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Danish 0–9 School Leader Perceptions of School Leadership During the COVID-19 Pandemic Shift to Online Learning as Guided by the Seven Fields of School Leadership

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Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Daniel Martin Palomares

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

Danish 0–9 School Leader Perceptions of School Leadership During the COVID-19
Pandemic Shift to Online Learning as Guided by the Seven Fields of School Leadership

by

Daniel Martin Palomares

MEd, National University, 2000

BA, National University, 1996

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Walden University

May 2024

Abstract

The problem addressed in this study was the gap in the literature pertaining to Danish 0–9 school leader perceptions, experiences, and efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions during the 2020–2021 shift to online learning, guided by the Danish Ministry of Children and Education’s seven fields of school leadership. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore Danish 0–9 school leader perceptions and experiences of the role of school leadership during the shift from face-to-face to online learning during the 2020–2021 COVID-19 pandemic as guided by the seven fields of school leadership. Edmondson’s psychological safety theory offered a framework for this study. Twelve Danish 0–9 school leaders participated in semi-structured interviews, including three top leaders, three principals, three vice principals, and three teachers who managed collaboration or cooperation of teacher groups during the school lockdowns. Results of inductive coding indicated the lack of a guiding model to support leaders during the crisis, and the value of interpersonal interaction in support of well-being and productive outcomes. Recommendations emphasize leadership engagement on teaching and collaboration. Findings may guide Danish 0–9 school leadership support during periods of institutional change and may endorse an alignment of school leadership competencies.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In the Danish educational system, the compulsory basic education for children spans 10 years, ranging roughly from ages 5 to 15 years old. This is known as *grundskole* [ground school]. In this study, these schools are referred to as Danish 0–9 schools and were the organizational study site in this study. This study addressed the topic of Danish 0–9 school leaders' leadership perspectives and experiences during the COVID-19 shift to online learning, with areas of inquiry guided by the seven fields of school leadership as articulated by Danish Ministry of Children and Education (UVM, 2015, 2024). In this study, the viability of the Danish seven fields of school leadership was pertinent based on the fact that there is no required standard coursework preparation or licensure for 0–9 school leaders in Denmark. Because this is so, the seven fields of leadership serve as areas of inquiry into the profession.

During the COVID-19 crisis, Danish schools were tasked with stabilizing the educational experience of 0–9 school-age children to support uninterrupted and persistent student learning (Danish Evaluation Institute [EVA], 2021a). The 0–9 school leaders had to convey new teaching expectations while helping teaching teams cope with and adapt practice to an online format (EVA, 2021a; Nabe-Nielsen et al., 2021). Danish 0–9 school leaders worked to mitigate adverse impacts on constituent well-being and minimize academic setbacks under evolving conditions (EVA, 2021a; Nabe-Nielsen et al., 2021).

The conception of a Danish 0–9 online instructional experience had never been realized on a wide scale in Denmark prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to the potential deployment of any type of online instruction in lieu of face-to-face instruction

to be a novel experience (EVA, 2021a; Qvortrup et al, 2020). The immediacy of this enterprise, to move all Danish 0–9 school instruction into an online learning space, highlighted a time of uncertainty and reconfiguration of the 0–9 educational experience, while exposing school leaders and school constituents to new, potentially stressful circumstances and unique challenges (Clausen & Moll, 2021, EVA, 2021a; Nabe-Nielsen et al., 2021).

The current study needed to be conducted because it had the potential to enrich a sparse scholarly record regarding Danish 0–9 school leadership during the COVID-19 lockdowns, as well as to advance broad management and best practice discussions regarding Danish 0–9 school leadership. The seven fields of school leadership as presented by the UVM are: leadership of learning environments; leadership of strategy and change processes; leadership of knowledge and results-based development of the school’s teaching; leadership of capacity and competence development; leadership of subject and interdisciplinary work; leadership of well-being, motivation, and commitment; and, leadership of the open school (UVM, 2015, 2024). These fields specify recommended areas of competency designed for Danish 0–9 school leadership and management. The seven fields of school leadership (UVM, 2023) provided a base of inquiry areas through which to explore Danish 0–9 school leaders’ work during the unforeseeable 2020–2022 COVID-19 school lockdowns. This was an under researched topic considering the scale of the educational disruption in the Danish 0–9 school leadership context.

There are positive social change implications inherent in this study, which may be realized by its examination of Danish 0–9 school leadership perceptions and experiences related to the extraordinary and unfamiliar shift from a face-to-face to an online instructional strategy during the COVID-19 lockdowns. There was a gap in the scholarly record of qualitative research and data that studied the thoughts and experiences of 0-9 school leaders on the topic, making it difficult to identify and discuss their perceptions and learned experiences. Social change happens when groups of people begin to identify with one another and begin to see things in the same way (May, 2011). Leaders in the field of education can use convergent insight to fuel social change (Claudet, 2010), further discussion regarding periods of institutional change, and endorse an alignment of school leadership competencies.

The areas of inquiry into the Danish 0–9 school leader job were guided by the seven fields of school leadership, which were articulated by UVM (2015, 2023). The seven fields outline relevant professional competency areas that could be explored within the context of the unanticipated challenges that were presented when standard practice became untenable or challenged, and when work goals and social conditions were compromised within schools' various constituent groups due to COVID-19. This study may positively impact social change by highlighting and enriching discussion on key professional leadership understandings related to Danish 0–9 educational leadership best practice by developing deeper discussions about how work groups relate to and cooperate with Danish 0–9 school leaders to improve achievement of school goals and adaptability while under adverse conditions. Chapter 1 includes the background of the topic, problem

statement, purpose of the study, research questions, conceptual framework for the study, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, significance, and a summary.

Background

The conditions brought on by the shift from standard face-to-face instruction, to a hastily conceived online model during the COVID-19 pandemic, charged Danish 0–9 school leaders with the responsibility to ensure that teaching staff swiftly moved their instructional practice to an online environment and learned to operate within the new working conditions (EVA, 2021a; Milner et al., 2021). In Denmark, the push from the Ministry of Education was to follow the officially mandated COVID-19 regulations, to be flexible, and to keep instruction going (EVA, 2021a). Prior to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, in 2015 a booklet was published by the UVM, via EVA, a publishing extension of the ministry. The booklet outlined seven major themes of Danish 0–9 school leadership and was produced to help Danish 0–9 school leaders and municipal administrators respond to new educational reforms rolled out in late 2014. The booklet was composed in cooperation with a consortium of Danish universities, associations, and research institutes, which formed the National Dialogue Forum for School Leadership. The seven fields of school leadership were published in 2015 and are still articulated on the official UVM website (2024):

- leadership of learning environments
- leadership of strategy and change processes

- leadership of knowledge and results-based development of the school's teaching
- leadership of capacity and competence development
- leadership of subject and interdisciplinary work
- leadership of well-being, motivation, and commitment
- leadership of the open school

Because the seven fields of school leadership were developed for the Danish 0–9 school leadership context, they define relevant central competency areas for local 0–9 school leaders and are supported and articulated by the UVM to the present. The UVM's seven fields of school leadership were applicable as areas of inquiry and exploration into the role of the Danish 0–9 school leader in normal times, but also during times of crisis. In this way, they served as important foundations for the research questions in the current study. The seven fields of leadership are explored in more detail in Chapter 2.

Relevant to the background of this study was the process related to how a person professionally or academically qualifies as a school leader of a Danish 0–9 school because the absence of consistency on this topic shaped this study, prompting me to identify and use a form of leadership criteria to guide the inquiry. The seven fields of school leadership as presented by the UVM were used in this study for this purpose. At the time of the study, there was not a consensus as to whether a Danish 0–9 school leader must or should hold a master's degree or a diploma in leadership, or whether no training in leadership is necessary (Bøje & Frederiksen, 2021). However, Bjørnholt et al. (2019) reported that 86% of Danish 0–9 school leaders had completed or were currently engaged

in the completion of a master's degree or a diploma program in leadership. The most common professional route to attain a Danish 0–9 school leader position is when teachers progressively advance into the job role, which can be viewed as a “departure from one's previous professional identity as a teacher” (Bøje & Frederiksen, 2021, p. 291). Given this grassroots approach to Danish 0–9 school leadership professional development and progressive attainment of leadership roles and responsibilities, the preparation levels, backgrounds, and perceptions of working Danish 0–9 school leaders can be varied.

There have been reports and publications that supported one or more of the fundamental thrusts of the UVM's seven fields of school leadership (Danish Board for Education and Quality [EMU], 2020a; Kommunernes Landsforening. [The national association of municipalities] (KL), 2017; Qvortrup, 2019). However, there have been other current Danish academics who reported on the topic of Danish 0–9 school leadership with other considerations in mind. Major themes in recent research and discussion about Danish 0–9 school leadership addressed issues such as the opposing expectations of governmental and municipal interests against the expectations of staff or students (Bøje & Frederiksen, 2021) and deficits of time to invest in pedagogical leadership and staff development (Aisinger, 2021; Bøje et al., 2018). Some academics reported criticism of modern trends in 0–9 Danish education, which allegedly place more importance on school leaders to achieve high domestic and international rankings, generate data-friendly academic results, and encourage more bureaucratic top-down approaches (Laursen, 2020; Moos, 2015, Pedersen, 2014) over more democratic forms of leadership that emphasize dialogue between leadership and staff, staff and personal

development, and collaboration in educational management (Laursen, 2020; Moos, 2015; Wiedemann, 2021b). To understand the modern context of the Danish 0–9 school leader role, a brief history covering this topic over the last four and a half decades is presented in Chapter 2. Managerial trends and political movements that have impacted structures of responsibility and power in Danish 0–9 schools in recent times are explored in more detail there.

Research on Danish 0–9 school leadership during the COVID-19 crisis suggested that Danish 0–9 school leaders experienced a new set of challenges. General management of the school included executing state-driven COVID-19 policy regulations (Milner, 2021), while Danish 0–9 leaders were responsible for supporting constituents to mitigate psycho-social impacts on students (Egmont, 2020; EVA, 2021a; Wistoft et al., 2021) and teachers (EVA, 2021a; Nabe Nielsen et al., 2020), as well as addressing concerns about possible degraded academic outcomes (EVA, 2021a; Reimer et al., 2021; Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet [Ministry of Education and Research] [UFM], 2021). The job of being a Danish 0–9 school leader became challenging in new ways that impacted the management of schools during the shift from face-to-face to online instruction during the COVID-19 crisis (EVA, 2021a; Vaaben et al., 2021).

The current study addressed a gap in the literature and a potential gap in practice pertaining to Danish 0–9 school leadership experiences during the shift from face-to-face to online instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with research areas of inquiry guided by the UVM's seven fields of school leadership. Obtaining qualitative data from the Danish 0–9 school leaders personal experiences may help to identify and advance

understanding of practical knowledge and best practice understandings. By exploring the perceptions of Danish 0–9 school leader experiences, including school leader guidance and associated efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic, the current study may provide relevant and useful knowledge associated with Danish school leadership in times of crisis, as well as potential ways to address gaps in practice that may directly or indirectly impact leadership goals and outcomes for school constituents relating to the UVM’s seven fields of school leadership.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this study was the gap in the literature pertaining to Danish 0–9 school leader perceptions, experiences, and efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions during the 2020-2021 shift to online learning, guided by the UVM’s seven fields of school leadership. The exploration of the Danish 0–9 school leadership role under the adverse conditions of the school lockdowns offered a unique opportunity to learn about how Danish 0–9 school leaders perceived their roles and their experiences in managing staff and other work demands to adapt to the unique conditions. The gap of available qualitative research and scholarly publications that explored the topics and themes reflected the lack of focused study on this topic. This study addressed this gap in research, which reflected a lack of scholarly knowledge attainment and associated distribution pertaining to professional experiences and contextual best practice knowledge relating to how Danish 0–9 school leaders cooperate with their organizations’ work groups and adapt their leadership practices while under adverse conditions.

There was general importance placed on the role of the Danish 0–9 school leader (UVM, 2015; Winter, 2021), as well as widespread agreement that the abrupt shift to online learning due to COVID-19 was consequential for Danish 0–9 education (EVA, 2021a; Nabe-Nielsen et al., 2021), yet at the time of this study there was only a modicum of research literature focused on how Danish 0–9 school leaders perceived their work experiences during the shift to online learning (Clausen & Moll, 2021; EVA, 2021a; Milner, 2021; Nabe-Nielsen et al., 2021), with only two studies containing qualitative interview data (EVA, 2021a; Lundtofte, 2021) documenting the personal experiences of Danish 0–9 school leaders during the shift to online learning. The current study addressed the gap in research regarding how Danish 0–9 school leaders experienced school leadership during the COVID-19 school lockdowns.

The seven fields of school leadership (UVM, 2015, 2024) were formulated for the development of Danish 0–9 school leaders shortly after a national school reform initiative in 2015. Despite the prestige of the various unions, associations, and forums of experts in the field of school leadership that formulated the seven fields of school leadership (UVM, 2015) for the UVM, there have only been a handful of academic references to all seven of the fields in Danish scholarly work (Diepeveen, 2015; Moos, 2016) or municipal 0–9 school leadership programs that address the seven fields of school leadership (Dragør Kommune, 2016).

Contrarily, Danish scholarly work has focused on one of the seven fields of leadership at a time. For instance, studies have examined leadership of capacity and competence development (EMU, 2020a, EVA, 2021a; Lange Gruppen, 2017), leadership

of knowledge and results-based development of the school's teaching (Hornskov et al., 2018; Qvortrup, 2019), and the leadership of the open school (Steiness et al., 2015). However, to my knowledge, the current study would be the only one to qualitatively address how Danish 0–9 school leaders experience all seven of the UVM's seven fields of school leadership during the COVID-19 school lockdowns. This study was significant not only based on the COVID-19 school lockdown experience but also on the contextual school leadership experience. This was highly relevant considering that all seven of the fields of school leadership were designed to offer structure and improvements to Danish school leadership, and there were no empirical data available that examined to what degree the seven fields of school leadership were helpful during the COVID-19 school lockdowns.

Successful fulfillment of the seven fields of leadership during normal school operation might be a challenge; however, with changing circumstances brought on by the COVID-19 crisis, Danish 0–9 school leaders had very little time to help staff adapt (Clausen & Moll, 2021; EVA, 2021a; Netolicky, 2020). In this dynamic setting, it is logical to expect that Danish 0–9 school leaders had less time to devote to all seven of the leadership fields due to the immediate transition to the online platform, especially considering the presence of ongoing issues such as lack of time for Danish 0–9 school leaders to invest in pedagogical leadership and staff development (Aisinger, 2021; Bøje et al., 2018; Lieberknecht, 2020).

The current study addressed gaps in practice supported by gaps in the current research literature by exploring the experiences Danish 0–9 school leaders relating to

adaptations of schools during the COVID-19 crisis and knowledge and best practice. The fields of inquiry were guided by the seven fields of school leadership as articulated by the UVM (2015, 2024). This study also addressed gaps in practice relating to crisis situations in which a shift from face-to-face to online instruction became necessary. By exploring the perceptions and experiences of Danish 0–9 school leaders, this study may provide useful understanding and knowledge of ways to address gaps in practice that directly or indirectly impact the leadership and management of Danish 0–9 schools by Danish 0–9 school leaders, particularly when undergoing changes that sap schools' resources or times that require swift institutional adaptations.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore Danish 0–9 school leader experiences and perceptions of the role of school leadership during the shift from face-to-face to online learning during the 2020–2021 COVID-19 pandemic as guided by the seven fields of school leadership. Despite the vigorous amount of scholarly work conducted on the impact of COVID-19 on education internationally, there was a gap in the local Danish knowledge base because few empirical studies reported on the experiences and perspectives of Danish 0–9 school leadership in the country of Denmark, and fewer had qualitatively explored the perceptions of school leaders during the shift from face-to-face to online instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Epistemologically speaking, the knowledge sought by means of this study regarding the perspectives, observations, experiences, and lived stories of 0–9 school leaders could only be explored by qualitative methodology (Percy et al., 2015). The

current study was an examination of a social context and contrasts in nature from a positivist tradition (see Halfpenny, 2001). How people interpret reality, states of affairs, and “description of accepted properties and characteristics” are questions of ontology (Harvey, 2006, p 2) and are also congruent with the research paradigm that the current study applied. Toward developing an understanding of the stated problem, the intent of the study was the facilitation of a qualitative exploration. The research paradigm of this study was qualitative, interview-based methodology to describe and explore Danish 0–9 school leaders’ perspectives regarding how they managed their role overseeing the seven fields of leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic with particular attention to how the leaders engaged staff in fulfillment of successful school management objectives.

A conceptual focus of this study was to learn about how school leaders enabled productive leadership and management understandings and approaches to meet objectives in times of adversity and uncertainty, in this case during the COVID-19 school lockdowns. The concept of interest in this study was how the many aspects of the seven fields of school leadership are not duties that can be performed or embodied by a single school leader, just as the teaching of all classes at a school requires a coordinated effort between many teachers managed by school leaders. Using the conceptual lens of psychological safety, I explored themes pertaining to interpersonal beliefs and behaviors in the context of the Danish 0–9 school leader profession. The term *psychological safety* (Edmondson, 1999) refers to shared beliefs held between group members pertaining to interpersonal trust and mutual respect within the group. This line of inquiry was imperative to inform scholarly and best-practice discussion regarding how to strategically

respond to organizational goals such as the seven fields of school leadership as well as to improve conditions for productive staff well-being and readiness for cooperative work should other unanticipated situations prompt a drastic shift in practices that call for increased teamwork and adaptability in Danish 0–9 learning institutions.

Research Questions

The problem that was addressed in this study was the gap in the literature pertaining to the Danish 0–9 school leader perceptions, experiences, and efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions during the 2020–2021 shift to online learning, guided by the UVM’s seven fields of school leadership. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the Danish 0–9 school leader perceptions of seven fields of school leadership experiences during the shift from face-to-face to online learning during the 2020–2021 COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. The following research questions guided the study:

Research Question 1: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of learning environments”?

Research Question 2: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of strategy and change processes”?

Research Question 3: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of knowledge- and results-based development of the school’s teaching”?

Research Question 4: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of capacity and competence development”?

Research Question 5: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of subject discipline and cross-professional work”?

Research Question 6: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of well-being, motivation, and commitment”?

Research Question 7: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of the open school”?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework undergirding this study was based on the scholarly work that Edmondson conducted in 1999. Since then, the presentation of psychological safety as a connective construct that impacts work groups’ behaviors and outcomes has since been adapted to many different professional spheres and environments (Edmondson, 2019; Frazier et al., 2017; Hu et al., 2018). The model, as originally presented by Edmondson in 1999, mainly consists of four intersecting broad constructs.

Psychological safety as a conceptual framework helped me explore the perceptions and experiences of Danish 0–9 school leaders regarding application of the UVM’s seven fields of leadership during the COVID-19 crisis because the framework

was applicable for analysis of interpersonal perceptions and experiences without diverting attention into theoretical areas of leadership that might distort the stated purpose. Although it is true that personal leadership characteristics, modus operandi, and leadership styles are influential in Danish 0–9 schools, I sought to have a conceptual point of reference that was more universal and could be identified, examined, and discussed regardless of the leadership approaches or styles embodied by the school leader who might have participated in this study.

The conclusion of extensive research on leadership is that good leaders come in many forms; there is no one best type of leader. Effective leadership has been shown to depend on characteristics of the group and its environment as well as those of the leader. (EBSCO, 2021, para. 1)

The current study did not address the best kind of school leader or what theory of leadership might appear to support the tenets of the seven fields of leadership; instead, I explored the perceptions of school leaders relating to personal, interpersonal, and organizational beliefs and behaviors as features of psychological safety that were helpful for school leaders to help their organizations positively respond to the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 school lockdowns.

To understand the choice of psychological safety as the conceptual framework for this study, it is necessary to accept that it is not possible for a Danish 0–9 school leader to personally fulfill all facets of school leadership in a school, particularly at a time when the learning organization is preoccupied with unusual situations and demands. Leadership in this context requires a person who can manage their organization by

supporting positive adaptive behaviors of groups of people in their schools, drawing upon common articulated goals, exercising collective knowledge of staff, and activating teams of people to achieve desired outcomes (Albrechtsen, 2022; Andersen, 2021; Edmondson, 2020). This expertise in leadership or management hinges on how school leaders enable and support teams (Albrechtsen, 2022; Weiner et al., 2021) or groups of administrative staff, teachers, support personnel to accomplish goals. Because I accepted this premise to be true, the interconnecting constructs that create the framework of psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999) was appropriate to use as the contextual lens through which Danish 0–9 school leader perceptions and experiences were explored in this study.

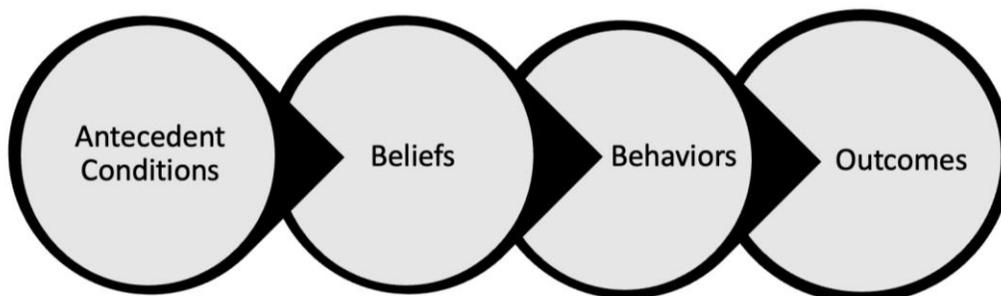
The origins of the constructs and theories that describe psychological safety are rooted in organizational management theory, which has examined the roles of leadership within a business organizational context (Edmondson, 1999). Edmondson's articulation of psychological safety has been applied as a framework in many studies within the fields of business leadership and organizational management (Frazier et al., 2017; Harvey et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2020) as well as within an educational context since the framework was articulated in 1999 (Baeva & Bordovskaia, 2015; Edmondson, 2020; Newman et al., 2017; Weiner et al., 2021). The findings of Edmondson's (1999) study supported the hypotheses that beliefs and behaviors of the team members in an organization impact team outcomes and overall organizational performance (Edmondson, 1999, 2019). In this section, I offer a framework of understanding as to what psychological safety is, how it is identified, and how it served as the conceptual lens through which the current study was

conducted. More thorough explanations and background of the conceptual framework of psychological safety are available in Chapter 2.

To illustrate how psychological safety fits into a larger context and why school leaders might consider its significance in advancing practice and adapting to changes, it is helpful to examine a model created by Edmondson (1999, p. 357), which is broken into four parts providing an overview model. As shown in Figure 1, the four-component framework starts with antecedent conditions and continues with team beliefs, team behaviors, and work outcomes (Edmondson, 1999).

Figure 1

Psychological Safety Work-Group Model



Note. Adapted from Edmondson's (1999) four-component framework of psychological safety.

Antecedent Conditions

Antecedent conditions refer to structural features, context support, and leader behaviors that impact whether members of an organization are properly resourced to work together. These conditions, if inferior, can limit feelings of psychological safety held by group members (Edmondson, 1999). For example, if an organizational group is

poorly resourced and has an irritable, impatient, and authoritarian leader, the level of psychological safety felt by the workers may be compromised, leading them to believe that it is best practice to accept the work conditions without protest because challenging the status quo might compromise their relationship with the power structure or their standing within the group. This is an example of a workplace with low psychological safety due to unfavorable antecedent conditions. In an opposite scenario, if a work group is well resourced and has a competent leader, these antecedent conditions may support an atmosphere in which positive psychological safety has a chance to flourish.

Structural features represent the common team goals “with an enabling team design” (Edmondson, 1999, p. 8). These work designs comprise context support to ensure satisfactory resources, relevant information to the tasks, and rewards. Team leader behaviors such as coaching, support, and direction setting (Edmondson, 1999) are also seen as antecedents that impact potential for psychological safety. For example, having characteristics of “transformational leadership and managerial openness” (Edmondson, 2014, p. 17) can be considered leadership antecedents that impact the settings in which organizational members function.

Team Beliefs

The conceptual framework of the current study included consideration of antecedent conditions; however, the model of psychological safety to be applied in this study was manifested in the three constructs: team beliefs, team behaviors, and outcomes. Team beliefs refer to two types of shared beliefs: the level of group efficacy and psychological safety. The team belief of psychological safety refers to the levels of

interpersonal trust, respect, and caring the group members have for one another.

Although this is what Edmondson posited in 1999, since then the broader cluster of beliefs, behaviors, and outcomes that are connected due to the mediating role of psychological safety is usually what is examined or measured (Carmeli et al., 2010; Edmondson, 1999, 2014, 2019; Kim et al., 2020).

Additionally, the common team-member assessment of the quality level of the team's product or general results is referred to as the level of group efficacy. It is constructive when workers are confident that they produce a service or product that is of high quality (Edmondson, 1999). Organizational members' shared beliefs about efficacy and psychological safety of the groups in which they work have a cumulative impact on their interpersonal interaction, types of behaviors they engage in, and the outcomes they achieve.

Team Behaviors

The conceptual framework of the current study included beliefs, behaviors, and outcomes, along with the acknowledgement of the role of antecedent conditions. Psychological safety, as a collective belief structure, influences workplace behaviors (Edmondson, 1999, 2014, 2019). Edmondson (1999, 2014, 2019) posited that the behaviors that group members exhibit are connected to their feelings of psychological safety and commonly held beliefs about their group's efficacy levels. Behaviors of workers in groups can be constructive to common goals, which yield innovative thinking or advancements in discourse and group action, or the behaviors can be counterproductive.

In a workplace in which group members show high degrees of psychological safety, positive behaviors that stem from interpersonal trust, caring, and respect would be evidenced. In this setting, a group member might be more inclined to credit and promote a coworker's innovative or effective technique. They might share information that could otherwise be later deployed for possible personal gains. Other examples of positive levels of psychological safety could be workers seeking feedback, discussing work-related problems or errors, asking questions without fear of negative repercussions, or trying new creative solutions to problems. However, in situations in which group members are insecure or do not feel mutual trust, care, or respect, examples of behaviors expressed might be to keep silent about workflow issues, refrain from sharing information, avoid feedback, or abstain from asking questions that might yield negative attention or scorn.

Outcomes

Core to the conceptual framework in this study was that beliefs and behaviors lead to outcomes (Edmondson, 1999, 2014, 2019). The term *outcomes* represents the results of what the group of workers produce individually and collectively. Outcomes can be successful or problematic and correspond to the type of service or product a team or organization members work together to yield. In a school leadership context, examples of outcomes influenced by psychological safety could include the following:

- positive or negative outcomes relating to well-being among staff members or other constituents
- positive or negative outcomes relating to professional cooperation
- positive or negative outcomes relating to instructional practice

- positive or negative outcomes relating to professional learning
- positive or negative outcomes relating to personal development within the team

An example of a productive outcome based on positive levels of psychological safety could be schools in which staff members speak up early about issues in responding to the instructional changes, are taken seriously by leadership and colleagues, and with a cooperative effort the teachers learn to conduct classes via Zoom or Microsoft Teams. In this example, there is a positive outcome relating to professional learning due to high levels of psychological safety, which is advantageous when organizations are in a state of change. Other examples of positive outcomes in an environment with high psychological safety could be sharing innovative lesson plans between teaching groups or an administrative staff member who asks a difficult yet timely question that is very helpful in informing administrative practice.

In an example of a school where there is low psychological safety shared between colleagues, a school leader might unsuccessfully attempt to coordinate an online social event during lockdown with a group of students to strengthen comradery but may be arrogant in their approach and not elicit sufficient buy-in from key group members. The team members may be unsure of what to do and may not feel comfortable questioning the plan, asking questions about the idea, or getting involved, resulting in a poor outcome, that might have been avoided if the team members had felt included, and were respectfully invited to support the idea. Other examples of undesirable outcomes due to low levels of psychological safety could be poor student or teacher attendance of online

classes, professional breakdowns in team communication and cooperation, or setbacks in teacher or student learning.

Edmondson (1999) suggested empirical support for psychological safety having a mediating role between variables of antecedents and learning behavior. This suggests that learning behavior in organizational groups is influenced by the way group members experience psychological safety in relation to the antecedent conditions, such as being well resourced, being well coached, and having clear goals. In relation to this, psychological safety is also positively and negatively delineated and is associated with both learning behavior and performance outcomes. Based on this theory, if an organization is motivated to enhance the performance and outcomes of its work groups, it is possible that improving the level of psychological safety could support this goal.

Psychological Safety and Its Identification

Psychological safety, or lack thereof, can be identified by noting behaviors work group members engage in, such as asking questions, taking risks, seeking feedback, speaking their mind, finding creative or alternative solutions to problems, sharing information, and openly discussing issues or errors (Edmondson, 1999, 2019; Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Even in normal times in schools, individuals in work groups encounter problems or unfamiliar situations. However, there was even more operational uncertainty during the COVID-19 school lockdowns (EVA, 2021a).

Identifying Psychological Safety in Schools

How work groups in schools behaviorally respond to conditions may indicate their collective levels of psychological safety. Behavioral responses can be based on fear,

which may take the form of a lack of action or not seeking clarification in a way that is visible to the group. Spotting examples of low levels of psychological safety may be more difficult than the opposite because areas of insecurity can be quietly lived with and hidden for fear of reprisal when leadership is authoritarian, or feelings of interpersonal safety are absent in a work group (Edmondson, 2019).

Behaviors that reflect high levels of psychological safety are based on mutual feelings of interpersonal respect, care, and trust between group members. In an educational workplace, the behaviors might be vigorous information sharing networks used by teaching groups, open acknowledgement, or praise of colleagues' contributions, openly asking questions that challenge the status quo, admissions of error, and seeking help or feedback. Because these behaviors are carried out openly, they may be easier to identify.

Contextual Lens of the Study

Edmondson (2019) discussed the applicability of the original 1999 study to a wide variety of organizational structures. This included the field of K–12 education as an organizational structure that is impacted by psychological safety. This recognition suggests that the context of the Danish 0–9 school workplace is an appropriate setting for analysis of the indicators of high or low psychological safety as outlined by Edmondson (1999, 2019), including the suggestion that “interview data can be coded to detect the presence or absence of psychological safety” (Edmondson, 2019, p.20). This approach supports the recognition of psychological safety within the bounds of the current study, realized through the perspectives, experiences, observations, and lived stories of Danish

0–9 school leaders. The contextual lens of Edmondson’s (1999) work–team model to explore psychological safety was integral to the formulation of the current study and guided its methodological design, instrument development, and data analysis.

Nature of the Study

This study included a basic qualitative design. People’s subjective perceptions, experiences, opinions, and beliefs are most appropriately studied through qualitative methods because “such psychological things cannot be measured in the statistical sense” (Percy et al., 2015, p. 76). The recollection of problematic moments and observational life stories are rooted in the qualitative tradition (Denzin & Lincoln, 2007). Because the current study focused on human perceptions, human experiences, and human interactions during a finite period of time and within a specific context, the qualitative tradition was the most appropriate choice to explore Danish 0–9 school leaders’ perspectives, experiences, observations, and lived stories to learn about the extent to which psychological safety may have played a role during the unplanned shift from face-to-face to online instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic in Denmark.

To address this study focus, 12 interviews were conducted with Danish 0–9 school leaders, including the following:

- three school top leaders who oversaw more than one large section of a school (e.g., administration of a kindergarten, a 0–9 school, and an upper secondary school)

- three school principals who oversaw more than one subsection of a 0–9 school (e.g., indskoling, klasse 0–3 [school start, Grades 0–3], mellemtrinnet klasse 4–6 [mid-level, Grades 4–6], udskoling [completion school, Grades 7–9])
- three vice principals who had administrative responsibilities for one or more subsection of a school (e.g., indskoling [school start, Grades 0–3], mellemtrinnet [mid-level, Grades 4–6], or udskoling [completion school, Grades 7–9])
- three school-based teacher-leaders were responsible for curricular, instructional, collaborative, or coordinative tasks between teachers in addition to their teaching duties

Participation was with the only requirement that they were in a school leadership position as defined by Danish 0–9 school leadership titles, roles, and responsibilities, which include the following: the coordination of teaching duties, curricular or instructional support, coordination of professional development, teacher team management, student disciplinary or behavioral support, and administrative and communication duties on behalf of the school. The UVM’s seven fields of school leadership outline further areas of Danish school leadership and are explored more in Chapter 2:

- A top leader or school director oversees or manages several complete sections of a school (e.g., a director could oversee, a kindergarten, a 0–9 school, and an upper secondary school. Although this is uncommon in the United States, it is not in Denmark.

- Principals administratively oversee or manage at least one section of a school. For example, a principal might be a leader of a 0–9 school, which includes three subsections: indskoling [school start, Grades 0–3], mellemtrinnet [mid-level, Grades 4–6], and, udskolning [completion school, Grades 7–9].
- Vice principals oversee or manage one or more subsections of a school such as indskoling [school start, Grades 0–3], or mellemtrinnet [mid-level, Grades 4–6], or have other duties assigned ranging from a curricular or instructional leader to scheduler to disciplinary duties.
- Teacher-leaders and teachers with coordinator roles are identified by Danish 0–9 school staff members who taught students yet also fulfilled leadership roles at a school. Teacher-leaders oversaw, coordinated, or facilitated a teacher group or groups throughout 2019–2021 when the COVID-19 pandemic school lockdowns transpired.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face or via video conference technology, such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams, based on the wishes of the participants. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded by breaking down the language data with basic qualitative coding methods (see Saldana, 2016) for themes associated with the designated research questions and stated conceptual framework to explore Danish 0–9 school leaders’ perspectives, experiences, observations, and lived stories of seven fields of school leadership experiences during the shift from face-to-face to online learning during the 2020–2021 lockdowns.

There are advantages to using video conferencing tools such as Zoom, such as “reduced labour and travel costs made viable wider reaching participant recruitment and multi-site data collection” (Oliffe et al., 2021, para 1), and downsides to using video conferencing, such as “in-person interview nuances were lost amid the virtual platform demanding unique interviewer skills to compensate some of those changes to each” (Oliffe et al., 2021, para 1). I was prepared to conduct the interview using either method. The primary goal was to conduct the interview in a way that maximized the state of comfort of the person being interviewed to elicit relaxed, thoughtful, and open communication.

Definitions

Achievement gap: “Refers to any significant and persistent disparity in academic performance or educational attainment between different groups of students” (Glossary of Education Reform, 2013, para 1). Examples of this can be (but are not limited to) gaps between students of different socioeconomic groups, different genders, or different ethnic or language backgrounds (Glossary of Education Reform, 2013).

Antecedent conditions: Structural features, context support, and leader behaviors that impact whether members of an organization are properly resourced to effectively work together (Edmondson, 1999).

Asynchronous learning: An online learning experience in which live video or audio is not a component. Students may complete assignments at the time of their choosing (Scheiderer, 2022).

At-risk students: A regionally and context-related set of characteristics that make certain students vulnerable to low academic achievement or failure experiences in school systems. Young people who may fall into this category could include racial and ethnic minorities; poor or low-income students; students with learning disabilities; immigrant local language learners; gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered students; students with criminal involvement; and children who live in homes or neighborhoods with socioeconomic or psycho-social issues (Carter, 2008).

Blended learning: A practice of combining traditional face-to-face classroom teaching and learning practices with online tools or learning application software on computers or mobile devices (Watson, 2008).

Cognitive presence: One of the three components within the community of inquiry framework, which is based on the idea that learners in a computer-based learning environment would be cognitively active, seeing connections, constructing knowledge, and interacting with the content (Garrison et al., 1999).

Community of Inquiry framework (COI): An instructional model for online and blended learning environments (Garrison et al., 1999).

Danish 0–9 school: The 10-year obligatory course of basic education in Denmark for children ages 5 to 15 years as defined by the UVM (2015).

Danish 0–9 school leader: A person holding a leadership position in a Danish school. In the current study, the title was broadly applied to include principals, vice principals, teacher coordinators, and top leaders of schools who oversee different sections of a school (e.g., primary, middle, and senior sections).

Face-to-face instruction: This refers to instruction which happens in a physical classroom. (Face-to-face Instruction, n.d.). This takes place in school settings where teachers interact with students in person.

Grundskole (ground school): A school teaching the basic subjects, which includes a mandatory period of 10 years for all children in Denmark ranging from 5 to 15 years old (Grundskole, n.d.).

Leadership of learning environments: Danish 0–9 school leadership practices that promotes high expectations for learning and well-being, with a varied and motivational school culture. Goal-oriented teaching and learning are supported with differentiated instruction, input from students, and inclusive practices (UVM, 2015).

Leadership of strategy and change processes: Danish 0–9 school leadership must formulate a vision and strategic objectives for the school’s pedagogical work based on results of national and municipal objectives, as well as frameworks set by the school board (UVM, 2015).

Leadership of knowledge and results-based development of the school’s teaching, capacity, and competence development: Danish 0–9 school leadership is responsible for formulating a vision and strategic objectives for the school’s pedagogical work and results based on national and municipal objectives, as well as frameworks set by the school board. School management must prioritize resources and competencies that are in line with the overall goals, as well as prepare action plans with goals for the school’s pedagogical work and results to change practices and habits at the school (UVM, 2015).

Leadership of capacity and competence development of the pedagogical staff in the school: Danish 0–9 school leaders must ensure that the school’s employees have the relevant subject didactic competencies, and that the school as a whole has the capacity and the relevant competencies so that it can function as a learning community with goals and results related to students’ learning and well-being. Strategic analysis of the school’s capacity and competence development needs should guide planning, professional development, and recruitment practices (UVM, 2015).

Leadership of subject and interprofessional collaboration with a focus on students’ learning and well-being: Danish 0–9 school leaders must adequately frame professional and cross-professional opportunities to enrich the potential gains on students’ learning. The school management supports team collaboration, including sparring about teaching practice and the use of supervision in teaching (UVM, 2015).

Management of well-being, motivation and commitment of the teaching staff, students, and parents: Danish 0–9 school leaders must ensure the support, commitment and participation of the pedagogical staff, students, and parents. Successful learning-centered school leadership in this field of leadership is about leading with a focus on well-being, motivation, and commitment among students, staff, and leaders in a productive, balanced, and ethically sound manner (UVM, 2015).

Leadership with a focus on involving the school environment, otherwise known as the open school: Danish 0–9 school leaders must analyze the needs and potentials of involving external academic environments, while creating conditions and incentives for the outside world to be included in the school. This includes relations to the cultural,

leisure, and association life of the local community as well as other educational institutions and companies (Steiness et al., 2015; UVM, 2015).

Learning gap: The difference between what a student is expected to have learned by a specific grade level and the actual level of achievement reached by a student by that grade level (Learning Gap, 2013).

Lockdown: A security measure in which people are physically confined or restricted in social interaction, access to public spaces and travel. (Lockdown, n.d.) In the current study, this term referred to time spans during the years of 2020 and 2021, when citizens were mandated or strongly encouraged to work, study, and remain at home to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Microsoft Teams: A collaboration platform produced by Microsoft, which enables users to video conference, screen share, send messages, and share files with others (Duffy, 2023). This application is often used for business and educational purposes.

Online education: Also referred to as online learning. In the context of the current study, the term refers to a form of education in which curriculum deployment and teacher–student interaction is carried out via the internet on digital devices. Currently this is the most widespread application method for distance education (Online Education, n.d.).

Online Instruction: Instructional process when teacher and students are not in the same physical location and the internet is used to deploy lessons and interact (Online Learning, n.d.). In the context of the current study, both online education and online

instruction refer to this same concept. Currently this is the most widespread application method for distance education.

Organizational work teams: Individuals who are brought together to perform organizationally relevant tasks and have common goals. They often have “interdependencies with respect to workflow, goals, and outcomes, are together embedded in an encompassing organizational system, with boundaries and linkages to the broader system context and task environment” (DeChurch et al., 2018, p. 5).

Professional work groups: A term used interchangeably with organizational work teams, which include individuals who are brought together to perform organizationally relevant tasks and have common goals. They often have “interdependencies with respect to workflow, goals, and outcomes, are together embedded in an encompassing organizational system, with boundaries and linkages to the broader system context and task environment” (DeChurch et al., 2018, p. 5).

Psychological safety: A concept representing the shared beliefs of members of an organizational work team. These beliefs are often accompanied by behaviors that affect team performance (Edmondson, 1999).

Self-regulated learning: Learning that is controlled by the learner. How a learner independently meets challenges related to online learning without direct support from another person. Self-regulated learning is moderated by levels of motivation, maturity, and the use of cognitive strategies related to a given task (Dent & Koenka, 2016).

Situational leadership theory: A leadership model in which leaders adapt their leadership approach to individual subordinates depending on the job at hand, along with

the level of ability and willingness (which is sometimes referred to as maturity) of the staff member (Hersey et al., 1979). In the current study, this term was used to explain or define perspectives of school leaders pertaining to why they interact as they do with specific teaching staff members.

Social presence: One of the three presences in the Community of Inquiry framework that represents the feelings and emotions students experience relating to the interpersonal interactions and collaboration between themselves and their classmates and instructors in the online learning environment (Garrison et al., 1999).

Synchronous learning: An online learning experience that occurs in real time (Garrison et al., 1999).

Teaching presence: One of the three components of the COI framework that is defined as the instructor's role and the structure of the deployed content (Garrison et al., 1999).

Teaching team: A term used interchangeably with organizational work team and teaching group, which includes individuals who are brought together to perform organizationally relevant tasks and have common goals. They often have “interdependencies with respect to workflow, goals, and outcomes, are together embedded in an encompassing organizational system, with boundaries and linkages to the broader system context and task environment” (DeChurch et al., 2018, p. 5).

Teaching group: A term used interchangeably with organizational work teams and teaching team, which includes individuals who are brought together to perform organizationally relevant tasks and have common goals. They often have

“interdependencies with respect to workflow, goals, and outcomes, are together embedded in an encompassing organizational system, with boundaries and linkages to the broader system context and task environment” (DeChurch et al., 2018, p. 5).

Zoom: A widely used cloud-based video communication application that enables video and audio conferencing and screen sharing between individuals and groups (Antonelli, 2020). This application is often used for business and educational purposes.

Assumptions

In this study, I employed five assumptions that were believed but could not be demonstrated to be true: first, that people in school leadership positions have an impact on teaching staff; second, that teaching staff members have a general understanding of what constitutes online instruction; third, that psychological safety is impactful in a non-face-to-face environment; fourth, that participants in the study would feel safe enough to share honest thoughts; and fifth, that the successful outcomes or problems identified in the analysis of the data pertaining to the research questions would at times be affected by the presence or absence of psychological safety in the participants’ workplaces. The first assumption was that people in school leadership positions have an impact on teaching staff. I assumed that they influenced the work groups, which was important to the problem of this study that focused on school leaders’ management experiences and efforts supporting staff team learning, well-being, and engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was important to the context of the study because school leaders were positioned in the study as pivotal and influential interlocutors in their respective schools, but I was not able to demonstrate this to be true.

I also assumed that school leaders and/or teaching staff members had a general understanding of what constituted the basics of online instruction. I assumed there were common points of reference to discuss successes and problems in the implementation of online instruction. This was an important frame of reference that I operated under, although I could not demonstrate that the base of knowledge was sufficiently shared between me and interviewee to the point where misunderstandings could not have taken place. This assumption was necessary in the context of this study because exploration of an online learning environment touched upon technical aspects and jargon pertaining to topics of online curricular and instructional leadership.

Next, I assumed that psychological safety was impactful in a non-face-to-face environment. It is possible that many beliefs and behaviors related to psychological safety held by team members did not manifest in observable behaviors in a non-face-to-face online context. Although this assumption was critical to the core of this study, I was not able to demonstrate that a full account of psychological safety was possible when examining a non-face-to-face environment. This was necessary within the context of this study because if the construct of psychological safety was unimpactful outside of physical face-to-face proximity, the conceptual framework of psychological safety was misplaced in this study.

In addition, I assumed that participants felt safe enough to share honest thoughts. I informed all participants of the high degree of confidentiality pertaining to data collection and reporting on data because honest responses were paramount to the integrity of this study; however, I was not able to demonstrate that the interviewees felt safe enough to

share honest information. Within the context of this study, this assumption was necessary because the goal of the study was to learn from honest perceptions and recalled experiences.

Finally, I assumed that the successful outcomes or problems identified pertaining to the research questions could be, at times, clearly linked to by the presence or absence of psychological safety. During the course of transcription and careful coding, I looked for indicators that addressed the research questions and provided credible and internally consistent findings. Central to the context of this study was the assumption that it was possible to interpret how psychological safety was related to the successes and problems experienced by teaching teams; however, it was not possible to demonstrate that this was so.

Scope and Delimitations

The problem that was addressed through this study was the gap in the literature pertaining to Danish 0–9 school leader perceptions, experiences, and efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions during the 2020–2021 shift to online learning. The study was guided by UVM’s seven fields of school leadership. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore Danish 0–9 school leader perceptions of seven fields of school leadership experiences during the shift from conventional face-to-face learning to online learning during the 2020–2021 lockdowns. This focus was chosen to address a gap in the literature and practice pertaining to Danish 0–9 school leadership experiences with and perceptions of UVM’s seven fields of school leadership during the shift from face-to-face to online instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with a view toward

identifying and advancing management understandings, priorities, and knowledge to narrow gaps of practice, potentially leading to improvements in Danish 0–9 school leadership in future times of crisis.

Boundaries of the Study

The focus on Danish 0–9 school leaders as the participant group was chosen to keep the sources of collected data concentrated on people who had central roles in managing teaching staff in Danish 0–9 schools. The Danish 0–9 school leaders were tasked with managing teaching staff. Excluded from this study were teachers with no leadership roles, nonteaching Danish 0–9 school staff, Danish 0–9 school students, Danish 0–9 school students' parents or student guardians, or community members who may have had leadership roles within the community in which the Danish 0–9 school was embedded. Included in the Danish 0–9 school's community members were school board members, parent community organizers, or other people who do not supervise nor manage teacher groups. An example of a teacher group could include a homeroom teacher, which in Denmark is often referred to as the classroom teacher, along with other teachers who instruct the class in different subjects. These subject teachers have various specializations such as mathematics, science, English, Danish, history, social studies, physical education, music, food preparation, and visual arts. Also included in a teacher group were resource teachers who work with students who have special needs. Danish 0–9 school students were not a participant pool associated with this study and were not interviewed. However, in recognition of the impact on the community in which the Danish 0–9 school is housed, the outcomes reached by Danish 0–9 school leaders and

teachers were considered to have relevance to the study due to considerations related to populations such as students, parents, and nonteaching staff.

Conceptual frameworks that were closely related to this study but were not used included theoretical work related to neoliberalist social and political constructs, which bring attention to issues that can impact 0–9 education, such as standardized testing, competition in schools, and ideologies of global capitalism (Flew, 2014; Sharma, 2018). Facets of neoliberalist theories could impact priorities and motivations behind school management. However, I deemed it out of the core focus area of this study; therefore, these topics were not researched in depth.

There were also conceptual frameworks related to the topic of leadership and psychological pathologies. Conceptual frameworks addressing narcissistic traits and unethical leadership behavior (Chandler, 2009) could have intersected with the purpose of the current study; however, a psychological evaluation of the school leaders who participated in this study was not available to me. If some data appeared to be highly unusual or incongruent with other data, they would be analyzed as discrepant data. From my perspective, it was unrealistic and inappropriate to integrate theories pertaining to psychological pathology in the analysis of the data. Therefore, these topics were not addressed in this study.

Potential Transferability

My intent was to provide rich and accurate descriptions of experiences, perceptions, and observations, as well as important contextual information to increase the likelihood that researchers in other locations might determine the level of transferability

of the findings of the study (see Burkholder et al., 2016). It is possible that the examples and descriptions of coded data that I collected will be recognized as applicable to other contexts. It is difficult to estimate to what degree educators may be interested in the findings of this study and may make use of them when examining local educational contexts. The intent of the study was to report the findings of the local 0–9 Danish school context and make the collected data and findings thoroughly represented and comprehensible.

This study addressed a gap in scholarly literature regarding Danish 0–9 school leadership. The study provided data and findings with potential application to further Danish 0–9 school research. Scholarly work relating to 0–9 school leadership may be influenced by the findings in this study. Because there was limited qualitative research addressing the topic of Danish 0–9 school leadership from a qualitative psycho-social angle, this study was poised to offer a useful reference point. It is also conceivable that Danish 0–9 school leadership training could include the findings of this study to influence or improve preparation coursework for potential school leaders. This may occur within the context of future health-related school shutdown scenarios or other forms of school response to necessary shifts or pivots in school sustainability due to unforeseen impacts, or insights transferrable to other situations in which there is a critical need for development or teamwork in Danish 0–9 schools.

Limitations

I took reasonable measures to address and mitigate potential limitations. Limitations of transferability and dependability are described, along with ways in which I

addressed these limitations. Personal biases that could have impacted this study and how I addressed these biases to guard against adversely impacting the integrity of this study are also described in this section.

Study Design Limitations

A limitation to the design of this study was that I coded and analyzed the perceptions of a relatively small group of Danish 0–9 school leaders. One possible measure to address this weakness would have been to interview more Danish 0–9 school leaders beyond the 12 interviews conducted to ensure that an even more thorough level of saturation could be achieved. A second limitation was that participants were limited to a small geographical area and cultural homogeneity of the country of Denmark. Due to this limitation, the transferability and dependability of the findings may be narrow and of limited use outside of the Danish 0–9 school context. A reasonable measure that I applied to counter this was to maintain awareness of this fact, and refrain from reporting on findings or making recommendations beyond the scope of this study. However, the review of international research I had conducted was helpful in guiding my study design, interactions as well as my interpretations of the data. This may have enabled me, to some degree, to present data and findings in a way in which a broader community outside the country of Denmark may identify interesting common ground.

A third limitation was my non-Danish upbringing and educational background. When asking questions and discussing topics, it was possible that I may have been less able to recognize and make use of cultural common ground. An interviewer who shares a common geographical upbringing and similar education background with a participant

might understand their cultural references more deeply in some ways, or perhaps pick up on a linguistic nuance that could influence the flow of conversation. On the other hand, my foreign background could have had some advantages for interviewing, as I was potentially less inclined to make assumptions about statements and comments.

Sometimes I asked elementary questions that prompted interesting responses. A passing comment that might have seemed normal and insignificant to a Dane, could have been interpreted as significant as qualitative data, or to a person with a different background.

A fourth limitation to the study design was the recognition that Danish 0–9 school leaders have different personality types, suggesting that some may have been more forthcoming in response to interview questions, while others may have offered a distorted version of their experiences when reflecting on their management experiences. To address this concern, I allowed for additional or extended data collection and recognized that interview data that were incongruent with most responses may have been interpreted as noteworthy but not representative of a consistent and repeatable data point.

Study Methodological Limitations

The difficulties in securing access to Danish 0–9 school leaders as participants did not result in methodological limitations pertaining to this study, although it was challenging to secure willing participants. I informed potential participants that the interviews would be completely confidential and strictly protected. The incentive to participate depended on the individuals' availability, willingness to participate, and self-selection. Danish 0–9 school leaders are busy people, and the incentives that I offered them were modest, so the recruitment challenge was that I could not be very critically

selective. The unique nature of the study and the interest in documenting participants' experiences in the spirit of potentially helping others eventually inspired 12 Danish 0–9 school leaders to participate.

Another methodological limitation pertaining to this study was that most of the interviews took place in the Danish language. To make the interview or coded content comprehensible to English readers, it was necessary to translate the interviews. Any time translations occur, there is potential for misunderstandings or linguistic distortions to occur, which are formidable methodological limitations. A measure to address this issue was to use English during the interview to clarify any language that was ambiguous. Also, when conducting interviews, I informed the participants that I would be sending them a transcription of the interview that they were encouraged to examine to clarify points of the discussion if the transcription was unclear. Finally, I consulted with a Danish colleague who affirmed a few translations from Danish to English from the transcripts without seeing or hearing the transcripts themselves. In one case the peer reviewer suggested a translation that was an improvement over mine. An unclear aspect of the language was cleared up in this way.

Limitations of Transferability

Denmark is a relatively homogeneous society with engrained perspectives and social norms in Danish 0–9 schools that could limit the usefulness of the results of this study beyond the local context. The value of this study in Denmark will be weighted by the level of validity and trustworthiness of the work and the clarity of the methodology and findings. I accepted the responsibility to maximize validity and communicate the

findings “faithfully based on participants’ experiences” (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 186). The transferability within Denmark or beyond will be dependent on the accuracy and high ethical standards of the work as well as my ability to present the study. I stand behind the integrity of this project.

Limitations of Dependability

An argument aimed at the dependability in this study could relate to the depth and breadth of 0–9 Danish school leader interviews. Because this was the first qualitative study I conducted, more interviews could have taken place to insure dependability of the results. However, because I had a strong foundational understanding of the theoretical elements and contexts that framed this study, I maintain that the collected data and findings were consistent and repeatable. I was committed to continue interviewing Danish 0–9 school leaders until saturation was reached, and I presented the data and findings within a high degree of transparency, stringency, and clarity. However, to address this potential limitation of inexperience, I engaged scholarly peers who suggested improvements to the ways data were collected to achieve depth in the discussions and responses. Achieving depth in the interviews bolstered consistency and stability of data over time. Finally, Walden University resources, research reference materials, and academic mentors were consulted to ensure consistency and stability of data and findings.

Potential Bias

I had no personal relationship with the participants, and I carefully observed my potential personal biases that may have influenced the interview process. Personal bias may be reflected through physical engagement with the participant, as well as through

verbal engagement with participants. The physical engagement with the participant may include meeting in person for the interview. A person's physical appearance, accent, or clothing choice do not negate the value of their experiences and potential value to this study. I am confident that any personal biases I may have had about these characteristics did not detract from or interfere with the research.

The verbal engagement with the participants included telephone calls and video conference events through Zoom and Microsoft Teams. To mitigate researcher bias, I conducted myself as engaging, friendly, yet slightly formally so as to develop an appropriate relational engagement and comfort level with each participant. It was my intent to interview participants whom I had not met to mitigate potential preconceived notions associated with the participant interviewed or myself. The interviews I conducted were comfortable, engaging, and respectful of the participant's position; yet somewhat formal, as this was appropriate to convey respect for the participant's time, effort, and professionalism.

To mitigate the potential for bias, I staged two practice interviews with Danish peers with the intent to identify possible biases and missteps in wording or affect that could have conveyed unconscious bias or influenced the way participants responded to the me. I wanted the participant to be at ease and engaged with the content of the discussion, not focused on me as the researcher. The interviews were conducted primarily in Danish to promote the participant's ability to freely explore the topics on a linguistic level, although two interviews took place in English as was requested by the participants. As a non-Dane who has an excellent command but not native-level pronunciation of the

Danish language, it is possible that the participants may have been biased toward me as a researcher due to linguistic reasons. The practice interviews I conducted with trusted colleagues helped to mitigate the potentiality of pronunciation or wording issues eliciting bias toward me.

Another potential for bias was the interview coding process. Although I believe that I have developed an understanding of empiricism and would not consciously misconstrue statements made by participants of the study, it was possible for me to misinterpret a statement or infer an unintended meaning. A reasonable measure to mitigate this issue was to share the transcription with the participant and ask whether transcript data were correct or to ask clarifying questions to determine the intended meaning of the language (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

In terms of my personal biases, I have been influenced by research I have conducted about school leadership and personal experiences throughout my teaching career. I tend to perceive that leaders who show compassion, respect, and recognition of subordinates typically empower their staff more than leaders who coerce or intimidate their staff members. To address this bias, I focused on the purpose of the study and strove to remove my personal feelings about the personalities of the Danish 0–9 school leaders and focus on the data pertaining to the research questions. The value this study is inherent in the honesty and clarity of the empirical work.

I have had a fairly long career as a 0–9 schoolteacher. I have taught in the United States, Mexico, and Denmark. I have experienced many school settings, professional staff groups, classroom teacher colleagues, and school leaders during my professional career.

As part of my nature and educational background, I have always been fascinated as to why certain 0–9 school teaching work groups are more harmonious and effective than others, while observing the role of leadership in my workplaces. When moving to Denmark from the United States 24 years ago, my examination of the Danish 0–9 school workplace became my focus.

My interest to better understand the 0–9 school leadership role and how it impacts teaching staff and students informed the current study. My educational preparation and professional experiences, as well as my possible future professional plans also impacted how this study was conceived. However, as I developed and carried out this study, I adopted a scholarly perspective and thoughtfully considered my personal feelings and biases based on my years of work, with the intent to control for possible bias by seeking feedback to broaden my perspectives. Discussions with local scholars and a peer reviewer regarding the various processes and analytical work were helpful to identify and keep my personal biases and assumptions moderated.

Significance

This study may enrich the scholarly record pertaining to Danish 0–9 school leader perceptions, experiences, and efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions during the 2020–2021 shift to online learning, guided by the UVM’s seven fields of school leadership. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore Danish 0–9 school leader perceptions of seven fields of school leadership experiences during the shift from conventional face-to-face to online learning during the 2020–2021 lockdowns. At the time of the study, there was limited scholarly work that addressed this topic. I did not find

any qualitative research that addressed the role psychological safety plays in the Danish 0–9 school workplace.

I investigated the experiences of Danish 0–9 school leaders and their styles of leadership while working in times of uncertainty and increased demand for organizational adaptation and learning, which was an underresearched topic in the context of Danish 0–9 schools, with potential practical application for 0–9 Danish school leaders. By exploring the descriptions and experiences of Danish 0–9 school leaders' efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic, this study may provide useful ways to address gaps in practice that directly or indirectly impact teachers or students when Danish 0–9 schools undergo significant changes due to crisis situations or other significant organizational changes that require swift adaptation or group learning. The implications of this study may support positive social change through better understanding the impact of psychological safety on successful leadership outcomes during high stress periods in Danish 0–9 schools.

Summary

This study addressed a gap in the research regarding Danish 0–9 school leader perceptions, experiences, and efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions during the 2020–2021 shift to online learning, guided by the UVM's seven fields of school leadership. The problem of this study was contextualized by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, when Danish 0–9 schools pivoted from conventional face-to-face instruction to an online model of instruction. I sought to explore the Danish 0–9 school leader perceptions of seven fields of school leadership experiences during the shift to online learning during the 2020–2021 lockdowns.

