (2013) research on organizational management. He said that for any organization to run efficiently, it requires a manager who plans, organizes, directs, controls, and evaluates the effectiveness of the day-to-day operations. Although the school principal is the building manager, day-to-day operations are not their primary responsibility, so in order to make sure that aspect of their organization is operating at an optimal level, the principals in the study outlined structures that are a part of their daily routines that keep the operations running.

Keith (2002) found that complex adaptive systems are continuously adapting their processes and structures to accommodate for emerging predictions, recent experiences, and new learning. Principals in this study outlined structures and processes they have put in place usually in response to some aspect of their school's internal or external community. It was revealed that although all schools are in the same business, teaching children, the structures and processes employed for them run smoothly are not necessarily consistent. The principals shared the unique aspects of their school communities and how those individual characteristics required them to respond in similar and different ways from one school to the next.

Morrison (2002) identified dynamical interactions as a vital component of the complexity theory. The principals shared that the processes and structures that they employ developed out of necessity to address a problem or an area where processes were not working well. Watkins et al. (2017) stated that school principals have to have the ability to sense environmental cues, adapting to changing contexts, and thrive in uncertainty while adhering to their primary responsibility of creating a strategic plan for their schools that lead to academic success for all students.

#### **Results for Research Question 4**

There were two themes that emerged related to Research Question 4. They were self-certainty/ expertise, feedback/ validation. The first theme, self-certainty/ expertise, speaks to the principals' belief in their capacity to perform all the responsibilities and meet all the expectations outlined in their job description. Kelleher (2016) found that a school leaders' perceptions and thoughts about their roles and their ability to do the job successfully have a significant influence on their schools. Kelleher's research was

confirmed through my study as each of the principals described a level of certainty in their ability to lead their school buildings. Bandura (2012) defined self-efficacy as a “judgment of capability” (p. 29). When Bandura speaks of judgment, he is referring to personal or internal judgment. Van der Putten (2017) further defined Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy as the optimistic self-belief or lack thereof in one’s own competence to execute the behaviors necessary to successfully accomplish the job. In other words, a principal’s belief in their capacity to perform the job responsibilities of the principalship will influence their ability to do so.

The principals in the study spoke of experiences that they believed were handled well and resulted in both positive outcomes and affirming feedback. They also expounded on how the resolution of those situations influenced their belief in their competency to perform their responsibilities as principal. Each of their responses confirmed Bandura’s belief that mastery experiences are influential sources of self-efficacy.

One principal shared success in leading her school through the state accreditation process, another shared the process of moving from one school to another after a long time principal who was liked and well respected and the process of leading that school, another shared the process of working with a staff member who was dealing with some mental health concerns, and yet another shared leading through the process of school redistricting and the combining of two communities. The principals categorized these events as significant challenges in their careers. Their ability to lead through them successfully gave them a sense of expertise. Bandura (1997) posited that when people

successfully maneuvered through a stressful situation, they become convinced that they possess what it takes to preserve through all difficulties.

The second theme was feedback/validation. The principals in this study all agreed that feedback is an essential aspect of their growth and a contributing factor of their self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) characterized this component of self-efficacy as verbal persuasion, which is when significant others express faith in one's capabilities (p. 101). He believed verbal persuasion in isolation to be limited in its ability to fostering recognized efficacy, but he thought it could support self-change if the positive feedback is genuine. This validates the finding of this study as each of the principals discussed how receiving positive, affirming feedback or verbal persuasion was beneficial to the principal's belief in themselves and confidence in their ability to continue to face the job's challenges.

One principal described the role of feedback as vital to helping principals excel in all aspects of the job. The principals also discussed the reverse; in the absence of authentic feedback, there can be a decrease in the principal's analysis of their capacity. The principals discussed commendation feedback, recommendation feedback, and constructive feedback as all having a role in the growth of a principal, but in the absence of feedback from supervisors or division leadership, principals should seek to garner the feedback they need to increase their self-efficacy in the stakeholders with whom they work every day. Bandura (1997) found that self-affirming beliefs promote the development of skills and a sense of personal efficacy.