A basic qualitative design was implemented to address the purpose of this study, which was to explore Danish 0–9 school leader perceptions of seven fields of school leadership experiences during the shift from conventional face-to-face to online learning during the 2020–2021 lockdowns. Edmondson’s (1999) model of psychological safety offered a conceptual framework for this study. The research questions were addressed through interviews with school leaders who represented the target population of this study. I explored the perceptions and experiences of Danish 0–9 school top leaders, Danish 0–9 school principals, Danish 0–9 school vice principals, and Danish 0–9 teacher-leaders as they related to the research questions of this study and the framework of psychological safety, with a focus on successful outcomes and problems in Danish 0–9 school teaching teams during the shift to online education. Although the transferability of this study beyond the Danish 0–9 school system may be limited, there is potential for better understanding of the role of psychological safety in Danish 0–9 schools by examining meaningful data relating to perceptions and experiences of Danish 0–9 school leaders during the shift from face-to-face to online instruction. In Chapter 2, the literature search strategy employed to prepare for this study is described along with an in-depth discussion of the topics related to this study to inform on the breadth of the research considerations and contextualize the interrelated research areas that merited consideration and exploration in this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In 2021 and 2022, when the Danish government mandated that all 0–9 schools were to institute online learning in lieu of standard instructional practice due to the COVID-19 virus, the Danish 0–9 school communities became participants in a massive international experiment. Over 150 countries instituted non-face-to-face instruction to mitigate the potential spread of COVID-19 in their local communities (Muñoz-Najar et al., 2021). The literature review of the current study examined this interesting and broad situation with a local focus on the challenges Danish 0–9 school leaders experienced when carrying out their jobs as they implemented the mandated requirements in Danish 0–9 schools. The problem that was addressed in this study was the gap in the literature pertaining to Danish 0–9 school leader perceptions, experiences, and efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions during the 2020–2021 shift to online learning, guided by the UVM’s seven fields of school leadership. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore Danish 0–9 school leader experiences and perceptions of role of school leadership during the shift from face-to-face to online learning during the 2020–2021 COVID-19 pandemic as guided by the seven fields of school leadership.

This literature review chapter is broken down into several sections. The first main topic is recent literature establishing the relevance of the problem that the current study addressed. The following section is a discussion of the research strategy that was applied in the iterative process of conducting this study. The next section reports on the conceptual framework of this study. This conceptual framework section has various subheadings that are contextually presented. Finally, this literature review chapter reports

on the key variables and concepts that were relevant to research in preparation for this study. The key variables and concepts are as follows: the structure of Danish 0–9 education; the historical and political context of this study; the seven fields of school leadership; international research on school lockdowns and K–12 education Danish studies on lockdown effects on 0–9 education school leadership during the school lockdowns; and, leadership and crisis management.

Current Literature Establishing Relevance of Problem

In Denmark, there was general importance placed on the role of the 0–9 school leader (UVM, 2015; Winter, 2021) and widespread agreement that the abrupt shift to online learning due to COVID-19 was consequential for Danish 0–9 schools and leadership (EVA, 2021a; Nabe-Nielsen et al., 2021). However, there was little research on how Danish 0–9 school leaders perceived their work experiences during the shift to online learning (Clausen & Moll, 2021; EVA, 2021a; Milner, 2021; Nabe-Nielsen et al., 2021). I found only two published studies that contained qualitative interview data (EVA, 2021a; Lundtofte, 2021) documenting the personal experiences of Danish 0–9 school leaders during the shift to online learning.

Recent scholarly literature suggest that there are noteworthy issues worth consideration and discussion about Danish 0–9 school leadership, such as the opposing expectations of governmental and municipal interests against the expectations of staff or students (Bøje & Frederiksen, 2021; Lindvig, 2018), deficits of time to invest in pedagogical leadership and staff development (Aisinger, 2021; Bøje et al., 2018; Lieberknecht, 2020) and long working hours (Lieberknecht, 2020; Skoleleder Forening

[School Leader Union], 2020). Despite the relevance of these topics on what most consider to be the important work of Danish 0–9 school leadership, there is a gap in qualitative research on these topics, even preceding the crisis brought on by COVID-19.

The more acute gap, which is what this study is specifically addressing, is the Danish scholarly record regarding the experiences of Danish 0–9 school leaders during COVID-19 era which impacted the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 Danish 0–9 school years. Considering how Danish 0–9 school leaders have self-reported as having found their profession as demanding during the shift to and from online learning because of the COVID-19 restrictions (EVA, 2021a; Lundtofte, 2021), it is relevant to explore the role of Danish 0–9 school leaders to gain understanding of their experiences and perceptions relating to their work. It is not known when or if Danish 0–9 school leaders might need to pivot their schools to online teaching again, but there are many possible scenarios in which it might become necessary (Manuell & Cukor, 2011).

Research considering peoples' subjective perceptions, experiences, opinions, and beliefs are most appropriately studied through qualitative methods, as “such psychological things cannot be measured in the statistical sense” (Percy et al., 2015, p. 76). Specifically, the recollection of problematic moments and observational life stories are rooted in the qualitative tradition (Denzin & Lincoln, 2007). Therefore, the almost complete lack of qualitative research available on this topic, how Danish 0–9 school leaders actually experienced the role of school leader during the COVID-19 school lockdowns in Denmark, is a relevant gap to address. The knowledge gained from the

findings of qualitative data from Danish 0–9 school leaders could potentially advance practice and scholarly thought on the profession.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature search strategy included an implementation of the Walden University library resources, as well as different accessible academic search engines that are currently available. The implementation of the university library resources as well as additional search engines ensured that a well-rounded literature search was accomplished. This section presents the following topics:

- List accessed library databases and search engines used.
- List key search terms and combinations of search terms (with more detailed search terms located in an appendix if appropriate).
- A description of the iterative search process by explaining what terms were used in what database to identify germane scholarship.
- In cases where there is little current research, and few (if any) dissertations and/or conference proceedings, describe how this was handled.

The Walden University library has been a key research tool throughout the research process in this study and was the primary entry point to the different databases that I used in the research process. The databases that I utilized mostly included, APA PsychArticles, COVID-19 resources, ERIC and Education Source combined search, ProQuest Central, PubMed, SAGE journals and knowledge, Taylor and Francis Online, and UNESCO documents database. Walden's Thoreau Multi-Database Search was also applied to sample from a broad range of databases.

Although the Walden library was integral in my research process, accessing current local research was often easiest using Google Scholar. The Walden University library supported the acquisition of some published Danish scholarly work and was helpful in finding international scholarly content on topics relevant to this study, however Google scholar was also useful locating Danish book publications providing background on the Danish educational system (Pedersen, 2014; Hall, 2016; Moos, 2016) and other published Danish works. Hard copies of additional resources of Danish origin were either purchased online or borrowed from Danish royal and university libraries.

The advanced search function which can be enabled on the Walden University Library search function, in which several search terms can be applied simultaneously, as well as the ability to select several databases at once were also applied. The time frame for searching was set to 2019 to the present for all research related to COVID-19. Primarily, searches were also limited to peer-reviewed scholarly content that was published within the last five-year period. Some of the search terms that were most effective were comprised of Boolean operators that included: school leadership *or* educational leadership, principals *or* school leaders *or* administrators, k-12 schools *or* k-12 education, crisis *or* crisis management. In other searches, synonymous terms were not combined. As one example, terms including online education, distance education, virtual, stress and psychological, along with previously mentioned terms (including COVID-19) were applied and extracted useful results towards locating relevant scholarly research. As I read articles considered to be relevant or instructive, it was prudent to examine who these authors cited in their own research and reference lists. In doing this, the use of these

references enriched the search for related scholarly work as there were specific articles or researchers' work that merited direct investigation. As the research process began to narrow, specific databases were used to identify germane research. As an example of this, when looking at psychological considerations of the COVID-19 in the educational environment, using the search terms, schools and education, and COVID-19, using the APA PsycArticles database, the result was 68 scholarly articles with a particular focus on psychological aspects of the searched terms. These found articles were recent, many were relevant, and some were quite applicable to the focus of this study. The hit count of 68 is also manageable and well-narrowed. When using the search terms of, principals or school leaders or administrators, COVID-19, using the multi database Thoreau, the result list was 4,087 hits. This result was unwieldy but drew from many databases that perhaps would not otherwise have been located, including ScholarWorks and the Teacher Reference Center databases. In the case of this research harvest, scrolling through a large portion of this list was worthwhile to get an idea of what kinds of multi-disciplinary research has been conducted that related to the topic.

In contrast to the above mentioned 4087 results using the Thoreau multi database, when including the search term Denmark or Danish or Danmark in a separate search field, the result list went down to 18, none of the results being relevant. However, if one substituted the Boolean search term, principals or school leaders *or* administrators, with the Boolean search term, education *or* leadership *or* school *or* learning or teaching *or* classroom *or* education system, the results increased to 862 peer-reviewed studies, with mixed results, some of which were pertinent to school leadership even though that term

had been removed. This result list contained mostly relevant scholarly work, much of which had a relation to the country of Denmark. This large contrast in results due to the alteration of the search term was noted.

Locating and accessing current scholarly work which was conducted in Denmark via the Walden University library service proved difficult to achieve and did not meet necessary expectations. Google Scholar was helpful in locating relevant scholarly work being conducted through Århus University and the University of Southern Denmark (Qvortrup et al., 2020; Wistoft et al., 2021). These Danish academic papers, and the published work produced by the Danish Ministry of Children and Education reported on academic experiences and psycho-social impacts of students of non-face-to-face instruction in Danish schools. Qualitative findings relating to Danish school leadership were more difficult to locate yet particularly relevant to this study (EVA, 2021a; Lieberknecht, 2020). The findings of these locally conducted studies were contextually valuable to this study.

Conceptual Framework

The objective of this section was to describe the framework of psychological safety, which is the conceptual framework of this study, as well as to provide structure to the components comprising psychological safety, the origins of the framework, and how it is compatible with the study being proposed here. The conceptual framework will be presented with the following sections headings: What is Psychological Safety?; Primary Theorists Undergirding Psychological Safety; Primary Writings and Key Theorists; Psychological Safety and its Identification; and finally, Current Study Benefits from

Conceptual Framework, which consists of the following sub-topics; COVID-19, Adaptation, and Team Learning; Flexibility of Psychological Safety; Psychological Safety as Independent of Leader Type; and finally, Teamwork in Schools.

What Is Psychological Safety?

Psychological Safety is used to describe the level of safety, or empowered well-being individuals feel within a team or organization (Baeva & Bordovskaia, 2015; Edmundson & Lei, 2014; Edmondson, 2019). It is a shared feeling of security (Kwon et al., 2020), or can also be seen as a climate in which all group members can be their genuine selves (Edmondson, 2019). A person with of a high level of psychological safety, feels safe engaging in actions such as asking questions to peers and leaders, sharing opinions, risk-taking and attempting creative and innovative solutions to problems (Edmundson & Lei, 2014; Weiner et al., 2021) which are all important characteristics when adapting to changes.

Although these activities may be common in well-functioning organizational work groups, in work contexts in which there are low levels of psychological safety, a person may be hesitant to expose oneself to possible criticism and judgement and may refrain from behaviors which call attention to one's own idea or an issue at hand. A person who feels psychologically unsafe may retract or freeze productivity and learning within the organization (Edmondson, 1999, 2019; Weiner et al., 2021). This may be in the form of keeping silent, or by finding workaround solutions that meet immediate work needs without identifying and diagnosing problems in plenum, which would be more help to the organization in the long term (Edmondson, 2019)

Primary Theorists Undergirding Psychological Safety

Although psychological safety has become an applicable research model within the field of education within the last decade (Edmondson, 2014, 2019; Gerlach & Gockel, 2018; Weiner et al., 2021), the origins of the constructs involved in the framework that Edmondson presented in 1999, were primarily developed out of the field of organizational theory, although one could say that Bandura's social learning theory from 1977 discussed the importance of listening and supporting subordinates, which arguably, proposed the creation of a working climate compatible to conditions where psychological safety may be actualized. This being said, Bandura's theoretical framework had more of a focus on how leaders needed to be clear with directions, expectations and model desired behavior (Newman et al, 2017). Psychological safety goes further than just supporting team members, listening to them, and modeling how to carry out work tasks.

Prior to Edmondson's work, Argyris (1993) reported on how tacitly held beliefs by group members impacted team outcomes. This was an important building block of the work Edmondson would later conduct, that eventually gave credibility that Argyris' assertions about the importance of tacitly held beliefs held by work group members. Additionally, work by Wittenbaum et al. (1999), discussed how information sharing between group members not only enriches common knowledge, but also served to validate members, and help them to relate to one another, which is an assertion that can be affixed to a broader framework called psychological safety.

These perspectives by Argyris and Wittenbaum were contrary to older scholarly work conducted in a variety of organizational settings that had supported the idea that

team effectiveness was primarily enabled by structural features, which in this study are referred to as antecedent conditions, such as a well-designed team task, appropriate team composition, and a context that ensures the availability of information, resources, and rewards (Hackman, 1987). From my research, it would seem that although qualitative work in the 1980's and 1990's was describing and identifying interpersonal features in group learning, there was still a great deal of focus on structural features, or antecedent conditions, while underestimating the importance of interpersonal interactions in group learning and positive work outcomes. At that time, Edmondson lamented that the theories and constructs which focused on interpersonal factors on team learning did "not allow for explicit hypothesis testing" (Edmondson, 1999, p. 3). Edmondson's work was impactful as her investigations provided empirical evidence supporting ideas about how the nature of interpersonal relationships, communicative and non-communicative behaviors, information sharing, and tacit beliefs impact work group outcomes.

Primary Writings and Key Theorists

Schein and Bennis (1965) were the first on record to use the term psychological safety (Edmondson, 2020; Weiner et al., 2021). They used it to describe the need organizational members have, to feel safe, carry on, and cope with feelings of discomfort when faced with organizational change. In 1990, Kahn discussed the concept further in a management journal, explaining major tenants of psychological safety. Kahn applied the term to describe conditions which play a role in organizational members' feelings of attachment and engagement at work. Kahn's study examined how individuals' work experiences are impacted by the degree to which they can be open, honest and take risks.

Kahn's work was primarily focused on individuals, whereas Edmondson's 1999 study conceptualized psychological safety as interactive and community-engaged group beliefs, that emphasized the group or team experience as the central focus in her study (Frazier et al., 2017).

As in Kahn's study from 1990, Edmondson (1999) incorporated additional contemporary thinking about interpersonal factors, trust, sharing, group beliefs and organizational structures (along with Schein and Bennis' concept of interpersonal safety) in a way in which hypotheses about psychological safety could be constructed on the model, empirically tested, and evaluated. In doing so, Amy Edmondson brought attention to psychological safety with the 1999 study. Since then, Edmondson's work has been applied to many different organizational fields, from business (Frazier, 2017; Newman et al, 2017) to the educational sphere (Baeva & Bordovskaia, 2015; Edmondson, 2014, 2019; Harvey et al., 2019; Weiner et al, 2021).

Concepts Inherent in the Framework

As represented through Figure 1, and described in Chapter One, the conceptual framework of this study consists of four interconnected constructs that are often collectively referred to as psychological safety but will be addressed individually. These concepts form the conceptual framework that Edmondson articulated in 1999 and that will be used in this study. The four components are: Antecedent Conditions; Team Beliefs; Team Behaviors; and Outcomes. The following is a summary the four components.

Antecedent Conditions

Antecedent conditions refer to structural features of a workplace that are in place which impact the way work teams are assembled, coached and the degree to which they are equipped to meet desired work goals and demands. In ideal situations, the leadership, available resources, and setting support the objectives of the work group and organization. The consideration of antecedent conditions as being important to work groups pre-dates Edmondson's work. A well-designed team task, appropriate team composition, reward system, and a context that ensures the availability of information, resources, and rewards are important to increase team effectiveness (Hackman, 1987). Antecedent conditions represent the setting or climate in which psychological safety may either flourish or languish. It is advantageous to have appropriate to attractive work conditions acknowledging that an over-indulgence of resources and low expectations is not advocated for (Edmondson, 2019).

Team Beliefs

Team beliefs refer to two different types of shared beliefs held by work groups, one being the level of group efficacy, and the other is psychological safety. Group efficacy refers to the degree to which team members consider their team as being skillful at executing their goals, service, products, etc. The collective opinion or belief of a work group on the quality of the product or service that they produce is their shared belief of group efficacy, which is generally considered to impact group performance (Edmondson, 1999).

The team belief of psychological safety refers to the levels of interpersonal trust, respect and caring the group members have for one another (Edmondson, 1999).

Workers' beliefs about both group efficacy and beliefs about team psychological safety have a cumulative impact on their interpersonal interactions, behaviors and ultimately work outcomes (Edmondson, 1999; 2019). Although the team belief of psychological safety may appear to be simplistic, these core beliefs held by the workers about the levels of trust, respect and caring between members of the group have a profound effect on how the team members interact, behave, how well the group members collaborate, adapt to new situations, and ultimately their cumulative work outcomes (Edmondson, 1999; 2019).

Team Behaviors

According to Edmondson, signs of psychological safety can be seen in behaviors of individuals, and in groups of workers. Work environments where people can genuinely be themselves, feel appreciated and trusted, are psychologically advantageous to collaborative work, and lead to better outcomes due to the behaviors that are supported in such settings (Edmondson, 1999; 2019). Following this reasoning, teams with high degrees of psychological safety create work environments in which it is common to engage in constructive interpersonal behaviors, such as respectfully listening to one another, asking helpful but sometimes difficult questions, trying out creative solutions to common problems, and speaking up about areas of possible improvement for the good of the group and organization (Edmondson, 2019).

There are risks involved in engaging in behaviors in which one breaks silence, or openly engages in an alternate work strategy. Trying new creative ideas, or speaking up in plenum at work, opens a door to criticism or rebuke. This willingness to show vulnerability is enough to impact work behavior. In her well received Ted talk in 2010, Brené Brown explained vulnerability as “allowing ourselves to be seen” (2010). Brown discussed the importance of embracing vulnerability and authenticity as these behaviors can ultimately lead to personal development and improvement in many areas of one’s personal professional life. In a work team setting, an acceptance of vulnerability can support interpersonal behaviors. Edmondson discussed how admitting that one needs help, saying I don’t know, admitting a mistake or saying sorry are all expressions of vulnerability. “By being willing to acknowledge that you are fallible human being, you give permission to others to do likewise” (Edmondson, 2019, p. 200).

More scholarly recognition of the importance of behaviors exhibited by workers were shared by organizational psychologist Adam Grant (2017). In the discussions about workgroup behaviors which are arguably highly compatible with Edmondson’s (1999), Grant posited that there are generally three different styles of how workers interact. He called the first group takers. They take advantage of as much help and resources as possible, but do not offer anything in return unless they cannot avoid it. This mindset contributes very little to collective cohesion or goals. These team members, according to Grant (2017) are destructive to group productivity and long-term outcomes. This work group description is consistent with behaviors which negatively impact or are symptomatic of low levels of psychological safety.

The second group Grant (2017) calls matching cultures. This interpersonal approach is transactional in nature. In matching work cultures, team members only exchange information and support to personal allies within the group. This type of behavior pattern can be identified as influential to group psychological safety as it falls short of an ideal situation in which goals of the groups and organization are of high value. The third type of team culture Grant called giving cultures. The behavior of these group members is very comparable to what one would expect from a team with high levels of psychological safety. These people exhibit behaviors like asking questions, volunteering to help others, and showing trust and loyalty to one another. It could be argued that what Grant is describing is a workplace in which there is evidence of high degrees of psychological safety in the behaviors of the work teams.

Outcomes

Feelings of interpersonal connectedness, mutual trust, and respect are conducive to well-being between group members. It is logical to expect that workplace behaviors can be either helpful or counter productive to team goals. From the perspective of an organizational leader, beliefs and behaviors may be seen as insignificant unless they can be shown to have a measurable impact the outcomes work groups achieve. The significance of Edmondson's (1999) work was that her work provided empirical evidence connecting the concepts of antecedent conditions, team beliefs, and the behaviors exhibited by team members to the quality of outcomes work groups achieve.

Psychological Safety and Its Identification

Psychological safety, or lack thereof, can be identified by noting behaviors work group members engage in, such as asking questions, taking risks, seeking feedback, speaking one's mind, finding creative or alternative solutions to problems, sharing of information, and open discussion of issues or errors (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Edmondson, 2019). Even in normal times in schools, individuals in work groups encounter problems or unfamiliar situations. However, it has been reported that there was even more operational uncertainty in the case under the COVID-19 school lockdowns (EVA, 2021a).

Identifying Psychological Safety in Schools

How work groups in schools behaviorally respond to conditions may infer their collective levels of psychological safety. Behavioral responses can be based in fear, which may take the form of a lack of inaction, or not seeking clarification in a way that is visible to the group (Edmondson, 2019). Spotting the absence of, or examples showing low levels of psychological safety, may be more difficult to identify than the opposite, as areas of insecurity, possible communication issues or faults in workflow can be quietly lived-with and ignored for fear of reprisal when leadership is authoritarian, or interpersonal good-will is absent in a work group (Edmondson, 2019).

Behaviors which reflect high levels of psychological safety are based on mutual feelings of interpersonal respect, care, and trust between group members. In an educational workplace, the behaviors might be vigorous information sharing, collaboration in teams, networks used by school leaders, teachers or teaching groups,

open acknowledgement, or praise of a colleagues' solution to a common problem. Openly asking questions that challenge the status quo, admissions of error, and seeking help or feedback are also behaviors which indicate a high degree of psychological safety.

Current Study Benefits From Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of psychological safety has been suitably applied within the context of this study. In this subsection, the current study benefits of this conceptual framework are explored. The following topics will be discussed; Wide applicability of Psychological Safety; Work in Danish 0–9 schools is carried out in teams; Psychological safety is Independent of Personality Types; COVID-19; Adaptation, and Psychological Safety, and finally the conceptual framework conclusion.

Wide Applicability of Psychological Safety

The conceptual framework of psychological safety can be explored in reference to many different phenomena to learn about conditions of well-being and learning within organizations, including K-12 schools (Edmondson, 2019; Higgins et al., 2011). Studies suggest that it is also appropriately compatibility with different languages and cultures around the world (Edmondson, 2019). Edmondson supported the idea that psychological safety can be measured qualitatively as is intended in this study. “Interview data can be coded to detect the presence or absence of psychological safety” (Edmondson, 2019, p.20).

Several studies showed the relevance of psychological safety in educational, hospital, and organizational settings. Psychological safety has numerous positive outcomes, such as increased job engagement, job satisfaction, team learning, and team

performance” (Gerlach & Gockel, 2018, p. 304). In a study called Project Aristotle conducted by Google to examine what makes the best work teams, psychological safety was identified as “the most important of the five dynamics we found” (Rozovski, 2015). Innovation and creativity have also been credibly linked to psychological safety in a study from 65 research and development teams from technology companies in Taiwan (Huang & Jiang, 2012). These examples are suggested that the broad applicability of psychological safety is relevant to organizations in need of activating the above types of activities.

Work in Danish 0–9 Schools Is Carried Out in Teams

Psychological safety is a team or work-group phenomenon. The components of the model are activated when teams of people work together. Since the 1990’s, work carried out in Danish 0–9 schools has been primarily carried out by teams (Albrechtsen, 2022). Work teams in Danish 0–9 schools can be assembled in various ways, however typically they take the form of class teams, year group teams, department team, and subject discipline team (Albrechtsen, 2022). To understand the choice of psychological safety as the conceptual framework for this study, it is necessary to acknowledge that it is not possible for a Danish 0–9 school leader to personally fulfill all duties and tasks in a school. Teams meet the challenges and adversities presented to them but are influenced by the presence and competence of the leader.

Leadership, in this context, requires a person who can manage their organizations by supporting positive adaptive behaviors of teams in their schools, draw upon common articulated goals, exercise collective knowledge of staff, and activate groups of people to

achieve desired outcomes (Andersen, 2021; Albrechtsen, 2022; Edmondson, 2019). This expertise in leadership, or management as it is sometimes called, hinges on how school leaders enable and support teams (Albrechtsen, 2022; Weiner et al., 2021), or groups of administrative staff, teachers, support personnel, etc., to accomplish goals. As I accept this premise to be true, the inter-connecting constructs which together create the framework of psychological safety, as presented by Edmondson (1999), is appropriate to use as the contextual lens through which Danish 0–9 school leader perceptions and experiences will be interpreted in this study.

Psychological Safety Is Independent of Personality Type

As EBSCO (2021) noted, as concerns characteristics that reflect strong and effective leadership:

The conclusion of extensive research on leadership is that good leaders come in many forms; there is no one best type of leader. Effective leadership has been shown to depend on characteristics of the group and its environment as well as those of the leader. (para. 1)

The goal of this study is not to determine which leadership style or personality characteristics of Danish 0–9 school leaders are most advantageous in tackling the COVID-19 crisis in schools, nor what leadership style is best in relation to the tenants of the seven fields of leadership as proposed by the Danish Ministry of Children and Education.

As reported by Edmondson (2019), psychological safety is not correlated with levels of extroversion or personality factors. While it is true that personal characteristics,

modus operandi, and leadership styles are influential in Danish 0–9 schools, this study seeks to have a conceptual point of reference that is more universal and can be identified and examined regardless of the leadership style embodied by any given school leader. For this reason, the aim of this study is to examine the perceptions and experiences that different school leaders had, relating to how their organizations responded to the COVID-19 school lockdowns, and by analysis of coded interviews, identify evidence, or lack thereof, psychological safety as being either helpful for a positive response to the challenges brought on by the added stress on their organizations or not.

COVID-19, Adaptation, and Psychological Safety

In the context of the COVID-19 Danish 0–9 school shift to online learning crisis, normal work and learning conditions at schools were significantly altered, which put school constituents under stress, while at the same time calling for adaptation of the organization, open-mindedness, and participation from all involved (EVA, 2021a). The psychological safety of an educational environment has an impact on the development of the organization, the well-being of its community members (Baeva & Bordovskaia, 2015; Weiner et al., 2021), and schools' ability to react positively to changing conditions (Weiner et al., 2021).

“Research shows a relationship between psychological safety and innovation” (Edmondson, 2019, p. 40). Team learning has also been credibly suggested to be arbitrated by psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999, 2014, 2019; Harvey et al., 2019). This collective research suggests that psychological safety is impactful to teamwork and a useful framework to examine leadership in schools that required swift adaptations and

teamwork in response to the abrupt shift to online learning during the vulnerable and stressful time of the COVID-19 school lockdowns.

Conceptual Framework Conclusion

An examination of perspectives and experiences of Danish 0–9 school leaders under the conditions of COVID-19 can be used to identify interactions between team members and gain insight into the degree in which elements psychological safety can be identified. It is important to remember that even if there is a willingness to adapt and learn during crisis situations, emotional, technical, or other challenges can put pressure on the school leaders' abilities to enable productive interactions with work groups. These dynamics may have influenced the sense of security members of work groups felt when confronted with the need to ask for help, take chances, or admit when they didn't understand how to proceed (Harvey et al., 2019), particularly in novel situations like the one COVID-19 introduced to schools (Weiner et al., 2021).

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

To understand the variables and concepts relating to the problem of this study and how to approach the topic with a meaningful purpose, required knowledge of various theories, concepts, historical factors, and other contextually important topics. These areas of research helped identify a problem as well as helped to identify ways to approach the problem with an aligned purpose. In this section, the following topics will be presented as the key variables and concepts of this literature review: The Structure of Danish 0–9 Education; Historical and Political Context of This Study; The Seven Fields of School Leadership; International Research on School Lockdowns and K-12 Education; Danish

Studies on Lockdown Effects on 0–9 Education; School Leadership During the School Lockdowns; and Leadership and Crisis Management.

Structure of Danish 0–9 Education

The current landscape of Danish 0–9 school leadership, including historical background, and political influences on Danish 0–9 education over the last few decades could have influenced how Danish 0–9 leaders responded to, or experienced their roles during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Although this study did not set out to contextualize the history and political development as important facets in the examination of Danish 0–9 school leaders' experiences with leadership and management during the COVID-19 school lockdowns, research about these topics as well as, general contextual information, which I will outline, may lend background understanding to differences in school leaders' perceptions of their roles, related to differences in how the 0–9 school leaders were prepared for the work. As this study proposal is being presented to a United States-based university, this section of the literature review is necessary to help non-Danish scholarly readers to have some understanding of the setting and context of the study.

0–9 education in Denmark is a constitutional right of every citizen in Denmark. After this obligatory Danish 0–9 school, ten-year basic education, students are typically 16 years old (UFM, 2021), and can then choose from several paths forward. There are both public schools and private schools in Denmark. All private and public schools have at least one school leader and often two or three under the criteria defined in this study. Danish public schools are called folkeskoler [folk, or ground schools]. Danish private 0–9 schools are referred to as privat skoler and have more autonomy as institutions but must

still conform to national and many municipal guidelines to function legally and receive funding.

The general structure of leadership responsibility for Danish 0–9 education starts with the country’s codified national laws in the *Bekendtgørelse af lov om folkeskolen* [Promulgation of the Act on ground school], which is the set of laws codified in paragraph form (*Folkeskoleloven* [ground school law], 2021) which details basic rights and responsibilities pertaining to 0–9 education. For example, section two reads: “§ 2: Kommunalbestyrelsen har ansvaret for folkeskolen. Kommunalbestyrelsen har ansvaret for, at alle børn i kommunen sikres ret til vederlagsfri undervisning i folkeskolen” [The municipal board is responsible for the primary school. The municipal board is responsible that all children in the municipality are guaranteed the right to free education in the 0–9 school] (*Retsinformation.dk* [Online Danish statutes], 2021).

The Danish Ministry of Children and Education follows and politically enacts laws pertaining to educational rights and directives and is responsible for establishing curricula at primary and secondary level (UFM, 2021). However, how the explicit curricula taught are essentially decided on by the schools and teachers themselves. Nevertheless, school leaders report to local school boards of their institutions, and municipal 0–9 school administrations who, besides the Danish Ministry of Children and Education, have authority over how schools operate and are fully responsible for the funding of 0–9 schools within their municipalities (UFM, 2021).

Historical and Political Context of This Study

Various Danish scholars have pointed out noteworthy changes to the role of the 0–9 school leader over the last forty years or so. The intent of this section is to acknowledge observations on which there appears to be some consensus, and which could add context to the way school leaders might experience their role or influence how they might respond to questions about their work. General policy implementation, based on political movements related to this topic will be discussed to broadly report on the evolving landscape of Danish 0–9 school leadership.

Bøje & Frederiksen (2021) and Hall (2016) reported on how in the 1980's, and prior to this time, Danish 0–9 school leaders were typically accomplished teachers who progressively advanced into the school leader position from a teaching role and had been, therefore, educated as a teacher in a teaching seminary, not a university. School leadership during this time was highly focused on instruction and content (Hall, 2016; Wiedeman, 2021). Hall (2016) described the school leader position in the 1980's as an outpost of the municipal administration, 0–9 school leaders carried out communal directives, however the school principal was seen as “fremmest blandt lige mænd” [a standout among equals] in relation to the schoolteachers (Hall, 2016, p. 27). This strongly suggests that there was not a large status or power gap between leader and teaching colleagues. There seems to be consensus that democracy between the school leader, teachers and students was greatly supported during this era in Danish school leadership (Hall, 2016; Pedersen, 2014; Wiedemann, 2021b).

During the latter part of the 1980's, the job of Danish 0–9 school leader began to change. New Public Management (NPM) made its 1983 debut in Denmark and started to influence how welfare organizations were managed in most OECD countries around this timeframe. Virtually all OECD countries implemented and/or currently implement NPM to some degree (Grønnegård-Christensen, 2023). In Denmark, schools fall into the category of welfare organizations (Hall, 2016), as do nursing and social work. These professions represent a subset of the public sector, which along with many other sectors were introduced to the influences of NPM during the 1980s.

The management model of NPM was started in New Zealand (McLaughlin et al., 2001). It addressed areas for improvement regarding efficiency and transparency in the public sector, but also introduced more controversial areas of emphasis, such as increased competition, marketing and privatization, and more centralized control of organizations (Grønnegård-Christensen, 2023). Another key concept of NPM, is that leadership can be generalized, meaning that knowing how to be a leader is a skill set independent of what type of organization one leads. In other words, if a person can competently lead and manage a private company, thinking in line with NPM would suggest that it stands to reason that the person could also competently run an educational institution (Hall, 2016; Wiedemann, 2021a). Many scholars equate the overall thrust of NPM with neo-liberalistic goals (Grønnegård-Christensen, 2023; Pedersen, 2014). The impacts of neo-liberalism on modern educational structures are often criticized by Danish and international scholars (Connell, 2013; Pedersen, 2014; Sharma, 2018).

In the 1990's, the role of the school leader became more influential within Danish schools. The teachers' strong union presence which had earlier been a decisive body in the management of 0–9 Danish schools was dropped during national school reform negotiations, and in 1989 this power was shifted to the local 0–9 school leader (Hall, 2016; Wiedemann, 2021a). It was also during the 1990's that the word teams started showing up in Danish educational literature. This concept of school staff working in various work group constellations called teams, has, since then, become fully integrated in the Danish 0–9 school staff workflow (Albrechtsen, 2022).

Also developing during this era, was the idea that schools were best led as competitive organizations, which is a hallmark of the influence of NPM (Grønnegård-Christensen, 2023; Hall, 2016). Also influential at this time was New Zealand and Canadian school leadership literature about transformational leadership leading to positive test results (Hall, 2016). Although more emphasis was put on measurable results from schools during the 90's, data-driven leadership would become more influential later when Denmark began participation in PISA testing in 2000, TALIS testing in 2008, and standardized national tests in 2010 (Hall, 2016; Wiedemann, 2021a). In professional literature pertaining to Danish 0–9 school management at this time the term service management was used, emphasizing the concept that Danish 0–9 school leaders should run their schools like small businesses, with families as customers (Wiedemann, 2021a).

A parallel example of this new value placed on competition began to focus on how academic preparation should reflect competition in a globalized world (Hall, 2016; Wiedemann, 2021a). Whereas traditional Danish 0–9 leadership operated in a more

democratic paradigm in which content and instructional practices were the focus, the new emphasis was on preparation of a viable future workforce (Hall, 2016; Pedersen, 2014; Wiedemann, 2021b). Hall (2016) posited that Danish 0–9 school leadership in the 2000’s was even more influenced by the principles of NPM than the previous decade, as schools became more results driven. Technology was now making it possible to implement more standardized testing and analysis of data to shape Danish 0–9 education.

In 2003, a diploma program supported by the Danish government in leadership became available to aspiring or current Danish 0–9 school leaders (Hall, 2016). As previously noted, at this time Danish 0–9 school leaders were virtually all educated as teachers and advanced into the role of school leader, so this new qualifying diploma in leadership was a significant step in redefining the position of the Danish 0–9 school leader (Hall, 2016; Wiedemann, 2021b). The training emphasized organizational improvement but signified a move from pedagogical leadership to generalized leadership strategies that could be used in any organization (Hall, 2016).

In 2007, a visiting team of the OECD along with a local academic made an analysis of the Danish 0–9 school system titled, *improving school leadership national background report, Denmark*, in which the OECD critiqued that Danish schools were too focused on pedagogy, and that strategic thinking, innovation, evaluation, and documentation were missing in Danish schools (Hall, 2016). This fueled more focus on the use of international and national standardized tests as drivers of and documentation of *fælles mål* [common goals] to measure schools’ output, or results (Hall, 2016; Moos, 2016; Wiedemann, 2021a).

The 2010's and leading up to the Danish school reform in late 2014, Danish 0–9 school leadership had a continued focus on generalized leadership strategies and measurable data to analyze output and to document strategies (Hall, 2016). Danish 0–9 school leaders were encouraged set clear, simple, and measurable goals (Pedersen, 2014). Although the job of Danish 0–9 school leader was considered a valued role (Wiedemann, 2021b), it was a role described by some scholars as overwhelming (Aisinger, 2021), or a krydsfelt (Hall, 2016; Hildebrandt, 2011). The dictionary definition of this word, krydsfelt, literally translated as cross field, is, an area where a number of widely different currents, interests, methods, viewpoints etc. meet and enter into an interaction with each other. (Krydsfeldt, n.d.). This word was used to describe the work reality of a Danish 0–9 school leader trying to support and satisfy many different constituent groups, as well as strategically recruit qualified staff, upgrade local competencies, promote their schools, keep a healthy school climate, use strategic data to achieve higher academic results, etc.

This was the setting in late 2014 when new school reforms were enacted by the Danish federal government. The aim of the reforms was to strengthen professionalism and competency of school staff to strengthen student achievement, enhance student well-being and work harder to breakdown negative social heritage issues (Folketinget [Danish Parliament]. (2013), which means to help students who come from low achieving families and communities to break away from a negative cycle. The school day was lengthened for all 0–9 students, and new academic expectations and expectations of integration of special needs students into mainstream classes were set into practice (Olsen, 2013).

Unfortunately, the roll out of the new mandates was a not a calm transition. There were contractual issues between the teacher unions and the legal representation of the municipalities which led to 25 days of union teacher lockouts and eventual alterations of Danish 0–9 schoolteachers' work agreements to look more like other public jobs (Jensen & Jørgensen, 2022). Although the measures were eventually put into practice, a later analysis conducted in 2018 (VIVE), concluded that neither student well-being nor academic achievement were significantly positively impacted by the national 0–9 school reform initiatives.

Seven Fields of School Leadership

Ostensibly presented in the spirit of helping school leaders, school boards, and municipal education offices navigate their roles during the implementation of school reforms, in 2015 the Danish Ministry of Children and Education published the booklet: *Ledelse af den nye folkeskole* [Leadership of the new 0–9 school] *Syv ledelsesfelter til skole ledelser og forvaltning* [Seven leadership fields for school leadership and management]. This 38-page booklet presented the seven fields of school leadership to the target groups of Danish 0–9 school leaders, local 0–9 school boards, and municipal education offices (UVM, 2015).

The booklet outlined seven major themes of Danish 0–9 school leadership. It was composed in cooperation between a large consortium of Danish universities, associations, and research institutes, which formed the National Dialogue Forum for School Leadership. Which consisted of representatives from Aarhus University, Aalborg University, Center for Offentlig Kompetenceudvikling [public competence development],

Copenhagen Business School, Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut [Denmark's evaluation institute], KORA – Det Nationale Institut for Kommuners og Regioners Analyse og Forskning [The National Institute for municipalities' and regions' analysis and research], Professionshøjskolerne [Profession colleges], SFI – Det Nationale Forskningscenter for Udvikling [The National center for development], and Syddansk University. The seven fields of school leadership were published in 2015 and are still articulated on the official Danish Ministry of Children and Education website at the time of writing this (UVM, 2024). They include:

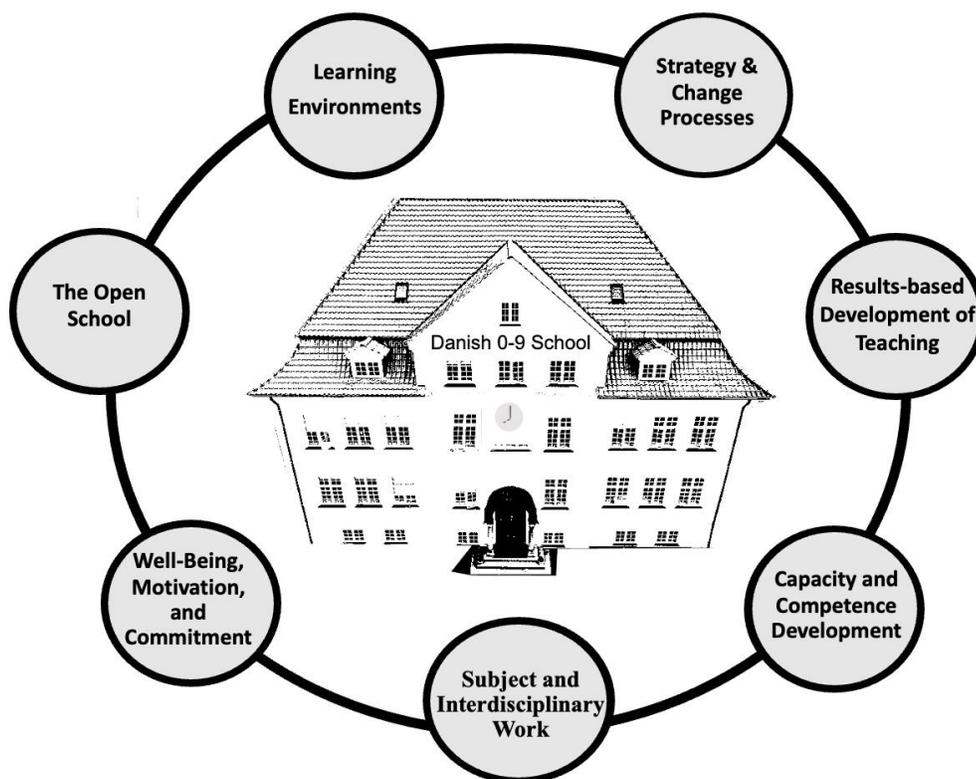
- leadership of learning environments
- leadership of strategy and change processes
- leadership of knowledge and results-based development of the school's teaching
- leadership of capacity and competence development
- leadership of subject and interdisciplinary work
- leadership of well-being, motivation, and commitment
- leadership of the open school

Each of the above fields of leadership, which were articulated by the Danish Ministry of Children and Education in 2015 and given lengthy titles to represent various concepts embedded in their descriptions are explained below. They are outlined in terms of how they were originally presented by the Danish Ministry of Children and Education (2015), as well as discussed in terms of the context of this study. The seven fields of school leadership were published prior to the COVID-19 crisis, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Danish Ministry of Children and Education's 7 Fields of School Leadership pre-COVID-

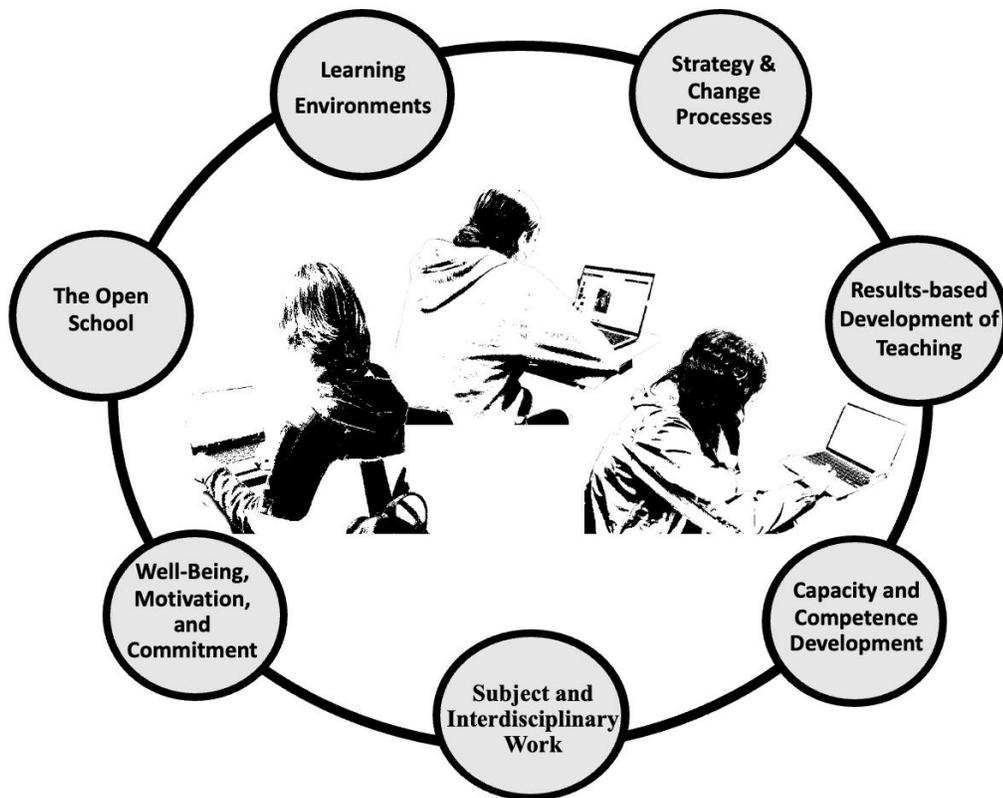
19



Note. In Figure 2, one sees a Danish 0-9 brick and mortar school with the seven fields of school leadership surrounding it. This represents a normal paradigm of operation for a Danish 0–9 school. The various constituents, work teams, school leaders, and students and parents interact in person, to hopefully collaborate to support organizational goals.

Figure 3

Danish Ministry of Children and Education's 7 Fields of School Leadership During COVID-19 Lockdown



Note. In Figure 3, the traditional school paradigm has been substituted for online interaction, yet the surrounding seven fields of school leadership remain. It could be argued that need for cooperation on many of the seven fields were heightened under the new challenging conditions brought on by COVID-19. Research suggests that the unexpected school shutdowns impacted Danish school constituents and operations (Eva, 2021a).

Leadership of Learning Environments

The field of leadership of learning environments focuses on the importance of Danish 0–9 school leadership in promoting high expectations for learning and well-being, with a varied and motivational school culture. Goal oriented teaching and learning are supported with differentiated instruction, input from students and inclusive practices. The school leader must create a school culture in which all teachers have high expectations of the students ensuring that every child can be developed to his or her fullest potential (UVM, 2015).

The concept of a learning environment can be viewed as a multi-dimensional concept, referring to cultural contexts, physical settings, educational approaches, that are found in a classroom (Horne-Martin, 2002). Although there may be uncertainty in the scholarly world about what is theoretically meant by pedagogical leadership and precisely what, on practical terms can be done as a school leader to improve 0–9 Danish learning environments (Lund et al., 2020), let alone how a school leader can ensure that every child reaches his or her fullest potential. However, in the context of Danish 0–9 school leadership, this field of leadership is closely tied to highly engrained Danish 0–9 school leadership and pedagogical traditions. Indeed, the study of learning environments and pedagogical approaches are a focal point in virtually all western school educational traditions. It could be reasoned that this field represents a good area for inquiry into Danish 0–9 school leaders' perspectives and work experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Leadership of Strategy and Change Processes

Danish 0–9 School leadership must formulate a vision and strategic objectives for the school's pedagogical work, based on results of national and municipal objectives, as well as frameworks set by the school board (UVM, 2015). The goals and vision for the school should reflect the potential of the school, its challenges, and areas where there are needs for change and development. Schools must provide resources and the competency levels to carry out management goals and results with the strategic goal to develop and improve instruction (UVM, 2015).

The field of leadership of strategy and change processes has a focus on strategic goal setting and establishing processes and agreed upon vision(s) with agreement from the local school boards. National laws and guidelines as well as municipal objectives. A key strategic goal is to facilitate buy-in from school staff into the vision and initiatives which ultimately should improve instruction and results (UVM, 2015).

It can be reasoned that if a Danish 0–9 school leader has a high degree of competence in establishing, articulating, and supporting school-wide strategies and change processes in their schools, she or he would be well-positioned to respond to and help their organizations adapt to a crisis or abrupt change in institutional practices, like the changes that incurred due to the COVID-19 crisis. As the main researcher of this study, I consider the possible utility of the strategy and change process field of leadership to be very highly interesting area of inquiry, potentially leading to edifying Danish 0–9 school leader experiences about working with people, coordinating information, communicating strategy, and leveraging buy-in from different professional groups.

On the other hand, as concepts like a school vision or a strategic plan can sometimes be viewed as political and somewhat nebulous concepts. Critics of the heightened prominence of this field of leadership over the last few decades often question the root motivations behind the various stakeholders' different goals, visions and change initiatives (Hall, 2016; Pedersen, 2014; Moos, 2016). Although, it is unlikely that the Danish national educational response to the COVID-19 crisis was motivated by any stakeholder's agenda, this area of inquiry has the potential to be a source for meaningful reflection in the context of the crisis brought on by the COVID-19 shifts to online learning.

Leadership of Knowledge and Results-Based Development of the School's Teaching, Capacity, and Competence Development

Danish 0–9 school leadership is responsible for formulating a vision and strategic objectives for the school's pedagogical work and results based on national and municipal objectives, as well as frameworks set by the school board. School management must prioritize resources and competencies that are in line with the overall goals, as well as prepare action plans with specific goals for the school's pedagogical work and results in order to change practices and habits at the school (UVM, 2015).

This leadership field of knowledge and results-based development of the school's teaching, capacity, and competence development may have been a difficult time for school leaders, as they might have felt unsure of what the expectations for testing and accountability were going to be. As it turned out, the Danish government eased requirements of the number of the tests and final exams that Danish 0–9 schools had

otherwise planned to carry out (UVM, 2023), but during the early part of the educational crisis brought on by COVID-19, it was unknown to school leaders how results-based data would be impacted by shifting from face-to face to online learning. It is difficult to estimate the level of utility of this field of leadership as an area of inquiry for this study.

Leadership of Capacity and Competence Development of the Pedagogical Staff in the School

Danish 0–9 school leaders must ensure that the school’s employees have the relevant subject didactic competencies, and that the school, as a whole, has the capacity and the relevant competencies so that it can function as a learning community with goals and results related to students’ learning and well-being. Strategic analysis of the school’s capacity and competence development needs should guide planning, professional development, and recruitment practices (UVM, 2015).

The field of leadership pertaining to capacity and competence development of the pedagogical staff is a practical field of leadership. In Danish schools, teachers are recruited with different levels of qualifications in relation to the classes they teach. Most desirable are 0–9 teachers with formal training in teaching the specific academic subject they were hired to teach. Other potential teachers do not have formal training as teachers, but the school leader makes the assessment that the person has teaching competencies that are comparable to the trained teacher, and finally there are people working in schools who do not have any specific competence in the academic subject (VIVE, 2019).

In a study carried out by Den Nationale Forsknings – og Analysecenter for Velfærd [The national research and analysis center for welfare] (VIVE, 2019) data was

provided by 0–9 school leaders on the above levels of teaching personnel qualifications in correlation with results on the national standardized tests. There was statistical support for the proposition that students who were taught by formally trained teachers who had formal training in the specific academic subject, or teachers who, despite the lack of formal training, have teaching competencies that are comparable to the trained teacher achieved better results than non-qualified people (VIVE, 2019).

It is not surprising that recruitment is a key determinant of the composition of a teaching staff, but also inspiring teachers to upgrade their qualifications as well as letting go of staff members who are not equipped to deliver quality instruction are all part of this leadership area. Although not explored in the booklet which thoroughly describes the seven fields of leadership, as it was written pre-COVID-19, was the topic of technology proficiencies as online teaching competencies suddenly became a highly critical skill area pertaining to the competency of teachers to deliver coursework. Some data suggests that as soon as instruction was forced to be moved online, many qualified teachers who knew their academic subject well, struggled to use the medium of online education to teach their classes (DLF, 2020; Nabe-Nielsen et al., 2021). It may be interesting to discuss with school leaders the role and importance of technological competencies in responding to the shift to online learning as well as technology skills in relation to training and recruitment after the COVID-19 educational crisis.

Leadership of Subject and Interprofessional Collaboration With a Focus on Students' Learning and Well-Being

Danish 0–9 school leaders must adequately frame professional and cross-professional opportunities to enrich the potential gains on students' learning. The school management supports team collaboration, including sparring about teaching practice and the use of supervision in teaching (UVM, 2015). School leaders must competently organize subject discipline cooperation in their schools as well as facilitate cross-professional learning groups with other schools, with the goal of enriching learning and well-being at school (UVM, 2015).

This field of leadership is highly dependent on the ability of Danish 0–9 school leaders to activate staff teams, of different professional constellations, to engage with one another to enrich and challenge one another. This type of engagement, if carried out in a meaningful way should cultivate new learning in the staff members, and thereby support improvements in student learning and achievement. This focus on working in teams directly involves interpersonal dynamics between the individuals. Important to these working relationships is guidance of school leadership ensuring mutual respect between members of the group, ensuring all are clear on the value of all group members professional contributions (EVA, 2015).

In terms of this study, this field of school leadership focusing on professional and cross-professional cooperation is central to the theoretical framework, psychological safety, of this study. The theory of psychological safety focuses on the interpersonal interactions between members of teams within organizations and how these relationships

along with antecedent conditions impact outcomes (Edmondson, 1999). As this is a fundamental construct underpinning this study, this field of school leadership focusing on professional and cross-professional cooperation is highly applicable and will hopefully be a source of interesting inquiry and discussion.

Management of Well-Being, Motivation, and Commitment of the Teaching Staff, Students, and Parents

Danish 0–9 school leaders must ensure the support, commitment and participation of the pedagogical staff, students, and parents. Successful learning-centered school leadership in this field of leadership is about leading with a focus on well-being, motivation and commitment among students, staff, and leaders in a productive, balanced and ethically sound manner (UVM, 2015).

This field of Danish 0–9 school leadership focusing on the importance of well-being, motivation and commitment of the teaching staff, students and parents is not difficult to understand, but carrying this competency out in practice is not easy to accomplish for school leaders in all schools. Supporting school climate in which all constituents can operate in optimal conditions is a topic of great international scholarly interest, discussion, and research. A slight criticism that some might have regarding what the booklet published by the Danish Ministry of Children and Education (2015) described about this field of leadership focusing on well-being, motivation, and commitment, is the omission of non-teaching staff in the description of this leadership competency, as international research suggests that non-teaching staff also impact school culture and climate (Clotfelter, 2016; Al-Ghabban, 2018). Nevertheless, the description of this field

of school leadership provided examples of what leaders should strive to facilitate and create in schools relating to well-being, motivation, and commitment in the teaching staff, parents, and student bodies.

This field of leadership as described by the Danish Ministry of Children and Education (UVM, 2015) is highly applicable to the purpose of this study which is the exploration of how Danish 0–9 school leaders perceived or experienced their roles on their schools during the COVID-19 school lockdowns. Clearly the well-being of school constituents during this time, was a high priority, as was enhancing motivation and commitment of teaching staff, parents, and students was also critical in moving forward during that time of uncertainty and adversity. Therefore, this area of inquiry has the potential to inform this study on how school leaders experienced and influenced their personal and colleagues impacts on well-being during the crisis.

Leadership of the Open School

By mobilizing the resources of the local community, the learning opportunities for Danish 0–9 school students can be broadened and strengthened. With the intention of strengthening learning opportunities and student well-being, school leaders must analyze the needs and potential opportunities of incorporating external educationally relevant environments (UVM, 2015). Some of the local institutions that can be incorporated can be youth groups and music schools, cultural institutions, associations, and local businesses with the goal of meeting educational or social goals (UVM, 2015)

School leaders should show competency in determining the needs and potential opportunities for creating relationships and networks with community groups that can

participate in creating valuable opportunities for students. School leaders should be competent in establishing formal and informal partnerships with external institutions and organizations to take advantage of development opportunities reaching out from the school into the larger community (UVM, 2015).

In the context of this study, the open school field of leadership, may appear to be irrelevant or misplaced under the conditions of the COVID-19 school shutdowns as schools were primarily scaling back interaction between all constituents, both internally and externally. However, it may be interesting to hear to what degree school leaders encouraged work groups to access external partnerships or institutions to seek input or engagement to help solve problems, collaborate to enrich teaching opportunities, collaborate on common issues or other possible network empowered opportunities. Although the lockdowns due to COVID-19 shut down many physical operations, there may be evidence that productive work teams may have engaged in collaboration with external institutions, associations, clubs, etc. For this reason, the field of leadership of the open school, is in my opinion worthy of exploration in the context of this study.

As the seven fields of school leadership were developed specifically for the Danish 0–9 school leadership context, they define relevant central competency areas for local 0–9 school leaders and are supported and articulated by the Danish Ministry of Children and Education to the present. Each of the seven fields of school leadership as presented by the Danish Ministry of Children and Education serve as carefully curated areas of inquiry into which leaders of Danish 0–9 schools can aspire to and serve as integral to the research questions of this study.

International Research on School Lockdowns and Education

Regardless of the country in which a school leader works, he or she must take into consideration the needs and realities facing school constituents. Physical, psychological, and social conditions of school staff, students, parents, and community members have an impact on how these participants can perform or adapt to new conditions and challenges. In this section, the impact of COVID-19 on school constituents is explored in terms of the possible psycho-social impacts, as well as the potential academic implications due to the shift to online learning. This information is relevant to this study, as it represents possible issues school leaders were trying to resolve and mitigate.

International Studies on School Lockdown Effects on K-12 Students

Early in the process of researching this study, it became clear that many scholars and educational professions had concerns about the potential for adverse effects associated with the educational shift to online learning due to the COVID-19 crisis (Baba, 2020; Bonk 2020; Brooks et al., 2020; Dick et al., 2020; EşiCi et al., 2021; Ma et al., 2021; Tee, 2020). International studies have been conducted which suggest that there can be negative effects, such emotional distress, sleep problems, fear, sadness, depression, mood swings and even post-traumatic stress disorder associated with isolating people in the attempt to mitigate the spread of contagious diseases (Brooks et al., 2020; Bu et al., 2020; Manuell &Cukor, 2011). In the case of COVID-19 the isolation measures were not strict quarantine conditions in Denmark, nevertheless, international research reported many psycho-social issues associated with the shift from face-to-face schooling to online learning (Baba, 2021; Ma et al., 2021; Orgilés et al., 2020; Tee et al., 2020).

Much research from around the world suggests that the educational shift away from face-to-face learning due to COVID-19 had negative emotional impacts on school constituents. In a survey-based study conducted in China ($n=680$) as many as one out of five children aged 7-15 showed signs of PTSD and one out of fourteen showed symptoms of depression during the pandemic lockdown (Ma et al., 2021). Orgilés et al. (2020), conducted a study examining the emotional impacts of the quarantine experience with a survey given to parents in Spain and Italy ($n=1143$). The study found that 85.7% of parents noticed that their children's emotional state and behavior changed during the lockdown. These findings are consistent with scholarly documentation of how people react to quarantine situations (Brooks et al., 2020).

In an Italian survey-based study ($n=488$) of sixth and seventh grade students reported that kids who did not have strong home or school support had difficulties with emotional regulation and completing schoolwork (Pozzoli et al., 2021). It has long been established from studies regarding higher education distance learning that motivation and self-regulation can be difficult for learners to manage (Cho et al., 2017; Dick et al., 2020). It is not difficult to imagine that with even younger students, staying disciplined and motivated is very difficult without adult guidance.

The experience of learning was impacted greatly by how much support students received from key adults. The importance of supportive adults at home to help school children was continually supported in the research (Barbour, 2012; Christensen, 2021; Sari & Nayır, 2020). This disadvantageous family dynamic can intensify a learning gap for disadvantaged students (Sari & Nayır, 2020). In other situations, access to functional

technology to participate in Internet-based instruction was the problem. In the country of Georgia, under 50% of rural homes have a computer (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020). This lack of infrastructure issue is not nearly as drastic in a country like Denmark, but European research conducted has shown that not all homes are equally resourced (Bonk, 2020; Brom et al., 2020; Chaseling et al., 2020).

International Studies on Lockdown Effects on K-12 Teaching

The way school leaders improve educational outcomes and well-being in their organizations is primarily through empowering the teachers they oversee. In their regular contact with teachers, principals and other leaders should be aware of the psycho-social and practical challenges their teaching colleagues face. The global research suggests strongly that teachers lacked sufficient experience and preparation to repackage their instructional practice (Pozzoli et al., 2021; Sari and Nayır, 2020). McGee et al. (2017), reported that even experienced teachers who choose to perform their work in an online environment find it extremely difficult to carry out, as there are many competency areas and barriers to delivering curriculum and facilitating quality peer interaction.

In a qualitative study of teachers' psycho-social experience and career needs during the COVID-19 crisis, Eşici et al. (2021), identified several important themes. These included negative aspects, but some positive sides as well. For instance, some teachers saw the crisis as a possible catalyst to learning new ways of working and developing new professional skills. Another theme was the "need for psychological support, in-service training and support for infrastructure" (p. 157). In the interviews conducted, several teachers emphasized the point that they, as teachers, should be

prioritized and given as much support as possible first, so that they can then be prepared to help others. This was insightful and a good example of the type of specific examples regarding managing a crisis in schools that can be attained from qualitative interviews-based studies.

Another topic presented in this highly useful study by Eşici et al. (2021), had to do with adaptation to the crisis. Teachers showed awareness of their need for learning. Learning how to communicate with families during the crisis was necessary, as well as acknowledging the need for better understanding of technology that is required to teach under emergent conditions. These themes are interesting to consider in the light of the construct of psychological safety (one of the conceptual frameworks in my study) as it impacts how well people in groups can adapt to, and function constructively, as opposed to withdrawing from challenges or halting progress (Weiner, et al., 2021).

While quantitative studies can provide data to consider pertaining to psychosocial issues related to this topic, the qualitative work can give more nuanced examples of what people experienced during the COVID-19 educational experience. Flynn and Noonan (2020) conducted a unique study that started with a survey containing questions that were able to be quantifiably analyzed, but the survey also contained open-ended questions. Later, the researchers facilitated a focus group. They applied a phenomenological qualitative methodology to examine the participants' lived experiences in teaching remotely during the pandemic. Key themes were revealed that showed what the educators felt were important to understanding their experiences. Once again, the importance of creating situations in which students could make mistakes without fear of

negative consequences, which is integral in psychological safety, were documented (Flynn & Noonan, 2020).

In a quantitative study ($n= 517$) that examined distance learning in primary school aged children in Croatia, Ferlin et al. (2020), reported that teachers experienced downsides to the educational practice. For many teachers, the feeling that they should be able to be open to being contacted 24 hours a day and on weekends was stressful. Also, teachers felt that it was very difficult to ascertain to what degree students were comprehending lessons. This can also add to stress, because as a teacher, one wants to feel confident that students are progressing and reaching the desired levels of mastery.

This study by Ferlin et al. (2020), also discussed online teaching models that the Croatian ministry of education made available to schools. The models discussed forms of implementation of online learning ranging from primarily synchronous learning, in which all students and the teacher are working together simultaneously in a video conferencing setting, to an asynchronous model in which students are studying and completing assignments at different times, as well as a hybrid model (Ferlin et al., 2020).

This breakdown of instructional models was not common to find in researching this topic, and although a little bit of information regarding synchronous and asynchronous models could be found on governmental websites (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2021; Gov UK, 2021), however, so far in my research, I have found no examples in which specific guidelines were pushed out to teachers through school leaders. This may point to some possible fundamental lack of understandings school leaders may have had about how to teach online. As school leaders were also

learning and struggling to manage their own, more immediate work tasks, it is possible that they were not attuned to information regarding online instructional practices or how to use them on a practical level to help teachers and students. Research suggests that on an operational level, teachers had to find their own ways to make things work (Dick et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2021)

Finally, in a study from the Netherlands, van der Spoel et al. (2020) reported on survey findings of K-12 teachers ($N = 200$) suggesting that there were significant differences in how teachers experienced the shift to digital instruction depending on the degree of prior experience with teaching using computer technology and online tools as being a critical factor in how these teachers felt about the experience and their own ability to deliver online, high-quality instruction. The teachers were given the survey prior to beginning online instruction due to COVID-19, and a second follow-up survey after having taught online for one month. Similar findings regarding prior experience with online learning or instruction as being pivotal were evident from studies from the United States of America (Moser et al., 2021) and Denmark (Danish Teacher's Union, DLF, 2021).

Danish Studies on Lockdown Effects on 0–9 Students

Quantitative research conducted in the country of Denmark suggested the potential of negative impacts on Danish 0–9 student well-being (Egmont, 2020; Lindberg, 2021; Qvortrup, A., Christensen, J., & Lomholt, R., 2020; Wistoft et al., 2021). For example, in a study exploring Danish students' feelings about the shift to online learning from face-to-face instruction, Wistoft et al. (2021) ($n = 5953$) reported that

during the first phase of online learning due to COVID-19, roughly 20% of respondents in grades 3- 9, “missed support from their parents, they didn’t feel recognized by their teachers, and they had below average contact with their friends” (p. 1). Only 54% of students in grades 3-9 reported that if they had a task that they did not understand, they could get help from their teacher within the online instructional model (Wistoft et al., 2021).

Almost half of the students surveyed in grades 3–9, reported feeling unhappy and 20% reported feeling lonely (Qvortrup, A., Christensen, J., & Lomholt, R., 2020)). For parents, supporting their kids during this time was not always easy. Christensen (2021), reported on how challenged Danish parents were in managing their children’s education. The survey-based study of parents ($n=1140$) found that there were huge differences in how different families, depending on parents’ level of education and socio-economic status, coped with the role.

Although Denmark is a relatively wealthy country, socio-economic inequalities do exist. “Research from the lockdown period documents that families differ in their responses to their new responsibility for their children’s homeschooling by socioeconomic status and that the Covid-19 crisis has increased educational inequality” (Reimer et al., 2021, p. 1). In this study, data was analyzed from a widely used reading app by children in Denmark. The data showed the children’s reading behavior (time spent reading) had a large gap depending on the socio-economic status of the home. Reimer’s study is consistent with analysis of data of children’s use of public libraries (Jæger & Hoppe-Blaabæk, 2020). In this study analyzing Danish public library resources used, it

was also found that COVID-19 increased socio-economic inequality in learning opportunities in terms use of e-books for young readers. Particularly immigrant families were underrepresented in accessing resources at a much lower rate as native Danes (Jæger & Hoppe-Blaabæk, 2020).

In another quantitative survey-based study ($n=710$ school leaders, $n=680$ teachers, $n=1,110$ students) funded by the Danish Ministry of Children and Education which focused on various aspects of the emergency teaching situation during the COVID-19 pandemic, found that kids who are vulnerable due to socio-economic reasons, social problems or kids with learning disabilities suffered most (EVA, 2021a). On the other hand, some kids with psychological issues did well under the distant learning conditions indicating that they felt that they felt calmer and experienced less socially demanding conditions for learning (EVA, 2021a).

The shift to online learning in Denmark may have also had impacts on academic achievement of 0–9 students. A study released by Danish teachers' union (DLF, 2020) reported that 69% of 0–9 teachers felt that they had a harder time adapting teaching to individual students. Quantitative studies conducted in Denmark have suggested that not besides the emotional hardships (Egmont, 2020; EVA, 2021a; Wistoft et al., 2021), students experienced, more than half 0–9 students reported that their educational experience was degraded (EVA, 2021a; Qvortrup, A., Christensen, J., & Lomholt, R., 2020)). Research suggests that Danish 0–9 teachers agree that instruction was not optimal during the pandemic (DLF, 2020; Nabe-Nielsen et al., 2021). This is relevant to the focus

of the study as a primary role of 0–9 school leaders in Denmark is to support the work and well-being of teachers and their teaching outcomes (UVM, 2015).

There is evidence suggesting that Danish 0–9 teachers also experienced some difficulties during the shift to online instruction, with specific focus upon teacher preparation, increase in workload, feelings ineffectiveness in their ability to teach at a normal standard, or reach the same educational goals with their students. Roughly half of teachers reported not being prepared to implement online instruction (Danish Teacher's Union, DLF, 2021), and they considered their workload to have increased (Milner et al., 2021; Nabe-Nielsen et al., 2021; EVA, 2021a). 0–9 teachers also reported that they felt their teaching was less effective. Over half reported that the variety of tasks they assigned was more limited than normal, and 69% reported that they had a hard time adapting instruction to individual children (DLF, 2020). In several studies, teachers reported that 0–9 teachers had considerable difficulties in reaching and helping at-risk students (EVA, 2021a; Reimer et al., 2021; Wistoft et al., 2021). Danish research reflected that both teachers and students reported that they thought that the learning outcomes were lower after the non-face-to-face instruction, particularly in the case of at-risk students (EVA, 2021a; Qvortrup, A., Christensen, J., & Lomholt, R., 2020).

This research backed up the educational relevance of this study as well as social justice implications of this study, as the impacts of the crisis appear to have impacted school constituent demographic groups that were already disadvantaged. School leaders have the job to see their schools through times of crisis. If some things did not go well

under the forced educational paradigm, then there is room for improvements to be made (Qvortrup, A., Christensen, J., & Lomholt, R., 2020).

School Leadership During the School Lockdowns

Not to be confused with the previous topics regarding the impacts of school lockdowns on students, teachers, and teaching, this section deals with the impacts of the shift to online learning relating to leadership of schools. Although much of the international and Danish research on the topic of being a school leader during the COVID-19 crisis is dependent on local contexts, some scholarly work was conducted which inquired into and examined problems school leaders experienced as well as competencies of school leaders and leadership approaches, that may be advantageous, or less so, during a crisis such as the unexpected shift to online learning. This section will present a literature review regarding international discussion regarding school leadership during the COVID-19 crisis which includes discussion regarding fundamentals of online instruction in relation to school leadership, as well as scholarly discussion from Denmark regarding 0–9 school leadership during the school lockdowns.

International Research on Crisis School Leadership

While the international research and scholarly work on the topic of the COVID-19 and school leadership is varied, and growing, there were several findings and perspectives that often came into focus in the process of researching the topic. The following will be subsections of the overall topic of crises and school leadership: The first topic is the recognition that the shift from non-face-to-face to online education was a major disruption to school leadership practice. Secondly, general preparedness for

implementation of alternative teaching methods must be addressed and improved upon in order for school leaders to be prepared for possible future emergencies. This topic also contains an exploration into what high-quality online instructional models should be comprised of and that school leaders could theoretically implement or coach teachers into adopting during a school lockdown situation. Thirdly, I will discuss the types of activities, competencies, and mind-sets the research suggests are most helpful for school leaders who find themselves in crisis situations. Lastly, I will make final thoughts about how this cumulative research relates to the Danish 0–9 school leadership context.

Shift to Online Learning Was a Serious Disruption for School Leaders

Internationally, the shift on online learning was due to COVID-19 was nothing short of a crisis for school leaders to navigate and manage (Chaseling et al., 2020; EVA, 2021a; Grissom & Condon, 2021), and there was great disparity between schools and their communities in terms of how prepared they were to respond to the disruption (Muñoz-Najar et al., 2021). Beyond the unprecedented challenges of running a school in a completely new way, there were confusing directives school leaders were mandated to follow by governmental bodies (Chaseling et al., 2021; Harris & Jones, 2020).

School leaders were constantly being presented with new situations, requiring ongoing flexibility and unique task-related problem solving (Francisco & Nuqui, 2020). Netolicky (2020) reported that school leaders were “navigating the following: accountability and autonomy; equity and excellence; the individual and the collective and well-being and workload” (p. 391). Marshall, et al. (2020), discussed how many different organizational issues such as teacher competency, lack of equity in constituent groups

and technology skill gaps were exposed by the COVID-19 crisis, giving school leadership and management previously dormant problems to grapple with. “For school leaders working in these demanding and chaotic circumstances, the pressure is relentless, the options are limited, the sleepless nights are frequent” (Harris & Jones, 2020, p. 244). It could be argued that during the COVID-19 crisis, school leaders had a very stressful situation on their hands.

Preparedness for Crises Needs to Be Improved

Grissom & Condon (2021) reported that there has not been enough attention given to the issue of crisis management from school leadership preparation programs, ensuring that successful navigation in these conditions can be met with competency. Research supports the idea there can be other types of incidents or outbreaks which could induce a temporary or longer-term implementation of an online learning approach (Baills et al., 2020; Manuell & Cukor, 2011). During the time of the COVID-19 crisis, Gustafson (2020) lamented that “limited research has been conducted on how virtual school principals lead their organizations” (p.3). Post COVID-19, the acute lack of knowledge and preparedness on how to switch to online learning is likely mitigated by the fact that most schools and current school leaders have now personally experienced the shift, however, this call for preparation by school leaders was a common theme in researching this topic.

To meet this need, a vision, or plan, or needs assessment guide should be put into place in schools to help diagnose impacts and implement strategies to achieve goals in future crisis situations (Marshall et al., 2020; Thompson, 2004; Quezada, 2020). James

and Wooten (2009) recommended the establishment of a crisis management team to help gather input, establish trust and buy-in within an organization to help prepare for potential crises. Leadership needs to be able to monitor the potential impacts and assess the potential usefulness of different crisis management plans which are already in place (Grissom & Condon, 2021; James & Wooten, 2009). While this advice may seem obvious, it takes time, energy, buy-in, and input from constituents to establish a truly comprehensive plan for how to respond to a crisis, however, “Running an effective school in disruptive times will require more than routine problem solving or occasional firefighting” (Harris & Jones, 2020. P. 246).

Leadership of an Online School

A fully online education was a somewhat rare and specialized instructional approach for K-12 learners pre-COVID-19, and most school leaders had no experience in implementing a fully online school prior to the crisis (Baker et al., 2020; Harris & Jones, 2020). Nevertheless, over the last 25 years, use of the Internet, learning applications, digital libraries, document sharing, learning management systems (LMS), and video conferencing have been integrated into the educational experiences of young learners. Often hybrid programs featuring technology-rich experiences which are balanced with social interaction and face-to-face teacher/student interaction are referred to as blended learning (Akyol, 2009; Picciano, 2017; Harrell & Wendt, 2019).

Besides leadership issues pertaining to skill sets, well-being, and equity of resources of constituent groups during the pivot to online learning during COVID-19, the management of non-face-to-face schools had to cultivate an online learning experience

consisting of “three complementary, critical components: effective teachers, suitable technology, and engaged learners” (Muñoz-Najar et al., 2021, p. 4). While it could be argued that the above three items are important, when it comes to teaching and learning, an online school, there is a considerable amount of scholarly work regarding what makes a quality online learning program.

Quality Online Education

On the onset of the COVID-19 it would perhaps have been unrealistic to expect school leaders to become experts on the field of online learning and roll out well designed online programs at a moment’s notice. However, for the context of this study and looking forward, basic knowledge about this type of distance education is relevant for all people in leadership positions during the school lockdowns. Successful navigation of a crisis requires a diverse skill set (Grissom & Condon, 2021). The following is a general breakdown of some of the most basic concepts that one could argue could be considered and to some degree implemented in a situation in which students must learn from home.

As a primary example, it could be argued that school leaders should have instructional leadership competence regarding synchronous and asynchronous teaching and learning. Synchronous learning can be defined as an online learning experience that occurs in real-time (Ferlin et al., 2020). A class meeting on Zoom or Teams would be considered a synchronous event. Asynchronous learning is an online learning experience in which live video or audio is not a component. Students may complete assignments at the time of their choosing (Schneider, 2022). The distinction between these two

approaches is quite large and although Danish teaching practitioners could, on their own time, seek information on the Danish Ministry of Children and Education website (EMU, 2020b). International scholars such as Ferlin et al. (2020) explicitly supported the idea that this was a fundamental aspect of an online education.

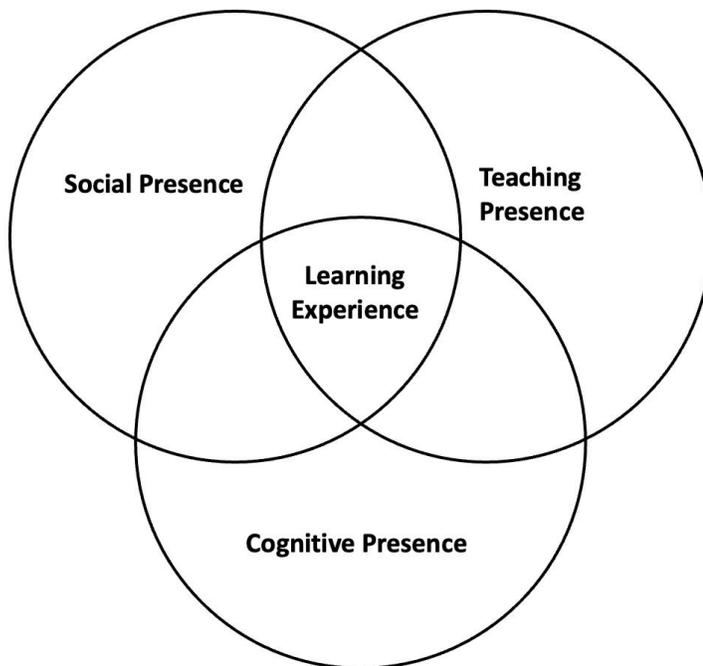
As the focus of this study is on Danish 0–9 school leadership, it would be off topic to report on the history, all core instructional philosophies, and technical progression of online or distance education, with much of this scholarly work having been developed and tested with much older learners as participants. However, a theoretical learning theory that many practitioners and proponents of technology driven educational approaches refer to as being noteworthy in terms of understanding the nature and potential of online or networked learning is theory of connectivism.

The learning theory of connectivism was fully articulated in an article in 2005 by George Siemens. The idea behind connectivism is that modern technology offers learners new and powerful ways of learning and information sharing that enable participants to develop, expand, and create knowledge by their connections to, and participation in various digital networks (Siemens, 2005). This theory about learning in the digital age is not exclusive to any particular age group. There is insufficient research to suggest that the benefits of digital connective learning theory suggests benefits represent a viable or suitable substitute for conventional face-to-face learning for children. However, this learning theory can be used to make decisions on the types of cognitive and open-ended learning activities presented by teachers. One could argue that this learning theory is often incorporated in blended learning models, which were discussed earlier in this

section. A level of familiarization of this theory may be relevant for school leaders in the process of guiding instructional practice in their schools, at a time when online learning becomes the primary educational conduit.

A more complete learning model which could, theoretically be helpful in constructing a fully non-face-to-face online learning model is the Community of Inquiry (COI) model which was first articulated by Garrison et al. in 1999. This framework is one of the most acknowledged and widely applied models for virtual/distance learning/online learning. It was originally developed with university-aged students and faculty as target and participant groups in studies but has also become used to examine online programs for younger students as well (Li et al., 2021; Sanders, & Lokey-Vega, 2020). “The community of inquiry has become one of the more popular models for online and blended courses that are designed to be highly interactive among students and faculty” (Picciano, 2017). This model has been applied in many contexts, since its conception, making it a relatively simple and helpful model to consider when shifting instructional practice from a face-to-face, to online model.

The COI model has three main components: social presence, teaching presence, and cognitive presence (see Figure 4). Social presence is established by learner groups where open communication can occur, building cohesion and interpersonal expression which mold the group experiences.

Figure 4*Community of Inquiry Model*

Positive indicators of social presence are opportunities for risk-free expression, collaboration between learners and space for emotions to be shared. Teaching presence represents the design and organization of the coursework as well as the facilitation of the discourse which may be via direct instruction. Positive examples of this are matching appropriate curriculum and methods to the learners, sharing personal meaning, and focusing discussion. The final COI component, cognitive presence, is engaged when a learning experience is triggered. During this cognitive activity, the learned material is further explored and integrated into the understanding of the learner. Positive indicators of this are a sense of perplexity and concentrated thought and the connection of

conceptual understandings to previously learned content (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007, p. 158).

“By incorporating the Community of Inquiry framework in course design online instructors can help students to overcome the challenges of online learning as well as enhance the student’s sense of belonging” (Singh et al., 2022, p. 575). Although the COI model could be an applicable resource for Danish 0–9 school leaders as the three components of the COI model are relatively simple and can be applied to most if not all grade levels, the usefulness could be debated as the amount of research on COI with young learners is limited “little is known currently about how COI could be used to understand young learners” (Li et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, due to the absence of face-to-face instruction, the social component of the COI puts into focus the need for interactions between learners and collaboration on content presented. In a systematic review of online teaching in the United States presented by Johnson et al. (2023), essential components of online learning are connections between learners, and a sense of community and practice. This supports the idea that COI dimension of social presence, is valid as essential in online education. Teacher presence represents what teachers need to offer in terms of leadership of their coursework, as well as setting realistic levels of interaction they can engage in with their students. Finally, the cognitive presence is a challenge to teachers to provide real learning challenges and opportunities for students despite the deviation from the normal face-to-face education paradigm. For this reason, the fundamentals of the COI framework were worthy of research in consideration of the context of this study.

Leadership and Crisis Management

This study seeks to learn about the perceptions and experiences of Danish 0–9 school leaders during a time of crisis. In the effort to gain a broad perspective of how people in leadership positions might operate in adverse, urgent, and high-pressure conditions, the research of this topic included an examination of the broad topic of leadership and crisis management. The research reported on in this section, is primarily based on leadership of K-12 school organizations, but also includes scholarly work which examines other types of organizations as well. Stress and hardship on constituents, rapid adaptations of work approaches, need for urgent team learning, and uncertainties regarding communications, were among many similarities in the scholarly record on challenges to leaders in many work arenas. This last section of this literature review will focus on constructive leadership approaches during crisis situations.

Constructive Leadership Approaches During School Crisis Situations

Several themes emerged in the examination of constructive school leadership approaches during the COVID-19 school lockdowns or other crises that could present unanticipated challenges to 0–9 school leaders. In this section, I will discuss findings of which there appeared to be consensus on organizational attributes considered to be constructive in these situations. Firstly, I will report on three general principles pertaining to school leadership that were developed in reference to the COVID-19 crisis that were listed as core competency areas articulated by Grisson and Condon (2021). The first is competence area is analysis, sensemaking, and judgment; the second is communication; and finally emotional intelligence is highlighted. Afterwards, a discussion of distributive

leadership as well as psychological safety are also explored as being conceptually relevant to the topic of constructive attributes and mind-sets of school leaders during times of crisis.

Grisson and Condon (2021), discussed analysis, sensemaking and judgement activities as highly important activities to engage in for understanding the scope of the crisis, enabling the school administrator to forecast risks, and estimate the potential usefulness of the crisis management plans at hand. Much of this topic about planning ahead has been previously discussed in the section of this literature review that discussed how school preparedness for crises needs to be improved upon. In summary of that text, a vision, plan, and/or needs assessment guide should be put into place in schools to help diagnose impacts and implement strategies to achieve goals in future crisis situations (Marshall et al., 2020; Thompson, 2004; Quezada, 2020). School leaders can potentially analyze a crisis they may face and reference the articulated plan to forecast risks, inform communication strategies, and take appropriate action (Grisson & Condon, 2021). The analysis and needs assessment ought to include what steps to take to pivot instructional approaches, including practical and operational plans of a shift to online learning should that be necessary.

Communication strategies should also be collaboratively articulated and available before an event triggers a crisis. Various strategies of communication should be part of this strategy to reach the different constituent groups. Goals should include restoring calm and comforting constituents as well as establishing positive public relations of the school (Grisson & Condon, 2021; James & Wooten 2009). Strategies could include phone

tree lists, email, websites, and social media communication. As “Communication with parents and students is key for remote learning interventions to operate” (Muñoz-Najar et al., 2021, p. 30), the communication strategy should answer as many questions as possible, but also contain possibilities for two-way communication in order to help people find answers to their questions as well as to gather information from constituents for decision making (Grisson & Condon, 2021). Frandsen and Johansen (2020) advised to “make the text fast and easy to read and to avoid a more strict academic style” (p. 272).

Finally, Grisson and Condon (2021) among other scholars (Baba, 2020; Fernandez & Shaw, 2020) discussed emotional intelligence as a critical competency of school leaders who need to lead their schools during a crisis. Emotionally intelligent leaders recognize the stress levels and needs of others, so that they can help deescalate potentially traumatic situations, but leaders who exhibit high levels of emotional intelligence are also adept at regulating their own emotional stability, enabling the leader to show courage, calm and strength which can positively impact the way others react and cope with crises (Grisson & Condon, 2021; Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). Marshall et al., 2020 used the label “courageous leadership” (p. 30) to describe the strength trait of a leader who can remain calm and collaborative while under pressure. As stress and instability have been shown to impair a person’s ability to make good decisions, it is necessary for a leader to competently regulate their own emotional state (Boin et al., 2013; Grisson & Condon, 2021). Additionally, the ability to put other people’s needs and interests above their own is also seen as an attribute of emotional intelligence (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020), which is critical in helping constituents cope with their circumstances.

Also represented as a constructive leadership approach for school leaders during the COVID-19 crisis was the concept of distributive leadership, which is a leadership approach that deviates from the idea that organizations should have one, or few, exceptional leader, or leaders who all constituents look to for direction, “distributed leadership is grounded in a representation of the workplace as a community of practice”. (Gronn, 2004, p. 3). It supports the idea that leadership is best shared throughout an organization and “not simply restricted to those with formal leadership roles” (Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016, p. 141) By using this model of distributing responsibilities, teams remain more incentivized as they have more ownership of the problem-solving strategies the work groups apply (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). Although some scholars offer differing views regarding how distributive leadership should be practiced in different contexts (Jones, 2014), It is not difficult to imagine why an environment in which teams throughout an organization are collaborating to find solutions, might be more adaptive and innovative in a time of crisis.

Closely related to the concepts of emotional intelligence and distributive leadership is the conceptual framework of this study, psychological safety. As stated in depth earlier in this chapter, psychological safety is a construct dealing with interpersonal relationships and how they impact work outcomes. It represents the level in which team members can be open and productive with one another. This construct is compatible with many of the traits emphasized above pertaining to emotional intelligence, as well as the general idea that there is value in collaboration and work that teams do, which is at the core of distributive leadership. The concept of psychological safety was also referenced

in both international and Danish publications as being noteworthy and important for how organizations coped with the shift to online learning during COVID-19 (Andersen, 2021; Simonson, 2021; Weiner et al., 2021; Edmondson, 2019).

Situational leadership may intuitively sound like a leadership theory applicable to the topic at hand. Indeed, Francisco et al. (2020) used the term situational leadership to represent “the new normal” (p. 18) of leading a school in times of COVID-19 shutdowns. In the effort to explain that “Situational leadership is the ability of the school administrators to adapt with the present situations” (p. 18), it is my judgement that Francisco et al. are either misapplying the term of situational leadership, or perhaps they did not make it clear that they are presenting a new concept which shares a label with an older established leadership theory. I suggest that Francisco et al., are describing flexibility and the ability to adapt. An older, established theory of situational leadership is not a description of whether a leader can adeptly respond to unique and new situations, but rather a breakdown of how leaders should interact differently with subordinates dependent upon their level of leader-perceived maturity in their roles or capacities (Hersey et al., 1979), which is not a specific focus of this study.

There are other areas of interest highlighted in scholarly work pertaining to constructive leadership in times of crisis such as, flexibility (Gustafson, 2020), authenticity and trust (Netolicky, 2020, Quezada, 2020) and focus on well-being (Berg, 2020; Netolicky, 2020), however it can be argued that these attributes are represented in the concepts of emotional intelligence, distributive leadership, and psychological safety. The review of literature pertaining to constructive leadership approaches during the

COVID-19 school lockdowns was significant in fully appreciating the practical considerations, emotional challenges and operational skill sets of school leaders during the shift to online learning during COVID-19 and will be helpful in constructing a study that is grounded in sensitive and respectful exploration of Danish 0–9 school leaders' experiences during that time.

Summary and Conclusions

This literature review explored research relating to the time Danish 0–9 school leaders were responsible for implementing non-face-to face instruction in their schools to mitigate the potential spread of COVID-19. This is a still evolving research topic with a broad range of related areas under investigation. The focus of this study examined the perceptions and experiences of Danish 0–9 school leaders when carrying out their jobs during the COVID-19 school lockdowns.

What is known about the topic of this study is that the role of a Danish 0–9 school leader has evolved considerably in modern times in terms of the variety of both personal and social skills needed, as well as organizational understandings. The shifting of the Danish 0–9 instructional approach from face-to-face to online coursework was a management challenge that caught many school leaders off guard, and after an examination of the research, there was much more to learn about the experiences Danish 0–9 school leaders had. What is not known about this topic is whether the concepts manifested in the Seven Fields of School Leadership (UVM, 2015, 2024) which were designed to guide Danish 0–9 school leaders were relevant, viable or helpful to school leaders during the COVID-19 school lockdowns. Also not known is to what degree the

impacts of psychological safety can be associated with the ways in which leaders helped Danish 0–9 school workgroups respond to the shift to online learning. A close examination of this crisis is meaningful as the experiences and perspectives gained, could potentially inform discussion and advance practice in local schools. It may also help to inform discussion on the job of Danish 0–9 school leadership in a broader context.

The research conducted was aimed at understanding the context of the study which has many different important themes. International data findings about school constituents' well-being during COVID-19, examinations of online and crisis school leadership and instructional practices, as well as a careful look at the history of Danish school leadership represent major themes that I considered to be informative and supportive in understanding the experiences and perceptions of the potential participants of this study. During the research process, I was cognizant of the types of sources used and strove to examine a wide variety of reference types, yet I remained observant of the academic nature of the publications where works originated. There are many qualitative and quantitative studies referenced in this study and care was taken to provide information on the study types when relevant, to inform why certain methodologies were used, especially when they modelled approaches that could be applied in this study. Referenced as well, were theoretical scholars, reports from unions and governmental organizations, and textbooks. Next, in Chapter 3, I will explain the qualitative research methodology proposed in this study to examine the experience and perceptions of Danish 0–9 school principals during the shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to explore the Danish 0–9 school leader perceptions and experiences of the role of school leadership during the shift from face-to-face to online learning during the 2020-2021 COVID-19 pandemic as guided by the seven fields of school leadership (UVM, 2015, 2024). Chapter 3 includes the research method of this qualitative study: research design and rationale; role of the researcher; methodology; identification of the population; instrumentation; procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection; data analysis plan; trustworthiness; and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

The seven research questions that guided this study were the following:

Research Question 1: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of learning environments”?

Research Question 2: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of strategy and change processes”?

Research Question 3: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of knowledge- and results-based development of the school’s teaching”?

Research Question 4: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of capacity and competence development”?

Research Question 5: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of subject discipline and cross-professional work”?

Research Question 6: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of well-being, motivation and commitment”?

Research Question 7: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of the open school”?

Central Concept and Research Tradition of the Study

The central concept of this study was the examination of Danish 0–9 school leader perceptions, experiences, and observations about their profession during a period of uncertainty and crisis. Epistemologically speaking, this study originated out of a constructivist tradition, which denotes that people’s interpretation of reality is shaped by their experiences (Burkholder et al., 2016), and that “knowledge is constructed through social interactions” (Ravitch and Carl, 2016). Unlike the study of natural sciences which follow a positivist tradition, a constructivist epistemology does not assume that there is one true answer to a question (Burkholder et al., 2016), rather it allows for complexities

and variations of perspectives, as individuals and social groups construct meaning based on their individual and collective interpretations of reality.

A qualitative methodological design was chosen, as it has utility in understanding human phenomena in their natural environments (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A well-designed qualitative study can potentially enable researchers to interpret people's subjective perceptions, experiences, opinions, and beliefs (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As Percy et al. (2015) stated it, "such psychological things cannot be measured in the statistical sense" (p. 76). Specifically, the recollection of problematic moments and observational life stories are rooted in the qualitative tradition (Denzin & Lincoln, 2007).

Rationale of Basic Qualitative Design

I proposed a basic qualitative design for this study. This design type is typically applied when a design does not strictly adhere to a phenomenological, ethnographic, or grounded theory approach, which some researchers consider to be the foundational qualitative approaches (Kahlke, 2014). In the case of this study, the design does resemble foundational design types in some ways, however there are fundamental areas in which the foundational methodology types diverge from what this study is poised to examine. As an example, a characteristic of grounded theory which is problematic for this study is that the researcher must attempt to derive a substantive theory at the conclusion of the study (Creswell, 2013; Kahlke, 2014). Although this is an interesting idea, I did not consider it to be necessarily an ultimate goal of this study. The basic methodology being proposed for this study also has much in common with a phenomenological approach; however, research suggests there is a distinction between the design types. In traditional

phenomenological methodology, “The phenomenological interest is in the internal subjective structures of the experiencing itself.” (Percy et al., 2015, p. 77). To adequately answer the research questions of this study, I did not believe that an exclusive focus on the “inner essence of cognitive processing” (Percy et al., 2015, p. 77) of participants’ experiences during the crisis would sufficiently answer the research questions. Rather, I was also interested in contextual information which influenced participants’ perceptions of situations and other people’s experiences. A basic design matched the current study by offering the flexibility to explore broader avenues of inquiry.

If a well-considered qualitative study does not fall exclusively into a specific traditional methodological tradition, I would argue that it would be in line with constructivist tradition for me as researcher to “draw on the strengths” (Kahlke, 2014, p. 39) of established methodologies while making the constructive adjustments needed to match the purposes of what is currently being examined. I considered a basic qualitative methodological design based on in-depth semi-structured interviews to be an appropriate methodological choice towards exploring the purpose of this study.

Role of the Researcher

In the process of collecting data in this study, my goal was to remain neutral and objective. However, my understanding and sensitivity to the topics discussed, questioning method, and conversational competency was aimed at retrieving meaningful data. Because of this, a participant-observer role was an honest label of the orientation I adopted during the interviews to elicit open dialog leading to a robust examination of the purpose of this study (Burkholder et al, 2016). In this way, I was not simply an observer

during the interactions with the participants. Nevertheless, I was exclusively interviewing participants with whom I had no personal, nor professional interaction. Our conversations were exclusively focused on the interview questions. This is advantageous as I was unincumbered by any personal thoughts or feelings that could be based on previous interactions. Aside from the interview interactions, in the process of data analysis, subjective thoughts were clearly recorded in the research journal in the spirit and practice of trustworthy data collection.

Ethical Issues

I am not aware of any inherent ethical issues that could be experienced during the process of carrying out this study. However, the positionality of my current professional role as a teacher and the participants' roles as school leaders does present a possible power relationship issue, should I have feelings of envy or other emotional reactions that could bias any part of this study. However, it is my belief that the potential value of this study is contingent upon the level of objectivity and clarity with which it is carried out. I consider the job of a school leader to be highly important, difficult, and worthy of respect, and I do not believe that any power relationship dynamic influenced this study. The involvement of all participants was greatly respected and appreciated.

Assumptions and Biases

Having articulated as much, I acknowledge that the scholarly work that was conducted relating to this study, impacted my perspectives on school leadership. I tend to perceive school leaders who reflect compassion, respect, and empower their staff, as having potential for achieving long-term success in their schools (Fullan, 2008), and that

a psychologically safe work environment will most often yield more positive outcomes (Edmondson, 1999). While these assumptions were later overtly considered in the analysis and results of this study, during data collection and coding, I exclusively focused on the analysis of data, as related to the purpose of the study. The value of this study is inherent in the honesty and clarity of unbiased data, through the mitigation of perceived and critically recognized bias.

I acknowledge that my identity as researcher is impactful in relation to the participants, methods, findings, and topics of this study (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). While it is true that I work in the same 0–9 educational field as the participants who were interviewed, I did not interview school leaders with whom I worked, nor did I have any personal history or personal relationship with the participants of the study. Furthermore, in an effort to mitigate the potential for bias, a practice interview was staged with a scholarly Danish peer, with the intent of identifying possible biases and missteps in wording or affect that could unconsciously bias or influence the way participants responded to me.

Finally, I applied member-checking during this study in the attempt to identify possible points of false assumptions or incorrect interpretations of data or conclusions (Burkholder et al., 2016) which potentially could be a result of personal bias. Although it may be impossible to achieve complete objectivity, as researcher I was vigilant of interpersonal dynamics, aspects of power and identity, and possibly unfounded assumptions that might have been engaged in throughout the process of carrying out this study.

Methodology

Identification of the Population

The participant population this study were people who worked as Danish 0–9 school leaders during the timespan when schools were responding to the COVID-19 crisis. The sampling strategy was the selection of 12 interviews with participants that were represented in the population. The rationale for this specific number of interviews, was the anticipation that data saturation could be achieved by this point, meaning that no new themes will be encountered in data being collected (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). However, due to this rationale, it was possible that conduction of more interviews might have been necessary to achieve data saturation.

In order to represent the targeted population of this study, I selected participants with the three primary requisites. Firstly, the potential participants had to have been employed in a school leadership position as defined by Danish 0–9 school leadership roles and responsibilities during the specified time frame when schools were responding to the COVID-19 crisis. Secondly, potential participants were people with whom I did not work with, nor have any personal relationship to. Finally, the third requisite considered the sampling array of participants explained in the next section.

Sampling Strategy

This study applied a purposeful sampling strategy. “Qualitative researchers tend to deliberately select individuals because of their unique ability to answer the study’s research questions” (see Ravitch & Carl. 2016, p. 128). In the case of this study, the purposeful sampling strategy was criterion-based (see Ravitch & Carl. 2016) as the

designated population are Danish 0–9 school leaders who were professionally active during the COVID-19 school lockdowns. To obtain a cross-section of perspectives and experiences from Danish 0–9 school leaders, it was advantageous to interview school leaders who did not hold the exact same leadership position, which was another criterion-based designation.

By interviewing leaders who had different hierarchical rank or responsibilities in schools, the interviews identified contrasts in perceptions and experiences. This served as way to triangulate findings as the examination of rival experiences and explanations the participants' perceptions including those of perceived cause and effect is a method of establishing internal validity (see Johnson, 1997). This purposeful sampling strategy aimed at achieving triangulation in findings was important as to establish trustworthiness of the study.

12 interviews were conducted with:

- top leaders, also called directors in Denmark, who oversaw more than one large section of a school, for example, responsible for administration of a kindergarten, a 0–9 school, and an upper secondary school
- 3 school principals, who administratively oversaw more than one sub-section of a 0–9 school, for example, indskoling, klasse 0-3 [school start, grades 0-3], mellemtrinnet klasse 4-6 [mid-level, grades 4-6], udskoling [completion school, grades 7-9]

- 3 vice-principals, who had administrative responsibilities for one or more subsection of a school such as indskoling [school start, grades 0-3], mellemtrinnet [mid-level, grades 4-6], or udskoling [completion school, grades 7-9]
- 3 school-based teacher-leaders who were responsible for curricular, instructional, collaborative, or coordinative tasks, between teachers in addition to their teaching duties. It must be noted that one participant (P12) had two separate roles during the COVID-19 crisis. During the 2019-2020 school year, he was a teacher. He became a vice-principal at the start of the 2020-2021 school year. As P12 represented views as both a teacher and leader, he was placed into the teacher-leader leadership tier.

The definitions of the leadership roles are as follows:

- *Top Leader or School director*: This leadership role oversees or manages several complete sections of a school. As an example, a director could oversee, a kindergarten, a 0–9 school, and an upper secondary school. Although this is perhaps uncommon in the United States of America, it is not in Denmark.
- *Principal*: This leadership role administratively oversees or manages at least one section of a school. For example, a principal might be a leader of a 0–9 school, which includes three subsections indskoling [school start, grades 0-3], mellemtrinnet [mid-level, grades 4-6], and udskoling [completion school, grades 7-9].

- *Vice-principal*: This leader role may administratively oversee or manage one or more sub-sections of a school such as indskoling [school start, grades 0-3], or mellemtrinnet [mid-level, grades 4-6], or have other duties assigned, ranging from a curricular or instructional leader, to scheduler, to disciplinary duties.
- *Teacher-leaders*: This school leader role is identified by Danish 0–9 school staff members who taught students, yet also fulfilled leadership roles at a school. Teacher-leaders either oversaw, coordinated, or facilitated a teacher group or groups throughout the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years when the COVID-19 pandemic restriction guidelines and school lockdowns transpired.

Identification of Participants

The verified participant identification information in this study included, the place of employment, the subject's professional title and/or professional roles, and the timespan in which they had the job. This information was confirmed by examining the school websites where the names and titles were displayed. The information retrieved complied with the European Union General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliance requirements which govern how and what types of specific data may be shared between a school workplaces, and the public. All retrieved information was publicly available. The participant consent form for the study which all participants consented to before data collection began, established consent to confirm this specific human resource identification information.

Procedures for How Participants Were Identified, Contacted, and Recruited

In Denmark, it is standard practice that school leaders are listed on school websites with school address and email contact information. This was the primary way potential participants were identified for this study. This was a simple way of identifying members of the target population for recruitment. In cases when potential participants were referred to me via another context or contact, identification of the potential participant's roles and position at the school was then made in the same way by confirming the identity of the individual on the school website.

In Denmark, it is acceptable for a researcher to contact schools with an invitation to participate in an academic study. This determination was substantiated by email correspondence with an established Danish educational researcher in Denmark who is a senior educational researcher at Aarhus University, as well as in writing from a Copenhagen municipal school administration representative. Therefore, school leaders can be identified on school websites and subsequently contacted with either email contact or by sending them a physical letter.

In this study, initial contact with prospective participants was made by means of a physical letter (Appendix C) written in Danish (Appendix D), which will be referred to as the initial contact letter. The initial contact letter (Appendix C, Appendix D) contained a cover letter, introducing myself as the researcher and gave very basic information about the study and why they had been chosen as a potential participant. Along with the cover letter, the official consent form, printed in both English and Danish, was given to them. The consent form clarified pertinent ethical and practical information regarding the study

and was included as part of the initial contact letter and subsequent email follow up correspondence. The Walden University's approval number for this study, 05-24-23-0521000, was shared in the consent form, as well as the expiration date of May 23, 2024. The documentation also provided my Walden University email address and telephone number to enable the prospective participants to obtain more information or to express an interest in participation. This method enabled me to make the study broadly available to a wide geographic range of Danish 0–9 school leaders who might be interested and motivated to participate in the study.

In cases in which no response to the initial physical contact letter was received from the potential participant within one week, an email was sent to the prospective participant with a professional greeting that referred to the study and the information that had previously been sent to the school leader through physical, postal mail. The initial contact letter and participant consent form were attached to the email. This email served to encourage participation and as part of the recruitment process. Participants consented to participation in the study by responding to the email by writing that they consented to participate in the study, or by signing the physical consent form and giving it to me in person in a face-to-face context. These procedures were consistent with the Walden University's IRB specifications applied to this study. For good measure, all participants gave their recorded verbal consent to participate in the study during the beginning of the interviews.

A few school leaders who valued being part of the study referred potential participants. In one case the referral was to a person within the same school, and this was

seen as favorable as to gain new perspectives from the same organization, thereby facilitating the triangulation of findings and strengthening internal validity (see Johnson, 1997). However, there are risks in following referrals from people who were personally previous participants of a study to potential recruits outside of the same organization, which is a strategy known as snowball sampling (Babbie, 2016). In the case of this study, it is possible that a potential bias or narrative of some kind could be suggested from the prior participant to the potential recruit. This makes this strategy for recruitment disadvantageous. This study did not apply a snowball sampling method. However, referrals to Danish 0–9 school leaders made by people who had not personally participated in the interview process were not seen as subject to bias and therefore not disqualified for that reason.

The recruitment process for this study entailed making friendly, yet professional contact with potential participants while sharing basic information about the study in the form of contact letters accompanied with the consent form. The documents were shared with all potential participants. The documentation clearly stated the title of the study, a short and easy to understand description of the topic, the rationale for conducting the interview, information about me, as the researcher, including my name and contact details for further information or questions, a clear indication of the length of time of the interview process, possible emotional triggers or hazards relating to focal points of the topics, information on confidentiality, concise information regarding anonymization of their personal identity as well as other identifiers compromising the anonymity of colleagues and school.

Renumeration and Sharing of Study With Participants

Also made explicit in the consent form was information pertaining to the modest gift, not exceeding 70 Danish Crowns which is approximately 10 US dollars, to show appreciation to participants for their cooperation and participation in the study. This gift was a symbolic gesture of appreciation for the thoughts, knowledge, and perspectives the participants offered. It was not seen as an incentive to participate, but a sign of gratitude. The rationale for this decision related to Danish cultural reasons. More detail on this topic is offered later in the ethical procedures section. All research participants received this gift. The consent form also informed participants that the final report of this study will be made available to them upon its completion and will explain how participants may register for a copy of the study or study summary.

Instrumentation

The instrument used to collect data for this research study was an in-depth semi-structured interview with Danish 0–9 school leader participants. Due to the open-ended nature of this approach, interviewers are enabled to ask follow-up questions and be flexible about the order in which questions are brought up. Semi-structured interviews are widely used in qualitative data collection (Adams, 2015; Bearman, 2019; Roulston & Choi, 2018). Participants scheduled either face-to-face or video conference interviews with me where data collection occurred. Examples of video conferencing applications are Teams, Zoom, Skype, etc. For face-to-face interviews, I insisted on a private location where interruptions will not disturb the flow of conversation nor compromise privacy. In the case of video conferenced interviews, I sat in a private place, free from interruptions

with the appropriate technology in use. The study participants were encouraged to arrange for the same conditions for the video conference interviews.

As the interview took approximately 40 – 50 minutes, there was a clear expectation that at least 40 minutes of time must be blocked off by both participant and researcher to conduct the interview. The interviews were recorded with a portable digital voice recorder. If the interview was conducted via video conferencing, the audio was recorded by the computer in addition to the digital voice recorder. In the case of the face-to-face interviews, two separate digital voice recorders were used. This was simply to assure that if a malfunction of a recorder took place, there was a backup device to record the content, although no malfunctions occurred.

The data sources were the corresponding audio recordings and their transcripts. All interviews were audio-recorded and carefully transcribed. The interviews were mostly conducted in Danish, although two participants elected to speak English. Those in Danish were first transcribed, and then later translated to English. Data results in this study were generated from the thematic coding process of the interview transcripts (see Saldana, 2016). The interviews followed a semi-structured protocol, meaning that there were specific topics that were explored, however the sequence of questions was at times influenced by the interviewee, which generated opportunities for open and natural conversation on the topic areas (see Bearman, 2019; Roulston & Choi, 2018).

Source and Basis of Data Collection Instrument

The structure and questions of the interview serve as the data collection instrument and were designed and created by me with input from informed contributors

such as my committee chair, local professionals, and published scholarly guidance (Bearman, 2019; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The general structure of the interview instrument was derived from the list of Danish 0–9 school leader competencies as outlined by the Danish Ministry of Children and Education’s seven fields of school leadership (UVM, 2015, 2024). The seven research questions of this study correspond to the seven fields of school leadership, set in the context of the situational conditions brought on by the shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Interview questions were designed to elicit perceptions, experiences, stories, and teamwork details that address the seven research questions. The formation of these questions were guided by scholarly work which provided examples of how to elicit relevant dialog (Bearman, 2019; Rubin & Rubin, 2012), how to strategize the order, pacing, and types of questions (Adams, 2015), as well as how to formulate questions that relate to the contextual framework of this study (Edmondson, 2019; Weiner et al., 2021).

Content Validity

Content validity was established by reaching saturation points with the interview data and using member checks to establish agreement in the analysis and understandings of the data results. Ravitch & Carl (2016) referred to member checks as “participant validation” (p. 197), which could be argued is a better descriptive term for member checks, as it stresses the importance of reaffirming the validity of the researcher’s interpretation of what a participant has communicated, which is at the essence of validity. Member checks entailed post interview interaction between me and participants which

entailed participant review of transcripts and researcher comments “getting feedback from participants on findings as they emerge” (see Burkholder et al., 2016, p. 78).

The point at which no new themes are emerging during the thematic analysis of the interview data is known as the saturation point. (Saldana, 2016). Achieving saturation is another way demonstrating evidence of validity in data analysis. When this is realized, it strongly suggests that the research has honed into the most important common themes pertaining to the topics being explored (Burkholder et al., 2016). Ravitch and Carl (2016) discussed how some researchers are critical of the concept of saturation points, as the concept implies that there is a single truth to be discovered on a topic. Although I think this critique is interesting and is worth keeping in mind as part of an iterative research process, in the case of this study, the consistency of themes that emerged in the analysis of the data were seen by me as important in my work to validate findings.

In-depth interviewing is a way researchers can explore “experiences, motives, and opinions of others” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 3) this enables researchers to understand new information and participants’ perspectives in depth (Adams, 2015; Burkholder et al., 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). For the context of this study, I discerned that a semi-structured interview was the best instrument available to potentially collect the relevant data pertaining to the purpose of this study. The choice of a data collection instrument is appropriate when it can be used to identify valid themes to the point where repetition of themes and concepts are reached in relation to the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Explanations on how the individual interview questions align with the study

research questions is fully articulated in the section *Connection of Data to a Specific Research Question*, (see Table 1).

Sufficiency of Data Collection Instruments

A careful coding process based on themes shared by participants during semi-structured interviews which, when subjected to a rigorous analysis was used to learn about the participants' perceptions and experiences. A coding process, when done correctly, can show important links between data and explanation of meaning (Saldana, 2016). In examination of how thematic coding has been used in similar interview-based basic studies (Kahlke, 2022; Weiner et al., 2021), it can be argued that in case of this study, the proposed data collection instruments and analysis tools were appropriately used to suitably address the research questions. Each interview question was carefully created to align with the objective of eliciting the perceptions and experiences of the participants relating to the seven research questions (see Table 1). The interview protocol including all interview questions is presented as Appendix A (Appendix B – Danish).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

This study adhered to ethical standards that respect, protect, and value the subjects who participate in it, as is consistent with standards set by the Danish National Center for Etik [National Center for Ethics] (n.d), and the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS, n.d.). The rules and processes university IRBs and ethics committees use to ensure ethical participant consent and confidentiality are “absolutely central to research ethics” (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 346). The processes involved in this study regarding the recruitment of potential participants, how they are interacted with, how data

collected was recorded, processed, and stored, conformed to Walden University's compliance responsibilities (Walden. n.d.-a) relating to ethical standards. In this following section, procedures for recruitment will be revisited, participation in the study will be outlined, and data collection methods will be described.

Participant Recruiting Procedures

The recruitment process for this study began with letters (Appendix C, Appendix D) sent to Danish 0–9 schools. The initial contact letter was written in Danish (Appendix D) and addressed to the school's name but included the name of the school leader in question, in accordance with the Danish Data Protection laws (J. Ubbesen, personal communication, February 28, 2023). When I did not hear back from a prospective participant, the letter was followed up with an email (Appendix G – English & Appendix H – Danish), inviting the prospect to learn more about the study by contacting me. It is important to note that in the country of Denmark, it is standard practice for the names, positions, and email addresses of school leaders to be listed on school websites, and it is acceptable for researchers who have university IRB approval to contact schools directly to inform about studies and invite potential subjects to participate. This information was affirmed by email and by telephone conversation with a clerk from the Danish Data Protection Agency (J. Ubbesen, personal communication, February 28, 2023). This method enabled me to make wide contact with the target population.

Referrals from one school leader to another within the same school, were seen as favorable, as interviews with different leaders within the same organization facilitated the triangulation of findings, as new perspectives and experiences within the same school can

be explored. However, a potential bias could emerge from a prior participant making a referral to a new potential recruit. This strategy for recruitment is known as snowball sampling (Babbie, 2016) or chain-referral sampling (Birnacki & Waldorf, 1981). This study did not apply this method of recruitment as I was not seeking participants within a population who were possibly of like-mind due to friendships or private affiliations. This study was best served by collecting data from participants simply on the criteria that the participants had the same job during the timespan in question. Crouse and Lowe (2018) explained this issue with snowball sampling this way “Due to the lack of randomization across study phases, data collected from participants cannot be considered generalizable to the target population as a whole. Definitive conclusions regarding the population may be inherently biased” (p.2). Contrarily, referrals to Danish 0–9 school leaders made by people who had not personally participated in the interview process and had no connection to the field were not seen as subject to bias and therefore, these potential participants were considered as acceptable if they met the other study participation requisites.

Initial Contact Document Cover Letter

As school leaders, the participant population of this study are busy people with many responsibilities and demands on their time. This population group was reluctant to participate unless they understood the importance and legitimacy of the ideas behind the study. I considered the introductory overview of the study in the form of the initial contact letter (Appendix C, Appendix D) to be appropriate as a part of the participant recruitment process in this study. Although some research posits that reading

comprehension problems can make information sheets problematic for some populations (Ennis & Wykes, 2016), in the case of this study, the professionals whom I sought to recruit had no issues comprehending the concise information about the study shared in the initial contact cover letter (Appendix C, Appendix D Danish).

Participant Participation and Consent Form

Use of participant consent forms have become a standard method researchers apply to inform and document the willingness to of participants to consent to be a part of a study. By signing the consent form, the participants provide informed consent to participate (Burkholder et al., 2016). A well-crafted participant consent form is important because it informs the participants of important and relevant details of the study and possible effects on the participant “in ways that are respectful, accessible, and transparent” (Ravitch & Carl, p. 361). The consent form was in accordance with the Walden University’s IRB consent form template requirements (Walden, n.d.).

Participants were directed to read the consent form carefully before voluntarily agreeing to participate in the study. The topics included in the consent form included: the name of Walden University as the institution that granted approval for carrying out the study; researcher name and contact information; the title of the study; a declaration that the person may say no by not signing the consent form; a number of boxes which must be marked with a check indicating that they have understood the articulated information that includes; the purpose, methods, risks, and inconveniences of the study as described in the information sheet; a declaration that the participant may not personally directly benefit from participating in the study; a declaration that participation is voluntary that one may

withdraw at any time; a declaration that the participant had been given information and the opportunity to ask questions; that the information specified in the information sheet regarding how transcripts will be stored for the purpose of this study; that any publication of the results will conceal the identity of all participants; and, that the participant has been given a copy of the participant information sheet and consent form to keep.

Data Collection

There are “two major ways of conducting research interviews: face-to-face and online” (Khalil & Cowie, 2020, p. 101). In this study, both methods were considered acceptable. There were advantages to using a video conferencing tool such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. It can save time, save on costs, and enable a wider geographical range of data collection (Khalil & Cowie, 2020; Oliffe, et al., 2021). However, there can be some downsides to this interview strategy. Oliffe, et al., (2021) suggested that it might be more difficult to pick up on nuances in interpersonal expression. Other researchers report positive experiences with video-conferenced interviews and support the method as being an effective tool for data collection if technical aspects such as a strong internet connection and functional devices are used (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Khalil & Cowie, 2020; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019). Considering the typical video-conference proficiency of the participant population of this study, and the general standard of technology infrastructure of Denmark, either face-to-face or video-conferenced interviews were considered viable in the context of this study.

The primary data collection event occurred once, during the interview. However, this study used member checks as a measure to achieve content validity. Member checks

entail post interview interaction between researchers and participants in order to validate transcribed data and early findings (Burkholder et al., 2016; López-Zerón et al., 2021). Other than follow up interactions in the form of member checks, there were no other data collection events besides the interview. The recorded interviews generally lasted approximately 35-60 minutes. This duration was directly related to the number of questions and general amount of content involved to cover as well as the time constraints on the participants. The interviews were only audio recorded.

There were many important considerations involved in the conduction of effective semi-structured interviews (see Adams, 2015; Bailey, 2018; Guest et al., 2013). I considered the time of day the interview was scheduled, the order and pacing of questions, and even the level of critical intelligence I should exhibit during the process (see Adams, 2015). The emphasis on building positive rapport with interviewees was critical to build trust and cultivate an interaction that could generate useful qualitative data (see Burkholder et al., 2016; Khalil & Cowie, 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As Guillemin & Heggen (2009) reported, “Often the best data comes at the expense of participants revealing something deeply personal about themselves” (p. 292). Although the goal of data collection in this study was not to unveil deeply personal information, willingness to share less than flattering experiences and overall candor was highly valued.

The debriefing process after participant involvement entailed thanking the participants for their time and participation in the study. This also included the handing over of a small gift of appreciation, not cash money; the value of which did not exceed 70

Danish Crowns, which is currently slightly less than 10 dollars. Small gifts like a gift card or a coffee mug, can be a way to “thank people for their time and involvement” in a qualitative study (Derrington, 2019, p. 3). The gift was designed to leave the participant with a pleasant feeling and potential receptiveness to further contact in the form of member checks. Finally, this symbolic gift was also consistent with Danish social norms and good manners. In a Zoom meeting with a Walden IRB representative (Walden IRB representative, personal communication, January 30, 2023), I was informed that a gift of this size is seen as acceptable in studies such as this one.

At the conclusion of the interview process, participants were informed that they should expect a transcript of the interview data, including my comments within a work-week for member check purposes. Participants were encouraged to review the transcription document to ensure alignment and agreement with the accuracy of the transcription and my comments. All participants, as well as other interested parties, were invited to register an email address that later can be used to send a link to where the study summary document will be available for download. The study summary will be designed for Danish 0–9 school leaders and educational practitioners. It will include a brief outline of the study, including the purpose of the study, the research questions, and summary of findings. The ProQuest publication information will be included on the document, for ease of access to the full dissertation publication. Like other confidential data involved in this study, the email list for the sharing of the publication has been securely stored to protect anonymity and confidentiality of all persons involved.