Much of the feedback the principals discussed was evaluative feedback from their supervisor and how schools' structure makes it difficult for authentic evaluative feedback

to be provided to principals because their supervisors are usually not involved in the daily workings of their building. Which can result in a validation deficit for those principals who do not seek those vicarious experiences that determined were necessary to maintain a sense of self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) decided that there are no absolute measures of adequacy, and therefore, people must appraise their capabilities in relation to the attainments of others; they measure themselves to people in similar positions or people engaged in analogous work.

The findings of my study confirmed this to be the case; four of the six principals shared experiences that they believed informed their personal sense of self-efficacy. Within the context of this study, the school principal works in isolation. In some situations, there is an assistant principal who works within the same building; however, the person who holds that position is subordinate to the principal. Just as Bandura (1997) found, the lens through which the people make those comparisons with others takes different forms. He found that when those comparisons are made, and there is the perspective of surpassing or outperforming others, self-efficacy is increased. Conversely, when the perspective is that one has been outperformed, the self-efficacy is lowered.

For the principals in the study, the lens through which they saw those vicarious experiences differed. One principal discussed the lack of daily oversight or authentic opportunity for people in the position of principal to collaborate because there is only one principal in a building. Another insight that was shared was looking on the lessons that can be learned through measuring experiences or processes with those of principals she has worked with and for in her past and making that comparison as a form of validation or confirmation of the necessary or correct actions. Another principal discussed how

imperative it is for principals to have colleagues they can call and confer with when faced with a similar circumstance that they have already maneuvered through. “When adequacy must be gauged largely in relation to the performance of others, social comparison operates as a primary factor in the self-appraisal of capabilities” (Bandura, 1997, p. 87). Another principal in the study explained how the monthly principal meetings are times she looks forward to because it is an opportunity to talk practice with colleagues who do the same job. It is where she receives the personal validation that she is or is not on the right track. When she realizes that her thinking or actions are in line with what her colleagues are doing or have done, “it renews my confidence in myself and what I am doing at my school.”

Bandura (1997) found that feedback can be expressed in ways that erode a sense of efficacy or improve it. Several of the principals spoke of the role of the summative evaluation, which usually happens at the conclusion of a school year. Many of them found this process to be fruitless in its effort to grow their practice if the supervisor offering the feedback has waited until the summative meeting to provide feedback. Bandura (determined that evaluative feedback given over a sustained period of time highlights a person’s capabilities raises their self-efficacy beliefs.

### **Limitations of the Study**

One limitation of the study is its small sample size. According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) and Boddy (2016), qualitative researchers gain in-depth knowledge of their participants working with a smaller sample of people within an identified context. The sample size for this study was six elementary and middle principals from one school district. The principal participants of this study were only able



to speak to their practices and structures within their local context and based on the mandates and resources therein. Principals who work within different school districts or regions of the country may have other structures, resources, or policies.

Another limitation of this study lies in its methodology. The collection of data for this study was through interview protocols where principal participants self-reported on their processes and structures. Having the opportunity to observe principals within their buildings would provide another layer of understanding and lens through which their structures and processes were constructed. These limitations could be addressed by expanding the study beyond its current context and including additional modes of data collection.

The third limitation of this study, which was unexpected, is that the research was conducted during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Most of the principal interviews took place after all schools within the state where the research took place were closed for the remainder of the school year. As such, four of the six interviews took place over a virtual format. If the research had been gathered outside the uncertainty of the global pandemic and principals having their focus on navigating how to continue student engagement and instruction in those uncertain times, the depth of their reflection and discussion might have been more focused and improved.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study contributes to the body of research on instructional leadership and principal practice. It was conducted to determine the process and structures principals employ to maintain the necessary balance between their role as operational manager and instructional leader of their schools and how their perceived level of self-efficacy was a

contributing factor in establishing and maintaining those structures. Due to its limited sample size within this study's defined context, it is recommended that this study be conducted using a larger sample size of principals across multiple contexts. This will broaden the lens and determine if the findings of this study are limited to the structures and processes that are generated due to the parameters of the school district where it took place and the training of principals within this district.