Data Analysis Plan

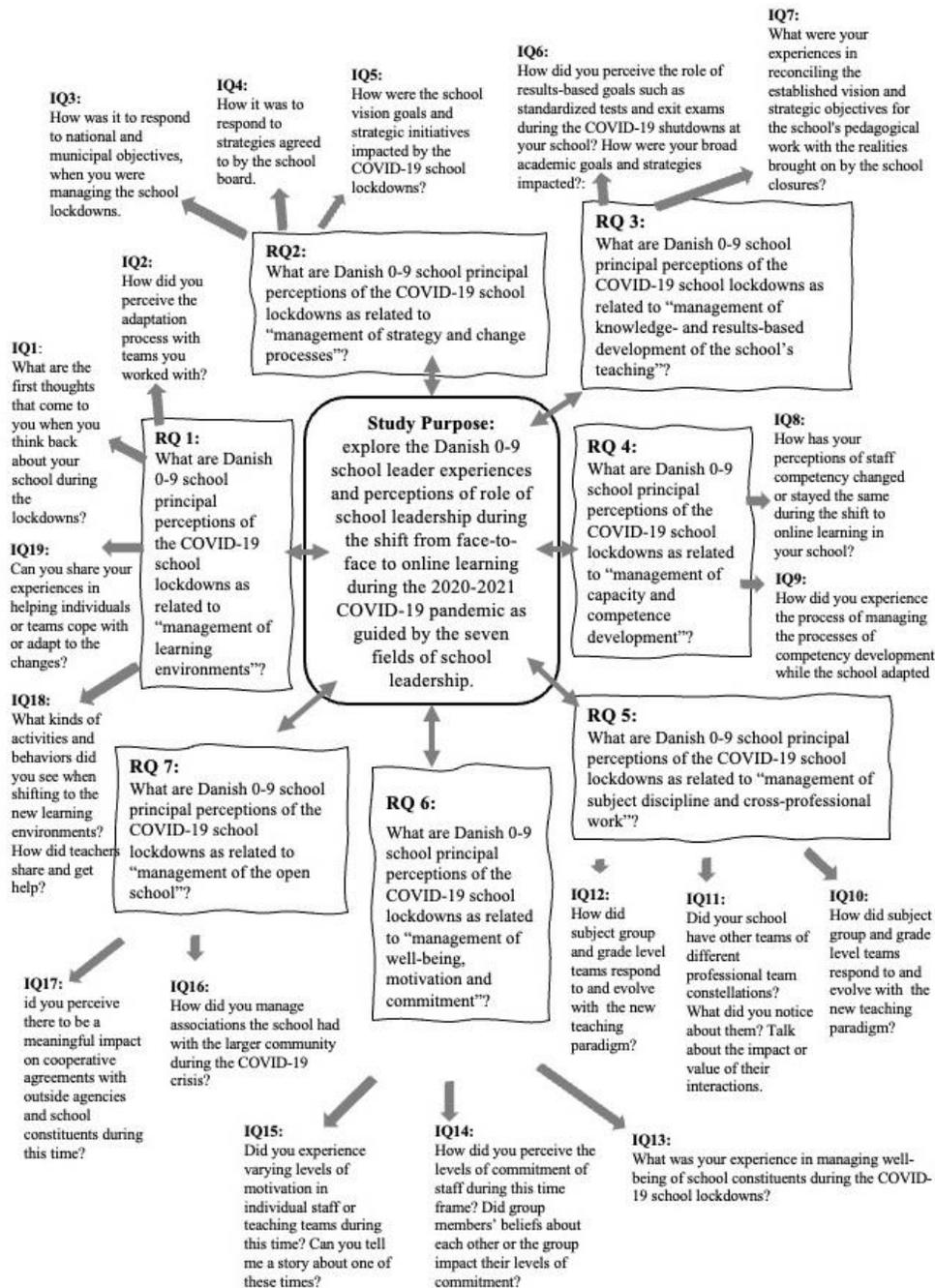
The data analysis plan that was utilized for this study was based on thematic analysis of the content transcribed from the interviews. Thematic analysis is a flexible data analysis plan that is compatible with basic qualitative studies (Statswork, 2021) and “are also applicable with structurally coded data” (Saldana, 2016, p. 101). In this section, the plan will be described.

Connection of Data to a Specific Research Question

The interviews were structured around the research questions of the study. As is consistent with standard semi-structured interview data collection practice, the research questions were broken into smaller open-ended questions for the participants to respond to and explore (see Roulston & Choi, 2018). As this study explored the perceptions and experiences of school leaders regarding each of the seven fields of school leadership, when examining each of the questions, the presence of alignment could be seen as the questions were designed to elicit perceptions and experiences related to each of the RQs. As the interviews were semi-structured, it was not a necessity that the questions were asked in a linear numbered fashion from each planned topic to the next (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Roulston & Choi, 2018) however each RQ was explored deliberately with all of the following questions.

Figure 5

Map of Study Purpose, Research Questions, and Interview Questions



The purpose of this study is at the center of Figure 5. Surrounding the purpose, one can see the seven research questions this study attempted to answer. The seven RQs are connected to the purpose with a double arrow. The RQs of the study have one-way arrows pointing to the interview questions applied to elicit the experiences and perspectives of the Danish 0–9 school leaders regarding the RQ topics. To provide clarity, the research questions and some of the interview questions were simplified in the graphic to help provide a legible and comprehensible visual graphic. However, the precise wording of the interview questions was not inflexible. In fact, within the context of conversation, the more relaxed wording used in the above graphic closely resembled the way the questions were phrased to avoid stiff, academic discourse in favor of contextually appropriate and affable communication.

Alignment between each research question and the related interview questions can be identified due to the emphasis on how the interview questions were designed to elicit commentary from the participant on their perceptions and experiences relating to the RQ topic areas that address the study purpose (see Burkholder et al., 2016). In other words, the terminology of perceptions and experiences is explicit to the wording of the RQs but is also embedded in the interview questions themselves. This is purposeful and serves also to align the data collection strategy with the conceptual framework of the study, allowing for new constructed meanings to be explored with interviewees on their perceptions and experiences relating to psychological safety in context of the RQ topic areas. Ravitch & Carl (2016) referred to opening up new topic areas by applying the conceptual framework to the discussion as “new terrain for you to traverse” (p. 36) and

emphasized the importance of the conceptual framework's presence in the construction of interview questions. "The conceptual framework helps align the analytic tools and methods of a study with the focal topics and core constructs as they are embedded within the research questions" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 36).

I asked follow-up questions to prompt stories and observations and to elicit data pertaining to the perspectives and experiences of the participant. Based on the conceptual framework of this study, particular attention was paid to themes pertaining to antecedent work conditions that impacted work groups, interpersonal beliefs, and behaviors seen in work teams, as well as how these elements may or may not have impacted outcomes relating to the seven fields of school leadership (UVM, 2015, 2024) during the shift from face-to-face to online learning in Danish 0–9 schools.

Table 1*Research Question 1 With Associated Interview Questions*

RQ 1	Interview questions regarding RQ 1
<p>What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of learning environments”?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are the first thoughts that come to you when thinking back about the time your school pivoted to online learning during the COVID-19 crisis? <li>2. How did you perceive the adaptation process to the new online learning environments of the teaching teams you worked with? <li>3. What kinds of activities did you see individuals or teaching teams engage in when shifting to the new learning environments? How did the teachers share their experiences and get help? <li>4. Can you share your experiences in helping individuals or teams cope with or adapt to the changes?

The first question of the interview listed above was designed to help the participant remember standout experiences from that time in his or her life. Practical information regarding the learning environments at the time of the crisis was reported. The aim was to help the interviewees recall how they felt, what they did, and what they thought of the situation at the time. After exploring the participants' first thoughts and recollections, the next question also stays very general, inquiring about how their school adapted their learning environments in response to the unexpected challenges of the COVID-19 school shutdowns. This question is probing for lived experiences and perspectives, however, some focus in this question is on teaching teams or interpersonal considerations, which represent essential areas of inquiry as the research conducted to support this study emphasized the importance of teamwork and cooperation in relation to how organizations responded to the changes brought on by the crises.

The following questions, numbers 3 and 4 pertaining to RQ 1, were often asked later in the interview. In the third question, more emphasis on work teams and information sharing as evidence of supporting collaborative work relating to learning environments was explored. The purpose of this line of questioning, was to elicit lived examples the school leaders experienced of interpersonal factors in team learning and adaptability, and to explore perceived behaviors of workers that related to cooperation and psychological safety of professional learning environments. The last question sought to learn about how the participant saw their own role in the leadership or support of work groups with an emphasis on experiences and perceptions and had the potential to provide evidence of low to high levels of psychological safety in the organization.

It could be argued that questions three and four above were the most meaningful and challenging questions of this study. However, it can take time to build rapport with an interviewee, so these last two questions were sometimes asked later in the interview, once other less potentially challenging questions and topics had been explored. For best results, I needed to build trust with the participants before asking questions in which a participant might feel challenged. As the interview proceeded, when the topics came up naturally, or if I perceived the participant to seem relaxed with the related topics, I asked questions 3 and 4 with the essential follow up questions for clarification.

Table 2

Research Question 2 With Associated Interview Questions

RQ 2	Interview questions regarding RQ 2
What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of strategy and change processes”?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell me about how it was to respond to national and municipal objectives, when you were managing the school lockdowns. 2. Tell me about how it was to respond to strategies agreed to by the school board. 3. How were the school vision goals and strategic initiatives impacted by the COVID-19 school lockdowns?

The above questions pertaining to the topic of strategy and change processes were focused on school strategic plans that were in place and how they changed or were

possibly altered due to the challenges of COVID-19. The experiences and perspectives of school leaders as they accommodated various directives from the federal government, municipalities, and local school boards were focal points of this discussion. This discussion was a chance to report on positive cooperation or dysfunction between these entities during the challenging time. The last question pertaining to RQ 2 examined whether there had been any type of paradigm shift relating to the school vision and goals as a result of the experiences brought on by the crisis. These questions sought to elicit examples of experiences that the participants had or gained perspectives that impacted their understandings moving forward.

Table 3*Research Question 3 With Associated Interview Questions*

RQ 3	Interview questions regarding RQ 3
<p>What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of knowledge- and results-based development of the school’s teaching”?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How did you perceive the role of results-based goals such as standardized tests and exit exams during the COVID-19 shutdowns at your school? How were your broad academic goals and strategies impacted? 2. What were your experiences in reconciling the established vision and strategic objectives for the school’s pedagogical work with the realities brought on by the school closures?

The above questions pertaining to the topic of the management of knowledge- and results-based development of the school’s teaching were designed to elicit the participants’ perspectives on the impact of the closures of the physical school locations in relation to the academic and strategic goals that the organizations had been working toward. These questions explored speculative thoughts of the participants. The goal of the questioning was to help the participants define their perspectives about the impacts the altered learning environments had on academic goals measured by standardized tests and

exit exam scores. School ranking, competition, as well as institutional vision and integrity were key topics that were explored in follow up questions. The second question was designed to explore the perspectives of the participants on the realities of how the strategic plans were impacted and whether this has had lasting effects on the school.

Table 4

Research Question 4 With Associated Interview Question

RQ 4	Interview questions regarding RQ 4
What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of capacity and competence development”?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you talk about how your perceptions of staff competency changed or stayed the same during the shift to online learning in your school? Did you perceive a need for new competency goals in the staff? 2. How did you experience the process of managing the processes of competency development while the school adapted to an online learning model?

The above questions pertained to the topic of management of capacity and competence development. The objective of the first question was to try to elicit memories or set of experiences that reflected on the perceived competencies of the staff as they reacted and applied their personal competency strengths, or lack of acuity to the shift to online learning. Research has suggested that staff members with more personal

experience in online learning techniques were advantageously positioned to adapt to the new learning paradigm. This being so, younger staff members who were perhaps not those normally sought after for their expertise may have been professionally elevated by this experience. The perspectives of school leaders regarding how the context of the crisis called upon different types of competencies and what participants considered valuable was central to this research question. Finally, I was interested in knowing how the school leader him or herself interacted with staff members or work groups to help facilitate the development of competencies to further organizational goals.

Table 5*Research Question 5 With Associated Interview Questions*

RQ 5	Interview questions regarding RQ 5
<p>What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of subject discipline and cross-professional work”?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Can you tell me about the how subject group and grade level teams responded to the new teaching paradigm? How did these groups evolve as the shutdowns continued? <li>2. Did your school have other teams of different professional constellations in place before the switch to online learning due to COVID-19? If yes, then, what did you notice about these types of teams’ interactions? Did group members’ beliefs about their fellow group members impact the value of interactions? <li>1. To what degree did you attempt to guide or assist in subject or cross-professional interactions?

The above questions pertaining to the RQ 5 topic of management of subject discipline and cross-professional work were closely related to the RQ 1 questions. Whereas RQ 1 was focused on learning environments, RQ 5 examined subject discipline and cross professional work. There is significant overlap between these areas, with the exploration of discipline and cross professional groups having the potential to elicit experiences and perceptions pertaining to how different constellations of groups, such as vertical groups, meaning for example, all teachers of a subject from grades 1–9, or horizontal team groups with members who, for example, all teach the same grade level but in different subjects met and worked together.

As the conceptual framework of this study was focused on the beliefs and behaviors associated with psychological safety in interpersonal group settings, and how this impacted work outcomes, the discourse pertaining to questions two and three above at times evoked perspectives and experiences relating to interpersonal dynamics of how team interactions either assisted or degraded cooperation and outcomes. In the third question above, the cooperative and leadership strategies of the participant him or herself were explored in relation teaching subject matter and leadership of cooperative groups. As this line of inquiry could potentially be interpreted as challenging by the participant, great care was taken to maintain trust and an open appreciative communication approach to avoid the participant becoming guarded or self-conscious.

Table 6*Research Question 6 With Associated Interview Questions*

RQ 6	Interview questions regarding RQ 6
<p>What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of well-being, motivation and commitment”?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What was your experience in managing well-being of school constituents during the COVID-19 school lockdowns? Did group members’ beliefs about each other or the group impact their commitment? <li>2. How did you perceive the levels of commitment of workers and teams during this time frame? Did group members’ beliefs about each other or the group impact their commitment? Can you tell me a story about one of these times? <li>3. Did you experience varying levels of motivation in individual staff or teaching teams during this time?

The above questions pertained to the topic of management of well-being, motivation and work groups' commitment were designed to elicit perspectives from the participants on the role of interpersonal communication, cooperation, and support between staff members. The participants discussed experiences they had trying to impact the well-being in their staff and what they perceived were the levels of commitment and motivation, and how this related to staff members' well-being and feelings of group affiliation during the transition from face-to-face teaching to an online model.

Once again, these questions had to be respectfully presented to emphasize that the participant him or herself was not being held responsible for each staff member's well-being, level of commitment, and motivation as it is highly unlikely that these attributes were controlled by a single leader but are cumulative in nature with many possible factors influencing the workers' experiences and behaviors. This topic has the potential to deeply connect with the conceptual framework of psychological safety, potentially providing indicators of the school leader's emphasis on the key areas that supported successful workplace cooperation, collaboration, and well-being of staff.

Table 7*Research Question 7 With Associated Interview Questions*

RQ 7	Interview questions regarding RQ 7
What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of the open school”?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How did you manage associations the school had with the larger community during the COVID-19 crisis? What was your experience with this? <li>2. Did you perceive there to be a meaningful impact on cooperative agreements with outside agencies and school constituents during this time?

The above questions pertained to the topic of management of the open school and were designed to elicit recollections from participants about experiences they had when managing the partnerships and extra-curricular school affiliations when the school shutdowns altered the rules of physical proximity of all clubs, volunteer programs, music programs sport programs, etc. This topic was less emotionally charged in comparison to many of the other RQs, however, the topic was relevant to the purpose of the study, which was to explore the Danish 0–9 school leader perceptions and experiences of the

role of school leadership during the shift from face-to-face to online learning during the COVID-19 switch to online learning. In Denmark, the role of the community has deep ties to schools, and the dissolutions of community partnerships did have impacts, however, these questions explored the ways in which the school leaders interacted or chose not to interact with community members.

Type of and Procedure for Coding

This study applied a thematic coding process to analyse the transcript data. The procedure of coding in this process was cyclical in nature. The data source was coded at least three times. The process of coding served to link the raw transcribed interview data to meaning which captured the essence of the thoughts recorded. As explained by Saldana (2016), a code is not the same as a theme. A code is a one word, or short phrase label used as a meaningful identifier. Themes are longer descriptions that describe the simple code. The coding process progressed from recording of simple codes to pattern detection which identified thematic ideas and categorizations, and finally upon saturation of data and major themes emerged.

Software Used for Data Management

The interviews were transcribed by use of the Dictate and Transcribe features in Microsoft Word. The initial automatic transcription completed by Microsoft Word was always inaccurate and required processing the transcription word by word as I listened to the recorded audio. It was a slow process that required listening and going back to relisten. This exacting process was essential to capture the correct words and meaning of the participant interviews. The transcriptions were then translated with the translate

feature in Microsoft Word, however, using Word was a first step in the translation process. The translated document was gone through carefully to validate the accuracy of the translation. The coding process of the themes which emerged during analysis of the interview transcripts was carried out by use of a qualitative coding software called Quirkos (2023), which enabled me to categorize words and phrases found in the text into themed codes and categories. This process identified common themes and distinctions of thoughts from the interview data. This enabled me to categorize pieces of data with potentially more than one conceptual theme and record this information from all the different interviews with a visual interface that was searchable with key words. In this digital environment, the themed data from all participants were collected, coded, categorized, displayed, and analyzed efficiently. This process was iterative and cyclical.

By using Quirkos (2023), coded themes and clustered ideas could be named and categorized as many times as needed. There were many efficiency advantages to having the information digitized as it clearly presented the data and its original source. This enabled me to go back to the original interview transcript to find more context when necessary. This was done by searching for the designated words and phrases into search functions in the transcript documents.

The thematic coding process was repeated three to five times to look for ideas or themes that may have been overlooked or initially considered unrelated (see Saldana, 2016). The final process of sorting and summarizing the data resulted in a more refined analysis (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012) which synthesized themes into categories and

identified relationships between data that were helpful to identify consensus and divergence of thoughts regarding the research questions of this study.

Treatment of Discrepant Cases

It is good practice to pay careful attention to the analysis of discrepant cases. Although this type of data may appear to be contrary to the consistency of findings, the respectful consideration of disconfirming data, lend credibility to the trustworthiness of the findings of studies. It can be challenging when data that is out of the norm (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In the case of this study, discrepant data offered new perspectives and was considered during the analysis of data, consistent with Saldana's (2016) assertions that discrepant data can "motivate a rethinking of a code, category, theme, concept, assertion, or theory" (p. 17). Discrepant cases were thematically coded, included in analysis, and impacted the iterative nature of the study, but were not given more value than areas of consensus between participants.

Trustworthiness

In quantitative work, the term validity is used to signify truth, or that the methodology being applied "accurately describe or reflect the phenomenon under study" (Burkholder, et al, 2016, p. 104). This same concept in qualitative work is referred to as trustworthiness (Burkholder et al., 2016; Nowell, 2007, Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Solid, trustworthy research is consistent with appropriate methodological choices and the rigorous application of them. The idea of trustworthiness includes the concepts of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Burkholder et al., 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016) which are discussed in this section. The objective of

trustworthiness in this study was to collect and report on data which truly reflected the reality of the participants' thoughts on research questions being studied.

Credibility

As a way of establishing credibility in this study, the interviews with Danish 0–9 school leaders were held with school leaders who represented different leadership ranks and roles. These interviews with the different leadership groups highlighted some important contrasts in perceptions and experiences while also providing evidence of consensus. This served as way to triangulate findings and ensure credibility of data reported.

The strategy of member checking was applied to establish credibility and dependability in this study. By sharing the transcribed interviews with participants, I verified that I had understood the participants correctly, including the correct transcriptions of sometimes subtle linguistic nuances shared by participants. Member checks can resolve misunderstandings by sharing qualitative data with the people who expressed the thoughts. In my case, this practice was particularly important as, although I have a high competency level in Danish, I am not a native speaker. It was reassuring to have shared the transcribed conversations with the participants to affirm accuracy and strengthen dependability of the study. Member checking was applied after the collection of data.

In addition to member checking, I discussed preliminary interpretations of the data with a Danish peer reviewer who was familiar with the 0–9 Danish educational system as well as qualitative research methods. This was helpful to analyze the process of

interviewing and explore how I was eliciting feedback from participants on specific topics. Ravitch and Carl (2016) explained that researchers, especially those working alone, must have a qualified professional peer question the assumptions and interpretations of the sole researcher, as unchecked conclusions can adversely impact the dependability of the research.

Transferability

Generally, an iterative and recursive mindset throughout the research process is considered important in achieving trustworthiness in scholarly work (Burkholder et al., 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). While collecting and analyzing data, the documented reflective thoughts recorded in research notes capacitated reflective thought and lent credibility to my ability to explain how I arrived at conclusions. Clear descriptions of contexts, settings, and my assumptions as I carried out this study will help readers to assess the potential of transferability, or how others might apply the study's findings (see Burkholder et al., 2016). Thick descriptions using quotations from the interview data supported transferability of the research findings of this study. Evidence presented from the interviews provided important contextual data that was needed to understand the perspectives presented. The semi-structured, in-depth nature of the interviews was compatible with this thick descriptive interview objective.

Dependability

In the positivist tradition, reliability represents stability in data results over time. In qualitative work, the word dependability is used to represent this concept (Mertens & McLaughlin, 1995). "In the constructivist paradigm, change is expected, but it should be

tracked and be publicly inspectable” (Mertens & McLaughlin, 1995, para. 39). A confirmability audit which was compiled in the process of conducting this study represented an audit trail consisting of a collection of thick descriptions in the form of detailed field notes, memos, reflection journals and other forms of documentation that provided reflective descriptions and explanations of how decisions were made during the study. These descriptions were helpful in establishing dependability of the study by explaining and confirming the subjective processes and analyses applied during the study (see Burkholder et al., 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The dependability of the current study is therefore enhanced by the audit trail, otherwise known as a confirmability audit, as other scholars can reconstruct the study with the same process and rationale, and therefore should yield very similar results.

Confirmability

In the case of this study, I created an audit trail consisting of process and reflective field notes and memos in order to provide as much context to and reflective thought regarding the decisions, analysis and processes that took place during the course of data collection, analysis, and reporting on results. These processes strengthened the credibility of the work as readers or other researchers have evidence to use to understand the rationale for the decisions made and how they led to analysis. It was my intent to use the afore mentioned different approaches of modernization, member checks, thick descriptions, and reflexive thought in order to produce a study that had input from other critical scholars and was honest about where my subjective analysis was being provided to achieve confirmability in the work that was conducted.

Ethical Procedures

This section will discuss ethical considerations and procedures involved in this study. In all studies involving human participants, the beneficial outcome of the proposed study must be seen as favorably balanced against the risks or inconveniences to the human resources involved. The ethical procedures of this study conformed to the Walden University IRB standards as well as ethical criteria required for non-medicinal social and educational qualitative, interview-based studies in the country of Denmark. This study complied with Danish laws that govern research projects that resemble the approaches this study carried out. The topics in this section are as follows; Treatment of Human Participants; Ethical Concerns; Treatment of Data Anonymity and Confidentiality; Methods for Anonymized Data collection, and Remuneration.

Treatment of Human Participants

Respect was shown to the people who elected to participate in this research study. Their choice was based on a clear understanding of what the purpose of the study was, as well as the potential risks and benefits of the study. (see NIH, 2022). The recruitment process for this study entailed sharing detailed information about the study, me as researcher and sample questions. This document was attached to the participant consent form, which was voluntarily agreed to before participation occurred. Participants were informed that they could opt out or discontinue their participation at any time.

Ethical Safety of This Study

Paragraph §46.102(i) of United States federal regulations requires “that the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not

greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life". In the case of this study, the topics of conversations relating to Danish 0–9 school leaders' work lives during the COVID-19 crisis, were not designed to evoke strong personal emotional reactions. The interview strategy was primarily focused on external conditions, situations, observations about interpersonal phenomena in the workplace, and challenges faced by the participants during the timespan when school lockdowns occurred. This external foci of attention in the study helped to de-personalize the unusual circumstance when the participants' work lives were externally impacted. Feelings evoking psychological discomfort or pain were not the target of questions, however as the questions were open-ended, participants could elect to share difficult memories. The conceptual framework undergirding this study prompted me to seek reflections, experiences and observations that primarily focused on the collective attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and outcomes of employed staff groups, and their interactions with teams within their workplace. As these conversations were carried out, there were no signs of trauma or overt discomfort witnessed by me that would surpass the ordinary daily life of a Danish 0–9 school leader.

While the data sought from participants was not designed to evoke painful memories, recollections of difficult work experiences were seen as relevant to this study. However, when I sensed that participants were ready to move away from certain topics, or if I sensed that a topic was perhaps uncomfortable, I gently moved the conversation to a new area of inquiry. No incidents of distress were noted during the interviews, however, in my observation journal I did make some notes about possible improvements

about the questioning strategy were noted and further included in the confirmability audit, as these observations could have had significance to the interpretation of the data.

Ultimately, the identification of problems experienced by the participants helped highlight significant themes and issues that elucidated the real-life experiences of Danish 0–9 school leaders during the time in question. I considered the benefits of learning about firsthand perspectives and experiences of the participant group, outweighed the possible evocation of an uncomfortable memory or description of a problematic group dynamic. Participants were informed of the topics of the interview prior to consent and were not pressured to participate. Additionally, I explicitly encouraged the participants to select an interview time, location, method, such as video conferencing or face to face, which best ensured comfort, privacy, and confidentiality of their participation.

Treatment of Data Anonymity and Confidentiality

When a participant gave consent to the interview, they were reminded that their participation would be treated with strict confidentiality. This was particularly important regarding participants who worked at the same learning institution. At no time was a participant informed that another professional from their same school had elected to participate in this study. Measures were taken to ensure that the interviews were implemented in a way that protected confidentiality, such as by conducting the interview away from the workplace when requested, or via video conferencing to support confidential participation.

The identities of all participants as well as their shared data were carefully protected. Unedited Audio recordings of interviews were stored as digital files as part of

a data set in only two secure locations that are owned by me and under my sole control. The recordings will be destroyed five years after completion of the study. Subjects will not be visually recorded. Pseudonyms or generic descriptors replaced identifying information in transcripts and remained consistent throughout the research project. Search and replace techniques were carefully applied to avoid unintended changes when replacing names or descriptors. An anonymization log was created and kept, which serves as a key to the replaced descriptors. It is stored securely and separately from the anonymized data files. The process for highlighting direct and indirect identifiers were based on whether the participant, third party or location could be known, disclosed, or harmed based on the information in the data file. All direct and indirect identifiers were pseudonymized.

Collected participant data was considered confidential to protect their identity. There were no paper copies of participant data kept. The participant consent forms were digitized for saving, then shredded. The saved files are stored in accordance with the Walden University IRB guidelines on an external hard drive and backup flash drive for a period of five years after the study has been completed. After which all participant data will be destroyed. All digital storage units will be reformatted five years from the completion date of the study.

Renumeration

A small gift was given to participants. The cost of the gift did not exceed 70 Danish Crowns and was given as a gesture of appreciation for participation in the study. In my view, this measure represented good manners when working with Danish

participants. I consulted several Danish professionals regarding this idea, and they affirmed that it would be considered what in Danish, is called *god stil* [good style] or *noget for noget* [something for something]. This measure supported rapport and participation with member checks, or the contacting of participants post-interview for clarification on any point. All research participants received this incentive and would have regardless of whether they had decided to opt out during interview process or retract their willingness to allow use of their participant data, although this situation did not transpire. This information was clearly stated in the participant consent form.

Summary

The epistemology of this study was grounded in the constructivist tradition which denotes that people's interpretation of reality is shaped by their experiences (see Burkholder et al., 2016), and that "knowledge is constructed through social interactions" (Ravitch and Carl, 2016). A basic qualitative methodological approach, which is compatible with the constructivist tradition, was chosen for this study. A well-designed qualitative study can potentially enable researchers to interpret people's subjective perceptions, experiences, opinions, and beliefs (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Although the methodological design of this qualitative study was very much akin to a phenomenological design or grounded theory approach, the choice of a basic qualitative design was made as it has the advantage of considering information about, not only the feelings of participants in the moment, but reasons why they felt as they did, considering the context and external conditions. This set of priorities was more compatible with a basic or generic qualitative design (see Percy et al., 2015).

In-depth interviews with Danish 0–9 school leader participants were the main instrument used to provide data relevant to the purpose and research questions of this study. As the intent of this study was to examine and understand Danish 0–9 school leader perceptions, experiences, and interactions during a difficult, yet finite time of their work lives, the interview questions probed into personal observations, feelings, beliefs, and problems experienced. I posit that the qualitative tradition, and specifically a basic qualitative methodological design based on in-depth semi-structured interviews was an appropriate methodology to apply to the purpose of the study.

Participants were identified by use of publicly accessible school websites and contacted via the schools where they work. All potential participants were provided clear documentation to inform their consent. These documents were in the form of an initial contact letter (Appendix C – English & Appendix D – Danish) accompanied by the participant consent form. These documents, along with communication between the potential participant and myself assured that their participation was based on ethically sound and informed consent to participate. This study followed the Walden University IRB regulations. The sampling strategy for the interviews was the conduction of 12–16 interviews with the final count of interviews being 12. The interviews were with Danish 0–9 school leaders who had different hierarchical ranks or responsibilities in schools. Although this strategy highlighted contrasts in perceptions and experiences, this strategy also provided evidence of broad agreement in perceptions and experiences between the hierarchical groups. This served as way to triangulate findings. Although no two

interviews were ever the same, I determined that saturation of the research question topics was reached upon completion of the twelfth interview.

The data results were generated from the coding process of the interview transcripts. Upon completion of the interview process, at least three coding cycles took place, which coincided with a qualitative mapping of the results into thematic codes, categories, and major themes by use of a software qualitative coding tool by the name of Quirkos (2023). This process enabled an analysis of the content and the identification of important themes in the transcript content (see Saldana, 2016). My role, in terms of bias and power dynamics was considered throughout this study and mitigated by member-checks and audit trials. The trustworthiness of this study was achieved by the application of strategies which lent themselves to thick descriptions and by clearly sharing awareness of how my personal subjective assumptions influenced the analysis of data as well as detailed descriptions in the form of a confirmability audit. This clearly documented how the methodology was designed and implemented so that other researchers can follow and potentially replicate the process fully aware of the considerations and decision-making processes that were engaged in while the study was carried out.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore Danish 0–9 school leader perceptions and experiences of the role of school leadership during the shift from face-to-face to online learning during the 2020–2021 COVID-19 pandemic as guided by the seven fields of school leadership (UVM, 2015, 2024). The seven fields of school leadership were published in 2015 and were articulated on the official UVM website at the time of this study (EVA, 2024): leadership of learning environments; leadership of strategy and change processes; leadership of knowledge and results-based development of the school’s teaching; leadership of capacity and competence development; leadership of subject and interdisciplinary work; leadership of well-being, motivation, and commitment; and, leadership of the open school. The following research questions guided this study:

Research Question 1: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of learning environments”?

Research Question 2: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of strategy and change processes”?

Research Question 3: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of knowledge- and results-based development of the school’s teaching”?

Research Question 4: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of capacity and competence development”?

Research Question 5: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of subject discipline and cross-professional work”?

Research Question 6: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of well-being, motivation and commitment”?

Research Question 7: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of the open school”?

The findings were framed through a recognition of the purpose of the study statement and the above seven guiding research questions.

This chapter presents the following sections: the setting of this study which will describe the conditions of the data collection process and how this might have influenced the interpretation of the results. The next section will examine the data collection process of this study. This information gives context and clarity regarding how the data were collected, frequency, and duration of the processes. The next section presents a report of the data analysis, organized by Research Questions 1–7, in which the individual codes identified in the interview transcripts are presented with evidence provided in the form of quotations from the interviews. This information is followed by a description of the

categories that were synthesized from the codes. Finally, in this section a description of how the major themes were chosen from the categories is presented. Following the presentation of the codes, categories, and major themes, a description of discrepant cases is presented, followed by a series of tables that provide a visual overview of all codes, categories, and major themes. These tables are organized by the research questions 1-7.

Each section presenting data analysis and results is organized and guided the research questions. Supporting evidence from the data is presented in the form of quotations from participants. Major themes of each research question are fully explored in this section with a separate summary of each Research Question. The next section in this chapter addresses evidence of trustworthiness, which discusses the credibility standards outlined earlier in Chapter 3. The implementation of the standards of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability will be also be discussed in this section including any adjustments made to the standards. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary section.

Setting

I did not have any type of personal relationship with the participants interviewed for this study. As this was the case, it was unknown to me whether there may have been personal situations present in their lives which could have influenced the interview experience for them. However, during the interview processes, there were no overt signs of distress, confusion, or exhaustion in the comportment of any of the interviewees. The locations and times of the interviews were chosen by the participants. Prior to the interview, the participants shared with me the time constraints they were under, which

helped to set the tempo of the interview and amount of follow up questions. A small discussion regarding the content of the consent form, which was thoroughly read by each participant prior to the start of the interviews was conducted to assure that each participant knew what types of questions would be asked, the confidentiality standards, and that they could stop the interview at any time.

Four of the 12 participants interviewed are no longer working in a school leadership role. This fact did not exclude them from the participant group, but at the times of the interviews these individuals were not currently in the same professional role as they were during the COVID-19 professional crisis. From my perspective, this did not have any intrinsic benefits, nor downsides pertaining to the participants' contributions to the study, but this fact is mentioned here.

Table 8*Participant Leadership Roles and Demographics*

Participant designation	Leadership role	Years in school leadership role	Public vs private school	Gender
P1	Top leader	25+	Public	M
P2	Vice principal	5+	Public	F
P3	Principal	10+	Private	F
P4	Top leader	15+	Public	M
P5	Vice principal	Under 5	Private	F
P6	Vice principal	Under 5	Public	F
P7	Top leader	10+	Public	F
P8	Principal	5+	Public	M
P9	Teacher leader	Under 5	Private	M
P10	Principal	5+	Public	M
P11	Teacher leader	Under 5	Private	F
P12	Vice principal / Teacher	Under 5	Private	M

As seen in Table 8, the demographics of this study represent four different leadership roles which represent hierarchical tiers of leadership in Danish 0–9 schools articulated in Chapter 1, Nature of the Study. The tiers of school leadership which were labelled as, top leader, principal, vice-principal, and teacher-leader were purposefully chosen to contrast these roles within the organization and serve as a tool to triangulate

findings. Three participants were serving in a top leader role. This means that they oversaw at least three sections of a school, for example, kindergarten, primary, and secondary school. Three participants had a principal role, meaning they oversaw two sections of a school, or in one case, worked in a small school of only 200 students. Three of the participants had the title of vice principal, and finally three participants were teacher leaders, which means that they had some teaching duties in addition to some type of leadership responsibilities, which could have been teacher coordination or leadership role at the school. There were contrasts in the findings from the different hierarchical tier groups, but also broad areas of agreement between the different groups of participants.

Also seen in Table 8, is whether the participant worked at a public school or a private school. As there were some differences between these two groups, I purposefully sought participants that worked at both types of schools, to intentionally explore possible differences and commonalities in their experiences or perspectives. All other demographic data, including the gender of the participants and years they had been employed in a leadership role were not part of the purposeful sampling strategy.

There were mixed genders in each of the hierarchical participant groups with an equal number of men and women interviewed in this study. I considered this equal distribution of gender to have been satisfactory, but it was not purposeful. While one participant was of a non-Danish native background, all others were educated in Denmark.

Ten of the interviews were conducted in Danish and later translated into English. Two were conducted in English as requested by the interviewee. In the data analysis section of this chapter, the transcription and translation process were discussed. There

were no communication issues during the interviews, and only minor challenges were presented in the transcription and translation processes. It is common to use English expressions in ordinary and professional discourse while speaking Danish, and during the interviews, a few English words and sometimes phrases were used within a mutually accepted context.

Data Collection

The data collection process of this study entailed a single semi-structured interview of each of the 12 participants that varied in length. In Table 9, it can be seen that one of the interviews was under the targeted duration length due to an unexpected time restraint on the participant, however I considered this interview in question to have been substantial enough, interesting and worthy of inclusion. All other interviews either met or exceeded the minimum targeted amount of time. The interviews addressed the seven research questions this study focused on. Each of the 12 participants chose the time and location of the interview. As can be seen in Table 9, five of the 12 interviews were conducted by use of videoconferencing. The other seven were conducted in person. Prior to the start of all interviews, the consent form was discussed, and consent was verbally granted in the audio recordings.

Table 9*Participant Designation, Language, Method, and Duration of Interviews*

Participant	Language	Method	Duration	Recorded consent
P1	Danish	Skype	56 min.	Yes
P2	Danish	Face-to-face	57 min.	Yes
P3	Danish	Face-to-face	38 min.	Yes
P4	English	Face-to-face	57 min.	Yes
P5	Danish	Face-to-face	41 min.	Yes
P6	Danish	Microsoft Teams	39 min.	Yes
P7	Danish	Face-to-face	30 min.	Yes
P8	Danish	Microsoft Teams	24 min.	Yes
P9	English	Microsoft Teams	48 min.	Yes
P10	Danish	Microsoft Teams	44 min.	Yes
P11	Danish	Face-to-face	31 min.	Yes
P12	Danish	Face-to-face	120 min.	Yes

Upon completion of the event, a transcription of the interview was shared with the participant in the form of a Microsoft Word document within one week of the interview as a member check. Via email, the participant was encouraged to examine the attached transcription and report back on any issues with the transcription or my comments, or to provide further context or clarification. All participants responded that they received the transcription. None of the participants wished to amend any part of the transcription, nor

did they provide in writing any comments regarding the comments I had made on the documents.

The data collection instrument consisted of 21 main questions (Appendix A). Due to the semi-structured nature of the instrument, the number of follow up questions varied. The questions followed the basic format outlined in Chapter 3. The format was to have two to three questions pertaining to each of the seven RQs, with the possibility of specific follow-up questions seeking to clarify points or open the discussion up further. It was discovered during the interviews that this strategy was generally effective and was kept throughout the process, although small improvements were made in the way questions were asked as I gained experience.

The data were recorded by means of a digital audio recorder. Whether in person, or via a video-conferencing interface like Zoom or Microsoft Teams, the audio-recorder picked up the audio conversation. The recordings were then downloaded to a password protected folder on the hard drive of a password protected computer. The audio files were also saved on a password protected flash drive which was kept in a separate location as a backup. The participant names and alias were saved separately from the audio files to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

The audio recordings were played on the computer while the automated transcription function of Microsoft Word was used to write out a rough version of the text. The text was then carefully gone through while carefully listening to the audio recordings. This included a great deal of starting, stopping, and rewinding to transcribe the words and grammatical and linguistic structure of the interview as accurately as

possible. Apple QuickTime version 10.5 (2023) was used to control the playback of the interviews. Once this process was complete, including the substitution of any names, places or other possible information which could compromise identity, the document was sent as an attachment to the participant to complete the member check process.

Participants were provided one week for member checking responses. The transcribed documents were then carefully translated from Danish to English. This process entailed using the function of Microsoft Word translation as a starting point. However, both the original recording, as well as the Danish transcription were carefully followed in a manual translation process to fully complete an accurate translation. It was regularly noted that the written Danish transcription which had been translated directly into English by Microsoft Word, was inadequate in either capturing the essence of what the participant had said, or there was something else that wasn't quite right. Therefore, this process was treated with attention to detail. Twice I consulted a native Danish speaker to listen to a three-second or less clip of audio that I had difficulty deciphering. This was helpful in one occasion. As this participation of a native speaker was not part of the original plan, this action was reported to the Walden University IRB office, which reviewed the case, and eventually approved the actions taken by me. Aside from this, there were no variations nor unusual circumstances in the data collection process that varied from the plan described in Chapter 3.

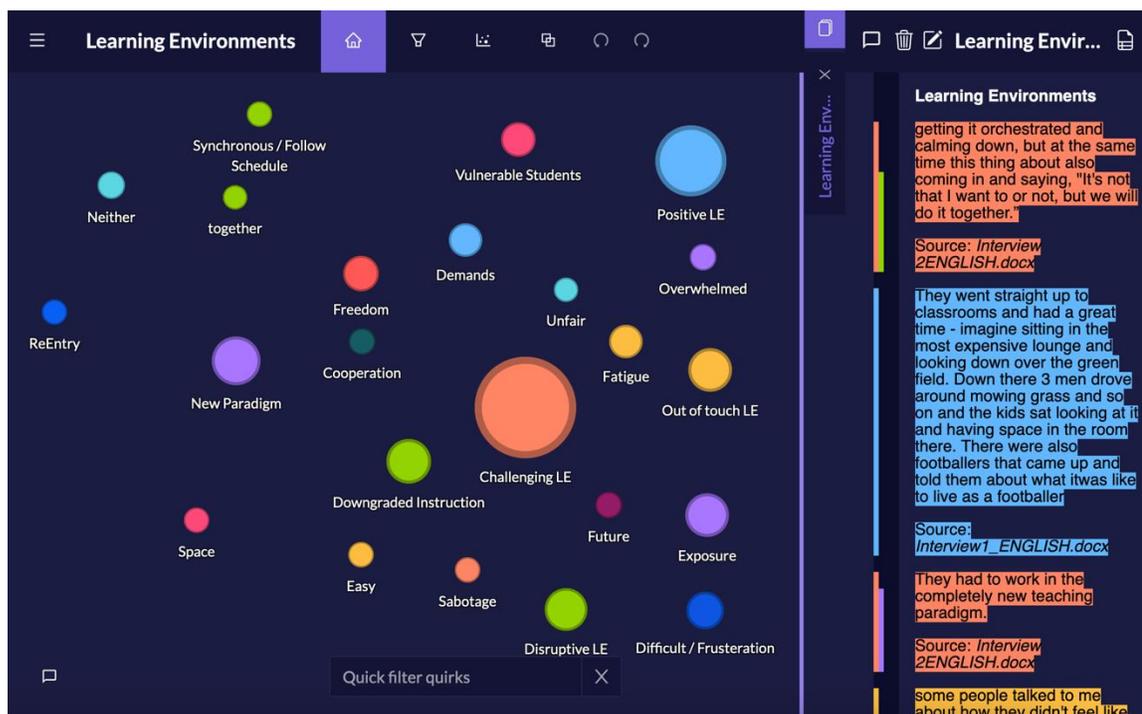
Data Analysis

A software qualitative coding system named Quirkos (2023), was implemented to manually identify coded themes in the interview texts. Using this software, selections of

text could be labelled with a code and color coded. The codes were segments of text that contained a meaning that was related in some way to an RQ of this study. The full transcriptions of the interviews were integrated in the Quirkos coding system which made it possible to systematically go through each of the transcriptions, assign an unlimited number of codes, visually arrange them, group, and rename the codes, and carry out other organizational functions. The software operated reliably. The software provided a visual interface for looking at the selections of text within these various data collections. The data collections were displayed as a collection of circles that resembled a mind map.

Figure 6

Quirkos Qualitative Coding Software Interface



The larger circles contained a higher quantity of coded text clips relating to the coded theme label than smaller circles. Figure 6 is a screenshot from the Quirkos

program showing the coded themes associated with RQ1, Learning Environments. To the far right, examples of text can be seen that were associated with some of the code collections in the center. Using the Quirkos software, selections of text were displayed as a labelled circle, and these could be connected to, or merged with other code circles. This enabled the codes to be collected into themed categories and, later, major themes.

An example of inductively moving from single coded units to larger representations relating to RQ1 can be explained by considering the code *Difficulties/Frustrations*. This label itself was a result of merging two separate ideas that I elected to combine. Although the text clips relating to the code *Sabotage* could also arguably be an example of a *difficulty* or *frustration*, it was kept as a separate thematic code as I determined that *Sabotage* represented a slightly different concept. Nevertheless, both codes did relate to *Disruptive Learning Environments* and were eventually added to the category of *Disruptive Learning Environments (Disruptive LE)*. Finally, this category of *Disruptive LE* was later determined to be part of a larger major theme labelled *Challenging Learning Environments (Challenging LE)* which included various other codes and categories in addition to the *Disruptive LE* category.

The process of thematic coding involved a careful consideration of the labels used as codes. I took an iterative approach to the thematic coding process. It was helpful that the Quirkos software tool used to manage the thematic codes and text data, enabled me to modify and undo actions that needed correcting as the interpretation of the data evolved. Additionally, the organizational facilities of renaming, merging, and combining thematic codes was significantly helpful in keeping clarity and multi-level perspectives of the data.

Identification of Codes

The raw data was examined and thematically coded with various revisitations and coding rounds. Saldana (2016), described the thematic coding process as “cyclical rather than linear” (p. 68). In keeping with this tradition, I often merged and unmerged codes, renamed codes, classified and re-classified text clips, reflecting a synergistic, cyclical process of data analysis and interpretation. It was common for me to notice a word of interest and, by using the integrated search function, locate other occurrences of the same word. This was an interesting technique as, although the contexts the word appeared in were often different, connections were sometimes made to other ideas that might otherwise have been difficult to spot. Gibbons (2022), discussed advantages of analyzing themes from broad concepts to specific themes, small codes to bigger themes, and across established same tier themes. She referred to this process as chunking. This approach forced me to be both analytical and recursive during the data analysis process.

Consolidating the various codes into broader categories brought forward and synthesized the ideas into important concepts that stood out. For example, the RQs pertaining to the topics of well-being (RQ6) and learning environments (RQ1), originally had well over 30 thematic codes each, but the most meaningful of these coded expressions were consolidated down further into the different codes that are listed later in this section. Other RQs did not generate as many different codes, categories or themes, such as RQ 7, dealing with the topic of the open school. This RQ represented activities that were strongly dissuaded during the COVID-19 crisis and thereby generated much less discussion during the interviews.

As mentioned, during the process of the second and third coding rounds, many code labels were consolidated into broader code ideas. Then, groups of codes that were related, were synthesized into categories, and finally major themes emerged from the language and ideas that the categories represented. The ultimate importance assigned to codes and categories was ascertained by how frequently the code was identified throughout the 12 different interviews, as well as the significance of the idea the code label represented. Sometimes a participant mentioned an idea, or code, again and again. If no other participant expressed that thought, the code was noted, but it was not interpreted as representing a consensus. To clarify, some codes represented profound and relevant thoughts that revealed authentic perspectives and experiences, while other codes represented less meaningful points of discussion, or repetition of previously explored practical information.

Code Descriptions

In this section, all codes identified in this study will be explored. The frequency of the codes and perceived importance of the codes will be indicated. Evidence from the interview transcripts in the form of quotations is provided in the descriptions of the codes. For organizational and conceptual context, the codes have been presented in order of the Research Questions.

Some codes identified in the transcripts could be associated with more than one RQ. In the discussion of coded results, overlapping thematic codes are sometimes mentioned when necessary. However, to avoid excessive repetition, I associated the thematic codes with the most applicable RQ. As an example, the code of *No Model*,

which signified the idea that there was no formal established model or framework school leaders could apply to the current situation, was applicable to various RQs, including RQ 1. However, I decided to apply it to RQ 2 which had to do with strategy, vision, and change processes, as this category was seen as the best fit, dealing with the broadest application of the concept.

Codes of Research Question 1

Research Question 1: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of learning environments”? Through this question, the data analysis evolved into codes that aligned with Research Question 1.

New Paradigm. *New Paradigm* was the most often occurring code relating to RQ1. This code was identified in all interviews. *New Paradigm* referred to the fact that the deployment of learning environments at the school during COVID-19 represented a novel and unique set of challenges. This was evident in that the learning environment shifted from a conventional face-to-face experience to an online model for almost all students in the country of Denmark. This shift brought on many new restrictions, issues and the necessity for rapid adaptation. P2 stated, “It’s a new paradigm”. P3 captured the idea of trying to conceptualize new approaches while simultaneously applying untested strategies when she stated, “We’re asphaltting the road while driving on it”. Put simply by P10, “the teachers had to manage a classroom that was virtual instead of physical”. The acknowledgement of the differences between face-to-face to online instruction was the point of the prolific *New Paradigm* code.

Downgraded Instruction. In ten of the 12 interviews, the code of *Downgraded Instruction* was identified when discussing learning environments. This code captured the occurrence of statements that acknowledged that the level of quality, or the amount of curriculum able to be covered in the online learning environment was not at the same standard as under normal circumstances. As participant 3 (P3) expressed it, “I had to constantly remind them that despite the pressure of expectations, as a teacher you can’t do the same things you would normally do.” P10 reported, “Clearly academics were put aside at that time”. Although some participants also highlighted successful instructional interventions at times, there was a general acceptance that the new teaching paradigm was inferior to normal, face-to-face teaching.

Exposure. The code *Exposure* was an unanticipated, but vivid topic discussed in nine of 12 interviews. *Exposure* referred to the feelings and experiences many teachers had while teaching online. P10 discussed it this way, “so there are some ethical issues about the fact that normally as a teacher you are with a class in a private room, whereas when teaching online you are among people other than the students”. P2 said, “there are some parents sitting inside who are following along, there are some teachers who have children at home themselves, too... It gets very complex”. Both P2 and P10 described the issue as an ethical one. This was a particularly interesting phenomenon, that yielded much animated discussion. A single headmaster, one principal, and one teacher leader did not mention this code of exposure.

Difficult or Frustrating. Apart from P8, all the participants mentioned something that was *Difficult* or *Frustrating*. Originally these were separate codes, but they were

merged. This code is somewhat self-explanatory. P4 stated, “some of them, maybe a few of the older teachers had a hard time adapting”. P5 said, “You can’t teach, if children aren’t thriving... it was very difficult and also very unnatural”. P5 recalled a situation when it was necessary to call a teacher whose colleagues were frustrated with his online teaching effort, “Then we have to call the person up ‘why were you only on for 30 minutes?’ ‘I was only on 30 minutes because my wife needed me to stand with the baby’”. It was interesting that one of the participants (P8) did not discuss the topic of *Difficulties/Frustrations* in the same way, preferring to focus discussion only in positive or constructive terms.

Sabotage. Closely related to the previous code of *Difficult or Frustrating*, the code of *Sabotage* was present in seven of the 12 interviews. This thematic code represented actions taken by students to thwart the online learning environment. I felt it necessary to separate *Sabotage*, from *Difficult or Frustrating* as it had a purposeful intent behind the interactions. As an example, P7 stated, “we had big challenges with students who un-muted and muted each other... that caused a lot of hassle, right?”. When talking about how some students had been mischievous, P10 remarked, “they found all those loopholes much faster than the adults”. These disruptions were seen as part of the shift to online learning. “How do we do this? ...and learn to sit without writing funny things to each other, muting, or putting rabbit ears on one another!” (P12). In more than half of the interviews there was evidence of *Sabotage*.

The act of sabotaging instruction by students during traditional instruction is not uncommon. While studying online, this took the form of muting and unmuting the

instructor and other students, as well as blocking classmates from joining the group or kicking them out of the instructional space among other activities that undermined the instructional process. A lack of security protocols set in place by the school's IT staff, or technical incompetence of teachers was suggested as reasons students could carry out this type of activity.

Out of Touch. In ten interviews, the coded theme, *Out of Touch*, was present. This refers to people feeling like a normal connection is missing. As P3 said, "How do I make sure that my students continue to have a learning progression when I don't have them right here"? Or P1's comment that his teachers were "not really feeling connected to them at home". As P2 expressed it, "I think a lot of people experienced that there was no feedback, that you talked out into a vacuum, right?" Well over half of the participants reported that the online instructional interactions during the shutdowns did not provide teachers a feeling of normal interaction and level of interpersonal reciprocity, that one normally experiences when teaching.

Vulnerable Students. In half of the interviews, the code of *Vulnerable Students* came up when asked about learning environments. However, later in the interview, the code was brought up by four more of the participants in comparable contexts, meaning 10 of the 12 participants considered the topic of vulnerable students to be relevant to this study. Both the participants who did not mention this code were *Teacher Leaders*. This theme was labeled when a vulnerable group of young people was specifically brought up by the participant as a topic. In relation to being visible during an online lesson, P12 stated, "if you're a sensitive teenager, it's even harder, because then you couldn't show

the best version of yourself”. Another school leader talked about children that had already been identified as being at risk. “These were children who we knew would have a hard time spending so many hours at home and were worried that they might completely lose connection to school, and so we gave the parents this offer...” (P6). This quotation refers to how the school accommodated vulnerable students with in-person instruction despite the restrictions. Some participants considered the younger students to be in this vulnerable category. P1 stated, “there was a discussion, could the little ones come back? Who had the greatest need to go back to school?” *The Vulnerable Students* theme was explicitly brought up and discussed by nine of the participants. Although *Vulnerable Students* was a code relevant to other RQs, particularly RQ 6 Well Being, it was also accepted as an important theme relating to RQ 1 Learning Environments.

Fatigue. The code of *fatigue* refers to many participants’ observations that engaging online instruction was difficult to maintain over time. This theme was coded in six interviews. P6 said, “I would say the further along in the lockdowns we got, the harder it became for the teachers to actually keep the motivation up because it (the instruction) became repetitive”. Referring to the students P4 mentioned, “they couldn’t keep up this way participating”. P12 recounted how he felt many students felt. “I think we had a period where it was too much, more tasks were laid out and so on, but then they also lacked that ongoing follow-up, and it was too much up to them.” The group of participants that shared this theme consisted of a blend of headmasters, principals, vice-principals, and teacher leaders. So, hierarchy in the school organization was not evident in holding this perspective or belief.

The afore mentioned codes generally had to do with negative sides of the learning environment during COVID-19, however, in responding to the questions pertaining to RQ1, there was also evidence of codes that had positive connotations. The most popular was *Freedom*. In addition to this code, other positive outcomes, observations, and constructive thoughts that were identified were given the code of *Positive Learning Experiences (Positive LE)*.

Freedom. This code represents the freedom teachers were given to create their own learning environments. Six of the twelve participants explicitly discussed this concept in response to RQ1. Despite the discomfort or unpreparedness that some teachers felt when adapting to the new teaching paradigm, many of the participants reported on an excitement, and creative energy that teachers appeared to experience along with an understanding that the teaching staff needed widened opportunities and liberties to try new approaches to their practices. As an example, P2 said “Everything was allowed. We were on a ‘practice track’”. Reflecting on some of his teaching staff, P4 reported “If anything, some of them were excited to use the technology”. P10 stated “There were some who thought it was super exciting and got something really positive out of it”. P1 showed understanding for the need to open up the teaching for new possibilities in the statement, “We must give educators their right and freedom to convey their message in the way they see fit”. P5 reported, “I experienced that there were some teachers who, in their daily practice, usually do not think so creatively, but maybe they do have a creative side and they used it incredibly much during corona. They made some cool projects”. These comments suggested an appreciation of the way many teachers

approached the crisis by seeing possibilities in the moment and appreciated the freedom they had to address them.

Positive LE. In all twelve interviews there was evidence of at least one positive comment having to do with learning environments or how teachers engaged with the learning environments. The code *Positive LE* was a broad label issued to positive recollections that related to learning environments during the COVID-19 crisis. Codes identifying feelings of excitement experienced by staff were not easy to separate from the previous code *Freedom* as there was overlap, but *Positivity LE* codes showed confidence and a productive attitude about the situation. “There are some who are a bit like Pippi Longstocking – we haven’t tried this before, so we can do it!” (P3) Or teachers who simply stated, “I enjoyed working this way” (P11). Successful lessons were possible as the teachers improved their learning environments “they (the students) felt like they were in a community -kind of like Pokémon Go or something like that”. (P3). Referring to his school, P8 said “Teachers built up the necessary competences. Partly the technical part, but also the didactic.” This comment suggested that instructional adaptation and progress was possible in this participant’s eyes.

Zoom/Teams. The software tools of Microsoft Teams and Zoom became the new, default learning environments operated by the participants’ schools. The code *Zoom/Teams* were identified in relation to RQ1 Learning Environments. Although these software tools presented an initial challenge to school staff, as the teaching staff and leadership were literally forced to learn how to use them, *Zoom/Teams* were talked about in relatively neutral terms by the participants. “Everybody needed to learn to go on the

computer and on Zoom, and later Teams” (P11). P4 reported, “It’s still a valued way of communication” showing appreciation of the digital interfaces. It is acknowledged that *Zoom/Teams* was a central tool by participants regarding RQ1. Generally, the participants referred to *Zoom/Teams* when reflecting on the setting of online interactions.

Codes of Research Question 2

Research Question 2: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of strategy and change processes”? Through this question, the data analysis evolved into codes that aligned with Research Question 2.

COVID Was the New Strategy. When discussing RQ2, which addresses the management of strategy and change processes, the most expressed thematic code identified in the interviews had to do with the fact that the process of adapting to the COVID-19 crisis became the central change process and strategy at hand. Evidence of this thought was present in all interviews. “It is an emergency. We have to adapt.” (P1). This focus on adaptation seemed to take the place on following any sort of strategy. “I don’t think we discussed any strategy that was not about how we were working with the COVID crisis.” (P11). In reacting to the immediate needs, most all school employees including school leaders had to improve software competencies. “All the purely technical stuff took up a lot of time and attention in the beginning.” (P2). There was a high degree of consensus that the strategic focus of leadership was almost exclusively being applied to solving problems associated with the COVID-19 crisis at that time.

Guidelines. The *Guidelines* code represented the rules issued by both the Ministry of Children and Education, and Municipalities to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus in Danish schools. It is important to note that two of the Teacher-Leaders interviewed did not discuss working with these guidelines as administrators, but this work was not in their job descriptions. All other participants, including one vice principal who at the beginning of the crisis was a teacher, discussed the guidelines as being central to their work experiences during the period of time in question.

One school leader participant (P8) did not consider the guidelines to be arduous at all, “When the lockdown was a reality, I called my employees together, outside – of course! I gave them copies of the guidelines and other documents I had. The message was: read and ask... and do something. From day one, it worked flawlessly.” This was a discrepant statement pertaining to the *guidelines* code, due the ease in which this school leader implemented what would seem to be an almost effortless and successful intervention. It can be inferred that this enterprise was fulfilled in practice by a highly competent staff.

This is not to say that all school leaders were completely negative about the guidelines. In fact, in reference to the governmental agencies P4 commented “They were adaptive, they were sensitive to the problems”. Three participants used a hotline to get help from the local municipality and reported this practice as to have been helpful. “Sometimes I called several times a day to ask some questions about what do” (P3).

Nevertheless, nine of the participants shared stories of hardship pertaining to the guidelines. “It was difficult to live up to the guidelines that came... It was dreadful” (P5).