The second recommendation is to expand the study's methodology. In this study, data were gathered through the principal participants' self-reporting of their process and structures using a structured and semistructured interview protocol. It is recommended that this study be conducted again, adding a participant observation protocol. The addition of a participant observation would allow the researcher access to the context of the data and will enable them to view the principals' structures and processes through their interactions. Including this additional data, source would provide a more in-depth analysis of the principals' practice and structures.

A final recommendation would be a study that takes a closer look at how a principal's sense of efficacy impacts their ability to do certain aspects of their job. According to Versland and Erickson (2017), in this era of accountability and the mandate of school reform, all efforts to improve schools pin the responsibility of making that happen on the school principal to lead change at the school level. With this being the case, a principal's self-judgment of their ability to perform the responsibilities of the principalship plays a crucial role in their motivation and resilience to do it. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) determined "a principal may feel efficacious for leading in particular contexts, but this sense of efficacy may or may not transfer to other contexts,

depending on the perceived similarities of the task” (p. 574). An in-depth look at the tasks principals are responsible for and how their perceived efficacy can inform their ability to perform at optimal levels could add to the body of research on principal leadership.

### **Implications**

The findings of this study suggest there are implications for positive social change within the local context in that school principals could be better able to meet the growing expectations of their job and still maintain their primary role as instructional leaders. According to Heffernen (2018), a principal functioning as an instructional leader has a significant effect on school performance and sustained student growth and achievement. With the role of the school principal being proven vital to student growth and achievement, it is imperative that while the responsibilities of the principal continue to expand that the school district leaders provide opportunities for professional learning for novice principals to learn strategies that focus on how to establish structures and processes to maintain the necessary balance. Onorato (2013) determined that effective school principals need to achieve a systematic harmony between instructional leadership and school management task. According to the Wallace Foundation (2013), when this balance cannot be established, principals leave the profession within 5 years. They also found there to be a connection between high principal turnover and lower student performance. This study presents the structures and processes proven to help principals balance their role as instructional leaders and operational managers.

Secondly, a principal’s perceived sense of self-efficacy has an undeniable influence on their ability to establish a shared vision, schedule priorities, collaborate and

manage a system of shared leadership, plan professional learning opportunities, and enact organizational structures to keep their schools running efficiently. This study provides principals, principal supervisors, and district leaders a better understanding of the connection between principals' sense and self-efficacy and their capacity to be high performing principals who positively impact student learning and growth.

Establishing genuine opportunities for principals to grow and experience positive interactions in the areas of expertise, feedback, and validation would accelerate their principals' self-certainty and, according to Bandura (1997), "promote competence which in turn will exert greater instructional influence" (p. 101) on the organization as a whole. Developing a system of continuous authentic feedback for school leaders through supervisors or a principal mentorship program would benefit the primary goal of student learning.

### **Conclusion**

Principals have an essential role in assuring that students who are entrusted to them are learning and achieving consistently. Research has shown that principals are second only to teachers in their impact on student learning. The research is replete with the tenets and expectations of an instructional leader and what principals must do to occupy that role within their schools; there is limited research that explores how principals effectively maintain their instructional lens while acting as their school's operational manager. This qualitative case study examined the processes and structures established by school principals to balance and manage their time to meet the expectations of managing their buildings while maintaining primary focus on being the instructional leader and what influence their sense of self-efficacy had on their ability to

do so. The framework of this study focused on the theory of complexity, coupled with Bandura's theory of self-efficacy. According to Keith (2002), complex adaptive systems continuously adapt their processes and structures to accommodate emerging predictions, recent experiences, and new learning. This defines the essence of a school; a collection of interacting parts that together function as a whole. It is the job of the school principal to navigate all of those interacting parts to create an organization that meets the primary purpose of student learning while also maintaining operational efficiency. For principals to hold this critical role, they must possess a personal belief in themselves to execute the responsibilities of the job.