There was at times a visceral sigh when the topic of guidelines came up. “I mean, you can also get saturated with information sometimes – when you say I can’t handle any more information or updates now” (P10). The participants appeared to have felt a deep responsibility to respond correctly to the *Guidelines* as there was no way around them. “They were very top down delivered messages. (P2). “They had a task force that we kind of had to operate in accordance with. It was made on a general municipal level... and it was very difficult to follow when you are dealing with children and people” (P6). Four participants remarked about working over holidays and on weekends, as well as getting updates from the Ministry or Municipality with little time to implement the new *Guidelines*.

Before the lockdowns were in place, there were also many regulations and processes like contacting families of children who had potentially been infected. Some school leaders had the responsibility to make innumerable phone calls to families to contain the spread of the virus. P7 reflected,

It was me who had the task... before we went online, while the children were still at school and we experienced the increased infection frequency, then I was the one who had to report the cases to the corona line, with our crisis preparedness numbers of children who were sent home, and which parents had to be called.

Half of the participants reflected on tedious and time-consuming tasks that had to be done to track the virus in their communities. I interpreted the relationship of the thematic code of *Guidelines* as overlapping greatly with the previous code of *COVID was the New*

Strategy” as it required much planning to adhere to guidelines that were changing frequently and were out of the normal workflow of a Danish 0–9 school leader.

Paused Strategy. When asked about the traditional or school community appointed vision, mission, or main strategies of their school and whether these goals were being carried out during the COVID-19 crisis, three participants could not say one way or another if ongoing school strategies or missions were active or not. However, eight out of the participants responded clearly that all those types of *Strategies Were Paused*. “All the good strategic ideas one had going on, you simply had to put down” (P6). Oddly, even goals pertaining to technological competencies was reported by one participant to be dropped for the time being, “All the goals, with IT or whatever else we wanted to develop...had to put on the backburner” (P1). The strategies that were not directly connected to immediate needs were not seen as critical at that time. “These things were simply parked... So now we shouldn’t go ahead with this concept because we have other things now that we have to deal with” (P3). Alternatively, there was one participant who, when asked about his school’s visions, goals, and strategic initiatives answered, “It was immediately clear that this was not possible to the same extent, but I do not think it was difficult to continue the tracks”. I concluded that P8’s statement communicated that despite the reconfiguring that had to be made to accommodate the COVID-19 restrictions and online instruction, the primary vision and goals of the school were not completely incompatible with the sudden adaptation process. It is also possible that this response is, in actuality, evidence of a difference in perspective about how school initiatives can be carried out long term rather than a true uniquely unaltered course of his school’s strategy

in comparison to other participants schools. Nevertheless, in eight of the twelve interviews, participants considered non-COVID-19 related activities regarding school vision and organizational change strategies to be *paused*. Two teacher-leaders reported not knowing whether all strategic work was paused or not.

Ad Hoc. When asking participants about the strategies put into place, I noticed the theme of *Ad Hoc* solutions or strategies put in place to respond to the situations at hand. *Ad Hoc* is not intended to be a code that might suggest poor solutions or strategies, only that action was taken without the luxury of working from experience or knowledge of possible outcomes. “It was very trial and error in the beginning” (P12). I noticed an *Ad Hoc* reliance by school leader participants of outsourcing technical help to a designated staff member who had allocated time to help staff with IT concerns. P2 shared,

We had an IT specialist, who has 3 hours a week and is technically supposed to take care of teachers’ needs. He could say, ‘You can contact me if you need something’, but you don’t do it if you don’t exactly know what you need.

Some might consider using an IT specialist, or *IT Guy*, to address the technical concerns of an entire staff to be an *Ad Hoc* solution.

In the case of P1, an *Ad Hoc* decision was made to reorganize workgroups: “That caused unrest, of course because you were used to being in a team, you wanted to be in that team, and those teams were split up... The issue was very frustrating for teachers.” Or in P3’s case, a morale-boosting *Ad Hoc* decision was taken, in which the school leaders physically drove to the teachers’ homes unannounced during the workday to deliver traditional Danish Fastelavn buns, “We drove around to all the teachers... and there were

some teachers who thought it was very intrusive” (P3). What seemed like a cordial idea was apparently not thoroughly thought out.

It was my interpretation that hasty judgement calls about what *Ad Hoc* actions to take were prevalent, simply because knowledge about what to do to make positive change was not clear. “I had to familiarize myself with what is out there. What is ‘nice to, need to’ and what can be set aside?” (P2). This prevalent code applied to all participants at least to at least a minor degree, except for P8 who consistently communicated a high degree of purpose and intent in his speech regarding strategy.

No Model. In the second interview, P2 discussed a flower shaped change model that her leadership team previously had worked with, when managing change processes at the school. I asked, “could it be used during corona – this flower model?” P2 answered, “Well, no it couldn’t”. I noted this exchange, and in subsequent interviews, I asked participants about whether there was a change model that could be implemented to improve strategy. The most common responses were either no, “Well, it wasn’t something we talked about, that is, what kind of models we should use” (P10), or the answer was coded *Covid was the New Strategy*. “It was a situation that is in no way similar to anything we have seen before. So, there weren’t any models or templates you could pour over it and say, ‘that’s how it should be’” (P7). Some participants seemed a little surprised by the idea of some kind of model for change or adaptation, as they had not considered that there could have been anything like that.

One could argue that this code of *No Model*, was linguistically planted into the interview data, as I specifically asked about a model or framework. That would be a fair

allegation, but the importance of a model or framework that could provide guidance and help prioritize efforts at that time of crisis, struck me as significant when P2 brought up the idea. One of the last questions I asked all participants was, “What have I not asked about that is missing from this conversation?” It was in response to this question that P2 talked about the lack of a change process model. This inquiry into a model was seen as an important question by the researcher and integrated into the last ten interviews. During the interviews, the question produced careful reflection by the participants and six of the twelve participants responded clearly with the *No Model* response to the question. More notably, no single participant answered that there was a helpful model or framework that could be used during the COVID-19 crisis.

The results of the interviews strongly suggested that the process of swiftly interpreting and implementing *Guidelines* dealing with COVID-19 in schools required addressing unique problems and operating under new conditions. The interview data suggest that these realities made the creation and implementation of a coherent vision and change process very difficult. In lieu of a strategy, school leaders discussed the importance of getting through the crisis by focusing on *Well-Being*, *Psychological Safety*, *Communication*, and by building *Relationships*, which were all codes relating to RQ2 and will be examined forthcoming. However, RQ 6 deals directly with well-being, motivation, and commitment, so this topic will be revisited again later in detail.

Well-Being/ Psychological Safety. In all the twelve interviews, *Well-Being* was identified in some way as a leadership goal. In regard to students, P6 reported, “It was simply a matter of emphasizing social *Well-Being*, because if they were not thriving in

this way, then they wouldn't do well academically". However, this code was applied even more often regarding teaching staff. "The teachers were told not to carry any burden alone and burn up inside with something and get sad and feel like they couldn't do what was needed" (P10). Evidence was coded that participants felt that if the schools' teachers and students were to have an acceptable level of well-being, this would be able to carry them through the crisis. "We should back them up (the teachers) and not make any further demands" (P1). *Well-Being* was discussed as almost a strategy, "Then the focus was on *Well-Being*. So, you should be thriving! ... And then this kind of became weightier than any of the other goal" (P2). This idea of *Well-Being* being an important guiding force was present in most of the interviews.

Codes that represented components of *Psychological Safety* were evidenced in eight of the twelve interviews. For instance, remarks supporting the idea that teachers were safe to try new solutions without fear of reprimand, "We celebrate the mistakes here at this school, and we encourage the same with the children" (P3), as well as the important psychological safety concept of being secure enough to ask questions in group settings, perhaps exposing one's areas of ignorance or weakness. "One can also be open about when things are difficult" (P6) and respectfully supporting one another, "By helping each other, we create common security" (P7). These types of comments were labelled as elements of *Psychological Safety*.

Although these comments about *Well-Being* and *Psychological Safety* were not seen as representing a complete strategy or change process, they were interpreted as impactful of a strategic mindset. Participant 8 even went as far as to say that due to the

high levels of *Psychological Safety* in his school, during the COVID-19 crisis, “The employees simply managed it so well, that for long periods I felt superfluous”. Indicating a high degree of confidence that the staff teams could tackle the challenges without much leadership intervention. This comment was considered discrepant, as it was out of the norm.

Communication. In discussion of leadership strategy, the topic of *Communication* was emphasized and thematically coded in nine of the twelve interviews. This code was sometimes identified in terms of how important it was to communicate with community members, “It was a newsletter every day” (P7). In other coded examples, the importance of communication had to do with making sure expectations were clear. “I believe that if you’re transparent in your management style and especially in crises, it will also mean that you have a staff who know they actually have to comply with this” (P5). Generally, being an effective communicator was remarked upon as being important “Actually, that was also a big part of my role to make sure that information was shared” (P2). Transparency and clarity in communication were seen as key skills during the crisis.

Relationships. Related to the afore mentioned codes of *Psychological Safety* and *Well-Being*, there was evidence of the *Relationships* code in ten of the twelve interviews. This thematic code emphasizes the importance of productive interpersonal interactions between the school leader and others. Examples of this code mostly had to do with relationships between school leaders and teachers. “When you work with management, it’s a lot about building good relationships with your employees” (P5). Participants saw

the need to connect with teachers outside of whole group meetings or email correspondence. “*Relationship* skills really came into play there” (P3). *Relationships*, for one participant, were at the core of trusting alliances “As a manager go in and get the job done and create the good relationships... It’s super hard, but it helps to create trust” (P2). Leaders expressed the importance for productive *Relationships* within their schools to support the processes that were necessary to adapt to the COVID-19 crisis.

Takeaways/Developments. Some participants reflected on how their personal ideas about education or their schools’ visions and strategies had developed or changed in some way. “There are just some experiences from COVID-19 that we can take with us” (P10). The reflections of the school leaders about what could be learned about strategy or change processes were varied, and not always very specific. Some discussed experienced gained relating to learning environments relating to RQ 1, such as how to reach vulnerable students, “We have invested in a robot that the student can remotely control from home, and in this way be part of the school” (P8). A more relevant discussion had to do with school refusal due to emotional issues was acknowledged, “Children who have school refusal cannot be part of the community... this is an area with potential.” (P2). One participant reflected on ways of grouping students that was exercised during COVID-19 that had favorable local results as being a possible future strategy, “like this thing about having fewer adults that interact with a group of students” (P10), in reference to a published study P10 had read.

The debate on whether children spend too much time using digital devices was also coded a *Development* as it had potential impact on future school vision and strategy and was influenced by the crisis. P4 shared,

I think even United Nations and our prime minister's talking about it like it's a worldwide epidemic. You know the addiction to your cell phone and what it does to children and harmful way, so it's been an opportunity for us to be more aware, to have a policy in this area.

Four participants remarked on their concerns regarding students' consumption of digital media during discussions about *Vision and Change Processes*. Whether this data is a truly meaningful *Takeaway* regarding this topic is debatable, but it was recorded.

Naturally, competency development was also a topic that was related to vision and change processes. However, remarks addressing competency will be discussed in the data analysis section regarding RQ 4 which deals with management of capacity and competence development. What can be briefly shared here about competency development is that there was not a consensus among participants regarding to which and to what degree competencies should be addressed to impact future school vision or change processes. The code, *Developments* also signified actions leaders engaged in to help strategize, for example P5 interacted with a group of colleagues from other schools. "We had a weekly meeting where we met online for a half an hour or so, where we could guide each other and hear how to do at other schools" this activity was also thematically coded under *Relationships*.

Codes of Research Question 3

Research Question 3: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of knowledge and results-based development of the school’s teaching”? Through this question, the data analysis evolved into codes that aligned with Research Question 3.

Before introducing the codes relevant to RQ 3, a clearer definition of what this RQ is delving into is important as it could be considered as being ambiguous by the RQ text alone. The Ministry of Children and Education booklet that defines the seven fields of school leadership, which the RQs of this study are based on, defines the topic of RQ 3 as: In order to create the best conditions for learning and ensure the greatest learning outcomes for students, it is crucial that teaching takes place on the best available knowledge and is based on relevant data and results from teaching (UVM, 2015, p. 16). The focal point of this RQ is about how data results on teaching and learning are strategically used by school leaders to impact learning and well-being. This concept of using data as a management tool has been a common theme in modern education, sometimes referred to as the data-driven school.

It is also important to clarify that in the country of Denmark, all international and national standardized testing as well as the conduction of exit exams from 0–9 schools was halted during the 2020- 2021 and 2021-2022 school years. Therefore, no official academic data was broadly collected or analyzed in the school years that were impacted by the COVID-19 virus. As this was the case, the data collected in this study was based

primarily on answers to questions regarding what participants thought about this gap in data collection although thoughts about the role of data in strategic management of schools was also offered. The following nine themed codes are presented in order by how many participants addressed them directly throughout the transcripts.

People Not Data. In eleven of the twelve interviews the code *People Not Data* was identified. This label was placed upon text clips that implied that the well-being of the school constituents was more important than examining data during the COVID-19 crisis. “It was not exactly the data-driven that occupied me, but it became very relational to the individual employee in relation to the team – Are you ok?” (P2). In relation to academic progress of the students, there was an almost identical remark, “we could measure the effect of shortcomings with how much they’ve learned, but it was it was emphasized from the management, that you know, you need to keep the relationship. You need to make sure they’re ok” (P4). There was a large consensus that the human relationships and well-being of the staff and students was placed over analysis or implementation of academic data to inform school strategy.

Cancelled Ok. This thematic code represented the label given to text clips that suggested that the participant was at ease with the fact that two school years of academic data collection practice were skipped. Simply put, the cancellation of the standardized tests and formal exit exams was ok. There was evidence in ten of the twelve transcripts, that indicated that the participant was in agreement with the decision by the Ministry of Children and Education to cancel all National standardized tests as well as the exit exams from the 0–9 ground school system. “It wasn’t really something that ruined anything”

(P6). Again, the priority was on *Well-Being*, “It didn’t worry me; The students will learn what they need academically, I was and am more concerned about their character and their well-being (P8). P1 saw the idea of testing under the circumstances to be very counterproductive. “Why should we suffer under some rigid rules or exams or tests at some point when we are in a completely different world situation” (P1). There was consensus that it was ok that academic data collection was cancelled during the two school years, although two participants. P2 and P10, expressed that they thought it was a pity that the students didn’t get to experience the process.

Additionally, P10 discussed the impact of this loss of data as impacting how graduating students had been possibly inaccurately evaluated in the two school years in question. “It was seen at the national level that the grades for these cohorts— they have been much higher than the years where there was no COVID-19. So, schools compensated for the fact that they had had this disruption to the instructional approach, and maybe they overcompensated” (P10). This comment explains that teachers could not accurately evaluate what students had learned. The teachers were too generous in awarding perhaps undeserved grades by carrying over very favorable progress grades as their final evaluations. P10 considered this exclusion of exam grades to inform exit data to have resulted in the inaccuracy of the evaluation of exiting 0–9 students nationally.

Thoughts About Data. When asked about the data gap due to the absence of exit exam data and other test data used to inform school leadership strategy, eight of the twelve participants shared their thoughts about the use of academic data in general, “numbers can always be used for what you want to use them for (P10)”. Also, very

relevant to this discussion, is that coded text suggested that the school leader participants in this study have widely different responsibilities pertaining to data collection. Private schools are not obligated to participate in national nor international standardized tests. Five of the participants who worked at private schools, therefore, did not seem to have strong thoughts or feelings about the role of data in their work, as that was not part of their job. However, one private school vice principal shared that “We have the opportunity to take those national tests, but it is very voluntary” (P12).

Public school leaders had more to say about the data gap. “I think most schools are also governed by data – the question is probably more “more or less” (P8), One public school vice principal reacted to the question about not collecting data by saying “It’s very funny you ask -what do you think of it? Because the function you are in as a leader, it is not about what I think” (P2). This response was interpreted to mean that public school leaders follow orders regarding data collection, it is not up to them to allow feelings about it to have any sway regarding the practice. P10 observed, “Data is used, but probably not as much as they were keen on a few years ago to use data”. This comment suggested that the pressure on school leaders to strategically lead their schools based on data has perhaps subsided. However, a larger sample size of public school leaders would perhaps be appropriate for a more complete analysis of this populations’ feelings about the various principles of academic data-driven leadership. Nevertheless, in the context of this study, with the focus on COVID-19, there was ample evidence that neither the public school leaders nor the private school leaders were fervently committed to the practice.

It Is Hard to Use Data. Regarding the role of using academic data in school leadership, P10 participant remarked,

It can take 3 months to a half a year (to get results back) and that's quite a long time in children's development, and it can be over a summer holiday where they have completely new adults around them, and so the numbers should always triangulate with what else you have of data and your own experiences.

Only one participant was supportive of the data-driven practice, expressing that data could be used to instructively get insight into areas to improve instruction under the right circumstances, "If it is to make sense, we need to be able to work our way down into the data and then work with the teachers in relation to saying, 'what does this mean for your practice'" (P2).

In six of the interview transcripts, data was coded indicating that it was difficult to use academic data in meaningful ways, even under normal circumstances. This may be the reason, the code of *Cancelled Ok*, was often expressed as a thought. Participant 2, who came across as the most supportive of a data driven approach to leadership had a back and forth with me that was interesting and included here:

The data-driven takes up a lot of attention, but also school management must be close to the core service and teachers all the time, and every day.

Is it possible to do these two things? Does management have time to merge these two things together? (Researcher)

So, my short answer is no. You do not have time for that, but you do it on a smaller scale.

This exchange was referencing the practice of using data to inform instructive practice under normal, non-crisis management. There was no participant data found in the transcripts that would suggest that amid the COVID-19 crisis, academic data was being applied to guide instruction or strategy.

Types of Data. Data regarding attendance and the COVID-19 infection data was monitored and acted upon in practical ways in accordance with governmental guidelines. Six of the twelve participants discussed monitoring attendance data. “New things came regularly, we had to keep up with the numbers of who were infected” (P4). There was a correlation between those who were responsible for the COVID-19 related data, and those who talked about them in the interview, “We had to sit at home and start calling around 50 families and we had to send 10 staff members home sometimes” (P10). This was a new area of data collection that was relevant at during that moment that required collecting and monitoring illness and the numbers impacted decision making during the crisis.

When a type of data that was used came up in discussion it was labelled with the code *Types of Data*. Sometimes it was difficult to decide what qualified under this code and quantify the number of these codes, as any reference to attendance, infection rates, numbers of vulnerable students, student involvement, etc., could theoretically be coded as a reference to data and add noise to getting pertinent meaning about the *Types of Data*, as many references would be insignificant.

However, the codes did identify what types of data school leaders considered important during that time. One type of data that was perhaps not used strategically per

se, but leaders were interested in, was interaction between students and teachers. Three out of twelve participants mentioned that it was important that the students completed assignments or evaluations in their classes, “the teachers also have their own tests (beyond the standardized tests) – in relation to the teaching they do based on all the academic goals” (P1). Here, P1 was communicating that he considered the internal assessments applied by the teachers to be of importance. “You could see if they handed in an assignment or not.” (P10). For these three school leaders, it was important that assignments were being completed and that teachers were assessing learning throughout the crisis.

As earlier stated, six of twelve participants discussed pupil attendance data which was important for many school leaders, especially those who had responsibilities to report it to their municipalities. National tests, which were not given in any schools during COVID, and are not compulsory in private schools was a type of data that was directly asked about, along with the exit exam data that published every year by the Ministry of Children and Education. As previously stated, there was no exit exam data nor standardized test data collected during the COVID years.

We Do Not Do Data. In response to a question about standardized tests, and exit exam data, three participants, P5, P9 and P12, directly stated that their schools do not analyze academic data to drive school strategy. “Data driven? I don’t know if I would say that ... I don’t think we’re a school that is characterized by that” (P5). Not being characterized as being a school that is data-driven is not a sentiment that any of the public school leaders reported. “We give grades, of course, but otherwise I don’t think we spend

much time on that (analysis of data)... no” (P12). These three participants worked at private schools where there is ostensibly little pressure to analyze and apply data in their leadership roles.

Codes of Research Question 4

Research Question 4: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of capacity and competence development”? Through this question, the data analysis evolved into codes that aligned with Research Question 4.

Capacity and Competence of Staff (CC of Staff). The *CC of Staff* code reflected the readiness of the school staff to respond appropriately to the challenge of shifting their instruction online. As teaching staff are central to the operation of a school, this code examining the readiness, capacity levels, and competence of school staff to adapt educational practices to the new online environment generated much discussion regarding this management field. *CC of Staff* surfaced in all transcripts and overlapped greatly with RQ1 which focused on the management of learning environments.

Initial competence levels of teachers varied greatly. “Now teachers were to manage a classroom that was virtual instead of physical. It was about how well they could manage the fact that some children feel very safe behind a screen, and other children do not” (P10). As teaching children in person calls on certain sets of competencies, so does teaching online. Eleven out of twelve participants had reported on difficulties and hardships relating to competencies and capacities in their schools and there was also consensus that particularly older teachers with less technical experience

struggled with online teaching competencies. “Some of them, maybe a few of the older teachers had a hard time adapting” (P4). Sometimes the emphasis was not on age, but more having a teaching routine that is difficult to get out of, “When you do a job the same way for 10 or 20 years, and then you have to do something completely differently... with a relatively short amount of time to implement... it could be overwhelming and very difficult” (P9). Some staff members were simply acting passively or hesitant to engage, “there are people standing in slippers over here and ballet shoes who hardly dare” (P2). This participant spoke of shoes as a metaphor for how staff reacted. There were some with running shoes who ran out ahead, and others were slow and steady, so they wore hiking boots, etc.

Three participants talked about teachers who were not appropriately groomed or had inappropriate items behind them as they taught online. There were six participants who discussed different situations in which they had to confront the teachers as it appeared that they were not applying themselves to their work as they should have. These observations are related to competency levels and were therefore coded *CC of Staff*.

Additionally, there was evidence in nine of the transcripts that the overall quality of the education was negatively impacted during the school years affected by the pandemic. The topic of *Downgraded Instruction*, which was reported on in detail in RQ1, learning environments, is referenced again later in this section as the code, *Failures*. It is important to understand that although the competency was possibly downgraded, the starting point of discussions about competencies was taking into consideration that what

might be substandard under normal circumstances could easily be celebrated as a successful teaching effort in an online environment. Expectations were not very high.

Despite the vast range of competency levels, evidence was found in all transcripts that showed the capacity of the teaching staff to adapt in all the schools was overall very strong. Thoughts reflecting this were also labelled *CC of Staff*. “I think it was one of the most amazing things that I’ve experienced as a principle you know, was seeing how everybody just changed this rapidly” (P4). This positive feeling toward staff was common in the transcripts. “Most everybody had a good attitude... some didn’t... but most were working really hard to do something that was helpful to the children and to teach their classes” (P11). Generally, this capacity to be resourceful, and figure out how to function was appreciated by the school leader participants. “Here we are in an unusual situation, and what I experienced was a very high degree of mental pattern breaking, idea generation, joint co-creation, and people asking, ‘how can we solve this challenge?’” (P7). Particularly in the beginning of the crisis, there was reportedly a strong will to do well, “The commitment was high, and especially in the first period, there was good energy” (P8). This reference to the first period as being met with commitment and energy is related to the code of *Fatigue* from RQ1, as some of the enthusiasm reportedly waned with time, however there was evidence in all interviews that there was a strong capacity shown by staff to rise to the challenge, particularly at the start of the crisis.

Competency and Capacity of Leaders (CC of Leaders). Most participants seemed to find discussion regarding competencies and capacities central to school leadership to be an interesting topic, generating almost as many codes as those pertaining

to teaching staff. There were several original codes that were synthesized into the *CC of Leaders* code. I referred to these as areas of prowess. Social and relational prowess appeared to be the most important with all participants to some degree remarking on how their abilities to interact and relate with others as being of critical importance during the crisis. “I think it’s relational aspect is paramount” (p10). It was reported that the relationships are most critical when teamwork was necessary, “The closer the relationship you have, the easier it is when you are hit by crises like the corona crisis” (P5). There is evidence in the transcripts that majority of participants felt responsible for protecting their teachers. “As leadership, we had to sort of shield the teachers from the parents who were very smart, and who were very happy to advise us on how to do it – give us their opinions” (P1). In this case, the maintenance of good relations with different parties meant protecting one from the other.

The label of *CC of Leaders* was also used in examples of empathic actions and descriptions how the participants handled vulnerability in others. Six of the participants identified the needs of teachers to have the school leaders tell them that they were doing ok. “Actually, just reassuring them, and saying, ‘listen here, we cannot do it differently from what we are doing now, and if you give your best, that’s good enough” (P6). With this comment P6 was trying to lower the stress level experienced by his staff. “Too many of them had to hear, ‘That’s good enough. Calm down’, and, ‘you are doing well, and, it’s okay” (P2). One could surmise, that what P2 meant about “too many had to hear...” was that it was a shame that so many of her teachers felt insecure, although by adding “calm down”, it might be that she felt a little exasperated by the pampering her staff

appeared to need. Either way, P2 was aware that it was necessary to comfort vulnerable teachers.

When probed on the topic of disciplining teachers who were perhaps not showing enough commitment to their teaching under the circumstances, three participants discussed the topic, but emphasized that they had to be very careful about not being too tough on teachers. “It was really a balancing act... not pressing too much and then at the same time acknowledging that there’s basically something they’re afraid of. I would say I really trained my therapy skills during that period” (P6). However, other leaders could be more direct in their approach “I had to get closer and say, ‘That’s not good enough. You have the time for it’” (P2).

Apart from one of the teacher-leader interview participants, in all transcripts there were examples pertaining to organizational prowess. These areas of competence and capacity were also labelled as *CC of Leaders*. The ability to manage the governmental guidelines that were at hand and manage communication were seen as being of great importance. P5 explained,

Be very, very transparent in your communication when there were some new initiatives that came from above... and be lightning fast with information telling them “now we are facing this”... Yes, transparency, clarity, and frequent communication, these are at least some of the measures.

In another example, P8 reported on the need for leadership competence in relation to the interpretation of the legal COVID-19 guidelines, “I think my ability to read into legal

texts has been a co-creator of calm: the employees had great confidence in what I announced and the framework that was set – it was under control” (P8).

This important communication work demanded commitment on the parts of the school leaders. As P5 explained, “We had to decide what it could look like and we did that during the Easter holidays, among other things”. There was much evidence that suggested that commitment to getting the organizational and practical solutions was a competency area that participants saw as being critical under the circumstances. “It was a completely different way of working, and we were challenged as leaders” (P2). It was a time when interpersonal, empathic, and social skills were crucial, yet simultaneously, organizational, legal and communication practices were seen as being critical to establish calm.

Crisis Management. “It was a very unpredictable time with a lot of unpredictable tasks” (P5). The code of *Crisis Management* was applied to evidence in seven of the twelve transcripts that had to do with capacity and competencies relating to the COVID-19 crisis other than implementing governmental guidelines. Some *Crisis Management* codes referred to human resource issues. P10 reported,

So, we constantly had to try to make agreements that could apply to everyone, but still also constantly remember that we had to be able to make rules that applied only to the individual, and it was difficult sometimes, ‘Why is she allowed to sit at home every day? I’d like to do that.’ So, it could be very challenging.

It is not difficult to understand why issues of perceived fairness in the way school leaders were acting was a challenging side of *Crisis Management*.

Parents also presented school leaders with new types of questions outside of normal school leader competency areas. One participant (P12), reflected on questions asked to him by parents about whether they should keep their child home after describing symptoms, “And the parents kept asking, ‘Oh, he’s coughing a little... Should he stay at home? Shouldn’t he stay at home? He doesn’t have a fever... We have taken a test; it does not show anything’” (P12). P12 laughed about this example as he threw his hands up in the air. “How am I supposed to know?” (P12).

New issues, such as reintegration into school life for vulnerable students created new problems to solve. P7 shared,

After the pandemic, there has been a larger group of children whose anxiety has increased, as if social skills have not been allowed to develop as they should...

Now has become more natural, to have an avatar, a digital robot in the learning room.

It was reported by more than half of the participants that reintegration of students after the school shutdowns has been very difficult for many students which had extended the *Crisis Management* of the virus.

Overseeing the standards of online instruction for the school was a new *Crisis Management* experience for the school leadership. P10 shared,

Some (students) had turned off cameras, and what did you do in that case? Should one write to the parents or? What if the students were in their underpants or whatever other thing they were doing at the time?

Crisis Management can be difficult when neither school leaders nor teachers can predict how lessons will be received or what school constituents are experiencing privately. “It is extremely difficult... you do not have your finger on the pulse in the same way” (P5). The capacities and competencies of school leaders at this time were being tested in new ways which called for school leaders to constantly adapt their *Crisis Management* responses. “I think an atypical situation calls for atypical solutions”, P7 remarked about the situation, which could be considered evidence of *Flexibility and Adaptability* or an *Ad Hoc* response approach.

In three of the twelve schools, it took weeks or more time to get online teaching up and running as a *Crisis Management* response. P3 reflected,

I was also at school that was getting started with the process of using internet and computers – they (the staff) didn’t have a personal computer when I started, so the first time we went into lockdown on March 11, the staff didn’t actually have the equipment needed... it took a few months.

This identifies another competency and capacity area of *Crisis Management*, which dealt with how well leaders dealt with the technical aspects of moving instruction online.

Flexibility and Adaptability. The topics of capacity and competence within the context of the COVID-19 crisis overlaps greatly with RQ1, management of learning environments, as the learning environment is greatly impacted by the competence level of the teacher who creates it. In all interviews, the code of *Flexibility and Adaptability* was identified as being central to this topic.

The coded text suggested that capacity to be flexible and to adapt was more important than the level of competency one started out with. “Obviously, you can get into a situation and have to be adaptable, right? YI, navigate...I think many have learned somethings from the mistakes and good things they have experienced” (P1). Therefore, in terms of *Flexibility and Adaptability*, capacity was interpreted to be more important than competence, as competencies can be learned. “You had to work on your skills all the time” (P1). There is evidence of widescale learning in all transcripts.

The adaptation process often meant collaborating more and learning from others “It was a really good exercise in - not being a private practitioner, because there it just became very visible that we all have different skills, and you have to help each other” (P2). The data suggested that there was broad understanding that capacity and competence building during this time required *Flexibility and Adaptability* between all school colleagues and students.

Future. Perspectives of participants were sought exploring whether there were competencies and capacity areas that were developed during the COVID crisis, that should be considered in the *Future*. In seven of the twelve interview transcripts, there was evidence that participants thought that there should be *Future* support for learned competencies, As the shift to online learning resulted in many new ways of working, and the data of this study did not suggest consensus that teachers had mastered the online teaching techniques, the continued or enhanced support for skills pertaining to online learning seemed logical. P3 showed some enthusiasm for refreshing some of the skills learned during the crisis:

I think more people could sharpen their skills on that type of thing. There are some who still know how to run those Teams (software) meetings, and we have a great IT supervisor here, so it could be a sensible goal to have the entire staff kind of refreshed on it.

Others supported the need to be able to respond to possible *Future* crisis, “Of course, a lot of things have been learned. Obviously, you can get into a situation and have to be adaptable, right?” (P1). The need to sharpen the skill sets was also supported by P11 “I hadn’t really thought about this but, yes, I do. It would probably be very smart to have this type of skill set practiced”. Although these participants were supportive of the idea of strengthening the necessary skills to teach online if it were to become necessary again, none of the participants reported that their schools were engaged in the practice.

In three of the transcripts, support was shown for online instruction in the *Future* with older students “I actually think that we could use this distance learning for something more. So, for example, we talk a lot about the fact that the children have too many hours—of instruction - especially in secondary school” (P12). Also, in reference to older students, P10 said, “You could have, perhaps, just 5% or 10% of your schooling experienced virtually. We have not gotten started on that” (P10). None of the participants reported that their schools were currently engaged in online instruction outside of special individual cases with vulnerable children.

Three participants discussed the future possibilities of using avatars or robots in classrooms to accommodate children with anxieties. This is an area which seems to have been a place of innovation during COVID-19. “We have invested in a robot that the

student can remotely control from home, and in this way be part of the school even if they can't be there" (P8). While there was shown support for these future measures, it was not implied that there would be broad impact on professional development for teaching staff.

Contrarily, three participants did not think that capacities and competencies needed future training in staff groups. In response to whether these areas should be strengthened, P7 responded, "No, we were reasonably digital before... Now I must say that they have been strengthened, so it's become a more natural part of our communication, right?" P4 and P8 were also comfortable with their teaching staff's levels of competency in relation to being able to shift to online instruction. "It's just expected that if you're a teacher in Denmark you're able to use the computer you're able to use the platforms. You can use Teams, so, it's just, you know, basic standard package" (P4). In three interviews, the topic of recruitment was brought up relating to hiring younger people who are more technologically competent.

Evidence recorded of other new leadership competency areas were mentioned by participants had become standard and likely *Future* practices. These included holding meetings online, and improved some scheduling practices piloted during COVID, "The big ones go up and eat while the little ones are down... It has reduced the level of conflict in the groups of children across ages now that there is more space around them" (P7). Three participants discussed how their feelings after COVID-19 influenced their thinking on removing the constant presence of technology. P4 discussed his school's efforts to limit exposure "We've changed, for instance, the way we have the breaks in secondary.

We've changed that, so instead of them having their phones, now they can knit, they can play board games, they can play table tennis, basketball, soccer". For these few participants, the limitations of technological presence on children was seen as a necessary step to take in order to put social skills and interpersonal competencies as focal points moving forward.

Failures. This theme represented areas of capacity and competence that could be problems or weaknesses that were experienced by participants. Evidence in nine of the twelve participants from interviews suggested that the instructional level was downgraded. The code of *Downgraded Instruction* was identified relating to RQ1, learning environments, but is also relevant to RQ 4, capacity and competence. "So the thing became about helping the staff to be open about lowering the expectations for the students" (P10), The expectations were necessary to be lowered as teachers did not feel they could deliver the same level of instruction. "For some, it was about the feeling that they simply couldn't deliver a good quality of teaching" (P6). There were many reasons staff had a hard time keeping up. "They were drained by having to keep making an online teaching interesting and this lack of contact they had with their students" (P5). In these examples, there was a *Failure* to either deliver, or maintain an instructional standard that approximated normal teaching conditions.

Although only three participants identified this as an issue, it could be argued that may have been a *Failure* of leadership to provide opportunities for staff to help each other to build competencies in work groups. The next research question, RQ5, deals with subject discipline and cross-professional work. Although this topic will be explored later,

it is worth stating here that in most schools very minimal collaboration within teams was carried on. Vertical, subject group interaction, was largely cancelled during the crisis. “Under COVID it would have been helpful to have more meetings... or at least a regular ones” (P9). This absence of team cooperation was also noted by P11:

There really weren't too many meetings where we could talk about the problems that we were having, so people who were experiencing issues sort of had to deal with it on their own or ask the IT staff for help.

Both above quotations were from teacher-leader participants, who tended to experience the process of learning to teach online differently than the other school leader participants in this study. The above quotations had implications on the nature of *Psychological Safety* in the schools and group interactions experienced by P9 and P11. These comments in relation to *Psychological Safety* and these participants will be discussed in detail later in reference to this RQ, and also in reference to RQs 6 and 7.

Two participants discussed that some school staff that may have been negatively impacted to the point where they left their jobs during or shortly after the COVID-19 crisis. “There were some who are not here today. People who quit and found out they should do something else” (P3). P5 speculated that some school leaders moved away from their jobs after the crisis. “I can't remember who wrote the article, but it was about how many school leaders had quit their jobs after corona or were on sick leave with stress”. This participant also reported on experiencing stress during and after the crisis. These two text clips regarding teachers and school leaders leaving the profession were coded as examples of *Failure*.

Information Technology Support Guy (IT Guy). Six of the twelve participants referenced their school's *IT Guy*, which theoretically could have been a woman, in reference to competence development of staff. It may be that more participants' schools had an *IT Guy*, or more than one individual with the responsibility to build instructional practice by servicing the technical needs of the staff. "We had the IT guy amongst the teachers who was available almost 24/7 for the teachers" (P4). Considering the previous discussion of the code *Failures* of capacity and competence, it could be argued that this approach of having one or very few people in charge of the competencies of all staff might yield varying degrees of results. P2 explained,

We had an IT specialist, who has 3 hours a week who technically is supposed to take care of teachers' needs. He could say, 'You can contact me if you need something', but you don't do it if you don't exactly know what you need.

It was sometimes reported as not being clear on what types of things staff were getting help with. "I don't know how much the teachers talked with the *IT guys*. I don't really know how they ended up learning how to manage, but eventually it seemed like most teachers figured out how to get by" (P11). The *IT Guy* was a way of building competencies without the leaders themselves getting involved. "I didn't know the technology and didn't know what to do, so they went to the *IT Guy*" (P4). Although this approach is not necessarily bad, it was considered relevant to the discussion of capacity and competence building and *Psychological Safety*.

Psychological Safety. Previously the code of *Psychological Safety* was coded regarding what participants reported about RQ2, strategy and change process. The quoted

examples were evidence that eight of twelve of the school leaders understood the significance of components of *Psychological Safety* in the application of school strategy. The concepts involved in conceptual framework of *Psychological Safety* were also considered to be relevant to RQ4, capacity and competence.

Insecurities, which are emotional symptoms of low levels of *Psychological Safety*, were identified and coded in six of the twelve interview transcripts. “When you feel insecure... and there is nothing worse than feeling insecure when teaching, then you do not feel well-prepared. Online teaching can be like that” (P5). In this example, P5 reflected on an insecure teacher who felt unprepared, possibly compromising the teaching competency level. The capacity of teachers and students to learn and perform is impacted by feelings of security. As previously mentioned in the code *CC for Leaders*, six school leader participants recalled having to validate teachers’ efforts and tell them everything was ok, as staff were asking, “Am I doing well enough?” (P1). Two participants remarked that this type “am I doing ok? question to be very atypical from staff members under normal circumstances. The feeling of insecurity that some teaching staff were expressing might suggest that they did not feel like they were part of a strong group which validated and supported its members.

Psychological Safety is a group, interpersonal experience that, when present, reduces insecurities regarding work performance. In the careful review of transcripts, the types of *Failures* were possibly related to *Psychological Safety* issues. Evidence showed that there were very few cross-curricular and subject team meetings taking place in schools. This minimizes the expertise sharing that is important to building *Psychological*

Safety. The research also noticed a high degree of reliance on an *IT Guy* to manage the technical aspects of the shift to online learning. This had the potential to create situations in which some teachers could feel left out of experiences in which groups of colleagues could support one another. “I just found out if you do this, and like that, then the kids can... or whatever... there was a lot of learning passed on that way” (P10). This last comment underscores the importance of sharing techniques and solving problems together. The evidence from the interviews suggests that there were limitations to the quality of team interaction. The code *Psychological Safety* identified situations in which people did or did not experience a group dynamic that impacted capacity or competence. There is more on this code in relation to RQ 6.

Strengths. During the coding process, there was considerable overlap between the thematic codes of *Strengths* and the previous code of *CC Staff*. Both codes identified competencies and capacities of staff. The evidence of *Strengths* like willingness to assist one another, “They were helpful. They shared knowledge. They shared how they teach and the platform they used” (P4), can be found in all the transcripts, but it was noticed that complementary language about high levels of motivation and enthusiasm in staff addressed their capacity to change. Although, especially at the start of the crisis, there were competency problems identified in ten of the twelve interviews, the school leaders reported overall positive and constructive attitude in staff. “I think the teachers felt like a community beyond their professional roles” (P1). The capacity to build a community was seen as powerful. “We grew as a team. We have a stronger bond now than before COVID” (P4). This type of quoted evidence appears to represent communities that went

through a learning process together and came out of it showing strengthened capacity for change and competence.

Other *Strengths* relating to capacity and competence that were also coded related to comments about the overall resources of the schools. In more than half of the schools, all students and teachers had sufficient access to the internet and a digital device. Those that did not, generally fixed the problem very quickly. Even the municipal representatives were complemented by four participants as being helpful and providing excellent tutorial links for how to teach online.

Codes of Research Question 5

Research Question 5: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of subject discipline and cross-professional work”? Through this question, the data analysis evolved into codes that aligned with Research Question 5.

Simplification and Balance. The code of *Simplification and Balance* appeared in the transcript data in eight of the twelve interviews. This code identified thoughts relating to the need to simplify or scale down the number of interactions staff were expected to participate in relating to subject disciplines and interdisciplinary work, due to the more pressing issues at hand. These interactions usually take the form of meetings at schools. The types of meetings in 0–9 schools can be, entire staff meetings, grade-level meetings, class meetings, vertical/subject meetings, interdisciplinary meetings, and specialized cohort meetings.

The participants communicated that it was necessary to not overburden or overcomplicate the work lives of the personnel with too many meetings or collaborative work groups. “You had to kind of scale down - kind of like try to accommodate or ‘make room’ for them and try to accept the issues at hand” (P4). Smaller subject meeting group may have been considered overburdensome to expect from teaching teams. “It was not there that collaboration was prioritized. The cooperation is probably more prioritized in the class teams -year level, than vertically within the subjects” (P5). In order to achieve *Simplification and Balance* “Teams were split up” (P1). These quotations above are evidence that team meeting configurations that had previously been in place had been changed or simplified impacting the amount of subject discipline and cross-professional work being done.

Contrarily, in three interviews, participants reported that their work teams and meeting schedules were not simplified, and they carried on as usual. “I had the impression that their frequency of meetings was more or less the same as before, and after. However, the way to meet was virtual rather than physical” (P8), “We could continue with what was in place before” (P2). This statement was in terms of work team compositions. It should also be mentioned that authors of both these last two quotes also reported a very easy school-wide transition to digital teaching. In these schools, subject discipline and cross-professional work reportedly proceeded as usual, which was not the reported experience of most participants in this study.

On Pause. Overlapping greatly with the above code of *Simplification and Balance*, eight participants identified specific teams which were *paused* in terms of

collaboration. “So interdisciplinary group groupings - they all got a bit paused until...Yes. Because the whole vision picture was developmental, it was put on hold, right?” (P5). I interpreted the meaning of this quote to be, that as things were unclear and changing so fast at this participant’s school, it was necessary to pause meeting interactions on topics that were seen as peripheral to immediate needs. Participant 7 talked about the pausing of subject groups, also known as vertical groups, in this way, “It was very much about survival, wasn’t it? So, it was the planning in class teams and in the year group that mattered”. The word survival and focus on basic planning for students in this quote suggested that for teaching staff in eight of the twelve schools represented in the data, it was not expected to collaborate on deeper subject discipline and cross-professional work.

Missing Interaction. There was evidence in three interviews that perhaps some interaction was missing due to the simplification of teams and the pausing of activity of some team configurations. What is very noteworthy, is that two of these participants were teacher-leaders and were responsible for teaching with very little managerial work during these times. “I don’t think we talked enough about or at least not at length of about what we were all doing” (P9). P11 expressed a similar experience:

We didn’t always know what other teams were experiencing. Some of us were only meeting as a whole staff... and others with just a small grade-level group... It would be good to belong to at least 2 small groups, so you can learn from others.

The above two quotes came from teacher-leaders, but when one school vice principal was asked whether some teaching staff needed more opportunities to collaborate, she agreed, “Yes, I think so.” (P5). Although this one vice principal agreed with the idea that some

interaction may have been missing, most of the evidence collected in this study suggests a discrepancy between the teacher-leader participant group and full-time school leaders on the topic of group interactions. In the case of this RQ, the group interactions focused on subject discipline and cross-professional work.

Self-Initiated. The code of *Self-Initiated* was only applied to three different participants' comments, however in review of the transcripts, I suggest that the concept to be implicit in the educational culture of 0–9 education in Denmark. The discussion of subject and interdisciplinary collaboration during this time is possibly related to giving teachers room to *Self-Initiate* these interactions. Participant 6 shared how his school cut down on collaborative groups, but invited staff to *Self-Initiate* meetings:

They also work in interdisciplinary teams in relation to what they taught, but we shut these teams down for a period of time and then sometimes we said, 'if you need some sparring, then we can establish it'...when the schedule was flexible.

There may be cultural reasons behind giving the right to teachers to *Self-Initiate* the interactions "Every single teacher has been used to always deciding for themselves what goes on inside their classes and doing it their own way and having that freedom of method and so on. That's an old Danish virtue, isn't it?" (P12). Although there is not much evidence in the transcripts about *Self-Initiated* collaboration, I had the impression that this was a natural activity in many of the participants' schools. It is unknown to me how many staff members in Danish schools found themselves outside of friendship or collegial collaboration groups, or to what degree this work culture dynamic was present or reinforced during the COVID-19 crisis.

Codes of Research Question 6

Research Question 6: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of well-being, motivation and commitment”? Through this question, the data analysis evolved into codes that aligned with Research Question 6.

Teacher’s Well-Being (Teachers’ WB). The well-being of teachers was a central topic in the interviews and was among the most frequently documented codes identified in the transcripts. All twelve of the participants referenced the importance of *Teacher’s Well-Being* as having an impact on well-being and motivation in the student populations and considered how to benefit *Teachers’ Well-Being*, “Listening to and supporting teachers was my role” (P5). Although listening and supporting were reported as being helpful, the needs of the teachers were not the same. “There are some employees who reacted very, very differently... I think we had a very important role as a leader to go in and say, ‘everything is okay, and everything is new, and we’ll do it together’ (P2). It was not easy for school leaders to know what to do in increase the well-being of teachers, but there was consensus that it was their role to try to positively impact their teaching staff.

There were four participants who explicitly said that they needed to protect teachers from parents, “We stopped some of the parents who got too involved in the teaching and couldn’t figure out how to mind their own politics (business) when they were at home” (P6). Often the issue was that parents wanted to be helpful. “We had some over the top active parents who participate and suggested ‘why don’t you do this?’ or ‘could you explain this in another way?’ giving what they thought was very valuable

feedback to teachers. It wasn't always" (P4). Additionally, regarding parents, the coded concept of *Exposure* addressed in RQ1, learning environments, was also a situation which was impactful on teachers' well-being. The code *Exposure* surfaced in nine of the twelve interviews and described the discomfort many teachers had being broadcasted into many homes with parents, or others, viewing and judging their lessons.

Although there was nothing for school leaders to do about the *Exposure* of teaching online, consensus in the transcript data strongly suggested that participants overall felt that the stress levels of teachers should be kept as low as possible to support *Teachers' Well-Being*. "We should back them up and not make any further demands" (P1). Participant 6 recalled working hard to relieve pressure on the teaching staff when she recalled asking:

How is your class now and how are you? And don't worry about not being able to live up to your perceived demands and expectations ... This is the minimum we expect from you. What does it look like in your situation? Is there anything we can do?"

Although this reported experience may have been a bit of an exaggeration, this general forgiving attitude was recognized in eight of the twelve interviews. Later in this section, the code *Motivation/Commitment and Idlers* will be described. To avoid repetition, data concerning staff with low commitment levels will be addressed there.

Leaders' Well-Being (Leaders' WB). In ten of the twelve transcripts, evidence codified as *Leaders' WB* indicated that the well-being of school leaders was potentially impacted during the crisis. This is not to say that the personal well-being of every one of

the participants themselves had been seriously compromised during the COVID-19 crisis, but there was evidence in the data of challenges or circumstances that were examples of potential stressors that represent experiences that may have impacted well-being for school leaders in general.

The impacts were sometimes related to personal conditions. Participant 10 described that because he was a school principal, his young children were approved to physically attend their schools along with kids who were from vulnerable families or otherwise at risk:

They didn't have the opportunity to be looked after at home and that was quite hard on me. Sometimes I was like, "oh man! Now I am obliged to leave for work when I have home base that needs me!"

In this situation, P10 was not at ease about the safety of this family. Later in this conversation, P10 revealed that the health of the school principal where he worked was compromised. "She had an illness that meant that she was not allowed to get COVID-19 at that time, so couldn't be exposed". The well-being of the leadership of P10's school was clearly impacted by the crisis in personal ways, but further complicated by the health conditions of his leader colleague.

Teamwork in the leadership groups was very important and coded as *Leaders' WB* and was codified in eight of the interviews. "We had a management team - at the time we were 3 managers ... thank goodness we had a good relationship with each other" (P10). There was a need to delegate responsibilities during the crisis, so the administrative team had to interact frequently. "During that period, it was a close

collaboration in management” (P3). The work conditions at that time were interpreted as being intense in the transcript data, and the participants’ experiences were not just dependent on the collaborative team, but also their own personal situation. P6 commented, “Imagine if I, myself, was deeply afraid of being infected. How could I then act appropriately and be the top leader for my staff? Do you know what I mean?” Personal insecurities were relevant to the reactions of individuals. “People reacted very differently. Yeah, it was more about their personalities... how worried do you tend to get?” (P4). In the participant group of this study, none of the leaders were impacted to the point where they had to leave their jobs, and none of them reported serious interpersonal issues between themselves and other members of their schools’ management/leadership group.

Some stressors that impacted the well-being of the participants were related to the crisis-management work tasks at the time, “My whole holiday was spent receiving calls from the infection tracer. I then had to forward to our administrative manager. Then the children’s families had to be informed that they had been in contact with an infected person, right?” (P7). The intensity of the experience seemed to have lasting impacts on some of the participants. P5 shared,

It’s something that has left such a deep mark, I think, for everyone who works in a school, because you’ve put in an effort that has been so extraordinarily great... and it also affects your private life. It was difficult because you didn’t know how long it would last.

Some comments about the stress-levels were in reference to what had been heard about other school leaders' experiences. "I've heard that other school leaders who have been mega pressured in the situation, actually didn't want to show up for work themselves" (P6). In this quotation P5 discussed how after the experience some associates benefitted from discussing what they had lived through. "I know that in my network, some of their management crew has gotten some coaching afterwards to kind of pick them up" (P5). Contrarily, a few participants reported not allowing the work conditions to impact them personally. "Of course, I didn't think it was fun. I thought it was annoying and stressful, but I didn't get stressed by it" (P7).

There is evidence, coded as *Leaders' WB*, in more than half of the transcripts that the participants benefitted from different interactions outside of their school's leadership team. Three participants met with groups/colleagues from other schools, "We had weekly meetings where we met online for a half an hour... I was interested to hear about what they did at schools that were the same size as this one, because smaller schools were far more challenged" (P5). Three others used a municipal hotline for guidance. "We got mighty good support from the child and youth administration during corona time" (P7). It was assessed that the participants in this study belonged to leadership teams that were generally mutually supportive, however, in the case of two of the teacher/leader participants, it was more difficult to assess this, as they were not working in a managerial or administrative role during the shutdowns and identified more as teachers.

Children. Comments about the importance of the well-being of the children of the school were present in all interviews. It is not surprising that all participants

considered the impacts of the school lockdowns on the well-being and motivation to learn on students. “All employees at the school are there for the sake of the children” (P1). In a more direct way of saying it, P2 felt she had to remind some teachers that, “It’s not about you, It’s all about the students”. The *Well-Being* of the children was seen as first priority. “What can we create together that creates well-being for the children and that is tolerable for us?” (P7). Some participants discussed the well-being of the students beyond the reach of the school “Children’s mental health is strengthened by the communities they have outside school” (P10). As many community activities were shut down during the crisis, there was concern for the students’ social development and mental health.

There was concern for the children based on their age or grade levels in terms of their levels of vulnerability. The consequences of the crisis on children long term was also coded in six of the interviews. “After the pandemic, there has just been a larger group of children whose anxiety has increased, as if social skills have not been allowed to develop as they should” (P7). Apparently, this issue of students experiencing anxiety in returning to school was prevalent. “It was almost an explosion in the number of students who couldn’t go to school after corona” (P4). Considerations of these problems have been discussed earlier under the thematic code of *Future* in relation to RQ4.

Motivation, Commitment, and Idlers. This code represents comments made by participants that reflect evidence of motivation and commitment reflected by staff, or the exact opposite, the lack of motivation and commitment. When a staff member displayed actions or characteristics that embody an absence of motivation and commitment, this hypothetical person was referred to as an *Idler*. An idler does not quit the teaching job,

nor call attention to themselves. Instead, the *Idler* quietly under-performed during the shift to online learning, which sometimes prompted the school leader to confront the *Idler* to improve the situation.

As previously discussed in various sections of this study, all the participants of this study reported working in schools with generally high levels of motivation and commitment. When reporting on RQ 4, capacities and competencies, evidence was referenced suggesting consensus that the participants were aware of problematic competency areas in their schools, but the capacity of the staff to learn, adapt and find creative solutions to problems showed high levels of motivation and commitment. “They saw it as a challenge and tried every way they could be good to fix it” (P4). There was ample evidence of *Motivation and Commitment* in the transcripts of all interviews. “There was high degree of solidarity and understanding” (P7). As the general baseline for *Motivation and Commitment* was quite high, it became more edifying to identify where these positive attributes broke down using the code *Motivation/Commitment and Idlers*.

There were eight participants who commented on one or more *Idler* in their school. “There were some teachers who are not here anymore”. Although P3 did not discuss specifics of why these teachers had quit, or were fired, she went on to discuss a different situation in which a teacher couldn’t teach online with a hurt foot:

I have to say as a leader, it’s hard for me to understand that you can’t sit with your foot up and then have your online class... and there were sick calls along the way, from some, where I thought...Really!?

In this quotation, it was clear that P3 felt that there were some teachers on her staff who were shirking their duties.

All school leaders worked with some staff who sometimes showed a lack of *Motivation or Commitment*, these staff were labelled here as *Idlers*. P2 brought up passivity as sign of low motivation as he recalled a teacher who said, “I simply don’t have the technical knowledge to be creative... I can’t do anything but do this.” (P2). Although it could be that the teachers were really struggling, some participants felt that they were idling. “There are also some cool ones who were like, ‘I don’t have the equipment, I can’t do anything’” (P3), P9 reported on this type of teacher as well. “You have to adjust, even if it’s uncomfortable for you... accepting that ‘this is just going to be terrible... I’m just going to give a half-assed lesson or whatever.’ I don’t think that’s the way to go about it.” Participant 7 remarked “There is always someone who tries to fly a little under the radar”, and finally this comment by P2 described the need to keep an eye out for those who want to perform with minimum effort. “You see people start taking some liberties... there were also some who were cutting corners. They could probably get away with this in the beginning. It was a challenge as a leader to get hold of them” (P2). This above evidence identifying *idling* was interesting as it illustrated the grey area in which a school leader must productively engage or confront people who were difficult to reach during the crisis.

Evidence suggests that this was a particularly difficult task during the early phases of the lockdowns and was an annoyance, but perhaps did not have an overwhelming impact on well-being of the participants. What is unknown is why these staff members

who were coded as *Idlers*, were unmotivated. In all, there were eight of the twelve participants who discussed staff who were not showing sufficient *Motivation/Commitment* to their jobs. None of the participants self-reported as idling or lacking motivation or commitment.

Humanistic Skills and Relationships. In eleven of the twelve interviews, there was evidence that the participants were aware of the need to exercise *Humanistic Skills* and nurture *Relationships* to tend to the well-being of the staff. As the first code in this section, *Teachers' WB*, provided evidence showing the need to lower stress levels of staff, let them know that they were doing ok, defend the staff from overbearing parents, and give them freedom to be creative. It could be argued that these interactions were *Humanistic* in nature, as the goal was to support and respect the emotional needs of the staff, build trusting *Relationships*, to encourage and enable them to take control over their teaching situation.

Evidence of the coded theme *Humanistic Skills and Relationships* was pervasive in eleven transcripts. "As a manager go in and create good relationships seen from a management perspective, because you are not next to the employees all the time, that is. It's super hard, but it helps to create trust" (P2). The relationship with staff was represented as being critical. "When you work in management, it's a lot about building good relationships with your employees" (P5). Without established *Relationships* in place, *Humanistic skills* can be difficult to manage. "If you didn't ask enough or ask too much and get a little too close, people might react to that. "Is there a problem? Have you heard anything?" (P6). In this example, P6 shares a sensitive situation in which

humanistic skills could be confused by a defensive teacher as being confronted with an issue. P3 shared a similar recollection in which her intentions were not always appreciated. “There are also some things I did that were a little inelegant, because there was this distance that was present”. In this case P3 was a new leader at the school, so she did not at that time have established *Relationships* with the staff. Perhaps this is why her *Humanistic* approach was not always tailored for her group.

Groups/Psychological Safety. The transcript data suggested a consensus between participants in the general idea that during the lockdowns, strong relationships, and a humanistic way of engaging with staff were helpful to impact well-being, motivation and commitment of staff. However, the research and conceptual underpinning of this study would suggest that there is more to helping individuals thrive in changing learning organizations than improving individual constituents’ personal relationships with the school leader and being the sender of clear communication and guidelines.

The research preparation that underpins this study supports the idea that people’s interpersonal interactions and relationships within work groups, or *Psychological Safety* is impactful on their collective and individual well-being, levels of motivation and commitment to the team and organization. In five interviews, there were participant data showing evidence of an understanding that *Psychological Safety* went beyond only identifying components of it. Feeling that one can ask stupid questions, not feeling insecure or having a good relationship with the leader are components, or signs of *Psychological Safety*, however, here in reference to RQ 6, well-being, commitment and motivation, I was specifically seeking to identify discussion in the interview transcripts

which showed evidence of the importance of positive workgroup or internal team interactions and how they impacted well-being, motivation or commitment.

When asked about how staff addressed problems, P7 answered "...by helping each other, that is, to create common security – that is, psychological security in the situation" (P7). This statement was followed by the question "So is this something that is central to your thinking as a school leader? P7 answered, "Yes". When answering a similar question, P8 answered, "They helped each other a lot, and came up with ideas and suggestions for both technique, planning, and didactics; They weren't afraid to ask stupid questions to one another". P8 discussed the concept of Psychological Safety directly a few times, giving examples of the need to be open ask questions, but the above quote was the only time the importance of the group dynamic was pinpointed. P1 captured some of the spirit of *Psychological Safety* with the following, "You suddenly find that you are all in a common situation and have to solve it. I think, at least with us, they (the teachers) achieved even better unity across their subjects" (P1). When asked whether teams met, P2 reported "Yes, they met. And it was very important – because otherwise things would have fallen apart". This comment supports the idea that P2 knew how important the internal relationships within the workgroups were to common goals.

More information on group interactions was sought from participants. The answers were not always clear regarding the nature of workgroup activities "For instance, the science teachers -they have a strong network. I'm sure they met" (P4). Here, although the science teachers apparently met, there was acknowledgement that this particular team had a strong network, so there were likely productive collective team experiences, but as

for the other subjects, it was unknown. In an ideal situation, conditions for positive group interaction would be the goal for all team configurations.

P5 acknowledged issues with *psychological safety* in her school, “There was huge uncertainty there, and I think people were also nervous sometimes in the collaborations”. People feeling nervous about collaborating is not associated with strong outcomes. Two teacher-leader participants identified a lack of positive work groups “Some teams reacted positively, and others had struggles - perhaps there were internal struggles because we didn’t always know what other teams were experiencing” (P11). In this interview, a teacher-leader participant discussed that she was not part of a helpful work group and was not satisfied with the discontinuance of subject meetings at her school during the pandemic.

Families. The thematic code of *Families* was present in all twelve interview transcripts. Eight coded references had to do with the importance of parents’ involvement in the online teaching experience or other positive connotations. In reference to parents overseeing lessons, “It was good because then you knew the parent would help the kid do their work and keep up in class or with the class work” (P11). In most schools, there seemed to be good cooperation. “There was a huge goodwill among the parents, and motivation for this whole project to be possible” (P7).

Although issues with parents were documented in most of the interview transcripts, P8 didn’t recall that type of issue at his school, “I don’t remember conflicts or inquiries from parents with distrust or dissatisfaction” (P8). However, evidence of problems having to do with parents overstepping boundaries was coded in six interviews

“There were many parents who either agreed or disagreed with our advice. So, there were a lot of issues around what parents were doing and saying as they sat behind the kids” (P10). Although many parents were well-intentioned with their input, it was not easy for school staff to receive and integrate feedback. “We had some maybe over the limit active parents who participated – participating or suggest suggesting why don’t you do this? Or could you explain this in another way?” (P6).

There were five examples in the transcripts coded as *Families* that proposed that it was a tough time for parents and families. “Primarily the parents, you know having two jobs... having the children and having to work from home or losing their job. That was also a reality” (P4). This comment from P4 was *Humanistic* and showed compassion for the parents who were affected. There were many of people whose careers were impacted during the shutdowns and the process of supporting their children’s learning and school schedule was a big departure from their usual parenting roles. “Working people had to stay home from work and of course felt bad” (P1). Again, this comment shows compassion for parents.

Communication. In discussions regarding well-being, participants discussed the importance of *Communication*. Evidence of this code was present in ten of the twelve interviews. Regarding well-being, the *Communication* code fell into two categories, the first had to do with the *Guidelines*, which was a code used pertaining to RQ 2, strategy and change processes. Ten participants commented on the guidelines as involving their attention and work. Although P8, experienced few issues, and the two of the teacher-leaders made no comment about the guidelines at all, the consensus about the guidelines

was that they were arduous. “It was hard not to make mistakes in understanding the individual sub-elements of the guidelines, and there were often contradictory messages” (P7). The meaning behind this statement is that P7 wanted to be clear and consistent in his messaging but found it difficult. It is logical to consider this to have impacts on his staff’s sense of security and well-being.

The thematic code of *Communication* was also identified in nine of the interviews pertaining to *Communication* with staff and families. “Every single morning when school started, I sent an email out to my employees, wishing them a good day, and said that I was right here” (P3). This type of activity demonstrated a desire for P3 to impact the well-being of her staff with uplifting and kind *Communication*. P2 expressed it this way “So we had to be clear, but we also had to listen and be caring and trusting in a human and trusting way”. Transparency was a word that became connected with the *Communication* code. “I believe that if you have to be transparent in your management style -especially in a crisis” (P5). This emphasis on overall clarity as a core competence was also a well-represented point of view.

Disconnectedness. This code is virtually the same as *Out of Touch* from RQ 1, learning environments, as the feeling of being connected to colleagues, students, school leaders, etc. was thought to have impacted both the well-being of the constituents as well as the instructional learning environments. In ten of twelve interviews, there was evidence of that absence of conventional interpersonal activity or, *Disconnectedness*, was thought to have impacted the well-being of school constituents. “When the corona came, many of the children were very lost” (P1). Teachers felt disconnected to students as

coded in nine transcripts “It’s difficult without the physical, in-person interrelations” (P3). Despite interacting with students online P2 reported, “You get very far away from the students during such a period of time”. As teachers were accustomed to face-to-face interpersonal interaction, the new digital interface felt insufficient.

There was evidence of *Disconnectedness* in five interviews when discussing the participants’ connection with staff “It was not as possible to be as close to my employees as I normally am” (P8). P3 expressed the same thought, “You can’t feel connected to them (the teachers) in the same way”. In one interview, *Disconnectedness* was coded regarding the well-being of staff “We had teachers that are single. They live alone and they don’t have a large network... some of those were extremely lonely during that period” (P4). It was clear that the concept of *Disconnectedness* applied to both leader-staff relationships and staff-student relationships.

Grit. The code *Grit* was applied to text clips in which participants expressed the need for teaching staff to be tough and get the job done. The case could be made that all participants expressed the need to be resilient during this time, however, the code *Grit* was coded in seven transcripts in which an explicit remark was labelled that expressed this thought. “There are some who are a bit like Pippi Longstocking; we haven’t tried that before, so we can do it!” (P3). P4 recalled seeing Grit in the way staff showed determination “...others saw it as a challenge and tried every way they could be good to fix it” (P4). School leader participants appreciated the teachers who went about the work without complaining. “It was like a thing you just do – there’s no point sitting down and ranting about it.” (P1).

Although the thematic code *Grit* was only labeled in seven transcripts, the virtuousness of being resilient and willing to tackle the new challenges brought on by the unfamiliar circumstances was interpreted as being a commonly held value and belief throughout the entire participant group. In four transcripts, participants mentioned how they addressed situations when they perceived a lack of *Grit*, or lack of commitment from staff, “Very few teachers we had to contact and say “it’s not good enough that you’re not on Teams” or so on. You need to get on the screen with the students” (P4). The code *Idlers*, described earlier in this section, was sometimes used to identify people who were seen as having deficiencies in *Grit*.

Codes of Research Question 7

Research Question 7: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of the open school”? Through this question, the data analysis evolved into codes that aligned with Research Question 7.

For clarification, the term, open school, refers to the practice of mobilizing resources of the community for learning opportunities for school students. This could mean establishing formal or informal partnerships with other schools, clubs, volunteers, businesses, etc., in order to bring new environments and experiences into the school or to enable students to go outside of their school to enrich their educational experience.

The following thematic codes were identified in the transcripts pertaining to RQ 7, management of the open school. The following code list will not represent the frequency of evidence of the code as this would make understanding how the information

fits together difficult. Instead, the code list begins by first examining successful attempts participants shared about their schools interacting outside of their campus. To contextualize these types of open school interactions, subsequent codes will break down the information.

After codes have been explored regarding successful attempts of carrying out the concept of the open school, the final themes will address unsuccessful attempts or problems encountered. It is important to note that due to mandatory COVID-19 restrictions required during the school years in question, all schools temporarily halted almost all normal practices in which staff or students interacted with people outside of their inner circle, so even in the cases where schools could interact with the outside world, these activities were limited and in some cases were designed in order to reduce the number of students congregated in one place.

Successful Outreach. Five of the twelve participants described successful outreaches carried out by their schools. All but one of these successful projects had to do with students leaving campus to visit another location. For context, during the COVID-19 crisis, there was a period of time lasting for several months in which students physically attended school but were required to do so under the condition that they were not to interact with students from other grade levels, parallel classes, and there were many other rules about how many square meters should be available per child. For this reason, some schools sought to incorporate facilities outside of their own buildings. P1 was very satisfied with one *Successful Outreach* with a particular local sports facility with lots of

physical space. “We got a good cooperation with them... we got the premises for ourselves”.

Another example of using the local community, but in a different way was by using local merchants to interact with students who needed to get outside for exercise. P3 reported, “we had cooperation with a lot of local merchants - from the candy store to the kiosk to the bakery and so on... because those relay races”. In P3’s school, during the lockdown, teachers implemented a concept in which the students were to add up the number of kilometers walked and considered the cooperation with the small businesses where students checked in, to be a *Successful Outreach*.

Two other examples of *Successful Outreach* outside of school were pre-planned, yearly occurring examples of the open school concept. P2’s school had an agreement with a municipal waste management plant. Although there were some delays getting started, the agreements held, and the cooperation took place, even under heavy COVID-19 restrictions. “It ended up getting up and running in customized version. It wasn’t at first, but it did happen to some degree” (P2). Participant four discussed how the scheduled interaction between his school and a local high school carried on despite some initial restrictions:

We have a close relationship to the nearby high school and we kept that during the lockdown, so they were working with our students in the eighth and ninth grades with the stem science technology engineering and mathematics...so we kept that collaboration going.

In most of the cases, partnerships like the one above were paused during the lockdowns, yet re-established once the most severe restrictions were lifted, or if the collaboration could be continued via online learning.

Out and In. Almost all the examples of what could be considered an open school initiative had to do with students leaving campus or going *Out*. There were six examples of students going *Out*, and only one example of someone coming *In*. Besides the examples already mentioned of students going *Out*, a local church, and a local hotel were also interacted with during the restrictive times when school leaders were looking for extra space to mitigate the spread of the virus. P12 reported on the cooperation with a local hotel. “They had vacant lecture rooms. Because they were closed down, they did not use any space, so we paid very little money for two large rooms.” It is not my opinion as researcher that this is a robust example of the true concept of the open school. However, it is an example of the school interacting with, and using local resources to enable learning.

In only one case out of all twelve schools represented, a school leader had an outside party come *In* to the school to interact with students. P3 found out that the local dance studio could not operate due to COVID-19 guidelines. As many of the school’s students could not continue with their dance lessons, the principal invited the dance instructor to carry out the lessons on campus where distancing requirements could be met. P3 explained,

I made our schoolyard available and lent a key to the dance instructor and said, “try our schoolyard. Use our ball cage so you can have some distance between the kids and then you can do an outdoor dance school.”

This was a creative way of helping a community member’s business to remain active, as well as enriching the physical and social lives of students, which is true to the intention of the open school concept.

Reestablished. There was evidence in six of the twelve interview transcripts that all of the open school agreements that were in place prior to the crisis were *Reestablished* after the restrictions were lifted. P9 reported, “those agreements went back to normal after COVID”. However, in some cases, it took a while before the agreements with external agencies were reestablished to open the school up to the community. “It was not out of bad will, but we got into some other routines. It has come back now, but it took a long time to get back that cooperation”. As some agreements may have been paused for potentially up to two school years, it is understandable that contacts and plans would need to be *Reestablished*.

Closed. Five participants reported that their school was completely *Closed* to the prospect of interacting with any agency, facility, or people outside of their school. “I remember it as if the open school thing was shut down” (P10). This remark was consistent with the other four participants. P11 expressed it this way, “the school did have some agreements with outside associations but all of that was stopped of course during COVID-19”. This sentiment was not surprising considering that some schools were not lacking indoor space, so they did not have the need to seek external locations to expand

into. For these schools, the focus was on reducing the interactions with the outside world in order to mitigate the viral risks associated with exposure to new environments and people.

No Thanks. In four interviews there was evidence of low enthusiasm for open school practices during the school years in question. “I know there have been problems in other places in terms of cleaning and how many people came into the building and all these things. We didn’t have that” (P5). It is clear that by inviting people into the institution, schools adopt a responsibility for the associated hygiene as P5 was eager to avoid. In another situation, a school began to borrow another school’s extra classrooms, but decided against after complaints, “Some kids were sent over to another school which they thought was worse than ours... the premises were not so good” (P1). Another example had to do with the frustration of trying to figure out the logistics of sharing space with another school. Finally, P4 spoke about the importance of limiting the amount of input one must consider, process and incorporate in order to tend to a school’s constituents, even when it comes to experts and consultants from the municipal office. “It was a great opportunity for the school to focus on just being the best possible school without having consultants from city hall, politicians, everybody have an idea on what to do” (P4). Although this comment did not exclusively focus on ideas about the open school, P4 made this remark within the context of the open school discussion, and it was considered relevant.

Categories

In this section, all categories identified in the analysis of the codes labelled in this study will be explored. For organizational and important conceptual context, the categories have been organized pertaining to each Research Question, so there are seven in all. The rationale of how the codes related to each RQ and why they were grouped and consolidated into the chosen categories is explained in this section.

Categories of Research Question 1

Five categories of thematic codes were synthesized from the coded themes pertaining to RQ 1, which focused on Learning Environments under COVID-19. They were *Adaptation/Acceptance*, *Disruptive LE*, *Out of Touch/Fatigue*, *New Paradigm*, *Vulnerable Students and Freedom/Positives*. These categories developed by combining identified thematic codes that researcher considered to be related to one another in their meaning or impact. The following text is an explanation of which codes pertaining to this RQ were consolidated into the different categories, along with the rationale used to group the codes in this way.

Acceptance. The category of *Acceptance* consists of the thematic codes of *Zoom/Teams*, *Exposure and Downgraded Instruction*. The thematic codes clustered into the *Acceptance* category represented common perspectives offered by the participants that reported on their perceived realities of the online learning environment which were not necessarily ideal but accepted as true. The code *Zoom/Teams* label identified these digital tools of online instruction during COVID-19, as well as a current option for online learning. The codes of *Downgraded Instruction* and *Exposure* were also placed in the

category of *Acceptance*. The *Exposure* code reported on feelings of discomfort some teachers felt as they taught, with the full knowledge that non-students, parents and possible critics were witnessing the instruction. This was not ideal for many teachers, but it was a situation that had to be accepted in order to teach online. *Downgraded Instruction* was also connected to the category label of *Acceptance*. In all, the code of *Downgraded Instruction* was assigned to 22 text clips. It appeared that although there was not complete consensus that instruction was downgraded, the majority participants accepted and acknowledged this perceived reality. The above codes had a very important trait in common, which was that the participants felt that they had no choice but to accept these issues or realities and move forward in addressing the learning environments as well as they could.

Disruptive Learning Environments (Disruptive LE). This category was a grouping of the codes *Sabotage* and *Difficult/Frustrating*. Both represented disruptions to the learning environment and were therefore similarly impactful on the learning environment in a comparable way. The interview data suggested that the issue of students sabotaging instruction was particularly a problem at the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis. More than half of the participants brought up the topic of students, or in one case a parent, sabotaging online environment. This was seen as a significantly disruptive. Data labeled as *Difficult/frustrating* also fell into the category of *Disruptive LE*. Although the situations or obstacles coded as *difficult/frustrating* were not examples of purposefully enacted impediments to teaching, as in the above *sabotage* thematic code. *Difficult/frustrating* coded text clips naturally fit into the category of *Disruptive LE* as

these situations or issues impeded or disrupted the teaching flow. Every participant interviewed in this study referenced at least one perspective or experience that represented something difficult or frustrating to overcome during the COVID-19 crisis.

Out of Touch/Fatigue. This category combined the two codes of *Out of Touch* and *Fatigue* as they were often overlapping experiences based on the participant transcript data and had a similar or related impact. The feeling of being *Out of Touch* with one's students or colleagues was a widely expressed thematically coded sentiment. In ten out of twelve interviews, this feeling of being *Out of Touch* with students or colleagues was a serious concern that was perceived by school administrators. The other code placed in this category was that of *Fatigue*, which also represented a weakening of the bonds, in this case academically, between teachers and learners. Brought up by participants in six of the twelve interviews, text coded *Fatigue* deal with how instruction became less impactful over the time of the COVID-19 crisis, as enthusiasm waned, and variety of learning experiences lost energy that had earlier been present in the online instructional experience. As both *Fatigue* and *Out of Touch* described a loosening of the grip school personnel had on their relationship with students, these thematic codes were categorized together.

New Paradigm. The most popular thematic code pertaining to RQ1 was *New Paradigm*. The nature of participant citations regarding this code referred to how the situation was unique and called for new and untested responses. It was determined that this category should not adopt other coded labels into a broader collection. Participants'

thematically coded comments about the New Paradigm were interpreted as being representative the unique situation school personnel confronted.

Vulnerable Students. The category of *Vulnerable Students* was also a code that was determined as belonging to its own category. Regardless of the innumerable complexities surrounding the shift to online learning from face-to-face instruction, there were students who were vulnerable during this time, and most of the administrators explicitly remarked on this fact. The text clips provided evidence of school leaders having pre-knowledge of students who were likely having a difficult time, as well as participants who discussed the process of trying to decide which age group was the most at risk of suffering negative consequences due to the school shutdowns. This code was identified in nine of the twelve interviews. None of the teacher-leader participants mentioned this theme.

Freedom/Positives. This category combined the codes of *Freedom* and *Positive LE*. as they were often overlapping in the essence of the positive and productive thoughts that were transcribed. Although not exactly the same, both codes communicated a similar experience for the participants. *Freedom* was a coded in six of the twelve interviews and referred to comments half of the participants reported on how many school staff members felt a sense of exhilaration to freedom to try new things during the COVID-19 crisis. Teaching professionals who were willing to take chances in order to adapt and grow their teaching practices were ostensibly welcome to explore new techniques and creative initiatives at the schools where the participants worked. Also combined into the category of *Freedom/Positives* was the code of Positive LE. The *Positive LE* code was highly

varied, but in essence, these coded text clips were simply positive experiences or outcomes relating to the learning environments that were communicated by the participants. In all twelve interviews there was at least one comment that was coded as *Positive LE*.

Categories of Research Question 2

Codes pertaining to RQ 2, management of strategy and change processes during COVID-19, were consolidated into five categories. These categories are *Adaptation*, *Guidelines*, *Well-Being/Psychological Safety*, *Communication/Relationships* and *Takeaways/Developments*. Each of these categories will be described below, with a description of rationale behind the combination of the different codes into the categories.

Adaptation. The category of *Adaptation* contained interrelated codes, all of which represented reflections of a lack of management strategy during the crisis, which prompted *Adaptation*. This category consisted of three thematic codes, *COVID was the New Strategy*, *Paused Strategy* and *Ad Hoc*. These themes represented evidence of the adaptation process, besides the topic of competency development which will be fully discussed later, as RQ4 deals specifically with that theme. The code of *COVID was the New Strategy* had to do with the eclipsing effect COVID-19 had on school leadership. The strategies that were at the forefront of virtually all leadership activity was directly an *Adaptation* to coping with the immediate issues presented by the crisis.

The energy that leaders would normally exert in fulfillment of a school's mission or vision were now *Paused Strategies*. Virtually all schools have some targeted vision or set of goals for their school and there is often ongoing work groups assigned to strategic

development areas, which often involve staff, students and occasionally school boards. Besides one participant expressing an uncommonly positive recollection regarding how he did “not think it was difficult to continue the tracks” (P8) of school strategies. There was consensus that *Adaptation* to the immediate needs required pausing the strategic initiatives that had previously been rolled out. If there had been a school program to boost literacy levels, physical movement, social activities, etc., it was paused during the lead up to the lockdowns and during the online learning phases of the COVID-19 crisis.

While operating under uncertain circumstances, sometimes *Ad Hoc* decisions can be made. This was an appropriate label for examples when the participants described adaptation processes that seemed like good ideas at the time. As explained earlier in the description of the code, some of the *Ad Hoc* decisions resulted in unintended outcomes. In reflecting on the visits made to teachers’ homes to deliver traditional Danish Fastelavn buns P3 stated “it was perhaps not the best move on our part, but it was with the best of intentions”. This was the process of *Adapting*. One school leader rearranged teacher teams, which resulted in outcry. Five others started with a full teaching schedule and then later simplified it. Other school leaders started off with a simplified schedule then went to a full schedule. Some *Ad Hoc* strategies worked, others did not. The *Ad Hoc* code was used to label the *Adaptation* process as school leaders made decisions without knowing exactly what the outcomes would be, and consistent with the other codes in this category, represents adaptive behavior.

Guidelines. The category of guidelines consisted of two thematic codes, *Guidelines* and *No Model*. This category was arrived upon as an interesting paradox. The

two codes represent opposite sides of a governing workflow for the participants during their COVID-19 experiences. The code of *Guidelines* represented the impacts of the time-sensitive, then and then, governmentally issued regulations that frequently changed and although they were issued to increase public safety, they were the primary source of the disruptions to the normal functioning of the school. The *Guidelines* also kept many school leaders very busy with complicated tasks like figuring out a schedule in which only a certain number of students could be in proximity of others, as well as tedious tasks like calling long lists of families to inform them of potential risks of exposure. As previously stated, outside of the teacher-leader subgroup, in all other interviews, the code label of *Guidelines* was present and seen as being impactful to the experience of school leaders as they planned their strategies and carried out their work.

Inversely, the thematic code label *No Model* represented the absence of *Guidelines* in both an immediate and broader context. Whereas governmental *Guidelines* consisted of instructive material designed to address issues at hand, the *No Model* thematic code was identified the absence of a theoretical or pragmatic, big picture guiding framework to help structure an approach to the many parts of shifting a learning environment from a face-to-face to an online experience. As previously stated in the description of the *No Model* code, there was no evidence of any type of model that was helpful to any of the participants during the COVID-19 crisis. The codes were combined as they represented a striking guidance/no guidance paradigm the participants lived with.

Well-Being/Psychological Safety. These two codes were so deeply related, that combining them into a category was inevitable. The broad concept of *Well-Being* was

discussed with all participants as being central to the change-process and vision of their schools. “*Well-Being* comes into the picture. Some thrived very well, others not so. And those who felt a little bad about it needed conversations and help get through it well enough” (P1). In addition to this theme, the code of *Psychological Safety* was added to this category as the two concepts are highly related. In both cases, text clips of the transcripts that were coded represented behaviors or attitudes that participants described that were impactful to *Well-Being* or *Psychological Safety*. This included comments made that may have described situations that could have had a degrading effect on the levels of *Psychological Safety* at the school. In the following example, the common strategy of using a teaching staff member who has IT responsibilities to serve the needs of the teaching staff, “to make him (the IT person) available, so that you could come and get some ‘hands on’ help and then you can say ‘this had been helpful’ in the beginning, but there was a little bit of anxiety in some of them. The thing about someone thinking it was embarrassing to have to seek help” (P2). As anxiety and embarrassment are indicators of possible low *Psychological Safety*, this method of providing help to teachers, has some dependance on the workers’ relationship with the IT person. RQ 6, which specifically examines well-being, motivation and commitment will deepen the discussion on *Well-Being* and *Psychological Safety* further.

I had the preconceived notion that the concept of *Psychological Safety* was relevant to this study as this conceptual framework was pre-identified during the literature review research phase of the project as being integral in the study design. I acknowledge this as a potential bias. Nevertheless, the evidence in the transcribed texts

supported the importance of *Psychological Safety* within the context of RQ2. There were many coded representations of *Psychological Safety* in the transcriptions that might have impacted group work performance and influenced how some school leaders considered the topic of vision and change processes.

Communication/Relationships. Two thematic codes were combined to constitute this collection, *Communication/Collaboration* and *Relationships*. These two themes both emphasized the importance of having meaningful communication with others as being relevant to the discussion of RQ 2, vision and change processes. As evidenced in the interviews, school leaders frequently emphasized the importance of clarity “I had to become more responsive...but also articulate very clearly where we came from” (P2). Also, the nature of communication was seen as important when it came to strengthening well-being “I ended the day and said, ‘goodbye and thank you for your work today’” (P3) or acknowledging that the times were tough “I would pick up the phone and simply call up and listen and acknowledge that this was a tough period” (P5).

Participants’ comments about communication that surfaced in discussion of RQ 2, were often related to the maintenance and building of *Relationships*. The statements that were coded as relationships emphasized the importance of strengthening bonds between parents, students, or with other school leaders onsite or otherwise for professional consultation. Most often the *Relationships* referred to related to teaching staff, “as a manager go in and get the job done and create the good *Relationships* seen from a management perspective” (P2). This importance placed on *Relationships* was interpreted as being with the intent of supporting of positive change during the crisis.

Communication and *Relationships* were very closely related and aligned and were therefore placed in this category together.

Takeaways/Developments. This category is the same as the original *Takeaways/Developments* thematic code. As the thoughts shared relating to this code or category were somewhat unrelated to the other categories pertaining to this RQ but still related to the original RQ, it was deemed illogical to combine it with other themes. The afterthoughts, or lack thereof, of participants when discussing the topic of strategy and change processes were considered as important to document. The code *Developments* gathered various thoughts relating to how attitudes about school strategy may have evolved since the lockdowns. Disappointingly, this coded area of discussion was not as plentiful as one might hope. “I don’t think anybody thinks about COVID anymore in a way, which is not very smart because this kind of thing could happen again” (P11). The evidence of *Takeaways/Developments* directly relating to RQ 2, management of strategy and change-process, was unfortunately thin the transcript data.

To clearly report on the specific lines of inquiry that the research questions were designed to examine, effort was made to refrain from blurring concepts like *Takeaways* between RQ focal areas. In this section, this code is being recorded in reference to this specific RQ 2. In the context of other research questions such as RQ1, management of learning environments, RQ 4, management of capacity and competence development, or RQ 7, Well-Being, different data sets reported other types of afterthoughts or takeaways from the COVID-19 leadership experience. To avoid confusion and repetition, they are omitted here.

Categories of Research Question 3

In the case of the transcription data relating to RQ 3 which focused on the management of knowledge and results-based development of the school's teaching during the COVID-19 crisis, the quantity of meaningful coded themes generated could be placed into two categories. They were *Cancelled Ok* and *Thoughts about Data*. In the following paragraphs, these two main categories will be described and the rationale behind coupling of the various codes that constitute these two categories will be explained.

Cancelled Ok. Three thematic codes pertaining to knowledge and results-based development of the school's teaching were placed into the category of *Cancelled Ok*. They were: *Cancelled Ok*, *People Not Data* and *We Don't Do Data*. These codes were grouped together as they all represented the participants thoughts on why it was acceptable that a normal routine of testing and data collection were not carried out during the COVID-19 crisis. Only two of the twelve participants offered support for the practice of using academic data to drive school strategy, but even in their cases, P2 and P10, were not fully against the cancellations.

Central to the discussion of why it was *ok* to *cancel* the tests and exams, was the widely held perspective that under the circumstances it was *People Not Data* that mattered. All but one of the participants very clearly expressed that it was the well-being of the people of the school that mattered and that engaging in academic testing during the COVID-19 crisis would have been counter-productive to the operation of the school.

Also germane to the discussion was the fact that public schools engage in

standardized testing which private schools are not obligated to participate in. It was also apparent from the interviews, that public school leaders are given training pertaining to the practice of applying academic data to drive leadership strategy of schools whereas the private school leaders made no mention of this. Therefore, the responses to questions about data driving school leadership were typically generated more discussion with public school leaders. As private schools do not engage in data-driven strategy, the impact on them was not felt as much. Evidence of this was three participants from private schools who expressed the code *We Don't Do Data*.

Thoughts About Data. This category consisted of three codes, *Types of Data*, *Thoughts about Data* and *It's Hard to Use Data*. The codes were combined into a category as they all represented participants' thoughts and ideas about the variety and roles of academic and management data collected and used in school administrations. Although this research question is primarily examining school leaders' application of academic data, the transcripts would suggest that other types of data were more at the forefront of the school leader experience during the COVID-19 crisis. Some leaders had to check attendance data and report possible virus infections with the municipality or take other measures to minimize risk of contagion. For some school leaders, dealing with infection rates in the schools, this was time-consuming work. Additionally, student interaction with teachers, for example turning in assignments was also expressed as being noteworthy as an indicator that the school was operational.

Participants *Thoughts about Data* were highly influenced by whether the school leader worked at a private school or a public school. There was evidence in the interview

transcripts that private school leaders were relaxed about the cancellation of the tests, which makes sense as they were not conducting the standardized tests in the first place, and none of these participants made indication that the exit exam scores from their schools is something they spend much time on. On the other hand, public school leaders are strongly encouraged to apply data as a strategic management tool to improve student achievement in schools. All of the public school leaders acknowledged this point.

The philosophical discussion exploring to what degree school leaders should be strategically driving their schools with academic data suggested that there was not overwhelming enthusiasm for the practice, although the nature of discussion on the topic identified the practice as neither wholly good nor completely bad. One participant, (P2) showed support for the practice of using assessment data to improve instruction with a practical example that made sense, however P2 also admitted that there was little time to carry out that type of implementation under normal school leadership times, let alone during COVID-19. Although this research data did not demonstrate commitment and passion for the concept or leadership practices relating to the data-driven school, it is perhaps out of the scope of this research project to fully explore this topic enough to draw conclusions.

The code of *It's Hard to Use Data* provided evidence to inform strategic management of their schools, even under normal administrative conditions is not easy, and as takes a lot of time. Analysis of academic data and interacting with teachers on shortcomings or possible areas of improvement in instructional practice is time consuming. Evidence from the transcripts suggested that particularly during the school

years impacted by COVID-19, school leaders were not upset that academic achievement data was neither being applied nor recorded. Although this category of *Thoughts about Data* had variety in the types of thoughts and data, they were all related as the scope of the comments all related to the same overall theme.

Categories of Research Question 4

The organization of the codes relating to Research Question 4 which dealt with the management of capacity and competence development during COVID-19, fell into three main categories. They were, *Competence and Capacity of Staff*, *Competence and Capacity of Leaders*, and *Competency Concerns*. In this section, each of these categories will be described, including the rationalization behind how the various thematic codes were synthesized into the category groupings.

Competency and Capacity of Staff. This category combined the thematic codes of *CC of Staff* (Competency and Capacity of Staff), *Flexibility and Adaptability* and *Strengths*. These four codes all represented examples of traits and dispositions that the participants reported as being impactful to capacities and competencies as relating to RQ 4. It was well established that there were many problems with levels of competency, particularly at the beginning of the crisis, as ten out of twelve participants identified specific situations. For example, many participants believed that older teachers struggled more with the technical side of the shift to online learning. There was some evidence in the transcripts suggesting that some teachers did not present well online, with inappropriate items in backgrounds, low quality instruction or absence. It is worth noting here that RQ 1 dealt with learning environments, and more can be learned about the

capacities and competencies of the teachers to create learning environments by examining that topic.

There was evidence in the data that there were competency problems that needed to be resolved, however, regarding the *CC of Staff* to respond to the challenges they met, virtually all the participants spoke very positively about the teachers. In most cases the participants could not explain how the teachers became competent, but the capacity to rise to the occasion was present in all interviews. It seemed that in the eyes of virtually all the participants, the teachers did a remarkable job adapting. P4 reported “It was like almost a boost in the collaboration between parents and the school... they could see that we did our best and we tried. So, maybe we haven’t ever been this recognized for what we’re doing like this, ever”. This text described parents’ appreciation of the capacity of the staff. It did not attest that everything had gone perfectly, but it acknowledged a positive and perhaps even successful response.

In describing what capacity for improvement is, or looks like, participants reported on the next two codes in this collection, which were *Flexibility and Adaptability* and *Strengths*. The participants reported that teachers were learning from their experiences, building new skill sets, and helping each other. There was general agreement in the interview data that the strengths were related to high levels of motivation and willingness to change practice to adjust. Although there were examples of teachers who did not fully cooperate, this was not the norm in any of the schools represented by participants for this study. As all these codes were meaningful in

addressing the essence of the competency and capacity of staff in schools during COVID-19, they were assembled into a category.

Competency and Capacity of Leaders. This category consisted of the codes *CC of Leaders*, *Crisis Management* and *IT Guy*. In this collection, the different competency and capacity areas that the school leader participants spoke about were coded with the four mentioned labels. As all three of these codes related specifically on areas that lied strictly in the leadership field, they were grouped together as a collection. The first code, *CC of Leaders*, represented the two primary competency areas the participants reported on when reflecting on their own capacity to operate and motivate staff during the shift to online learning. I considered these to be areas of leadership prowess. The first leadership prowess was concerned with social and interpersonal abilities. In virtually all interviews, there was evidence of the participants discussing the need to establish strong relationships with the staff and other members of the leadership team. More than half of the participants also remarked on the need for heightened empathy. There were six examples of the school leaders recognizing that staff needed to explicitly be told that they were doing ok, everything is fine. Finally, there were also four participants who talked about the capacity and competency of absorbing pressure or complaints from parents away from teachers. Leaders reported that these interpersonal skills were the most important interpersonal competencies to exercise.

The next area of prowess that participants discussed relating to the competencies and capacities essential to their jobs during the COVID-19 crisis was organizational prowess. There was data in nine of the twelve transcripts showing evidence that

participants thought that a competent school leader during this time showed commitment to clear, frequent and timely communication to all constituents, as well as the ability to comprehend official communications and be able to act upon them. Sometimes this entailed working long hours. It was not unusual for the participants to show the capacity to work weekends and holidays during the crisis. Transcript data supported that the school leader participants considered competencies in these areas to be highly important. In review, evidence from the interviews suggests that it was the combination of interpersonal competencies and organizational competencies and capacities that were most important.

Also, part of the category of *Competencies and Capacities of Leaders* was the broad label of *Crisis Management*. This code identified a wide range of situations that were difficult to predict but had to be managed. Dealing with anxiety in students, teachers and parents was identified in the transcripts. Some students had difficulties during the lockdowns as well as reintegrating back into school. Some parents needed guidance as to how assess their children's health risks, and some teachers were scared to come back to work. Not all teachers showed the same level of fear of COVID-19, and they were not all equally at risk physically. Making special allowances for some teachers could create disharmony with others. These were difficult *crisis management* situations to handle.

Two school leaders recalled that, at the beginning of the crisis, their schools had to lend out computers to families, and one school leader reported that it took his school months to properly equip staff and students for online instruction. Once online, dealing with students who misbehaved online, or did not cooperate fully with teachers'

instructions brought on the need for new *crisis management* competencies from the participants. Overall, the data showed that the participants considered the capacity for school leaders to tackle and resolve the unpredictable nature of the issues to be central to managing the crisis.

The final code included in the category of *Competencies and Capacities of Leaders* is *IT Guy*. This code started simply as the identification of a central person's role pertaining to the school competencies that were important in helping teachers shift their instructional practice. Although the code *IT Guy* was only identified in six of the transcripts, it is likely that there is an *IT Guy* in more of the schools represented. This code was significant as it represented an important instructional leadership competency area that school leaders were surprising not very involved in. It is perhaps a lot to expect that all teachers will communicate well with the *IT Guy* and know what help to ask for. Therefore, the code of *IT Guy* might also be included in the category *Competency Concerns* which is the next category pertaining to this RQ. This outsourced area of capacity building potentially exposed some staff members to a less than optimal way of getting help. In only one transcript (P2), was there evidence of a school leader personally training a teacher on how to teach online. As all three of the codes in this category represent concepts and challenges that were solely in the hands of school leaders, they were categorized under the common label of *Competency & Capacity of Leaders*.

Competency Concerns. Possible areas of weakness regarding competencies and areas of capacity during the crisis, were labelled *Competency Concerns*. Besides the potential connection to *IT Guy*, the category labelled *Competency Concerns* was an

amalgamation of the three codes *Failures, Future and Psychological Safety*. All three of these codes dealt with broad and enduring management areas in which school leadership either manifested successful interventions and made productive decisions, or they came up short. The rationale behind using the word, *Concerns* for this code, reflects that these topics and themes represent ideas that possibly should be taken seriously or addressed in some way.

The data evidence from the interviews supports the assertion that the quality of online instruction *Failed* to substitute normal instruction. As was reported in relation to RQ 1, learning environments, ten of twelve participants expressed that instruction was downgraded, and half of the school leaders interviewed reported that over time, motivation in teachers and students waned, and instruction became more repetitive, suggesting that there lacked depth and substance to the online coursework and interaction, this could be considered a *Failure* in capacity and competence to optimally operate. Another indicator of *Failure* were the references to people leaving the educational profession. Although there was some acceptance of Downgraded Instruction as described pertaining to RQ 1, widespread failure to ensure overall operational competency was perceived as an important leadership competency.

Finally, it was noteworthy that two of the *teacher/leader* participants in this study, provided evidence that team collaboration with other teachers during the school closures was very limited, as organized online meetings were generally conducted with the entire staff, and that vertical subject meetings and other team configuration meetings were discontinued or very limited during the crisis. This could be considered a *failure* to

enable cooperative team environments to help and inspire staff to build competence. One could make a counterargument that it was natural for most staff members to reach out to colleagues to collaborate to learn the necessary competencies, however, there may have been staff who were not well-connected to or did not feel psychologically safe enough to interact with a broad range of colleagues.

As the framework of Psychological Safety has to do with how the nature of interpersonal experiences impacts work performance, it is important to examine the conditions for school staff had to exchange best practice information and methods of teaching and evaluation. What was noticed in the examination of RQ 4, dealing with competencies and capacities, was that in the majority of schools, the competency building process for teaching staff was not accomplished in the way that teachers usually work, which is in cooperative and collaborative teams.

The final component to the category of *Competency Concerns* is the code *Future*. This code fit into the collection of Competency Concerns as it identified competencies or capacities that school leaders should perhaps be concerned with in the *future*. The primary question posed to the participants regarding this topic regarded whether there should be future training to further develop competencies that were relevant during the COVID-19 crisis. Evidence from the transcripts revealed that the majority of participants considered future training to be a good idea, and there was also some support for reestablishing some online teaching for older students now.

A few leaders saw future potential for online instruction for students who suffer from anxiety and two of their schools have already invested in avatar/robots which serve

this purpose. Interestingly, there were three other participants who did not think that there was any need to build competencies in their staff's ability to teach online. Transcript evidence suggests that in their view, a modern teaching staff is prepared and equipped well enough to use the relevant tools to teach online if that measure becomes necessary. As all three codes that make up the category of Competency Concerns had to do with critical areas of leadership that had to be addressed in order to avoid major failures, they were categorized together.

Categories of Research Question 5

The codes that related to RQ 5, which focused on the management of subject discipline and cross professional work during the COVID-19 crisis, yielded a modest collection of codes. Two categories, *Balance* and *Interaction*, were constructed in the analytic syntheses and grouping of the codes. In the following paragraphs, these two categories will be described and the rationale behind the synthesis of various thematic codes constituting the two categories will be explained.

Balance. The theme categories of *Balance* consisted of two thematic codes, *Simplification and Balance* and *On Pause*. There was substantial overlap between these two themes. *Simplification and Balance* represented the perspective of, or acknowledgement that prioritizations had to be made that compromised normal collaborative work at the school. Due to the crisis, the immediate concerns eclipsed the need for nurturing subject discipline and cross-professional work. The code *On Pause*, was simply the label chosen for the action taken to disengage from this type of collaborative work. It implies that the collaborative activities will return, but at that time

expectations had been suspended. Eight of the twelve schools reported as having taken that approach. As these codes both represented perspectives from participants that it would have been too professionally demanding at that time for staff to focus on subject discipline and cross professional work during the COVID-19 crisis.

Interaction. The category of *Interaction* consisted of two thematic codes, *Missing Interaction* and *Self-Initiate*. Both codes address the issue of how some staff had to operate independently in their development of subject discipline and cross professional work during lockdowns. The broader category *Interaction* encompassed the *Missing Interaction* code pertaining to lack of collaborative opportunities, and the *Self-Initiate code* which signaled the need for personal initiative in order develop subject or cross professional collaborations. Although there was not strong consensus in the data regarding the importance of either of these two codes, they were both considered relevant to the overall discussions of the participant group.

As there were only three teacher/leader participants in this study, it was noteworthy that two of the three reported that they felt professional group interactions were lacking during the school lockdowns. However, is not clear in the data whether the types of collaboration that were missing were regarding subject disciplines or had more to do with teaching online or online classroom management practices/strategies. Nevertheless, it was interesting that two of the three teacher-leader participants offered a perspective that was different than the views of the full-time school leaders.

To better understand the Danish 0–9 school leaders' role in the organization, it is also fair to consider the work culture in place. As the thematic code *Freedom* was used in

when discussing RQ1, learning environments. Giving staff the space and permission to *self-initiate* their collaborations and be owners of their own learning process could be argued was a way of showing respect to teachers and putting one's own attention on other matters. My interpretation of the cultural importance of these themes was that it was important to be cognizant of the balance between the officially scheduled meetings for collaboration to mitigate *Missing Interaction*, while still giving staff the chance and space to *Self-Initiate* collaborative work.

Categories of Research Question 6

The ten codes discussed pertaining to RQ6, well-being, motivation and commitment during COVID-19, and were sorted into four different categories due to the relationships between the themes they had in common. These categories were *Interpersonal, Motivation and Commitment, Students and Parents and Teachers' and Leaders' Well-Being*. In this section, each of these categories will be described, and the rationalization behind how the various thematic codes were synthesized into the collections will be presented.

Interpersonal. This category consisted of four thematic codes *Humanistic Skills & Relationships, Messaging, Disconnectedness* and *Groups/Psychological Safety*. These codes are closely related, as they all have to do with how leaders and teachers communicated and interacted, and what possible impacts these types of relationships were having on well-being, motivation, or commitment in their schools. The code, *Humanistic Skills & Relationships* primarily had to do with the understanding of the school leader participants that felt responsible for positively impacting staff well-being.

Attempts to lower stress levels was used as a strategy to accomplish this. Interaction with individual staff members, in addition to addressing the whole group was seen as necessary and important, but sometimes checking in with some teachers could be misunderstood as an intrusion or confrontation. Overall, relationship building was seen as highly important.

Messaging was also a code and important theme pertaining to well-being and *interaction*. The school leaders were conscious of the need to communicate clearly with staff and families. Proper communication of the COVID-19 guidelines was seen as a very important job, although was not always easy and stressful at times. There was evidence that this impacted the well-being of some school leaders. The need for as much transparency as possible was also acknowledged as being a *Messaging* goal.

Another important code in this *Interpersonal* category was *Disconnectedness*. This code labeled evidence of a lack of *Interpersonal* connection between school constituents. The connection in question could be between teachers and students, which was seen as a substantial problem, as the students could be at risk, or it could mean that the teacher was having issues. The other lack of connection which was discussed as being relevant had to do with school leaders feeling disconnected with staff.

The final theme placed the category of *Interpersonal*, was *Groups/Psychological Safety*. The research conducted on the topic of school leadership, which eventually helped to conceptually shape the design of this study, strongly suggests that positive team interaction impacts outcomes. The research supports the idea that, especially in times of change or organizational stress, the levels of *Psychological Safety* within work groups is

impactful on how fast team members learn and adapt. Work groups are where *Interpersonal* work interactions occur, so this code was elemental to this category.

Motivation and Commitment. This collection consisted of the themes *Motivation/Commitment and Idlers* and *Grit*. These two codes logically fit into a common category as they address the same topic, which is *Motivation* and *Commitment*, yet approach the topic from antithetical ends. The codes are opposites. *Idlers* is a label for teachers who did not show an adequate level of motivation or commitment to their jobs in the eyes of the participants. Although some school leaders struggled with *idlers* more than others, there was consensus that this was an issue. The examples given of teachers who fit this description were far too passive in their teaching approach, not showing enough engagement and appeared to have low motivation. These staff members did not want to be noticed if possible.

On the opposite side of the behavioral spectrum, workers showing *Grit* were resilient to the new challenges and were committed to performing well their jobs. There was consensus that this was a very valuable set of attributes and appreciated greatly. In a few transcripts, school leaders described how they had to confront *idlers* with a description of *Grit* to let teachers know what the expectations were.

Students and Parents. The collection of *Students and Parents* consisted of the two codes *Children* and *Families*. These two codes belonged to one category, as they represented the perspectives regarding well-being of the customers of the school, *Students* and *Parents*. All participants considered the well-being of the *Students* to be of great importance. Teachers who were *idlers*, were reminded by school leaders that they

were there for the *Children*. The mental health of the *Students* was a concern of the participants. They considered there to be many vulnerable children who needed special consideration during the crisis, and the school leaders experienced that it took some *Students* a long time to return to school due to anxiety. Evidence of overall concern for the well-being of *Students* was a universal concern in the entire participant group.

Closely related to was concern for parents during this time, as they are important parts of the *Students*' lives and were highly important cooperators during the crisis. The majority of comments about parents were very positive, expressing helpful cooperation and good will on both sides. Most participants acknowledged that they were grateful for the help parents gave to their children during the lockdowns. The parents were critical in achieving successful outcomes. Due to this close relationship, the codes of *Students* and *Parents* were categorized together.

Teachers' and Leaders' Well-Being. The final category pertaining to RQ 6 was labelled *Teachers' and Leaders' Well-Being*. It consisted of the codes *Teachers' Well-Being* (Teachers' WB) and *Leaders' Well-Being* (Leaders' WB). When discussing the well-being of *teachers*, the participants' approach had to do with what they, as leaders, felt like they had to do to support *teachers*, and to express what they perceived were the stressors of the *teachers* at the time. A common point made was that it was impossible to generalize how teachers reacted to the situation as there was so much variation. This had to do with many personal conditions and factors. The participants felt responsible to keep teachers' stress levels down and support them by reassuring them they were doing well, and to protect the teachers from overburdensome parents.

When it came to discussing their own well-being, the participants also mentioned the role of personal conditions, fears, and personality types and how that factored into the well-being of school leaders. There is evidence that the work they were engaging in was often very different than normal and highly stressful which had the potential to impact their well-being, however none of the participants in this study reported having serious mental health issues.

The school leader participants reported that the interpersonal dynamics in their leadership groups was very important on their own well-being. Additionally, almost half of the participants engaged in professional workgroups outside of their work colleagues to talk and support one another. These are both examples of the school leaders identifying activities that promoted positive *Psychological Safety*, which the participants self-reported as being helpful and supportive of them during the crisis. Although there were many similarities when comparing the data pertaining to the well-being of teachers and the well-being of the school leader participants, it was interesting that they reported on their belonging to a supportive team or group as being significant and important whereas less than half of the participants mentioned the group belongingness as being an important condition when it came to the well-being of the teachers. Although this was ironic, it suggested yet another area in which the groundwork of well-being of these two groups was very much alike. As there were so many common personal and interpersonal dynamics relating to the well-being of both teachers and leaders, it was opted to combine the two groups into one category.

Categories of Research Question 7

The codes relating to RQ 7 which focused on the management of the open school during the COVID-19 crisis were placed into two categories. These were *Open School* and *Closed School*. In the following paragraphs, these categories will be described, and the rationale behind the synthesis of how the various codes that constitute these two collections will be explained.

Open School. The category of Open School represents the codes of *Successful Outreach*, *Out and In*, and *Reestablished*. All codes in this category represented experiences participants reported that were generally helpful to the school in supporting students' learning or ability to attend school in person during the COVID-19 crisis. The first code of *Successful Outreach* was identified in slightly less than half of the transcripts, and in all but one example, it had to do with students leaving campus to visit another location. The application of the code *Out*, were examples of schools expanding outside of their campuses to find extra space for in-person instruction, as the COVID-19 guidelines were restrictive. The code *In*, was only applied to one interview transcript in which a dance instructor visited a school thereby filling an important gap for students. *Out and In* was a code that identified the difference between students leaving campus and other people coming onto the campus grounds.

The code of *Reestablished*, was also included in this category of as it represented a successful rectification of a school-community link that had been severed or paused during the Corona virus restrictions. There were some examples of this in half of the interviews. This collection represented the experiences participants had that reported on

their schools' successful links to the community. The participants were generally enthusiastic about the partnerships that they had established and in a few cases, the links to the community members still existed at the time of the interviews. All of these specified codes described in this category of *Open School* belong together as they all represented successful outreach attempts by schools during the crisis.

Closed School. This category consisted of the two codes, *Closed* and *No Thanks*. The messaging from the government and municipalities during the COVID-19 crisis had a strong focus on distancing people from one another and cutting down the risk of infection by limiting interactions outside of one's most central friend and family groups. For this reason, it was not surprising to find out from participants, that professionally they went to great lengths to halt or greatly reduce interactions in and out of their schools.

This collection of codes labeled as *Closed School* consisted of the codes of *Closed* and *No Thanks*. The theme of these codes were related as each represented the fact that schools were encouraged to remain *Closed* to outsiders even when reopened to the students. A few participants gave some reasons as to why they would say *No Thanks* to opening their schools up to collaborations. They ranged from issues pertaining to hygienic contamination and unpleasant external learning premises, but mostly the rationale was that unless they were forced to, it was not advised.

Construction of Major Themes

In this section, a brief explanation of how the above categories were further distilled into Major Themes will be presented. As the above Categories section, the major themes will be organized systematically by Research Questions 1-7. It is worth noting

that in some cases, there were no differences between the categories of coded themes and the ultimate major themes labels assigned pertaining to each Research Question. A full and detailed exploration of these major themes, complete with evidence in the form of quotations from the transcripts is presented in the upcoming Results section.

Major Themes of RQ 1

RQ 1 addressed learning environments during the COVID-19 crisis. The six categories pertaining to RQ1, *Acceptance*, *Disruptive LE*, *Out of Touch/Fatigue*, *New Paradigm*, *Freedom/Positives* and *Vulnerable Students* could be further framed into four overarching major themes. These major themes were labelled *Challenging LE* (Challenging Learning Environments), *Positive LE* (Positive Learning Environments), *New Paradigm and Vulnerable Students*. In the following paragraphs the rationale of how the categories of RQ 1 were further framed into the major themes of RQ 1 will be explained.

Challenging LE. (Challenging Learning Environments) was an amalgamation of three different categories, *Acceptance*, *Disruptive LE*, and *Out of Touch/Fatigue* along with their respective codes. All themes incorporated in these categories, represented some type of challenge to the learning environments during the COVID-19 crisis. As the main thrust of all categories signified a threat perceived by the participants, it was logical to combine them as a Major Theme pertaining to RQ 1.

Positive LE. (Positive learning environments). This major theme of RQ1 explored evidence from the data that represented *Positive LE* (Positive Learning Environments). This major theme was a renaming of the category *Freedoms/Positives*.

As this category was an acceptable collection of codes that represented *Positive Learning Environments*, it was re-titled to improve the reach and scope of the theme for discussion purposes.

New Paradigm. This major theme is identical to the category of *New Paradigm*. This major theme began as a code, graduated to its own collection label, and remained as a major theme, due to its frequent identification of thoughts that were uniquely addressing situations that were novel, since the participants had never experienced anything like the challenges and experiences of COVID-19 crisis before. As this theme was so particular, it was not combined with any other categories.

Vulnerable Students. This major theme is also identical to the category with the same name, *Vulnerable Students*. The expressed concerns for this particular student group in the interview transcripts fell into its own thematic area. *Vulnerable students* have special needs and require special considerations. As this is so, it was decided not to attempt to interlace the codes and concepts involved with other categories to create a broader major theme.

Major Themes of RQ 2

The five categories pertaining to RQ 2, management of strategy and change processes during COVID-19 were, *Adaptation, Guidelines, Well-Being, Communication/Relationships, and Takeaways*. These categories were further synthesized down into three major themes. These themes were *Adaptation, Well-Being & Relationships as a Strategy, and Integration*. In the following paragraphs the rationale of how the categories were further framed into major themes will be presented.

Adaptation. The major theme of *Adaptation* was assembled from the two categories of *Adaptation* and *Guidelines*. The *Adaptation* process and experience were deeply influenced by the implementation of the governmental and municipal *Guidelines* during the pandemic. As these two categories were so closely related, and could be discussed in tandem, they were placed within the same major theme.

Well-Being and Relationships as a Strategy. The major theme of *Well-Being & Relationships as a Strategy* represents a combination of the two categories of *Well-Being* and *Communication/Relationships*. These two categories both dealt with the importance of human interaction, cooperation, trust, and communication when it came to the topic of strategy and change processes. As both categories of *Well-Being* and *Communication/Relationships* were so closely related, they were coupled together as a major theme.

Integration. This last major theme pertaining to RQ2 was a renaming of the category *Takeaways/Developments*. However, the name change represents a slightly different way of looking at the category. While *Takeaways/Developments*, as a label, identified new thoughts or evolved perspectives because of the lived experiences, the major theme of *Integration* is wider and perhaps more useful, as it includes the integrated changes that already had been introduced to the strategy of the school or with possibilities to introduce the strategy in the future.

Major Themes of RQ 3

The data analysis of the thematic codes pertaining to RQ 3, management of knowledge and results-based development of the school's teaching during the COVID-19

crisis, led to two main category areas that were later determined to also be appropriate labels for the major themes of the topics involved. The major themes therefore maintain the labels, *Cancelled Ok* and *Thoughts about Data*. One might consider that these two categories look like one major theme, as the opinions shared by participants regarding the acceptance and enthusiasm for cancelling exams and halting data collection is also, in fact, a *Thoughts about Data*. However, it was decided not to include *Cancelled Ok* as a *subset of Thoughts about Data*, as the specific commentary regarding results-based development to be rooted in core feelings about standardized testing and the concept of a data-driven school to be significant and was therefore given its referenced title of *Cancelled Ok*.

Major Themes of RQ 4

The data analysis of the thematic codes pertaining to RQ 4, management of capacity and competence development during the COVID-19 crisis, led to three main category areas that were later determined to also be appropriate labels for the major themes of the topics involved. The major themes therefore identified were *Competence and Capacity of Staff*, *Competence and Capacity of Leaders*, and *Competency Concerns*.

Major Themes of RQ 5

The data analysis pertaining to RQ 5 which focused on the management of subject discipline and cross-professional work during the COVID-19 crisis, led to the establishment of two categories, *Balance* and *Interaction*, which after consideration and further evaluation were deemed to be appropriate labels for the major themes of the topics involved. As the operations of schools, and delivery of instruction in schools

during the time-period in question was already a challenge for most schools, school leaders had to find a *Balance* in the expectations and demands on staff how much to initiate interactions. Therefore, discussion regarding this topic was seen as an important theme unto itself. The additional major theme of *Interaction* examined evidence which suggested that there were possibly untrained expectations held by school leaders that required staff to *Self-Initiate* networking and collaborative behaviors necessary to achieve optimal development of subject discipline or online teaching skills expertise during the crisis. The *Interaction* theme explores this dynamic was a possible area of improvement in the work conducted by school leaders at this time.

Major Themes of RQ 6

The thematic coding process pertaining to RQ 6 which focused on the management of well-being, motivation and commitment during the COVID-19 crisis led to five categories. They categories were *Interpersonal, Motivation and Commitment, Communication, Students and Parents Well-Being* and *Teachers' and Leaders' Well-Being*. The analysis of these categories led to the establishment of two major themes, *Teachers' and Leaders' Well Being* and *Students' and Parents' Well Being*.

In order to interpret and discuss the various categories within a context that clearly framed the results, it was logical and helpful to apply the categories to the two primary groups that interact at schools, the people who worked at the school, and the people who attended the school and their parents. In other words, the two groups were, school leaders and staff, and the second group consisted of students and parents. By

defining the group that is being discussed in terms of the categories pertaining to this research question, the relevant themes could be explored contextually.

Major Themes of RQ 7

The categories pertaining to RQ 7, management of the open school during the COVID-19 crisis were established as, *Open School* and *Closed School*. In the final analysis of these themes and related coded data, these labels were considered appropriate also to be the major themes pertaining to this RQ. The major themes are, *Open School* and *Closed School*. These simplistic labels represent the dichotomy of the situation at the time. The schools were either open, or they were closed. Practical and rationale justifications were offered for both decisions, to either close schools down, or open opportunities up. A thorough analysis regarding the themes pertaining to the experiences of the participants pertaining to the *Open School* and *Closed School* are presented in the Results section of this chapter.

Discrepant Data

In qualitative research it is important to consider points of view that are outside the norm, and researchers are encouraged to not simply reject participant data because it may appear to be in opposition of preconceived ideas held by the researcher or other subject data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). While respecting the potential value in outlier data, some discrepant case data were identified which showed clear differences between a teacher-leader perspective and the rest of the participants who had more defined leadership roles and no teaching responsibilities.

One of the teacher-leader participants had difficulty reporting on perspectives of leadership. P9 had clear recollections of the teaching experience during the COVID-19 outbreak, however topics directly relating to school leadership, were difficult for the subject to remember, relate to, or discuss in a meaningful way. The research verified that the individual did have a curriculum and teacher group coordination role, in addition to a teaching role during the lockdowns, however, it was difficult for this participant to discuss topics outside of the teaching sphere. When the individual did, the shared observations were vague or P9 could not remember. For example, in answering the question “In the leadership groups that you operated with, how did you address competency building?”, the response was “I have to be honest... I don’t.... so that’s... I don’t think we talked enough about that, or at least not at length, about what we were all doing to... let me take a step back.” At the end of the meandering answer, the participant reported that “If this were to happen again, I think, if nothing else, it would be important to maybe have weekly meetings... if something like a shutdown were to happen again”, but soon afterward P9 contradicted this by reporting that leadership teams did, maybe meet and address competency building. It was difficult to ascertain exactly what had happened at the participant’s school. The conversation mired, and I moved on to the next question. Although a lack of recollection or connectivity a participant has to a topic may not seem like discrepant data, when talking with the top leaders, principals, or vice-principals about the strategies of communicating with staff and carrying out their roles, much clearer perspectives were available, which made P9’s contributions on the topic of leadership appear discrepant.

Relevant Discrepant Data

Some discrepant data was meaningful. For example, in a discussion regarding how parents were often sitting-in on online lessons during the lockdowns, and how many teachers were unnerved by their presence, P9 was the only participant to express the following perspective:

This is better - to be on point, because I know these parents are here, and it's kind of a little test for oneself, you know? You let that motivate you, and for me it was more of a motivator in that sense.

P9 saw the parental presence during online instruction as a motivator for quality teaching performance. No other participant expressed precisely this thought. It was recorded/coded keeping in mind that this was an example of a participant that had been concluded to offer more of a teacher perspective than a non-teaching school leader. This data was relevant, but also discrepant and illustrated a difference between teacher-leader role and the full-time administrators who were part of the participant pool. Essentially, to attain trustworthiness in this study, my goal was to thematically code as much language data as possible from the transcripts that was congruent with the RQs, and represented genuine thoughts offered by the participants.

Data Analysis Conclusions

The analysis of the transcript data of this study yielded a total of 54 codes relating to the seven Research Questions the study was based on. After inductive analysis, this number of codes resulted in a total of 28 categories which were based upon the relationships and mutual themes within the codes that were combined to identify the

categories. The categories themselves were then also evaluated and analyzed in reference to the Research Questions of this study, resulting in a total of 17 major themes. A summary of the various codes, categories, and major themes is presented forthwith in table format to offer a broader visual display.