To manage the dichotomy of their roles, principals employ several routines, processes, and structures that all grow out of their ability to access the human resources within their schools and establishing systems that require their stakeholders to exchange thoughts, opinions, and information that is aimed at addressing the needs of the school. According to Stacey et al. (2000), human relations lie at the heart of the complexity theory for organizations like schools. The principals in this study did not work alone; they employed all their internal and external stakeholders' skills and talents to address the needs of the school. The themes that emerged were centered on the interactions of the collective group and not the work of one. The intersection of people within a school community is uniquely qualified to do the work related to student learning. Still, it is the principal's job to identify those areas of knowledge and access it to meet the school and community's needs.

This study revealed that at the heart of the principal's ability to place primary focus on their role as instructional leaders, they have to establish structures that ensure

they are not the only instructional leader within their school. To manage the school's operational responsibilities, the principal has to develop processes that ensure they are not the only managers within their schools.

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## Appendix A: Self- Efficacy Interview Questions

### Self- Efficacy Principal Interview Protocol

*These questions were used with principal participants during the structured interviews to address the research questions.*

#### Research Questions:

1. What are the structures and daily routines principals employ to balance the managerial responsibilities as opposed to the instructional leadership responsibilities?
2. What self- organization structures and processes do principals put in place to maintain their primary focus on instructional leadership?
3. What self-organization strategies do principals employ to address the managerial (non-instructional) responsibilities of the principalship?
4. What role does a principal's sense of self-efficacy play in their ability to create those processes and structures?

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Principal Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

*Self-efficacy is the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations (Bandura, 1997, p. 10).*

#### Interview Questions

- 1- Describe your level of achievement in most professional goals you set for yourself?
- 2- When you are faced with a difficult circumstance, how do you address it?

- 3- Describe your level of confidence in your ability to perform effectively on multi-faceted responsibilities you have as school principal.
- 4- Describe a time in your career as a principal when you were faced with a significant challenge or barrier that you successfully resolved and how did that experience shape your growth as a principal?
- 5- Describe a time in your career when you were faced with a significant challenge or barrier that did not meet with a successful resolution and how did you move beyond that experience?
- 6- Share the aspects of your job that cause you to have a physiological response (knots in your stomach, sweaty palms, headaches, etc.) and why do you think it happens?
- 7- How have your observations of or interactions with other principals shaped your thinking and how you address challenges with which you are faced?
- 8- In your role as school principal, what influence has feedback had on your thoughts and feelings of about your effectiveness/capacity?
  - What were the different types of feedback you received and did certain types of feedback result in different feelings?
  - Has feedback led you to work harder or has it led you to doubt your effectiveness as a principal?

## Appendix B: Balancing the Responsibilities of the Principals Interview Queries

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Principal Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

**Part A: Background Information**

1. How many years have you served as a school principal?
2. Describe how the job has changed in your years as a principal.
3. Have you had to adjust your thinking about what is required to be an effective principal since you entered the profession? If so, how would you describe those adjustments?

**Part B: Broader Interview Queries**

4. How do **you** define your role as the organizational manager of your school?
5. On average, what percentage of your day do you spend giving attention to the tasks that **you** consider more managerial?
6. What organizational structures and processes do you employ to stay abreast and up to date with the managerial aspects of your job (as described in responses to question #4)?
7. How do **you** define your role as the instructional leader of your school?
8. On average, what percentage of your day would you say you spend giving attention to the task that **you** consider instructional?
9. What organizational structures and processes do you employ to maintain a primary focus on your role as an instructional leader (use interviewee's responses from question #7)?

10. Recent trends in educational research suggest that school principals' primary role must be as the instructional leader for them to positively impact student achievement; What are your thoughts on the need to balance one aspect of your responsibility as principal over the other?
11. Describe any structures and processes you have in place to maintain the necessary balance.
12. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your role as your school's instructional leader and organizational leader that my questions did not allow you to share?