Tables Displaying Codes, Categories, and Major Themes

Seven data tables were created for each set of codes, categories, and major theme labels pertaining to the seven research questions. This was done to display a comprehensible, visually intelligible overview of the codes, categories, and major themes that constituted the data analysis processes and results. Note that when viewing the tables, the rows displaying the different codes are aligned with the corresponding category row that the code or codes were placed into. This alignment of rows further displays which categories were synthesized into which major themes. The analytic breakdown of all content seen in the tables was presented previously in this chapter.

Codes, Categories, and Major Themes of RQ 1

The following Table 10 presents the data codes, categories, and major themes pertaining to Research Question 1: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of learning environments”? In all, there were eleven codes that were synthesized into six categories. Finally, four major themes were identified as representative of the results of the data analysis process.

Table 10*Research Question 1 Coded Themes, Categories, and Major Themes*

Code identified	Category	Major theme
New paradigm	New paradigm	New paradigm
Vulnerable students	Vulnerable students	Vulnerable students
Downgraded instruction	Acceptance	Challenging learning environments
Exposure		
Zoom/Teams		
Difficult / frustrating	Disruptive LE	
Sabotage		
Out of touch	Out of touch / fatigue	
Fatigue		
Freedom	Freedom / positives	Positive learning environments
Positive LE		

Codes, Categories, and Major Themes of RQ 2

The following Table 11 presents the data codes, categories, and major themes pertaining to Research Question 2: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of strategy and change processes”? In all, there were nine codes that were synthesized into six categories. Finally, three major themes were identified as representative of the results of the data analysis process.

Table 11*Research Question 2 Coded Themes, Categories, and Major Themes*

Code identified	Category	Major theme
COVID was the new strategy	Adaptation	Adaptation
Paused strategy		
Ad hoc		
Guidelines	Guidelines	
No model		
Well being/psychological safety	Well-being	Well-being and relationships as a strategy
Communication/collaboration	Communication/	
Relationships	Relationships	
Takeaways / developments	Takeaways	Integration

Codes, Categories, and Major Themes of RQ 3

The following Table 12 presents the data codes, categories, and major themes pertaining to Research Question 3: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of knowledge- and results-based development of the school’s teaching”? In all, there were six codes that were synthesized into two categories. Finally, two major themes identical to the categories were identified as representative of the results of the data analysis process.

Table 12*Research Question 3 Coded Themes, Categories, and Major Themes*

Code identified	Category	Major theme
Cancelled ok	Cancelled ok	Cancelled ok
People, not data		
We do not do data		
Thoughts about data	Thoughts about data	Thoughts about data
It is hard to use data		
Types of data		

Codes, Categories, and Major Themes of RQ 4

The following Table 13 presents the data codes, categories, and major themes pertaining to Research Question 4: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of capacity and competence development”? In all, there were nine codes that were synthesized into three categories. Finally, three major themes identical to the categories were identified as representative of the results of the data analysis process.

Table 13*Research Question 4 Coded Themes, Categories and Major Themes*

Code identified	Category	Major theme
CC of staff	Competence and capacity of staff	Competence and capacity of staff
Flexibility and adaptability		
Strengths		
CC leaders	Competence and capacity of leaders	Competence and capacity of leaders
Crisis management		
IT guy		
Failures	Capacity concerns	Capacity concerns
Future		
Psychological safety		

Codes, Categories, and Major Themes of RQ 5

The following Table 14 presents the data codes, categories, and major themes pertaining to Research Question 5: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of subject discipline and cross-professional work”? In all, there were four codes that were synthesized into two categories. Finally, two major themes identical to the categories were identified as representative of the results of the data analysis process.

Table 14*Research Question 5 coded Themes, Categories, and Major Themes*

Code identified	Category	Major theme
Simplification and balance	Balance	Balance
On pause		
Missing interaction	Interaction	Interaction
Self-initiated		

Codes, Categories, and Major Themes of RQ 6

The following Table 15 presents the data codes, categories, and major themes pertaining to Research Question 6: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of well-being, motivation and commitment”? In all, there were ten codes that were synthesized into four categories. Finally, two major themes were identified as representative of the results of the data analysis process. However, it is noteworthy that although the category of *Interpersonal* is focused on the major theme of *Teachers’ and Leaders’ Well-Being*, some of the concepts involved can be applied to the well-being of students and parents. However in the context of this study, these codes and categories are primarily explored in relation to the school leadership and teaching staff of the school.

Table 15*Research Question 6 Coded Themes, Categories, and Major Themes*

Code identified	Category	Major theme
Teachers' WB	Teacher and leader WB	Teachers' and leaders' well-being
Leaders' WB		
Motivation, commitment, and	Motivation / commitment	
Idlers		
Grit		
Humanistic skills and	Interpersonal	
relationships		
Groups/Psychological safety		
Disconnectedness		
Messaging		
Children	Students and Parents	Students' and parents' well-being
Families		

Codes, Categories, and Major Themes of RQ 7

The following Table 16 presents the data codes, categories, and major themes pertaining to Research Question 7: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of the open school”? In all, there were six codes that were synthesized into two categories. Finally, two major themes identical to the categories were identified as representative of the results of the data analysis process.

Table 16

Research Question 7 Coded Themes, Categories, and Major Themes

Code identified	Category	Major theme
Successful outreach	Open school	Open school
Out and in		
Reestablished		
Closed	Closed school	Closed school
No thanks		

Results

Results of the data analysis were an outcome of the qualitative thematic coding process and analysis. The operation of grouping the thematic codes into categories, that were larger amalgamations of coded participant perceptions and experiences, was imperative in the identification of connective ideas and contexts between the represented codes. These groupings were contextualized further when assembled into the major themes and final results of the study. In this section, the results will be presented in order

of the study research questions 1-7. The major themes of each of the research questions will be presented as the findings of the study with evidence presented in the form of relevant quotations from the study participants.

RQ1 Major Themes and Results

Research Question 1: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of learning environments”? Through this question, the data analysis evolved into codes that aligned with Research Question 1.

RQ1, which focused on the management of learning environments, produced four major themes which will be framed and presented as results of the data analysis in this section. These major themes were *Challenging LE*, *Positive LE*, *New Paradigm*, and *Vulnerable Students*. Major themes of RQ1 In this section, will be discussed in terms of the categories that were merged to create them, and the importance of these ideas and themes in relation to RQ1.

Challenging LE

Challenging LE (learning environments) was an amalgamation of three different categories Acceptance, Disruptive LE, and Out of Touch/Fatigue, and their respective codes. The thematic codes that were incorporated in these categories all represented some type of challenge to the learning environments.

There were many new challenging realities that required *Acceptance* by school leaders, teachers, students, and parents during the COVID-19 crisis that the participants shared with widespread agreement. There was consensus in the data that some challenges

facing schools during the COVID-19 time were resolvable, as in the case with learning how to use Zoom/Teams, whereas other challenges presented bigger problems, such as the feeling of being *Out of Touch* with learners. “It is extremely difficult to build relationships through a screen, you do not have your finger on the pulse at all in the same way”. (P5). The usual level of interpersonal connection and reciprocity felt compromised in interactions between leaders and staff, and teachers with students.

There was also consensus in the interview data that leaders came to terms with the idea that the quality of instruction had become *Downgraded*. “We had to constantly remind them that despite the pressure of expectations, as a teacher you can’t do the same things you would normally do” (P3). In six of the twelve interviews, this issue of *Downgraded Instruction* was compromised further with the observation of *Fatigue* in the teaching/learning sphere as time went on “I would say the further along in the lockdowns we got, the harder it became for the teachers to actually keep the motivation up because it became repetitive” (P6). P4 summed it up. “It wasn’t that much fun in the long run.”

The Major Theme of *Challenging LE* included *Disruptive LEs* that recognized *Difficult or Frustrating* issues shared. All participants but one had at least one example of something that fit this code. The difficulties were generally associated with new medium of instruction “I think the vast majority have experienced that it was difficult to get students to participate” (P12). Disruptions to the welfare of staff were interpreted as disruptions to the learning–environment. “You lose your good spirit - when you have prepared something as a teacher that you cannot carry out” (P5). Many participants

identified older teachers as being vulnerable at this time. “A few of the older teachers had a hard time adapting” (P4).

Challenging LEs also included evidence of purposeful *Sabotage* in seven of the twelve interviews in the context of the online learning environments. “We had big challenges with students who un-muted and muted each other... that caused a lot of hassle, right?” (P7). Inappropriate backgrounds, kicking classmates out of groups and sideline chat conversations that were causing chaos and were various examples of what was coded as *Sabotage*. The major theme of *Challenging LE* therefore represents negative, arduous, or demanding aspects relating to RQ1, learning environments, in Danish schools during the COVID-19 crisis.

Positive Learning Environments (Positive LE)

This major theme of RQ1 explored evidence from the data that represented *Positive LE*. This major theme was a renaming of the category *Freedoms/Positives*. In all twelve interviews, there was at least one comment that was labelled as a *Positive LE*. It was positively noted that, almost every teacher at all twelve schools represented by the participants managed to teach online at least to some degree, “Teachers built up the necessary competencies, partly the technical part, but also the didactic” (P8). With this quotation, P8 emphasized that teachers at his school developed the necessary competencies over time.

This theme was mostly characterized by the reports of competence and adaptive behaviors of teaching staff. Six of the twelve participants discussed their perceptions that staff expressed feelings of excitement about the new challenges that were at hand and

enjoyed the freedom to try new ways of teaching. “There were some who thought it was super exciting and got something really positive out of it” (P1). This adaptive behavior was supported broadly by the participants. As P2 reported, “Everything was allowed”. We were on a ‘practice track’”. P1 explained his support of this *Positive LE* emphasizing trust in his teaching staff. “We must give educators their right and freedom to convey their message in the way they see fit”. I considered this mindset to have been supportive of adaptive behavior.

In all, this major theme of *Positive LE* consisted of 52 text clips of evidence, whereas *Challenging LE* contained 85 data points. Despite this apparent tendency to identify the problem areas more than cheerful or positive themes relating to RQ, the participants reported on many situations that could contribute to positive learning environments during the school lockdowns. Most of these positive comments focused on feelings of freedom, creativity, and excitement shown by teachers as they worked to create positive learning environments for their students.

New Paradigm

The major theme *New Paradigm* was carried over from the category with the same name. This topic areas stood apart from other themes and categories relating to RQ1, management of learning environments as it simply represented the plethora of comments that acknowledged that the situation brought on by COVID-19 was new, and there was no guidebook or plan. “We’re asphaltting the road while driving on it” (P3). In this quotation, P3 is expressing the idea that all school staff including the leadership were testing new systems and techniques, while implementing them at the same time. The *New*

Paradigm resulted in the fact that “A lot of time was actually spent in dialogue with the teachers and saying, ‘what can it look like?’” (P2). This theme was evident in every interview, and repeated frequently, often in reference to why problems were solved in an *Ad Hoc* fashion. *Ad Hoc* is a code that was discussed in detail in the results of RQ 2 dealing with strategy and change processes which is a topic that greatly overlaps with RQ 1, learning environments. The point with New Paradigm, was that the novelty of the situation created unplanned situations, implementation of untested techniques, and strategies. For some, this created an atmosphere of stress and unrest.

Vulnerable Students

The major theme of *Vulnerable Students* was a concept brought up by half of the participants and was inherited from a collection label of the same name related to RQ1. In hindsight, one might consider the theme of *Vulnerable Students* to lie outside of the RQ1, management of learning environments, as student populations are not the same as learning environments. However, in context, it was highly relevant for the participants to reflect on this learning groups experiences relating to the *Zoom/Teams* learning environment, which was ostensibly supposed to apply to all students.

There was evidence in six of the twelve interviews that the online learning interface was not appropriate or healthy for many vulnerable learners. “These were children who we knew would simply have a hard time spending so many hours at home, and were worried that these (children) might completely lose connection to school” (P6), The one-size-fits-all online learning environment was a cause for much concern and commentary for the school leaders as there was much speculation about which age

groups were most at risk “there was a discussion, could the little ones come back? Who had the greatest need to go back to school?” (P1). Also, in relation to learning environments, P12 brought up the awkwardness of the online lessons as being uncomfortable for self-conscious teenagers “if you are a sensitive teenager, it’s even harder, because then you couldn’t show the best version of yourself”. P12 brought this discussion further in admitting that he personally felt that he looked a little stupid as a mini talking picture on the screen during Zoom meetings. As these observations represent feelings of vulnerability in the online learning environment, *Vulnerable Students* was recognized as a unique and major theme relating to RQ1.

RQ 2 Major Themes and Results

Research Question 2: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of strategy and change processes”? Through this question, the data analysis evolved into codes that aligned with Research Question 2.

The categories that consisted of the thematic codes pertaining to RQ 2, strategies and change processes, were reduced to three major themes. These themes were *Adaptation*, *Well-Being & Relationships as a Strategy*, and *Integration*. In this section, these major themes will be discussed as to how they were constructed and as to what they represent relating to the discussion of results of the inquiry into RQ 2.

Adaptation

The major theme of *Adaptation* was assembled from the two categories *Adaptation* and *Guidelines*. The bulk of data suggest that in reference to RQ 2,

management of strategy and change process, the participants considered there to be many challenges related to the *Adaptation* process and that this *Adaptation* experience was also deeply influenced by the implementation of the governmental and municipal *Guidelines*. The data suggested strong consensus that both day-to-day management of change process was drastically narrowed due to the unique situations that presented themselves, as well as all of the schools' broader visions, missions and strategies were paused during this time.

A major component of the adaptation was the acknowledgement that *COVID was the New Strategy*. There was evidence in every transcript supporting the idea that virtually all school strategies or missions were supplanted by the management of *COVID Guidelines* or immediate plans to secure online instruction. "It was constant work getting into things and renewing guidelines and rules and frameworks, and then the method would change, and then we had to do things the other way around" (P3). As explained here by P3, one could not rest assured that once a guideline strategy was in place, it would remain. All other strategies that the school may have been working with were put on pause. The code *Paused Strategy* was evident in eight of the twelve interviews "All the good strategic ideas one had going on, you simply had to put down" (P6).

Adherence to the governmental and municipal guidelines was a formidable challenge for the school leader participants. There was evidence in ten of the transcripts, excluding the two teacher-leaders who had no duties assigned regarding enforcing them, that the *Guidelines* were demanding. "It was difficult to live up to the guidelines that came... It was dreadful" (P5). Although it must also be noted that one participant felt that

it was not difficult to conform to the guidelines and three other participants felt that their municipalities provided very good support with a hotline to call for support “Sometimes I called several times a day to ask some questions about what to do” (P3).

Although there were many guidelines to interpret and adhere to, there was *No Model* or framework for the school leader participants to follow during the crisis. “It was a situation that is in no way similar to anything we have ever seen before. So, there weren’t any models or templates you could pour over and say, ‘that’s how it should be’” (P7). P2 discussed a flower shaped change model that had previously been used by her administration group, when asked whether it could be used, P2 answered “Well, no it couldn’t”. The Adaptation process, appeared to be densely filled with guidelines, but without a big picture strategic model to use to frame the process.

The major theme of *Adaptation* also entails the concept of implementing *Ad Hoc* solutions. These were solutions that were made because they seemed like a good idea at the time. Although some *Ad Hoc* decisions and strategies might have rendered positive or neutral results, there were other times when the outcomes were negative or carried unintended consequence. “It was very trial and error in the beginning” (P12). When explaining how he had tried to simplify teams and meeting strategies P1 stated, “you wanted to be in a team, but those teams were split up... The issue was very frustrating for teachers”. The evidence of *Ad Hoc* decision making was evident in almost all interview transcripts. The steps to take to solve problems and make positive change were reported to have been unclear under the circumstances.

Well-Being and Relationships as a Strategy

The major theme of *Well-Being & Relationships as a Strategy* represents the two categories of *Well-Being* and *Communication/Relationships*. *Well-Being* and *Communication/Relationships* are perhaps not often applied as a strategy unto themselves, but in the case of the COVID-19, participant data in this study suggested that in lieu of any established strategy, model or plan, school leaders pivoted to an emphasis on *Well-Being*, and interpersonal support in the form of *Relationships as a Strategy* to be critical areas to consider in order to meet basic strategic or operational goals of the schools. “It was simply a matter of emphasizing social *Well-Being*, because if they were not thriving in this way, then they wouldn’t do well academically”, and in the case of the *Well-Being* of teachers, “We should back them up and not make any further demands” (P1). Part of the discussion of *Well-Being* introduced the concept of *Psychological Safety* into the results of the study, as eight of the twelve participants made remarks that contained evidence of one or more important components of *Psychological Safety* and its importance on the *Well-Being* of teachers “By helping each other we create common security” (P7). This comment and others that illustrate other facets of *Psychological Safety* “We celebrate mistakes here at this school” (P3), identify the importance of having the freedom to try new things and make mistakes as well as the need for positive interpersonal interaction to feel safe which is essential to *Well-Being*. Deeper commentary pertaining to *Psychological Safety* which is the conceptual framework of this study is presented in reference to RQ4 and RQ6.

Building and having productive *Relationships* was also reported as being integral in the *Well-Being* of staff. “From a management perspective... you had to really cultivate the relationship, so that there was *Well-Being* of the staff in a difficult period” (P5). This was seen as impactful on the bonds between school constituents. Finally, in relation to *Well-Being and Relationships as a Strategy*, there was evidence in nine of the twelve interviews that effective *Communication* was integral in supporting this concept. “I had to become more responsive, or what can you say, both responsive, but also articulate very clearly where we came from” (P2). Not just for *Well-Being* but for execution of the school strategies, communication was seen as important in the leadership role, “I believe that if you’re transparent in your management style and especially in crises, it will also mean that you have a staff who know they actually have to comply with this” (P5).

Integration

This last major theme pertaining to RQ2 was a renaming category of *Takeaways/Developments*. However, the name change represents a slightly different way of looking at the category. While *Takeaways/Developments*, as a label, identified new thoughts or evolved perspectives because of the lived experiences, the major theme of *Integration* is wider and perhaps more useful, as it includes the integrated changes that already had been introduced to the strategy of the school or with possibilities to introduce the strategy in the future.

One example of an integrated change is that several schools now maintain a hygiene strategy, that at the time of the interview in 2023, consisted of using one or two unisex bathroom(s) assigned to one class or grade level, this practice allegedly cuts down

on the likelihood of contagion of diseases between bathroom users, and has otherwise been reportedly helpful for keeping the bathrooms cleaner. This strategy represents a modest integrated change of practice.

Another example of an *Integration* is the recognition that children with anxieties or certain vulnerabilities sometimes cannot attend school in person, so schools have developed more informed ways of tackling these situations due to experience gained from the lockdowns, “We have invested in a robot that the student can remotely control from home, and in this way be part of the school” (P8). Another example reported by P10 had to do with seeing the positive results of altering student/teacher ratios “like this thing about having fewer adults that interact with a group of students”. In this quotation, P10 referred to a study which reportedly suggested improved instructional outcomes relating to specific scheduling approaches instituted with young children during the lockdowns.

The magnitude of the evidence of insightful new thinking or *Takeaways* that pertained to the exclusive focus on management of vision and change processes during the COVID-19 crisis was minimal. In other RQ areas, such as competency, learning environments and well-being, evidence of takeaways and integrated perspectives resulted in different and sometimes more fruitful results. Regarding strategy and change processes, the argument that the absence of a useful model to reference, guide strategy was, however, clear area of potential improvement that could be considered moving forward.

Absent from this discussion pertaining to *Integration* of lessons learned from going through the COVID-19 educational crisis, is the topic of capacity and competence

development. Although an exploration of these concepts would be appropriate here, RQ4 addresses specifically the management of capacity and competence as its exclusive focus. To avoid unnecessary confusion and repetition, learned takeaways and integrated improvement and changes relating to staff capacity and competence are reported on in detail in the RQ4 section.

RQ 3 Major Themes and Results

Research Question 3: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of knowledge- and results-based development of the school’s teaching”? Through this question, the data analysis evolved into codes that aligned with Research Question 3.

The thematic codes identified in the data that pertained to RQ3, the management of knowledge and results-based development of the school’s teaching, were placed into two main categories, *Cancelled Ok*, and *Thoughts about Data*. After the data analysis process, these labels were determined to represent satisfactory identification of the major themes regarding this research question, therefore, the same labels were adopted as the major themes. In this section these two major themes of *Cancelled Ok* and *Thoughts About Data* will be explained and the results of the exploration of the topics will be presented.

Cancelled Ok

Three thematic codes pertaining to knowledge and results-based development of the school’s teaching were placed into the major theme category of *Cancelled Ok*. They

were: *Cancelled Ok*, *People Not Data*, and *We Don't Do Data*. These codes synthesized a perspective from ten of the twelve participants that the cancellation of data collection during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years was appropriate.

One form of data that is typically collected nationwide is the 0–9 school exit exam results data. This data is accessible by the public and can be used to inform decisions about where to send one's children to school, although none of the private school participants seemed to be concerned with this. Otherwise, data collected within the Danish public school system are the results of what are called the national tests which are standardized tests which all public schools take part in, and the school leaders are strongly encouraged to analyze, and make use of the numbers for determining school strategy and improvement of instruction. "You have no idea how this has been drilled into us and what courses we have been on, regarding all sorts of things about this, what we can do, and how to use data in the good way" (P2). During the school years in question, this testing was cancelled. None of the participants reported missing this achievement data. P8, who worked at a public school reported "During corona, there was much less data, it didn't worry me... I was and am more concerned about their character and their *Well-Being*". This above quotation represented the very popular code of *People Not Data*.

There was evidence in eleven of the twelve transcripts that it was the *Well-Being* of the students that held importance, not the collection of data during this time. "Yeah, it wasn't that big of an issue...the main focus was no holding onto the students" (P4). Some public school leaders had impassioned thoughts about the standardized testing during the

stressful COVID years, “Why should we suffer under some rigid rules or exams or tests at some point when we are in a completely different world situation?” (P1).

Three private school leaders openly admitted that their schools did not analyze academic data to drive school strategy. *We Don't Do Data* was the code assigned to these comments. “Data driven? I don't know if I would say that... I don't think we're a school that is characterized by that” (P5). There were two other private school participants, who were both teacher-leaders. They reported that they did not know whether academic data was analyzed or used in any way. As said, none of the private school leaders seemed even slightly concerned with pausing data collection. P12 commented “We give grades, of course, but otherwise I don't think we spend much time on that (analysis of data) ... no”. The school leaders of public schools did not have the choice to say that *We Don't Do Data*, as this practice is a requirement for them.

Types of Data

This major theme category consisted of three codes, *Types of Data*, *Thoughts about Data*, and *It's Hard to Use Data*. The transcripts showed that other types of data, not academic data, were more routinely worked with during the COVID-19 crisis. Attendance data was used to report possible virus infections with the municipality or take other measures to minimize risk of contagion. “New things came regularly, we had to keep up with the numbers of who were infected” (P4). For some school leaders, dealing with infection rates in the schools, this was time-consuming work. “My whole holiday was spent getting calls from the infection tracer. Where I then had to return the information to our administrative manager, where children were informed if they had

been in contact with an infected person, right?” (P7). This work was tedious and reportedly monumental at times.

Additionally, student interaction with teachers, for example, turning in assignments was also expressed as being a noteworthy *Type of Data*, as an indicator that the school was operational. Three participants commented that it was important that students were completing assignments and assessments in their classes. “the teachers have their own tests (beyond the standardized tests) - in relation to the teaching they do based on all the academic goals” (P1). Confirming that this *Type of Data* was being collected by teachers regarding student progress was important to these participants.

Participants *Thoughts about Data* were highly influenced by whether the school leader worked at a private school or a public school. There was clear evidence in the interview transcripts that private school leaders were unconcerned with cancellation of the tests, as it was unimpactful for them. The private school leaders in the participant group were not representing schools that applied the standardized tests in the first place, “We do not have national tests as we are a private school, right? So, we didn’t have to worry about that” (P5), and none of the private school participants indicated that the exit exam scores from their schools is something that occupies their time. This prompted speculation on my part that the parents of students at these private schools are perhaps not using this data to apply any pressure on the school leaders. However, there could be other reasons why the publicly accessible data points regarding achievement levels of graduates could be irrelevant, such as, the overall reputation of the school, location, etc.

Not all *Thoughts about Data* were criticisms of testing or data. P10, showed concern about the fact that during the COVID-19 years, teachers overestimated the achievement levels “It was seen at the national-level that the grades for these cohorts - they have been much higher than the years where there was no COVID-19. So, schools compensated for the fact that they had had this disruption to the instructional approach, and maybe they overcompensated” (P10). P2 had received training on how apply test data in instructional leadership activities with teachers, and framed the idea this way, “If it is to make sense, we need to be able to work our way down into the data and then work with the teachers, in relation to saying, what does this mean for your practice?” (P2). Later in this conversation, P2 acknowledged that under normal circumstances carrying out instructional interventions is difficult to find time for, and not viable at all during the COVID-19 crisis.

In six of the twelve interviews, there was evidence that school leaders felt that *It is Hard to Use Data*. As P10 remarked “It can take three months to a half a year to get results back and that’s quite a long time in the children’s development”. This was a good point, considering holidays and changing staff can also postpone application of data. The data from this study suggests that analysis of academic data and interacting with teachers on shortcomings or possible areas of improvement in instructional practice is time consuming. “I know that data can help improve a school, but I haven’t seen a school really use this yet. The school leadership does not have time to do that, I don’t think” (P11). Evidence from the transcripts suggested that particularly during the school years

impacted by COVID-19, school leaders were not upset that academic achievement data was neither applied nor recorded.

RQ 4 Major Themes and Results

Research Question 4: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of capacity and competence development”? Through this question, the data analysis evolved into codes that aligned with Research Question 4.

The data analysis of the thematic codes pertaining to RQ 4, management of capacity and competence development led to three main category areas that were later determined to also be appropriate labels for the major themes of the topics involved. The major themes are *Competence and Capacity of Staff*, *Competence and Capacity of Leaders*, and *Competency Concerns*. In this section, the major themes will be described, and the results of the data analysis will be presented.

Competency and Capacity of Staff

This major theme combined the thematic codes of *CC of Staff*, *Flexibility and Adaptability* and *Strengths*. The data that informed on the topic of competence levels of the teaching staff during the crisis showed that there were many competence-related issues that had to be resolved along the way as it was a paradigm shift in terms of teaching practice. “Now teachers were to manage a classroom what was virtual instead of physical” (P10). Eleven participants had reported on difficulties or hardships pertaining to teaching online.

With minimal warning or preparation time, teachers had to shift their instructional practice from a face-to-face method to an online interface. Converting their usual teaching practice to an online experience was tough for many, “When you do a job the same way for 10 or 20 years, and then you have to do something completely differently... it could be overwhelming and very difficult” (P9). These could range from hesitation or passivity, “There are people standing in slippers over here and ballet shoes who hardly dare” (P2), to age-related competency and capacity issues, “A few of the older teachers had a hard time adapting” (P4).

Some teachers had inappropriate items in bookshelves behind them, others were insecure of the quality of their instruction “They were drained by having to keep making online teaching interesting, and this lack of contact they had with their students... some weren’t as present as they should have been, creating issues for school leadership” (P4). In the following quotation, P2 recalls a conversation with a teacher about another colleague, “‘She’s not putting in her hours. She’s invisible.’ Then I have to go in and get close to her (the teacher) and say ‘you have those hours a week ... I hear that you are not visible enough’”. Disciplining staff that is not living up to expectations is hard work for school leaders.

However, in consideration of the capacity of the teaching staff, there was substantial evidence to support the idea that the previously untapped capacity of teachers was a formidable resource that was operationalized during the COVID-19 crisis. This positively impacted the overall success of the adaptation process. In every interview, there was at least one comment that was complementary of the capacity of teaching staff

to keep instruction going despite the shift to online learning. “It’s the biggest leap we’ve ever done in in in skills in such a short time (P4). Although the competency or skill level was low at the start of the shift to online learning, once the dormant capacity of teachers was activated, schools were able to cope with the crisis. “What I experienced was a very high degree of mental pattern breaking, idea generation, joint co-creation and people asking, “How can we solve this challenge?” (P7). It was this capacity to collectively adapt that kept the schools operational and impacted the levels of success the schools experienced.

P4 reported that parents also had noticed the effort and capacity in the staff, “It was like almost a boost in the collaboration between parents and the school... they could see that we did our best and we tried. So, maybe we haven’t ever been this recognized for what we’re doing like this, ever” (P4). The emphasis in this comment is that the school staff did their best and tried. This communicated that capacity to rise to the occasion was central. The comment was not an accolade on the excellent competencies or top quality of the instructional product, but an acknowledgement of great effort.

Two themes, *Flexibility and Adaptability* and *Strengths* were identified in all interviews, sometimes explicitly and other times in more subtle ways. They were identified as components to the major theme of *CC of Staff* and were also highly related to, and shared with RQ1, management of learning environments. These codes will be described next as to how they fit into the theme of *CC of Staff*.

The participants reported that teachers showed *Flexibility and Adaptability* in the way they learned from their experiences, “I think many have learned something from the

mistakes and good things they have experienced, building new skill sets, and helping each other” (P1). There was general agreement in the interview data that the strengths were related to high levels of motivation and willingness to change practice to adjust. “There were also some who became much more creative along the way” (P2).

Evidence of *Strengths* shown were varied and were deeply related to *CC of Staff* and *Flexibility and Adaptability*. Some of the strengths highlighted pro-social behaviors to support competence and capacity of teachers. “They were helpful, they shared knowledge” (P4). It was seen as a *Strength* when participants reported on interpersonal support. “I think the teachers felt like a community beyond their professional roles” (P1). Generally, participants conveyed belief that staff cooperated and high levels of motivation positively impacted the capacity of staff to respond to the crisis in constructive ways.

Competency and Capacity of Leaders (CC of Leaders)

This major theme consisted of the codes *CC of Leaders*, *Crisis Management*, and *IT Guy*. These three areas were focused on competencies and capacities of the school leaders themselves. The first of these themes, *CC of Leaders*, primarily explored two main competency areas. The two areas were social and relational capacity and competence, and the organizational capacity, and competence of school leaders.

Participants reflected on their own capacity to motivate staff during the shift to online learning. In virtually all interviews, there was evidence of the participants discussing the need to establish strong relationships with the staff and other members of the leadership team. “The closer the relationship you have, the easier it is when you are

hit by crises like the corona crisis” (P5). More than half of the participants also remarked on the need for heightened empathy and keeping stress levels as low as possible. “It was really a balancing act – not pressing too much and then at the same time acknowledging that there’s basically something they’re afraid of” (P6). There was evidence that school leaders recognized that their teachers needed different types of support. “It was a very continuous competence development based on the individual’s needs” (P10). In reference to working with staff with a low skill set, P2 reported “our job as leaders was to get them to see it (whatever they could do) as a strength and use each other”. In this quotation, the participant went slightly further than many others by referencing encouragement of staff to use each other. The act of encouraging staff to help one another was implicit in most interviews, but not always voiced. In this example, it is not specific with whom staff should collaborate, how much, or when. Only that staff were expected to help each other.

There was evidence in more than half of the interviews, that school leaders recognized that compassion during this time was a form of competency, otherwise constituents could experience stress. Staff needed to explicitly be told that they were doing ok, and that everything was fine. “We cannot do it differently than we are doing now, and if you give your best, that’s good enough” (P6). Some participants also discussed the vulnerability of parents were also in a difficult situation “You can’t just expect parents to be both teacher and parent (P10). Finally, there were also four participants who talked about the capacity and competency of absorbing pressure or complaints from parents away from teachers, “As leadership, we had to sort of shield the teachers from the parents who were very smart, and who were very happy to advise us on

how to do it – give us their opinions” (P1). Leaders reported that these interpersonal competencies as being central to their work during the crisis.

Organizational prowess was another area that participants discussed relating to the competencies and capacities essential to their jobs during the COVID-19 crisis. In nine of the twelve transcripts, there was evidence that participants considered a commitment to clear, frequent, and timely communication with constituents to be highly important competencies, “be lightning fast with information telling ‘now we are facing this’... Yes, transparency, clarity and frequent communication...” (P5), as well as the ability to comprehend official communications and make them actionable, “I think my ability to read into ‘legal texts’ has been a co-creator of calm.” (P8). Worth noting here is that the antecedent conditions of the resources, infrastructure, culture, and leadership team at each particular school also surely impacted individual leader capacities during this time.

Not all of the participants found organization and clear communication easy. In five interviews, participants reflected on how hard it was to keep the messaging on point, “It was one of the skills that was never perfected... keeping a fluid communication all the time so that people were aware of the updates and whatnot, but then it was balancing act” (P10). P10 felt it was very unpleasant to reverse decisions that needed updating and to enforce some of the guidelines didn’t make sense, as he felt that it didn’t reflect well on perceived competence of his work.

Keeping organized during the tumultuous time of the crisis, meant that school leaders had to be committed to their work. “We knew we were shutting down shortly...then it’s probably important that we have control of that” (P10). Sometimes this

entailed working long hours. It was not unusual for the participants to show the capacity to work weekends and six school leaders talked about working over the holidays during the crisis, “We worked over the Christmas holidays. We were working over the Easter holidays...” (P2). Transcript data supported that the school leader participants considered staying organizationally on top of the governmental and municipal guidelines to be highly important.

An important theme of *Competencies and Capacities of Leaders* was the broad label of *Crisis Management*. This theme served as a collection of a wide range of situations that were unfamiliar and difficult to predict but had to be managed as they presented themselves. As the lockdowns were a completely new paradigm, every participant had some unique issue to deal with. For example, dealing with anxiety in students who had difficulties during the lockdowns, as well as reintegrating back into school, was an issue reported by ten participants. “We had 11 students in secondary who were unable to go back to school, so we had to open we open a special ‘steppingstone’ back to school” (P4), The intensified need for extra validation and support of the teachers was also seen as unique to the situation, “I really trained my therapy skills during that period” (P6). Some parents needed guidance as to how assess their children’s infection risk, which was out of school leaders’ area of expertise “Oh, he’s coughing a little... Should he stay at home?” (P12). Finding themselves remotely speculating on risks of viral contact is another example of how the school leader role had taken on a *Crisis Management* role.

Not all teachers showed the same level of fear of COVID-19 and were not all equally at risk physically. Making special allowances for some teachers could create disharmony with others “Each teacher and educator had different family relationships. Some may have lived with someone who was vulnerable, and there, we had to make a decision about how they could reconcile their private life with a working life” (P10). These were difficult *Crisis Management* situations to handle.

Finally, there were two participants who reported that at the beginning of the crisis, some constituents did not have the computer hardware necessary to implement online education. One school leader reported that it took her school months to properly equip staff and students for online instruction. “I didn’t have the equipment from my side... until we established that they (the staff and students) got their computers, but it took a few months” (P3). Once online, dealing with students who misbehaved online, or did not cooperate fully with teachers’ instructions brought on the need for new *crisis management* competencies from the participants. “There were many things that you could not foresee... annoyances that had a sabotage effect on the teaching” (P1). Overall, the data showed that the participants considered the capacity and competence for school leaders to tackle and resolve the unpredictable nature of the issues to be central to effectively manage the crisis.

The final theme to explore regarding *Competencies and Capacities of Leaders* was the concept of the *IT Guy* (Information and Technology Support Guy). This label identified a central person, or a few people on large school campuses, who had formidable importance and responsibility in helping teachers shift their instructional

practice to an online model during the COVID-19 crisis. “You know, I didn’t know the technology and didn’t know what to do, so they (the teachers) went to the IT guy” (P4). Although the thematic code *IT Guy* was only identified in six of the transcripts, it is likely that there is an *IT Guy* in more of the schools represented. This job designation was an important instructional leadership competency area that school leaders were apparently and surprising not very involved in. “I don’t know how much the teachers talked with the IT guys. I don’t really know how they ended up learning how to manage, but eventually it seemed like most teachers figured out how to get by” (P11). It struck me as remarkable that in only one transcript (P2), was there evidence of a school leader personally training a teacher on how to teach online, “I had to watch her, how she did it, and help her to set it up” (P2). This evidence of one-on-one support was the only one of its kind in this study.

Competency Concerns

This major theme explores possible areas of weakness regarding competencies and capacities within Danish 0–9 schools during the school years impacted by COVID-19. The topics involved in this major theme are *IT Guy*, which is revisited from the previous section and paragraph, as well as *Failures*, *Future*, and *Psychological Safety*. *IT Guy* will be the first area *Competency Concern* that will be discussed.

It could be argued that the training of staff for an entire school is a considerable responsibility to be placed on one or two IT savvy staff members, and perhaps unrealistic to expect that all teachers have a productive rapport with the *IT Guy*, not to mention that staff might not exactly know what help they need. P2 explained,

We had an IT specialist, who has 3 hours a week who technically is supposed to take care of teachers' needs. He could say, "You can contact me if you need something", but you don't do it if you don't exactly know what you need.

This comment appears to acknowledge the idea that leaving competency building to an IT specialist under the circumstances may not have met everyone's needs.

It could be argued that the field of online instruction as distance education is a multi-faceted and substantial enterprise, which requires more than a quick stop by a designated colleague who can help. This person may have lacked expertise in online instruction his or herself. This was identified as an outsourced area of capacity building which imaginably exposed some staff members to a less than optimal way of converting their instructional practice to an online model, which resulted in it being labeled a *Competency Concern*.

The major theme of *Competency Concerns* also included the themes of *Failures*, *Future*, and *Psychological Safety*. Each of these labels identified areas that perhaps should be taken seriously, addressed, or considered in some way. The theme of *Failures* as a *Competency Concern* will be the next to be addressed.

Evidence from ten of the twelve interview transcripts strongly supported the assertion that the quality of online instruction was *Downgraded* and *Failed* to substitute normal instruction. As was reported in relation to RQ 1, learning environments, ten of twelve participants reported that instruction was downgraded, "So the thing became about helping the staff to be open about lowering the expectations for the students" (P10). Six participants reported that motivation waned in teachers and students, and instruction

became more repetitive after a while “they simply could not keep “re-inventing the wheel” (P6), suggesting that there lacked depth and substance to the online coursework and interaction. “They were drained by having to keep making an online teaching interesting and this lack of contact they had with their students” (P5). These remarks struck me as honest assessments of the arc of implementation of the online program. Although it sounds a little severe to label this as a *Failure*, as the people involved were doing their best, there lacked capacities and competencies to optimally operate.

A stark indicator of *Failure* were the references to people leaving the educational profession due to their experiences during the crisis. In two interviews this topic came up. “There were some who are not here today. People who quit and found out they should do something else” (P3). It was unclear as to why these teachers left P3’s school, but they were encouraged to do so during the COVID-19 crisis. There was also some speculation offered by P5 that some school leaders moved away from their jobs after the crisis. “I can’t remember who wrote the article, but it was about how many school leaders had quit their jobs after corona or were on sick leave with stress”. This participant (P5) also reported on experiencing some stress during and after the crisis.

There were possible failures in the way collaboration was managed during the COVID-19 crisis. It was noteworthy that the two teacher-leader participants in this study provided evidence that was discrepant from the full-time, administrative school leaders when reporting that team collaboration with other teachers during the school closures was very limited, as organized online meetings were generally conducted with the entire staff. P11 explained,

Some of us were only meeting as a whole staff... and others with just a small grade-level group... if I remember correctly... It would be good to belong to at least 2 small groups, so you can learn from others and help other teachers too.

In P11's situation explained above, she felt that the cancellation of the smaller group interactions was not conducive to learning from colleagues. Additionally vertical subject meetings and other team configuration meetings were discontinued or very limited during the crisis, "we could have been better about communicating as a team and saying, 'hey I'm trying this' and 'have you tried this?'" (P9). This could be considered a *failure* to enable cooperative team environments to help and inspire staff to build competence. Again, these observations were shared by participants who had teaching roles at schools and very little management responsibilities. A counterargument to this concern of possible *Failure*, is that it was natural for most staff members to reach out colleagues to collaborate to learn the necessary competencies. However, imbedded in this point of view, is the expectation that all teaching staff are socially well-connected and feel *Psychologically Safe* enough to reach out to colleagues, initiate group interactions and vigorously participate.

The framework of *Psychological Safety* deals with the nature of interpersonal experiences and how they impact work performance. Therefore, it is relevant to examine the opportunities school staff had to exchange best practice know-how, and methods of teaching, interaction, and evaluation. When examining RQ 4, which dealt with the management of competencies and capacities, it struck me that in the majority of schools, the competency building process for teaching staff was not accomplished in the way that

teachers usually work, which is in cooperative and collaborative teams. As this was so, the potential apparatus of *Psychological Safety* had been removed.

The reduction of group interactions, as well as the non-participation of school leaders in the competency building process as this was often outsourced to an *IT Guy*, created a situation in which people who were not well-connected on a personal level with colleagues had to figure things out on their own. There is evidence in the interview transcripts which suggests that during the COVID-19 crisis, there may have been individuals who did not experience many opportunities to ask questions, challenge colleagues, and build competencies through interpersonal interaction.

The final theme associated with major theme of *Competency Concerns* was the code *Future*. This code fit in as it identified competencies or capacities that school leaders should perhaps be concerned with in the *Future*. All participants were directly asked whether there should be future training to further develop competencies that were learned and implemented during the COVID-19 crisis. Evidence from the transcripts revealed that seven of the twelve participants considered future training to be a good idea. “I think more people could sharpen their skills on that type of thing... so it could be a sensible goal to have the entire staff kind of refreshed on it” (P3).

In contrast with the above interest in reactivating training in the future to resolidify competencies that were learned during the COVID-19 crisis, there were three participants who did not see this as necessary. When asked whether the relevant competencies should be reinforced, P7 responded “No, we were reasonably digital before... Now I must say that they have been strengthened, so it’s become a more natural

part of our communication, right?”. Participants P4 and P8 were also relaxed about their teaching staff’s competency levels. “It’s just expected that if you’re a teacher in Denmark you’re able to use the computer you’re able to use the platforms. You can use Teams, so, it’s just, you know, basic standard package” (P4). This perspective struck me as being quite relaxed, but one might consider that some school leaders perhaps do not anticipate another shift to online learning.

Also implicit in this perspective, is the assessment that the competency levels of online teaching expertise at the schools where these participants worked at the time of the interview, would currently be sufficient to yield a quality substitute for their current face-to-face product. This could be seen as somewhat incongruent with the assessment made by ten of the twelve participants which posited that the online instruction offered during COVID-19, was not at the same level of quality as face-to-face instruction.

Because the concept of *Downgraded Instruction*, first identified in RQ1 and later revisited here in RQ 4 within the theme collection of *Failures*, ascertained a collective appraisal that what had been offered during the crisis was substandard, these three participants did not see the investment into strengthening online teaching programs to be worthwhile. It is possible that they did not think that the investment of time and energy would be necessary due to the unlikelihood of future lockdowns, or it might mean that they evaluated the quality of the potential educational product to be good enough to get past a temporary set of future lockdowns. There could also be other elements that impact these participants’ reasoning, such as a lack of enthusiasm to revisit a closed chapter in the history of their schools.

However, in three participant transcripts there was evidence of support for the idea of re-introducing online instruction with older students in limited amounts. “I actually think that we could use this distance learning for something more. So, for example, we talk a lot about the fact that the children have too many hours of instruction - especially in secondary school” (P12). P10 suggested this idea in another way. “You could have, perhaps, just 5% or 10% of your schooling experienced virtually. We have not gotten started on that”. Although there was interest in this idea, none of the participants in this study implement any form of distance instruction besides in individual cases with vulnerable children.

RQ 5 Major Themes and Results

Research Question 5: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of subject discipline and cross-professional work”? Through this question, the data analysis evolved into codes that aligned with Research Question 5.

Data analysis relating to RQ 5 which focused on the management of subject discipline and cross-professional work yielded two major themes. These major themes were *Balance* and *Interaction*. In the following paragraphs, the results of the data analysis of these two major themes will be presented.

Balance

The major theme collection of *Balance* consisted of two themes, *Simplification and Balance* and *On Pause*. There was overlap between these two themes. *Simplification and Balance* represented the idea that the amount of collaborative work in the form of

meeting interactions that staff were expected to take part in, had to be reduced so as not to overburden staff with collaborative interactions and to keep the work demands balanced. “You had to kind of scale down – kind of like try to accommodate or “make room” for them and try to accept the issues at hand” (P4). The interactions referred to here could be grade level meetings, class meetings, vertical/subject meetings, interdisciplinary meetings and specialized cohort meetings. “It was not there that collaboration was prioritized” (P5). The simplification of demands resulted in a culling of small group interactions between teaching staff.

In eight interviews, participants reported that small team meetings that were previously in place had been placed *On Pause* due to the perspective that prioritizations had to be made. “So interdisciplinary group meetings they also got a bit paused ... because the whole vision/picture was developmental, it was put on hold, right? (P5). The theme *On Pause*, was the label chosen for the action taken to disengage from this type of collaborative work. It implied that the collaborative activities would return, but at that time, expectations to meet in various group constellations had been suspended. “Interdisciplinary groups and teams and things like that, they were simply downgraded” (P3). As this research question explores subject discipline and cross-professional work, it was concluded that there was very little development in these particular areas due to the fact that the majority of the schools represented by participants in this study reported that work in these areas was *On Pause*.

Interaction

The major theme category of *Interaction* consisted of two thematic codes, *Missing Interaction* and *Self-Initiate*. Two of the teacher-leader participants reported that they had *Missed Interaction* with their colleagues during the lockdowns. “I don’t think we talked enough about, or at least not at length of about what we were all doing” (P9). Although both teacher-leader participants that voiced this sentiment reported that meetings did occur with the entire staff, smaller group sessions were reportedly kept at a minimum or did not occur at all. “We didn’t always know what other teams were experiencing” (P11). It is acknowledged that only two participants voiced this concern, however considering that the teacher-leader designation was included in the participant hierarchy tier group in order to triangulate findings, this discrepant point of view was considered to be important to identify and include in the results pertaining to this research question.

Finally, as the researcher’s intention is to adequately frame the context of findings, it was deemed important to discuss the theme *Self-Initiate*. Although this theme was only identified in three interviews, the unspoken mind-set behind supporting staff to *Self-Initiate* professional interaction is arguably strong in the participant group. As P6 said “We shut these teams down for a period of time and the sometimes we said, “if you need some sparring, then we can establish it when the schedule was flexible”. Although the critical reader might consider this comment not strongly support group learning, as it relies on teachers themselves to petition the opportunity to interact, there might be cultural reasons as to why this approach might be seen as being respectful.

To better understand the role of Danish 0–9 school leaders in schools, it is relevant to consider the work culture in place. P12 commented on it being “an old Danish virtue” to allow teachers to do things their own way and have the freedom to decide on their method of instruction. Giving staff the space and permission to *Self-Initiate* their collaborations and be owners of their own learning process did allow them to navigate the enterprise in the way they saw fit. “There were some teachers who met, let’s say in pairs, and maybe sat down together. But it worked... I’d say it worked” (P1). However, there was evidence that many of these self-initiated sessions were not taking place “I have the impression that the interdisciplinary teams, they were not so self-driving during that period” (P5). In this quotation, P5 is openly sharing that not all collaborative groups were formally meeting during this chaotic time.

It could also be argued that if one wanted to create a strong staff over time, the process of natural selection would eventually keep the staff members who were most resourceful, and best at self-initiating professional development. It could be suggested that this profile of teacher would remain, whereas staff that required coddling or leader-initiated structures for development would eventually leave. I take the position that leadership should not create a natural-selection type dynamic within school staff groups, and that school leaders should support and create opportunities for staff to support one another in ways that improve interpersonal interactions and high levels of *Psychological Safety* to improve group and organizational outcomes. The *Self-Initiate* method of strengthening subject discipline and cross-professional work does not appear to be supportive of these objectives.

RQ 6 Major Themes and Results

Research Question 6: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of well-being, motivation and commitment”? Through this question, the data analysis evolved into codes that aligned with Research Question 6.

The five categories pertaining to RQ 6 were distilled down further into two major themes. These themes were *Teachers’ and Leaders’ Well Being* and *Students’ and Parents’ Well Being*. The many different codes used to describe well-being, motivation and commitment which are the focus of RQ 6, were either applied to the *Teachers and Leaders* constituent group or the *Students and Parents* constituent group.

Teachers’ and Leaders’ Well-Being

The *Well-Being* of teachers and leaders both faced stressors during the COVID-19 crisis. In this presentation of the results of the findings of the data analysis regarding this topic, the *Well-Being*, motivation and commitment of both groups will be presented as part of a common major theme. To start with, the *Well-Being* motivation and commitment of teachers will be discussed, followed by a discussion of the *Well-Being* motivation and commitment of school leaders. Results which link features between the two groups, showing common characteristics and points to consider concerning both teachers and school leaders will finally be presented.

The perceptions of the participants on the *Well-Being* of teachers and what they, as school leaders, could do to improve, or stabilize *Well-Being* was seen as a primary concern for all participants. “Listening to and supporting teachers was my role” (P5).

Although there was broad support for *Well-Being*, the needs of teachers were not the same. “There are some employees who reacted very, very differently” (P2). Humanistic skills, relationship building skills, and good communication competencies were reportedly called upon.

In nine transcripts there was evidence supporting the idea that clear communication on all matters was seen as essential to maintaining positive relationships with teaching staff, “I believe that you have to be transparent in your management style - especially in a crisis” (P5). In addition to this, some participants recalled keeping in mind an upbeat and warm tone in their communication style “Every single morning when school started, I sent an e-mail out to my employees, wishing them a good day, and said that I was right here” (P3). In this comment, P3 communicated clearly that she was available to her staff throughout the day. Additionally informing staff of guideline changes that were clear and comprehensible was seen as supporting *Well-Being*. “I think my ability to read into ‘legal texts’ has been a co-creator of calm” (P8). In this comment P8 acknowledged himself for having this competency.

In eleven transcripts, evidence of a humanistic approach, or relationship building approach was documented. “When you work in management, it’s a lot about building good relationships with your employees” (P5). Evidence from six study participants, suggested that many teachers uncharacteristically required frequent reassurance that their performance was acceptable, “I think we had a very important role as leaders to go in and say, ‘everything is ok, and everything is new, and will do it together’” (P2). In this quotation, P2 expressed a humanistic approach to handling a staff member to ease

anxiety. P6 recalled asking a teacher “How is your class now, and how are you?”. This focus on interpersonal contact was strongly represented in virtually all interviews. “They were told not to carry any burden alone and burn up inside with something and get sad” (P1). In this comment P1 showed a high degree of commitment to support his staff. This was considered this a good example of a humanistic approach that supports relationships.

It was not always easy for school leaders to know what to do to increase the well-being of teachers but there was consensus in the interviews that they wanted to positively impact their teaching staff. As was reported earlier in reference to RQ 2, strategy and change processes, many participants considered the focus on the enhancement of *Well-Being* in the staff group, as a change-process strategy which they could apply to support the continued successful operation of their schools in lieu of another model or strategy framework which did not exist.

Four participants explicitly stated that to support *Teachers’ Well-Being*, they needed to protect them from parents, “we had some over the top active parents who participate and suggested ‘why don’t you do this?’ or ‘could you explain this in another way?’ giving what they thought was very valuable feedback to teachers. It wasn’t always” (P4). These participants considered this role of absorbing the parental feedback to be essential in their work during the COVID-19 crisis.

Despite the commitment to keep staff well cared for and motivated, there were staff who appeared very unmotivated and lacked commitment to their work. This was concerning to school leaders who, in many cases had to confront them. In eight of the twelve interviews there was evidence referencing staff who showed an absence of

motivation and commitment. Sometimes this appeared as general passivity, “I simply don’t have the technical knowledge to be creative... I can’t do anything but do this” (P2), to other situations in which a teacher doesn’t seem engaged. “There is always someone who tries to fly a little under the radar” (P7). Four participants reported on times when they had to intervene “It became apparent that there were some who are cutting corners. They could probably get away with this in the beginning. It was a challenge as a leader to get a hold of them” (P2). Although confronting staff is part of the job of a school leader, working out who was at fault ““Why were you only on for 30 minutes?’ ‘I was only on 30 minutes because my wife needed me to stand with the baby’” (P5), and whether a transgression or teaching snafu was justified or not, likely added stress to school leaders’ lives.

Parallel to their work in supporting their staff during the COVID-19 crisis, school leaders themselves had to support their own personal *Well-Being*. There was evidence in the transcript data of challenges and circumstances that were stressors that impacted the well-being of school leaders. These stressors and impacts varied from person to person depending on the participants’ personal situation. P10, who had to send his kids to school because he was required to go to work during the lockdowns reported, “that was quite hard on me over time. Sometimes I was like ‘oh man! Now I am obliged to leave for work when I have a home base that needs me!’” (P10). This same participant’s boss, who was a principal had a compromised health situation which further destabilized his workplace.

In the case of more than half of the participants, the responsibility of managing the governmental and municipal guidelines were the source of stress. P5 reflected,

There were a lot of guidelines from the Ministry of Education - you had to make sure you get established quickly out in the schools, so it was a very stressful time where you also spent a lot of your free time.

In the above example P5 was recalling working out issues on weekends. Four participants remarked about working over holidays and on weekends, as well as getting updates from the Ministry or Municipality with little time to implement the new rules. “I mean– you can also get saturated with information sometimes - when you say I can’t handle any more information or updates now” (P10).

Like teachers, school leaders have different personalities and reacted differently, P6 reported on hearing how other school leaders her network coped with the added stress, “I’ve heard that other school leaders who have been mega pressured in the situation, actually didn’t want to show up for work themselves” (P6). P5 had a similar comment, “I know that in my network some of their management crew has gotten some coaching afterwards to kind of pick them up” (P5). Although none of the participants in this study reported any serious trauma, the majority discussed challenges that I considered to be impactful on their *Well-Being* due to the intensity of the events. P5 went on to say:

It’s something that has left such a deep mark, I think, for everyone who works in a school, because you’ve put in an effort that has been so extraordinarily great... and it also affects your private life. It was difficult because you didn’t know how long it would last”

The uncertainty of how long school leaders were to endure the lockdowns and frequent changes to guidelines, was personally and professionally challenging.

However, not all participants reported being stressed or upset by the carrying out their work during the crisis. “I didn’t think it was fun. I thought it was annoying and stressful, but I didn’t get stressed by it” (P7). This quotation was interesting as it delineated finding a situation as stressful without personally getting stressed by it. This comment struck me as a good example of *Grit*, which was code that was associated to both teachers and leaders regarding *Well-Being* motivation and commitment. Evidence of *Grit*, as the attribute of being resilient and able to get the job done was found in seven interviews. It was typically brought up when speaking about the characteristic regarding teaching staff, however, support for this attribute could also explain some participants’ reactions to questions about their own personal *Well-Being* “it was like a thing you just do there’s no point sitting down and ranting about it” (P1). With this comment, P1 communicated that he considered dealing with adversity to be part of his job.

School leaders were not alone as they carried out their work duties. They belonged to management teams. There was evidence in ten of the twelve interviews that their leadership groups worked in unison. “During that time, it was close collaboration in management” (P3). The nature of the relationship between the leadership team was highly important and impactful on the participants’ *Well-Being* motivation and commitment. “We in management team, at the time we were three managers... thank goodness we had a good relationship with one another” (P10). The nature of the

relationship that school leaders had to one another in their teams was important and meaningful to their *Well-Being*.

In two different interviews, the participants were part of a very small management team of two people, a vice principal and the principal. Both participants remarked on this as being difficult “But when you work at a small school – like here where we have a headmaster, a vice-principal (me) and a janitor, there was no room at all for people to take care of each other during that period” (P5). In the case of this participant, she sought interpersonal collaboration outside of her management team as she participated in group meetings with other school leaders from other schools. P5 shared,

We had weekly meetings where we met online for a half an hour, where we could guide each other. I was interested to hear about what they did at schools that were the same size as this one, because the smaller schools were far more challenged.

There were three participants who reported on being part of external collaborative groups such as this one described. As a result of this need or desire to connect with a group of other people who can help lend support, whether in the leadership team that they worked in, or whether the individual connected with others outside of their workplace, suggests to the researcher that the importance of trusted group support with respectful interaction was impactful to school leaders’ levels of *Well-Being*, motivation, and commitment. The concept of *Psychological Safety*, in which interpersonal interactions are supported by a mutual trust and acceptance, but openness to speak directly without fear, could describe the type of group dynamic that would be effective in supporting school leaders through the chaotic time of the COVID-19 crisis.

The transcript data documented a consensus that strong relationships and humanistic interaction were helpful to strengthen well-being, motivation, and commitment in both teachers and school leaders during the crisis. In five of the twelve interviews, there was evidence that these participants understood the main underpinnings of how *Psychological Safety* was integral to the outcomes of work groups or team interactions, and that these collaborations were significant to supporting well-being and motivation they personally experienced, as well as the experience of staff. Although four other participants did not express a description of *Psychological Safety* which included reference to group interactions, they mentioned elements of the concept, such as feeling free to ask naïve questions and supporting feelings of security.

When asked about how staff addressed problems, P7 answered, “by helping each other, that is, to create common security – that is, psychological security in the situation” (P7). P1 captured this thought in a different way when he reported, “You suddenly find that you are all in a common situation and have to solve it” (P1). Finding people in a common situation to collaborate with is important. As a result of the data analysis, it was concluded that group interactions which included positive levels of *Psychological Safety* were important in supporting the *Well-Being*, motivation and commitment of teachers, but also of the leaders themselves during the crisis, as they also reported about the importance of their collaboration in management teams, or in the case of three school leaders, their participation in work groups outside of their organization.

Congruent with the above observations, two of the three teacher-leader participants expressed disappointment by the lack of opportunities for team collaboration

during the lockdowns. “I don’t think we talked enough about, or at least not a length about what we were all doing” (P9). Small group or team meetings were reported by the majority of participants to have been kept at a minimum, “Some of us were only meeting as a whole staff and others with just small grade-level groups... it would be good to belong to at least two small groups, so you can learn from others” (P11). Interestingly, this observation that collaborative work had been paused instead of facilitated, was supported by the majority of the school leader participants in the exploration of RQ 5, management of subject discipline and cross-professional work, when they explained the need to keep meetings at a minimum to enhance *Well-Being*.

Students’ and Parents’ Well-Being

Evidence of the participants’ concern for the *Well-Being* of students was coded in all interviews. Although the focus of the study was on management and leadership, the references to how the *Well-Being* of children was impacted during the COVID-19 crisis were reoccurring. “All employees at the school are there for the sake of the children” (P1). The *Well-Being* of everyone had to fit together, “What can we create together that creates well-being for the children and that is tolerable for us?” (P7). The work accomplished with interpersonal relationships and communication of expectations and guidelines with staff and parents was with the goal in mind to provide students with as good an experience as could be hoped for under the circumstances.

In eleven interviews, there was evidence of concern for the children based on their grade levels, and other factors that made them vulnerable. “These were children who we knew would have a hard time spending so many hours at home and were worried that

they might completely lose connection to the school...” (P6). The majority of participants mentioned that they considered the younger students to be in this vulnerable category.

“There was a discussion, could the little ones come back? Who had the greatest need to go back to school?” (P1). P4 offered a slightly mischievous comment that I perceived as heartfelt:

Children are not meant to be by themselves. They are social beings... it’s easy to say now, but it would have been better to have more infected children than having so many lonely children for such a long period of time.

As no one knew the dangers involved at the time, it was impossible to gauge the risk factors. All participants had to follow the governmental and municipal guidelines.

However, consequences of the crisis on children after the lockdowns were specifically reported by six of the twelve participants who discussed their experiences with reintegration process. “After the pandemic, there has been a larger group of children whose anxiety has increased, as if social skills had not been allowed to develop as they should” (P7). P3 also discussed the phenomenon in terms of social development, “there has been a pool of them after lockdowns, because they had difficulties entering into social relationships again” (P3). This level of school reintegration difficulties surprised me. “It was almost an explosion in the number of students who couldn’t go to school after corona” (P4). The issue had such an impact, that some schools where the study participants worked currently had or were investing in robots that students could control at home in order to virtually attend class.

As reported in RQ 1, management of learning environments, ten out of twelve participants reported that they felt *Out Of Touch* with others. teachers felt that their relationships with students had loosened, and they really had very little idea how they were doing. P1 commented that his teachers were “not really feeling connected to them at home”. And when teaching, “there was no feedback, that you talked into a vacuum, right? (P2) teachers did not feel like the depth of the interaction was adequate. P12 brought up the awkwardness of participating in online classes, “if you’re a sensitive teenager, it’s even harder because then you couldn’t show the best version of yourself” (P12). This might have something to do with the problems all schools had with kids who had their cameras off. P10 made the observation:

I think that besides not knowing who was actually behind a screen, and not quite knowing how the children are doing mentally... you didn’t really know what they were up to while they were at home. There were a lot of unknowns.

This last comment by P10 did an effective job in communicating a consensus opinion throughout the participant group.

As this feeling of *Disconnectedness* was present in all relationships at the school, very little could be said for certain by the participants about the day-to-day *Well-Being* of children and their families. Little was known about the average experience, as only the extreme situations in which a constituent acted out in some way either negatively or positively were noticed by the participants. Although virtually all participants reported on some odd experience with either a parent or student, almost all participants were very thankful for the support of the parents. “There was huge goodwill among the parents, and

motivation for this whole project to be possible” (P7), and showed understanding of the difficulties parents were facing, “having to work from home or losing their job. That was also a reality” (P4). It was also noted by a few participants that they perceived the pressure on parents to participate in the schoolwork had been excessive, “You can’t get just expect parents to be both teacher and parent. They also have to be at work. It became too much” (P10). The participants in this study reported that, much like the lives of the students, they perceived the parents’ *Well-Being*, motivation, and commitment varied from family to family.

RQ 7 Major Themes and Results

Research Question 7: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of the open school”? Through this question, the data analysis evolved into codes that aligned with Research Question 7.

The following section will present the results of the data analysis of RQ 7, management of the open school. The thematic codes identified in the data that pertained to RQ7 were placed into two categories, *Open School* and *Closed School*. After the data analysis process, these theme categories containing related themes were determined to represent appropriate identification of the major themes regarding this research question. In this section, the two major themes of *Open School* and *Closed School* will be explained and the results of the analysis of the topics will be presented.

For clarification, the term, open school, refers to the practice of mobilizing resources of the community for learning opportunities for school students. This could

mean establishing formal or informal partnerships with other schools, clubs, volunteers, businesses, etc., to bring new environments and experiences into the school or to enable students to go outside of their school to enrich their educational experience (UVM, 2015, 2024).

When asking participants about collaborations they had with outside associations leading up to, and during the lockdowns, many participants looked perplexed by the question. Half of the participants instantly said that that kind of thing was stopped and very counter-productive to their efforts at that time. “I remember it as if the open school thing was shut down” (P10). This reaction was not unexpected, as within the context of the COVID-19 situation, in-person interaction was strongly dissuaded, and opening up the school, or students to new experiences went against school guidelines. Comments this group of participants made about not seeking collaboration were coded as either *Closed*, or *No Thanks*.

Closed School

Five participants reported that their school was completely closed to interactions with any facility, associations, or person outside of the immediate school community. “The school did have some agreements with outside associations but all of that was stopped of course during COVID-19” (P11). Reasons as to why they would say *No Thanks* to opening their schools up to collaborations with outside entities was sometimes regarding issues pertaining to hygienic contamination, “I know there have been problems in other places in terms of cleaning and how many people came into the building and all these things. We didn’t have that” (P5). Unpleasant external learning premises was also

the cause for one school to say *No Thanks* to an opportunity to use an external facility. “Some kids were sent over to another school which they thought was worse than ours... the premises were not so good” (P1). However, mostly the rationale for keeping things closed, was that was not advised.

Open School

The major theme of *Open School* represented the codes pertaining to *Successful Outreach attempts* and represented experiences participants reported that were generally helpful to the school in supporting students’ learning or ability to attend school in person. Despite the general halt put on interactions with the outside world during the COVID-19 crisis, four participants reported on successful collaborations enabling students to leave campus to visit another location.

A goal for three schools that did not have very much extra internal space on campus, was to find local facilities where classes could be held, as the guidelines were often strict regarding the number of children that could be clustered per square meter. P1 established a cooperation with a local sports facility with large amounts of space. “We got a good cooperation with them... we got the premises for ourselves”. Another example of going expanding out was shared by P12 regarding a nearby hotel “They had vacant lecture rooms... we paid very little money for two large rooms” (P12).

Two other examples of *Successful Outreach*, despite the strict regulations were *Open School* collaborations that had previously been in place, and although temporarily paused and modified slightly, these collaborations continued during much of the crisis. P2’s school had an agreement with a municipal waste management plant “it ended up

getting up and running in a customized version. It wasn't at first, but it did happen to some degree" (P2). P4's school kept a STEM science program which included eighth and ninth graders visiting a local high school operational during the crisis as well "we kept that collaboration going" (P4).

In only one example from this participant group did an outside entity come onto a school campus to benefit school children. Upon finding out that the local dance studio could not operate due to the guidelines, P3 invited the dance teacher to carry out the lessons on campus, as she explained:

I made our schoolyard available and lent a key to the dance instructor and said "Try our schoolyard. Use our ball cage so you can have some distance between the kids, and then you can have an outdoor dance school."

P4's school also involved some other local businesses in physical education activities in which the children had to check in different places. This was also an example of a Successful Outreach effort that strengthened connections between P4's school and the local community.

Also relevant to the major theme of Open School was evidence in six of the twelve interviews, that *Open School* collaborations that had been discontinued were later *Reestablished*. School-community links that had been severed or paused during the Corona virus restrictions were fortunately able to be reconnected after the crisis had passed. "Those agreements went back to normal after COVID" (P9). These successful links to the community were seen as valuable, however some were not quickly *Reestablished*. "It was not out of bad will, but we got into some other routines. It has

come back now, but it took a long time to get back to that cooperation” (P6). Generally, the relevant participants were enthusiastic about the partnerships that they had established and, in a few cases, the links to the community members that were created still existed at the time of the interviews.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

In this section the implementation and/or adjustments to strategies pertaining to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability will be discussed. The discussions will briefly outline what was stated in Chapter 3 pertaining to these topics and will then be addressed in terms of what happened in the implementation of said strategies. Any deviations from the plans will be addressed.

Credibility

There were two main strategies planned and implemented to achieve credibility in this study. The first strategy related to the participant selection strategy of choosing school leaders with different hierarchical ranks and leadership roles in schools. There were three top leaders who oversaw many sections of schools, three school principals, three vice-principals and finally, three teacher/leaders who were selected. The rationale behind this was to collect data from participants who had different perspectives due to their different roles and responsibilities. This strategy was carried out exactly as planned and was effective in triangulating findings and to clearly identify commonalities and differences in the types of experiences from the different perspectives of the participants. The most evident contrasts in perspectives were in comparing the data collected from the teacher-leaders to the full-time school leaders, however, by collecting data from the

different hierarchical ranks of school leadership, the data became more nuanced and complete.

The second way of establishing credibility in this study was by member checking. The objective of collecting data was to clearly understand the perspectives and experiences of the contributing participants. Using member checks was a way to double check with the participants after the interviews that the transcript data was correct. This procedure was carried out as planned. Although in a few cases, there was a small amount of correspondence between the participants myself after the completion of the interviews, none of the participants made corrections to the transcription document, despite the invitation to do so. The fact that there were no corrections made and returned to the researcher could signify that the transcriptions were very complete and correct, which was the message that was received from a few participants. Or the lack of corrections or clarifications could mean that the participants did not want to use their time on that activity. There may be other unknown reasons why the member check process did not yield more participation.

Transferability

To ensure that the findings of this study could be replicated, it was important that the methodology and the types of recursive and reflective thought on the findings of this study were clear those who read it. The planned method to achieve this was by taking an iterative approach. This approach applied to both the data collection process as well as the data analysis process. The semi-structured, in-depth nature of the interviews was compatible with a thick descriptive interview objective. Although the observations made

regarding the improvements made to the interview techniques are found in the research journal, I documented reflective thought regularly when reporting on the results. Rich contextual information regarding the many direct quotations were included in the data results and described the thematic interpretations with care to give the reader a clear picture of what was being asked as well as the areas of inquiry which could be explored in more detail.

Dependability

To explain the subjective processes and analyses applied during the study, and audit trail was compiled which can be made available. The audit trail, which is a collection of contextual, observational, and otherwise thick descriptions in the form of detailed field notes, and reflection journals, etc. provide reflective descriptions and explanations of how decisions were made during this study. The dependability of the study is strengthened by the audit trail, as other scholars can reconstruct the study with the same process. I am confident that in doing so, very similar results will be arrived upon.

Confirmability

As was planned prior to the start of the data collection process, an audit trail was recorded, and consists of process oriented and reflective field notes and memos that provide detailed contextual descriptions and comments concerning the iterative process applied to the decision-making rationale and processes throughout the collection of the data, as well as the experience of the thematic coding process and interpretation of the

data. Readers or other researchers will be able to examine the audit trail to understand the rationale for the decisions that were made.

By applying the different approaches of interviewing hierarchical subsets of the participant group to triangulate findings, using member checks, including thick descriptions with plentiful quotations from the transcripts, and reflexive thought, the subjective nature of my analysis will be honestly represented so that other critical scholars will be clear about the meanings of the result data. In this way, confirmability in the work that is conducted has been achieved.

Summary

The research questions of this study were designed to identify and understand Danish 0–9 school leaders' perspectives regarding the RQ topics. Answers to the research questions are, therefore, the detailed descriptions of these important perspectives and experiences. The following summaries are constructed from the descriptions of the results of the study. As each RQ inquired about the perceptions of school leaders, this summary is an exploration of the most frequently shared collective perceptions. The summaries also emphasized common experiences, similar mutual beliefs, observed behaviors, and experiences, as well as other noteworthy areas considered to be important.

Summary of Research Question 1

The Research Question One associated with this study, with the articulated purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the Danish 0–9 school leader experiences and perceptions of role of school leadership during the shift from face-to-face to online

learning during the 2020-2021 COVID-19 pandemic as guided by the seven fields of school leadership, was offered as:

Research Question 1: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of learning environments”?

Participants’ perspectives pertaining to Research Question 1, were as follows: They perceived many serious challenges to the learning environments during the COVID-19 crisis. Some of the challenges were incidental and could be resolved, and others were disruptive and impacted school leaders’ and teachers’ abilities to secure quality learning environments over an extended period of time, resulting in instructional practices and learning outcomes that participants generally considered to have been of poorer quality than under normal teaching conditions.

However, there were also signs of positive learning environments due to the high capacity levels of staff manifested in energetic and enthusiastic adaptive behaviors which some leaders reported as lending support to the policy of giving staff ample freedom to be creative. All participants referred to how many teachers felt that the novel circumstances were exciting, and they enjoyed the freedom to explore new teaching methods. It had to be acknowledged that, whether the teaching product was good or bad, almost all school leaders and teaching staff were able to learn many new skills in a short amount of time to adopt the new instructional and communication interfaces and keep schools open and students engaged.

Participants shared that the *New Paradigm* of the situation meant that learning environments were created, implemented, and refined with virtually no time to assess their levels of effectiveness. This created an atmosphere of uncertainty and disorder in most of the schools represented, which impacted the learning environments as there was no clear agreed upon guidance as to how the teaching staff should move their instructional practice online. The *New Paradigm* theme was evidenced in every interview more than once.

Finally, because all instruction was designated to happen online, *Vulnerable Students* were of great concern for many school leaders. Participants shared that they saw the need to prioritize which grade levels needed help the most, as well as which vulnerable individuals were at risk. This was a difficult job, but necessary in order to help and accommodate the needs these learners as best as they could.

Summary of Research Question 2

The Research Question Two associated with this study, with the articulated purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the Danish 0–9 school leader experiences and perceptions of role of school leadership during the shift from face-to-face to online learning during the 2020-2021 COVID-19 pandemic as guided by the seven fields of school leadership, was offered as:

Research Question 2: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of strategy and change processes”?

The summary of the perspectives of participants in response to RQ 2 addressed the challenges of charting a school strategy, managing change-processes, as well as the immediate adaptation process the school leaders were confronted with during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants reported that coping with the demands of the crisis became the primary strategic focus for school leaders. The guidelines were numerous and difficult to follow and had an eclipsing effect on all other strategic initiatives that schools may have been previously working on. All previous strategic initiatives or school missions were at once paused strategies, which participants reported as being a necessary action to take, to channel the necessary resources, time, and energy to the basic operation of the school and adherence to the governmental and municipal guidelines.

Unanimously reported by the participants of this study was that there was no model accessible to school leaders that could be used to guide their efforts as they responded to the crisis. Many of the strategic actions taken during this time were ad hoc decisions that sometimes had unintended consequences. This was reported on by participants as being almost unavoidable as school leaders were forced to make decisions and operate with little foresight of new developments to come or how staff might interpret actions taken, like splitting up work teams, or showing up at teachers' houses with freshly baked buns, which although it was a friendly gesture, was interpreted as an intrusion of privacy by teachers of one of the school leader participants.

In lieu of a coherent strategy to use besides striving to meet guideline restrictions, most participants in this study discussed the focus on well-being and relationships as a strategy. This idea was that if people were generally feeling good, then things would

work out. Emphasizing well-being in the student and teacher groups and lowering stress levels were seen as constructive in keeping the schools operational. Components of psychological safety were visible in most of the transcripts acknowledging the importance of being able to ask what might be perceived as stupid questions, and the importance of trust between group members.

Relationships were discussed in most of the interviews as being critical to the well-being and communication between school leaders and staff. Responsiveness to the needs of the staff, transparency, and clarity in messaging were reported as particular areas which the participants focused on, to secure cooperation and compliance from teaching staff. The main idea conveyed was that carrying out strategies or change processes is easier when there are strong relationship bonds between leaders and staff and effective communication to secure clarity and buy-in.

Finally, evidence from participants on the integration of what was learned about strategy and change processes from the COVID-19 educational crisis into current or future practice, were scarce from my perspective. However, there were some practical ideas regarding scheduling and hygienic practices that were integrated into practice, and there was also some evidence of ways to use technology to better accommodate students who cannot come to school in person for different reasons that had been developed with experience gained from the crisis.

Summary of Research Question 3

The Research Question Three associated with this study, with the articulated purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the Danish 0–9 school leader experiences

and perceptions of role of school leadership during the shift from face-to-face to online learning during the 2020-2021 COVID-19 pandemic as guided by the seven fields of school leadership, was offered as:

Research Question 3: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of knowledge- and results-based development of the school’s teaching”?

There was virtually unanimous support for the cancellation of the exit exams and standardized tests during the COVID-19 years, and only one participant (P10) who felt the loss of data created a gap resulting in overly charitable grading practices during the crisis. Although there was not overwhelming enthusiasm for the concept of the data-driven school, the nature of discussion on the topic often did not identify the practice as neither wholly good nor completely bad. The philosophical discussions that emerged from the discussion of whether to, or how to use data in a results-based development of the school’s teaching were interesting to explore.

There was widespread agreement that it was the well-being of people, not recording or the application of data that mattered during the COVID-19 crisis. To go forward with the regular exam schedule would have been seen as prioritizing data over the people working at and attending the schools. Finally, there were private school leaders who reportedly did not engage with data, so the conversation was almost irrelevant for them. The code of *We Don’t Do Data* was a clear delineation of a formidable role of private school leader jobs and public school leader jobs.

The types of data used as strategic tools during the COVID-19 crisis were different than the academic data that is encouraged to be used to drive instruction. Attendance data, on-site infection data, and local infection rates became more relevant and time consuming for the participants during the school years in question. Both private and public school participants discussed the above types of data and the challenges associated with them.

Participants had many thoughts about data. Most participants did not express outright negativity about the idea of using academic data to improve instruction, however there were a few that did. P2 offered an interesting remark about how it wasn't up to her to think about the practice, it was simply expected of her. The public school leaders seemed to accept the use of data for results-based development of the school's teaching, but there was very little evidence in the transcripts that suggested passion for the practice.

Finally, half of the participants discussed that it's hard to use data. The thematically coded data from this study suggested that regardless of where one works, there are many work tasks that occupy the time of Danish 0–9 school principals. To effectively apply data to improve development of teaching, is an undertaking that appeared to be highly challenging considering the amount of coordination and preparation involved to carry out the enterprise. During the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years, there was widespread support for the pausing of the practice.

Summary of Research Question 4

The Research Question Four associated with this study, with the articulated purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the Danish 0–9 school leader experiences

and perceptions of role of school leadership during the shift from face-to-face to online learning during the 2020-2021 COVID-19 pandemic as guided by the seven fields of school leadership, was offered as:

Research Question 4: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of capacity and competence development”?

The exploration of the management of capacity and competence development resulted in many different important perspectives to explore and results to consider in response to the research question. The analysis of the data regarding the *Competency and Capacity of Staff*, suggested that there were widespread competency-related issues that were a result of the paradigm shift of changing to an online instructional environment. As there was virtually no warning nor preparation time to implement the conversion of teaching practice from a face-to-face to an online model, this resulted in unprepared staff groups of the schools represented, and ultimately educational programs that were not of the same quality the schools normally delivered.

The competency issues were varied. Some teachers found it difficult to teach due to the lack of normal interpersonal contact with their students, others were older teachers who lacked skills or were set in their ways, and others still who were hesitant or slow to get started. Some leaders reported having to confront some staff members to make sure they were fulfilling basic duties. One leader reportedly had to let some teachers go.

Despite the competency problems that all but one of the schools had, broadly speaking, the teachers in the schools that were represented by the participants in this

study, demonstrated the capacity to learn the competencies needed to meet the challenges they collectively faced. They were reported to have shown a high degree of industriousness and adaptability. Almost all the teachers acquired the basic competencies that were needed to interact with their students online and were credited the majority of the participants in this study in their ability to respond to the teaching challenge and keep their schools operational.

The main helpful attributes that the teachers reportedly showed were flexibility and adaptability. They were good at learning from their mistakes, implementing new skill sets and helping each other. There were reported high levels of motivation and willingness to adjust to the realities of the situation. Many of the strengths that they showed had to do with their ability to come together and cooperate to respond to the crisis in a constructive way.

The analysis of the data regarding the *Capacity of Leaders*, identified three main categories that were explored to get an understanding of the how the leaders self-reported on their, and other school leaders' competencies and capacities. The two areas that were identified as being the most central to the competency of leaders, in terms of frequency of coded evidence, were interpersonal and relational capacities and competencies, and organizational competencies and capacities.

The participants shared their perspective and experiences relating to their efforts to motivate and support staff. In almost all interviews the participants discussed the need to establish strong relationships with teaching staff and other members of the leadership team. More than half of the participants also talked about the need for heightened

empathy and keeping stress levels low. This concept was also referenced earlier in RQ 2 relating to using *well-being* as a strategy to get through the crisis in lieu of a model.

The participants reported that they saw or acknowledged that different teachers had different needs and personal health or family circumstances that influenced the way they could respond to the teaching demands. The school leaders in the study noticed that they needed to explicitly tell many staff members that they were doing a good job and that considering the situation they were in, what they were doing was okay. Some participants also referred to parents with compassion, as they acknowledged that parents were also in a difficult position, yet on the other hand, saw themselves as needing to act as a barrier between parents and teaching staff to keep the stress levels of teachers at a minimum.

The other area of personal competency and capacity of school leaders that was discussed as being central to their role was related to organizational competencies of school leaders. The prevailing perspective was that clear, frequent, and timely communication with constituents was highly important as well as the ability to comprehend and sometimes reformulate official communications from the government and municipal authorities. Not all participants experience this to be easy to manage. Some participants felt that it was very demanding of their time and that often the messages would contradict themselves or need to be updated. Keeping organized during this difficult time meant long working hours. Staying on top of communication-related matters was seen as being critical to their competence set during this time.

The broad label of crisis management served as a label for a wide range of situations that school leaders experienced during the school years being examined. These new problems or situations were unfamiliar and difficult to predict yet had to be managed. Developing the competencies and the capacity to effectively deal with the unfamiliar crisis management tasks was reported by participants as very important.

As the lockdowns were a completely new experience for everyone, all participants in this study had some unique issue or problem they had to address. Some participants talked about how students were experiencing difficulties reintegrating back into school life, resulting in the creation of special programs or processes to ease them back into a normal student experience. Also new for school leaders was the level of cautiousness leaders had to display with staff who were fearful of COVID-19, and the management of special allowances made for specific teachers due to personal conditions. This practice had the potential to create disharmony between teaching staff. Another example of crisis management work was the process of addressing technical and hardware issues at the start of the lockdowns. There were many situations presented that were unlike the normal work life of the participants. Data supported the perspective that it was considered important to their role as school leader to be manage these situations with competency and capacity.

The last topic that will be explored here in relation to the competence and capacity of school leaders, represents the concept or role of the on campus technical support staff, that half of the participants referred to in the interviews. The school leaders mentioned this important character, but omitted their own involvement in process or the

objective of what the this person was supposed to do. The technical support staff is typically a teacher who has some allocated hours to apply to helping colleagues with technical issues. It was interesting that school leaders appeared to have outsourced the task of leadership of instruction to another person without school leadership involvement.

In only one interview did a participant discuss how she personally discussed with a teacher how to teach online. The participants broadly did not see themselves as being a necessary part of training teachers how to move their educational program online. An argument can be made that the field of online instruction, as a form of distance education is a complicated and substantial area of study. To put the responsibility of training all staff how to successfully implement an instruction strategy on a person who is not a designated school leader appeared to be a potential competency concern relating to the capacity of Danish school leaders.

Other competency concerns were not directed necessarily at school leaders but were broad concerns impacting Danish 0- 9 schools. Evidence in the transcripts supported the assertion that the quality of online instruction was not equivalent to face-to-face teaching practices. Participants reported having to explain to teachers that even though what was being done was not great, it was still okay. In the analysis of RQ 2, it was discussed how exams were cancelled, further supporting the idea that there was a general acknowledgement that quality of education being delivered in Denmark had been downgraded. This could be considered as a failure to maintain a high standard of instruction, albeit under adverse and novel conditions.

Another indicator of failure were the few references made by participants about people leaving the educational field, or leaders who experienced a great deal of stress before and after the crisis. As a final area of concern about the competency and capability of schools to be able to respond to a crisis like this, had to do with the possible failures in the way collaboration between teaching staff was managed during the COVID-19 crisis.

Two of the three teacher-leader participants in this study had opinions that were divergent from the rest of the participant group regarding what they saw was an absence of team environments where teachers could learn technical and online instructional skills from one another, as well as inspire and build common competencies. It may be that school leaders felt that it was natural, and even expected, for staff members to reach out to colleagues to collaborate to learn the necessary competencies however embedded in this approach, is an expectation that teaching staff are socially well-connected and feel psychologically safe enough to create and participate in cooperative team learning interactions.

The framework of psychological safety deals with interpersonal experiences and how they impact work performance and outcomes. As there was a discrepancy between the teacher-leaders and the full-time administrator participants in this study regarding the opportunities staff had to learn and support one another due to the cancellation of subject team meetings, as well as the fact that many school leaders outsourced technical competency building to onsite technical support. This created a situation in which people who were not already well-connected on a personal level with colleagues may have been left to resolve how to get by on their own. This is a concern as it brings into question to

what degree the psychological safety of staff was supported in schools due to the absence of team interactions and to what degree this impacted instructional outcomes and personal experiences.

The final topic to summarize regarding the development of competencies and capacities of Danish 0–9 schools focused on the future. It was asked to all participants whether there should be future training to sharpen the skills of staff relating online instruction as it is not inconceivable that for some reason, a future pivot to online education may be deemed necessary. Most participants responded that it would be a sensible idea, however, there were three school leaders who did not see any skills-training as being necessary. They considered the competencies and capabilities of their staff to be sufficient despite the consensus that the quality of instruction had been substandard during the COVID-19 crisis. Finally, three participants voiced support for the idea that introducing limited online instruction with some of the older kids in the future could have some potential benefits, however none of the schools represented at the time of the interviews implement any such practice.

Summary of Research Question 5

The Research Question Five associated with this study, with the articulated purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the Danish 0–9 school leader experiences and perceptions of role of school leadership during the shift from face-to-face to online learning during the 2020-2021 COVID-19 pandemic as guided by the seven fields of school leadership, was offered as:

Research Question 5: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of subject discipline and cross-professional work”?

In summation of the participant perspectives in response to RQ 5, two major themes were used to frame the results of the data analysis process pertaining to RQ 5. In following paragraphs, a summary of the results will be presented. The major theme of *Balance* represented the idea that school leaders did not want to throw the work or stress levels of their staff out of balance. In relation to RQ 5, management of subject discipline and cross-professional work, this meant that the participants reported not wanting to overburden their teaching staff with too many collaborative interactions or meetings having to do with subject discipline and cross-professional work, as these topics were not seen as critical to focus attention on at that time. For this reason, subject meetings and cross-professional work were almost unanimously suspended during the shift to online learning and throughout the lockdowns.

As an important component in the methodology of this study, school leaders were selected from different leadership tier groups ranging from top leaders to teacher-leaders. This feature of the design was to enable a triangulation of findings to better see contrasts within the perspectives of the participant sub-groups. In the exploration of the topic of subject discipline and cross-professional work, two of the teacher-leaders had very contrasting responses from their full-time administrative counterparts in regard to the questions about the cancellation of subject and cross-professional meetings.

These two participants reported that they had missed these small group interactions, as during the lockdowns, they did not feel that they had many opportunities to meet with colleagues in small groups to share technical expertise, teaching methods relating to their subjects, and get a general idea of what others were doing. In both cases, the schools continued to hold staff meetings that included the entire staff, and these were seen as important, however opportunities for smaller group collaborations were not scheduled. This seemed to be a lost opportunity for positive interpersonal interactions and strengthening of psychological safety within groups that could have helped teaching teams achieve better outcomes and support teachers who were not as well-connected socially to their colleagues.

Finally, it was considered relevant to discuss the concept of self-initiative when it comes to building competencies through subject and cross professional collaborations. A case can be made that in Denmark one should expect that as a professional, one should be able to initiate professional interaction on one's own. In fact, teachers have historically had a high degree of independence, and some might even consider the necessity of leaders to manage collaborative interactions to be unnecessary.

Although this practice does not directly support group learning as it relies on teachers themselves to initiate interactions, culturally speaking, it could perhaps be seen as a way of keeping a respectful distance from managing how and when teachers should collaborate. One might even say that if school leaders do not allow teachers to solve their own problems independently and robustly, then they may end up with a staff that is too

dependent on leadership to be able to manage their own learning and development, which may lead to an ultimate weakening of the competencies and capacities of staff.

Although this may be a perspective that some may find convincing, based on my research focusing on school leadership, school improvement and particularly the importance of psychological safety in interpersonal and team interactions, I support a leadership perspective that is inclusive of all staff members, with the goal that everyone is given opportunities to learn from and interact with colleagues in respectful and productive settings. Therefore, this model of a work environment that naturally culls staff who do not have established collaborative relationships, or are feeling insecure in their work groups, is seen to be counter-productive and representative as a potentially toxic work environment.

Summary of Research Question 6

The Research Question Six associated with this study, with the articulated purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the Danish 0–9 school leader experiences and perceptions of role of school leadership during the shift from face-to-face to online learning during the 2020-2021 COVID-19 pandemic as guided by the seven fields of school leadership, was offered as:

Research Question 6: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of well-being, motivation and commitment”?

The exploration of well-being, motivation and commitment resulted in many different important participant perspectives to explore and results to consider in response

to the research question. Transcript evidence supported the idea that participants considered well-being, motivation, and commitment of teachers and leaders to have been compromised during the COVID-19 crisis. There were common characteristics between the two groups of teachers and leaders and unique points to consider regarding their well-being, motivation, and commitment. There was consensus in the perception that the stabilization and improvement of teacher well-being was central to the school leader role, as was the importance of excellent communication skills, and productive interpersonal interaction to supporting relationships during the turbulent times impacted by the COVID-19 virus.

The participants reported that the teachers reacted very differently from one another in terms of their well-being, motivation, and commitment during the COVID-19 crisis, with some teachers exhibiting behaviors that suggested more vulnerability than usual. This called on humanistic interpersonal skills of the leaders to help maintain positive relationships with teaching staff and to keep stress levels down. This humanistic approach was identified in almost all the participant interviews. There was consensus that the participants wanted to positively impact teaching staff and they connected this humanistic approach with a compatible communication approach that reinforced the role of positive relationship building as essential to organizational goals. Checking in on teachers often and asking how they were feeling on a personal level, as well as reassuring their teaching staff that they were performing at an acceptable level was commonly expressed as central to their work at that time.

Other communication skills of the school leaders were also seen as an extremely important attribute at this time. The common perspective was that timely, clear, and comprehensible communication supported the well-being of staff. There was evidence in a few of the transcripts that a friendly upbeat style was applied to try to lighten spirits and keep doors of communication open. The conclusion was drawn that since there was no model or framework available to apply as a change process guide for Danish school leaders, the ill-defined support of well-being, was widely seen as a change process strategy that could be applied to support the continued operation of the schools.

Almost half of the participants talked about how it was important for them to protect teachers from parents who were overzealous or bossy. These participants saw their role of absorbing this potentially destructive feedback to be essential to their work during the crisis. Despite the commitment to keep staff motivated, more than half of the participants reported that they had teaching staff who appeared to lack commitment to their work. The evidence of this in the transcripts mainly refers to issues of passivity in the teaching approach, including a lack of engagement or a complete absence from their duties. Sometimes it was difficult to know for the school leader participants when to step in and discipline teachers, or to be compassionate about their situation. It was not evident what caused the low levels of motivation or commitment in the examples reported on in the interviews.

As school leaders worked to support their staff during the crisis, some of them had personal issues or stressors that impacted their own well-being. Much like in the case of teachers, these stressors varied from participant to participant depending on their

personal situation. A few participants had school-aged children and others had elderly parents, or concerns about infection for other reasons, as this was so, there were some reports of discomfort and unease during the COVID-19 crisis from participants.

More than half of the participants had a leadership role in which they had to work and implement the guidelines from the Ministry of Education and the local municipality, resulting in a very trying time for most almost all that had this responsibility. This subset of the participant group talked about working over holidays and weekends and feeling anxious about getting updates about new guidelines with little time to communicate and implement the changes. Some participants talked about school leaders that they knew from other schools who experienced worse hardships than themselves as they carried out their work during COVID-19. In these commentaries, it was reported that the people being referred to, experienced high levels of stress, and some reportedly left their positions at the end of the crisis. Although these were secondhand reports, the participant who discussed this experience reportedly also felt that the experiences left some emotional marks due to the impact on both work and private lives.

Not all participants reported that the COVID-19 crisis was hard on them. Almost half of the participants reacted to the question about their stress levels with a stoic response which showed the characteristic of grit. This valued attribute could be associated to both teachers and leaders regarding motivation and commitment. This evidence of resilience and commitment to work through problems was seen in more than half of the interviews. It was most often used to describe teaching staff; however, it was

also evident that there was pride in describing this type of mind-set when talking about their own personal well-being, motivation, and commitment.

School leaders belonged to management teams. In almost all interviews the school leaders discussed the importance of their leadership teams in terms of collaboration and feelings of well-being, motivation, and commitment. Participants reported on how important it was that their leadership team worked well together. In two interviews, school leaders remarked on the fact that they were part of a very small leadership team of just two people, which made it very difficult for them as it was harder in this type of situation to support one another. In both cases, these school leader participants met outside of their official work teams with school leaders from other schools to collaborate, ask questions and hear how the other leaders were adapting to guidelines and tackling problems.

Participants commented on the value of being part of a harmonic and functional team during such a turbulent time of organizational change and adaptation. Working in a team supported feelings of safety, reassurance and the sense of being on the right path. Critical to collaborative work groups, are high degrees of psychological safety, which support open, frank communication without fear of condemnation or adverse consequences, acceptance of mistakes, and mutual trust. These conditions enable members of the team to feel safe and understood. There was evidence in the transcript data that most participants personally felt the need for healthy interpersonal interactions which that the underpinnings of psychological safety were personally felt, as well as conceptually understood by most of the participants.

Two of the teacher-leader participants interviewed for this study remarked that they didn't feel that they had enough opportunities to meet in teams or small groups. This implied that, like the school leaders, they also had the increased need to collaborate, ask questions, and exchange expertise. This supported the idea that during the unusual and stressful conditions introduced by the COVID-19 crisis, there was a need for enhanced team interaction for all participants and teachers during the crisis.

There was abundant evidence in the transcripts of concern regarding the well-being of children leading up to, during, and after the lockdowns. Although the focus of this study was on management and leadership, the participants of this study were conscious of the impact of leadership decisions on students and their families. In almost all the interviews there was evidence that the participants considered age and other factors that could increase vulnerability in the student population. Roughly half of the participants discussed students who had a very difficult time getting back into normal school attendance and routines after the lockdowns ended. A few participants identified this behavior as a symptom of missed social development during the lockdowns. It was remarkable that there were such pronounced issues with students who were deeply affected by the school disruptions that transition programs had to be established to reintegrate them. In two schools represented by participants of this study, robots were purchased which could be used to help kids attend class virtually.

A topic that has been revisited many times in this study was the feeling expressed by almost all participants in this study that school staff felt out of touch with one another. School leaders felt it was a struggle to feel connected with teachers, and teachers felt

disconnected with students. This lack of connection to one another was seen as something that could potentially impact student well-being and motivation. However, there were many unknowns regarding well-being due to this lack of human interaction.

Besides two of the teacher-leaders, all participants had at least one experience with parents during the lockdowns that was annoying, intrusive, or counterproductive. This supported the need for clear communication, and despite this occasional friction, most participants reported feeling empathy for what parents were experiencing during the lockdowns. Some participants identified the huge task parents had working from home while monitoring their children's online lessons. It was seen as a demanding time. The participants in this study reported that much like the lives of the students, the well-being, motivation, and commitment of parents varied due to personal circumstances, however, on average, the families associated with the schools represented in this study, appeared to help their children regularly attend and participate in the online education offered during the lockdowns.

Summary of Research Question 7

The Research Question Seven associated with this study, with the articulated purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the Danish 0–9 school leader experiences and perceptions of role of school leadership during the shift from face-to-face to online learning during the 2020-2021 COVID-19 pandemic as guided by the seven fields of school leadership, was offered as:

Research Question 7: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Education’s management field “management of the open school”?

Participant perspectives identified through the analysis of data pertaining to RQ 7, management of the open school, were mainly focused on collaborations that they had with outside entities during the COVID-19 crisis, more than half of the study participants immediately responded that there was no collaboration outside of the immediate school community due to the strict COVID-19 guidelines that narrowed and often halted this type of activity.

Despite this, some participants did implement successful outreach programs that were reportedly helpful to the school in supporting school students learning, or enhancements to the ability to attend school in person. Three schools that were represented in the interviews had very limited internal space on campus. Therefore, school leaders were motivated to find local facility facilities where classes could be held. There were strict guidelines governing how many children could be assembled within certain square meter confines. As this was the case, three schools sought locations where they could expand outward and keep more students in physical attendance.

Two other examples successful outreach efforts were collaborations that had previously been active with the schools yet had been paused for modifications so that the interactions could be continued through the crisis. Both collaborations had specific educational goals in mind and were seen as important for the schools to continue

implementing. These partnerships were not delayed long and continued throughout most of the COVID-19 crisis.

There was only one participant who reported on someone coming from the outside community onto the school campus to enrich students' lives. In this case, it was a dance instructor who had been contacted by the school leader to use the school facility to teach the classes. This was an example of a successful collaboration that supported this principal's students as well as a local business.

Also relevant to the results of this research question was the documentation that in six of the twelve interviews, it was reported that collaborations schools had previously engaged with which had been discontinued during the COVID-19 virus were later reestablished. Although it was reported as sometimes being difficult to reestablish cooperation with associations outside of schools, six participants shared that their schools had successfully reconnected with the outside agencies to support the possibilities and experiences that the open school opportunities afford students. It was noted that there was enthusiasm for the partnerships which the participants had worked to establish during the COVID crisis and an appreciation for the collaborations that had been reestablished after the crisis had subsided.

Conclusion of Summary

In this chapter, the results of answers addressing the research questions were explored by examining the perceptions and experiences of Danish 0–9 school leaders regarding each RQ topic. An understanding of the views of the participants was ascertained by processing the evidence presented in the form of direct quotations found in

the description of the individual codes, as well as in the Results section of this chapter. Understandings of how coded themes identified during the data analysis were presented in the Categories section and finally as Major Themes, this section was presented as a condensed summary of the main perspectives participants presented regarding each research question. In the next and final chapter, further discussion of the results framed as key findings will be offered, as well as further recommendations and concluding thoughts relevant to the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore Danish 0–9 school leader experiences and perceptions of the role of school leadership during the shift from face-to-face to online learning during the 2020–2021 COVID-19 pandemic, as guided by the seven fields of school leadership. This study followed a basic qualitative design. Twelve interviews with Danish school leaders were conducted and analyzed for themes. The qualitative research focused on the participants' perceptions, experiences, opinions, and beliefs (see Percy et al., 2015). The recollection of problematic moments and observational life stories are rooted in the qualitative tradition (Denzin & Lincoln, 2007). This methodological focus and depth of participant engagement during data collection were pertinent to this study due to the depth and breadth of rich data realized.

There was a gap in the Danish scholarly record of qualitative studies that addressed the experiences and perspectives of Danish 0–9 school leaders in the country of Denmark based on competency fields articulated by the UVM. Few qualitative studies had addressed these perceptions pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic. Considering the impactful role of Danish 0–9 school leaders in daily life and times of crisis, an exploration of their perceptions and experiences was essential to understand their role and its potential impacts. I sought to address this gap in the qualitative literature pertaining to this important participant group.

Key Findings

Key findings represented collective perspectives or experiences that were not addressed in the local research prior to this study. Other findings detailed in Chapter 4 are

not summarized here because they were either presented in other local studies or were deemed as not having the depth of importance of key findings. The key findings are presented in order of the research questions.

Research Question One was articulated as: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Children and Education’s management field “management of learning environments”? As previously documented in a study commissioned by the UVM, Danish school leaders perceived the quality of the online learning environments during the COVID-19 crisis to be less effective as face-to-face instruction (EVA, 2021a). Deepening this discussion as a key finding in this study, were strong indicators in most interviews suggesting that the feelings of interpersonal disconnectedness between schoolteachers and their students were a source of difficulty for teachers’ ability to maintain and sustain educationally productive teacher/student relationships. Additionally, a significant number of participants asserted that teachers had difficulties keeping instruction fresh and interesting over time within the digital learning environment.

Research Question Two was articulated as: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Children and Education’s management field “management of strategy and change processes”? The key finding relating to strategy and change processes was that none of the participants interviewed had any model or set of strategies to apply in leading their schools through the COVID-19 crisis. The situation presented an involuntarily induced change process for all schools, yet there was no conceptual model to apply to help guide school leaders’

work though the experience. Although the adaptation process was somewhat guided by regulations and guidelines shared with Danish school leaders from federal and municipal offices, these notices often created more complications than solutions for the school leaders. Finally, in lieu of a model or strategy, evidence in this study strongly suggests that school leaders perceived the best way to operate was to emphasize support for well-being as much as possible as a blanket approach to supporting school constituents.

Research Question Three was articulated as: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Children and Education’s management field “management of knowledge- and results-based development of the school’s teaching”? The key finding relating to management of knowledge- and results-based development of the school’s teaching, was that not only were all school leader participants ok with pausing academic data collection and analysis during the COVID-19 crisis, there was a lack of evidence that 0-9 school leader participants considered academic data in general as feasible to use or integral in developing their schools’ teaching even during times of normal operation. Only one participant, who was a public school vice principal, specified how to apply results-based knowledge in a practical way, however she acknowledged that it was time-consuming and difficult to manage.

As private school leaders were not required to implement standardized tests, the only data these participants ostensibly might have considered relevant to their jobs would be exit exam data which, although it is accessible by the public, the private school leader participants shared no major concerns regarding this data. Conversely, the public school

leader participants were much more versed in the practice of using results-based knowledge such as standardized tests results and exit exam data yet, as a group, they reported being relieved that during the two school years impacted by COVID, all data collection was cancelled. In addition to this finding, these participants expressed almost no enthusiasm for the practice of applying knowledge- and results-based development of the school's teaching in general.

Research Question Four was articulated as: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Children and Education's management field "management of capacity and competence development"? There were two key findings pertaining to this research question. The first was that despite virtually all staff severely lacking competencies upon the onset of the online teaching experience, in all the schools represented in the interviews, despite the lack of organized plans for teaching the school personnel how to run their classes online, teachers rose to the occasion. Staff adapted and managed to teach online to what was considered an acceptable degree under the circumstances. Considering the problematic start, the capacity of the staff to build the necessary competencies was admirable in the eyes of the participants, even if the quality level of the instruction was downgraded in comparison to face-to-face teaching.

The second key finding was that the school leader participants were not personally very involved in leading competency building pertaining to online teaching, sometimes revealing that they were personally not knowledgeable of the technical aspects. In only one interview did a participant report on how she coached a teacher how

to use video-conferencing software. In half of the interviews, references were made to an individual or a couple staff members at schools who were identified as the technical support resource for the school. Staff were told to speak with these technical supporters to learn how to teach online. The transcript data revealed that other than seeking help on one's own, staff were encouraged to help one another to gain necessary skills. Although this widespread expectation appeared to have worked for the most part, it may have had adverse impacts on staff members who were not well-connected or not interpersonally supported in their workplaces. I considered this evidence as potentially representing an absence of leadership regarding competency and capacity development and an oversight of support relating to conditions necessary for cultivating positive interpersonal collaboration and psychological safety.

Research Question Five was articulated as: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Children and Education's management field "management of subject discipline and cross-professional work"? The key finding relating to RQ 5 was related to the relaxed demands of school leaders to schedule and coordinate subject discipline and cross-professional work during the pivot to online learning. To boost well-being and reduce stress, school leaders self-reported in the interviews that interactions relating subject discipline and cross-professional work were to a large degree removed from meeting schedules. Although this decision was seen as supporting well-being, and therefore necessary at the time, it greatly reduced opportunities for collaboration in different subject and team constellations of work groups. It was noteworthy that two of the three participants who had teaching duties

pointed out they missed these types of professional interactions to build new competencies and knowledge of what other teachers were doing. This evidence, considering the lack of an organized and coherent online teaching training strategy, possibly exposed staff who were not self-initiating professional development, or who may not have had strong interpersonal connections with colleagues to have been under-supported during this time.

Research Question Six was articulated as: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Children and Education’s management field “management of well-being, motivation and commitment”? The key findings relating to the management of well-being, motivation and commitment explored two considerations. The first perspective was how participants perceived the importance of well-being from a management perspective was their top focus. Conducted via computer, the dissemination of well-being was an imprecise and hazily defined mission, yet participants reported this as being central to keeping the school organizations operable. This required enhancements in communication, relationship building, interpersonal skills and increased humanistic care of staff as requisite competencies of school leaders.

The key finding on the topic concerning well-being, motivation and commitment was evidence that most of the participants experienced heightened levels of stress during the COVID-19 crisis due to the array of personal and professional concerns that were present. It was evident in the data regarding their own personal well-being, participants considered the work teams that they operated in as being highly impactful on their

experiences. Some participants met with colleagues outside of their work location to collaborate and share experiences. Participants of two small schools pointed out the disadvantage of being part of such a small leadership team as having less flexibility and support in their work partnerships. These results supported the conceptual framework of psychological safety as useful lens to examine the types of relationships, beliefs, and behaviors were consistent with well-being and adaptation in individuals and groups during the school lockdowns.

Research Question Seven was articulated as: What are Danish 0–9 school principal perceptions of the COVID-19 school lockdowns as related to Ministry of Children and Education’s management field “management of the open school”? The exploration of the concept of the open school during the COVID-19 crisis was somewhat paradoxical, as the emphasis on management during that time was to minimize human contact, not to open schools to risk of viral threat. Interview data broadly reported that decisions made by school leaders to either open or close their school doors were supported by sensible risk calculations and/or problem-solving initiatives. Other than the acknowledgment of the reasonable actions taken by school leaders under the conditions at the time, there were no key findings to report pertaining to this research question.

Interpretation of the Findings

I found the results of this study to confirm many of the findings of international and local research that reported on the myriad of challenges and unforeseen pressures put on school leaders in their efforts to transpose operations and teaching practices into an online format (Chaseling & Boyd, 2020; Erol & Altunay, 2022; Fernandez & Shaw,

2020). Domestic research in Denmark reported on perceived downgraded educational efficacy, particular issues pertaining to vulnerable students, and challenges to leadership due to the drastic contrasts between face-to-face and online education (EVA, 2021a; Lundtofte, 2021). These findings were consistent with those of this current study.

In the process of analyzing data and results of this study, I was unable to disconfirm research or findings from other studies. The research conducted for this study strengthened my comprehension of topics relating to the subject matter and reinforced my respect and appreciation for the multifaceted nature of the participants' jobs. Although the findings of this study further developed and broadened findings from other studies as well as explored new territories, I did not arrive at any results of the data analysis that overtly challenged findings from previously conducted scholarly work.

However, the data collected in this study, and results of the analysis extended the knowledge relating to Danish 0–9 school leadership during the COVID-19 crisis into the distinctive areas of the seven fields of school leadership which constituted the research questions. This approach may account for some developments in data points and findings that were outside of the scholarly work which I had examined during the review of the literature. Additionally, the emphasis on psychological safety as the conceptual framework enabled a specific lens to apply to the research which prioritized the analysis of interpersonal factors when it came to the various demands associated with the adaptation process schools went through during the COVID-19 crisis, as opposed to examining the perspectives and experiences void of taking into account the possible impacts of collaboration, communication, teamwork, and trusting work relationships.

The process of researching the intersection of school leadership and the COVID-19 process yielded many international studies and findings that were valuable in gaining understanding of important themes involved in leading a school through a crisis. Some topics included the importance of emotional intelligence in the navigation of the crisis (Baba, 2020), which resonated with the findings of the study. Leading during this time was a balancing act of providing autonomy to workers, but with accountability. This was a strong theme in this study, and an area of emphasis in a study by Netolicky (2020). Shared instructional leadership during the crisis, reported on by Baker et al. (2020), was also relevant as a logical approach to dealing with the crisis, as collective efforts were essential to meet organizational objectives, and build competencies.

Eroll and Atunay (2022) approached the need for school leaders to address capacity building in a way that yields “socially oriented achievements” (p. 1). The emphasis on social achievements supports the theme of strengthening interpersonal interactions, as was Berg’s focus on empowering work teams (2020). Relating to work teams, the conceptual framework of psychological safety was also identified in research pertaining to the adaptation process of schools during the pandemic (Andersen, 2021; Weiner et al., 2021).

Much like schools in many countries, Danish 0–9 schools rely on work groups, or teams of individuals to implement educational programs (Albrechtsen, 2022; EVA, 2021). Cooperation and collaboration between school leaders and their staff, and teacher work groups was essential to collectively meet the challenges brought on by disruptions brought on by the COVID-19 lockdowns. The application of conceptual framework of

this study, psychological safety was a useful lens through which this work paradigm could be examined. The framework first demands the examination of beliefs, this enabled me to consider the transcribed thoughts and perceptions conveyed about the participants' beliefs on the topics, and vice versa, how the participants' beliefs might influence their perspectives.

The framework of psychological safety posits that beliefs are important precursors to behaviors. When sharing experiences, the participants provided evidence of behaviors witnessed or experienced personally. Discussing behaviors and experiences was simultaneously possible during the interviews, which enabled me to consider both the research questions and the psychological safety framework in tandem during analysis. Finally, the psychological safety framework concludes that beliefs and behaviors lead to outcomes. Through a thematic analysis incorporating the use of the framework of psychological safety, I could consider the outcomes described by participants, which were helpful to ascertain results and key findings of the study.

Limitations of the Study

There are limitations to trustworthiness in the execution of this study. Firstly, a larger number of participants may have yielded a higher degree of data saturation. The plan of interviewing 12 participants was followed, and I considered there to be clear areas of consensus, commonly expressed responses, and evidence of mutual thought within all tiers of the leadership spectrum that were interviewed. However, the teacher-leader subgroup of three participants did, in fact, voice a distinctive perspective in response to the topic of collaboration in teacher groups. Although the presence of this small participant

segment, the teacher-leaders, was purposefully designed to serve to triangulate data and identify discrepancies within the data set, one could surmise from the findings that to repeat this study with a larger participant group and equal numbers of participants with teaching roles along with school administrators would serve to further define the differences and importance of the perceptions and experiences of adapting teaching practice to the COVID-19 crisis from a more complete perspective, potentially increasing trustworthiness. The focus, however, of this study was on Danish 0–9 leaders' perspectives, therefore the divergence of teachers' experiences served to clearly identify a possible area of future study.

A second limitation to the trustworthiness of this study is that the participants were limited to the small geographical area and cultural homogeneity of the country of Denmark. Due to this reality, the transferability and dependability of the findings of the study may be narrow in scope, and of limited use outside of the Danish 0–9 school context. Although there is perhaps no counter measure to this geographically narrow data set, my personal non-Danish background as researcher, along with the extensive international research and understandings of the issues involved in the topics pertaining to the study, it is possible that a level of cultural objectivity was present that may have broadened the way interviews were conducted and later analyzed.

While my non-Danish upbringing and United States-based educational background provided some relational distance and possible objectivity when interacting with the Danish participant group as I was potentially less inclined to make assumptions or inferences regarding the shared beliefs, perspectives, and experiences, it is likewise

possible that, as researcher, I did not recognize contextual meanings or cultural references due to missing a verbal or non-verbal cue or misinterpreting a linguistic nuance. This represents a potential limitation to the trustworthiness of the transcription and translation of the interview data. Although I do not believe this to have been the case, as I did not experience the process of coding and analysis of the transcripts as being hindered by a lack of linguistic understanding, it was still possible that during the interviews, a native speaker might have picked up on small verbal or non-verbal cues and may have rephrased questions or moved the conversation into different directions which may have strengthened trustworthiness in the data sets.

A final possible limitation to the trustworthiness of this study pertained to the recognition that Danish 0–9 school leaders have different personality types, suggesting that some may be more forthcoming in their responses to interview questions, while others may have offered a distorted version and view of their experiences when reflecting on their management experiences during the COVID-19 crisis. As all participants self-selected to participate, it is possible that the psychological profile of school principals who were motivated to share their feelings, perspectives and experiences were not as representative of the population group as a potential subject group that had been selected at random, thereby potentially impacting the trustworthiness of the results and findings of the study.

Recommendations

This study examined a wide range of topics that are worthy of further investigation. As this study was based on the seven fields of school leadership that were

defined and published by the Danish Ministry of Children and Education in 2015 and still available on the website at the time of writing this, these categories are not only relevant, but they provided an array of inquiry topics that have the potential to inform current and future Danish 0–9 school leadership practice. The recommendations presented are kept within the bounds of what can be justified by both the research conducted and the results gathered from the analysis of data of this study.

Relating to Research Question One, learning environments, the findings of this study suggested that there is more to learn about why online learning was perceived as being inferior to face-to-face instruction and what can be done to improve practice. Future studies that explore issues, such as the origins of feelings of disconnectedness in the relationships between school constituents, or the challenges of how to maintain an engaging online teaching methodology over time, are potentially important topics to learn more about, considering the potential for future situations in which schools might need to pivot to an online teaching model once again.

Relating to Research Question Two, strategy and change-processes, I would recommend designing research studies to address how to create a model for change that school leaders could refer to in a crisis. A model or framework available for reference was unavailable during the COVID-19 crisis. Learning more from school leaders and potentially also teachers about critical management areas and how to present them in a way that could help school leaders maintain critical overall perspectives and offer big-picture guidance, could be helpful in future scenarios in which Danish 0–9 school leaders might feel untethered due to an unplanned crisis.

A recommendation relating to Research Question Three, management of knowledge- and results-based development of the school's teaching, would be to explore more deeply why there was an apparent lack of eagerness on behalf all but one of the school leaders in this study for the practice of strategically improving instruction by means of data-driven approaches. More could be learned by examining participant groups of school leaders who self-identify as being enthusiastic implementers of data-driven practices as well as other school leaders, to learn about the differences in perspectives and values of the different groups. Investigation of this topic could lead to enhancements of strategy and practice.

Research Question Four examined the topic of management of capacity and competence development. I would recommend learning more about the optimal role of the school leader when it comes to interacting with teachers about teaching practice. Research suggests that over the last three decades, trends have transformed the Danish 0–9 school leader position from a curricular/didactic leader and expert teaching practitioner to a position that is more managerial in nature (Hall, 2016; Wiedemann, 2021a). New Public Management (NPM) practices are often cited as being part of this leadership trend (Grønnegård-Christensen, 2023; Hall, 2016; Wiedemann, 2021a). Data analysis from this study was congruent with this trend, and provided evidence that most school leader participants did not personally involve themselves in helping teachers learn how to teach online on a practical level. Support for the hands-on practice was most often outsourced to teaching colleagues or a technology support member of staff. This practice aligns well with the construct that school leaders are less involved with the actual practice of

teaching in modern times. Research pertaining to this apparent trend, and whether it is constructive to student achievement may be worthwhile.

A recommendation for further research pertaining to Research Question Five, management of subject discipline and cross-professional work, focuses on a direct examination of the presence and/or absence of psychological safety in collaborative teams and workgroups in 0–9 schools. Investigation on how antecedent work conditions or situations, and interpersonal beliefs potentially activate productive or counter-productive behaviors expressed, and how this concept, known as the psychological safety framework, influences work outcomes. Research on this interpersonal domain of teamwork could reveal important insights on how school leaders might advance their practices to impact the nature of work-team interactions on school campuses to improve outcomes.

The recommendation for future study that I would make pertaining to Research Question Six, management of well-being, motivation, and commitment, is consistent with Research Question Five, which is the further study into the components of psychological safety as they pertain to professional work groups. The findings of this study pertaining to Research Question Six, suggested that the types of relationships the participants had within the workgroups they belonged to, were perceived as meaningful and influential to their personal state of well-being throughout the COVID-19 crisis. This study suggests that school leaders may have been unaware of how much teachers needed team support and guidance in the development of online teaching skills. To boost well-being and reduce stress, school leaders self-reported that interactions relating subject discipline and

cross-professional work were mostly cancelled and removed from meeting schedules. Although this decision was seen as supporting well-being, it reduced opportunities for collaboration in different subject and team constellations of work groups. Considering the lack of an organized and coherent online teaching training strategy, this step away from practical guidance and collaboration may have exposed staff who were not self-initiating professional development, or who may not have had strong interpersonal connections with colleagues to have been under-supported during this time. These reports were consistent with research examined regarding how levels of psychological safety impact well-being and job performance. As psychological safety can be applied to examine the nature of work groups, it would be appropriate to apply it once again with a goal of identifying possible interventions that could be applied to improve well-being and performance in work teams in Danish 0–9 schools.

Research Question Seven presented the concept of the open school. This concept represents an important and sensible encouragement of Danish 0–9 school leaders to open their facilities, learners, and faculty to the world of possibilities outside of their brick-and-mortar foundations. This could mean partnerships with sister-organizations or local businesses, or associations. Studies that explore this idea to report on successful enterprises or how schools accomplish this goal in different ways would be very helpful to inspire other schools to see beyond their campuses to enhance opportunities for student learning and growth. However, in the case of this study, the concept of the open school was unfortunately incompatible with the time period this study was reporting on. During the COVID-19 crisis, the objective of schools was to reduce human contact and scale

down interaction with anyone other than core interlocutors. For this reason, although this study recorded experiences pertaining to this topic that were interesting, it was outside of the reach of this study to make a full and meaningful evaluation of the concept of the open school to the point where recommendations for further study would be justified.

Implications

There are positive social change implications inherent in this study, which can potentially be realized by its examination of Danish 0–9 school leadership perceptions and experiences related to seven fields of school leadership (UVM, 2015, 2024) during the COVID-19 lockdowns. There is currently a gap in the scholarly record that qualitatively addresses the topic, making it difficult to identify what the crisis revealed as strengths and weaknesses in Danish 0–9 schools. More knowledge can have implications for future strategic and policy decisions and potentially new considerations for organizational practice.

Social change happens when groups of people begin to identify with one another and begin to see things in the same way (May, 2011). This study enabled the shared perspectives of the participants to support common perspectives and experiences adding to a knowledge base that can potentially instruct and develop organizational change. The results of this study can further discussion regarding the expectations of school leaders during periods of institutional change which could be useful for individuals, yet also potentially endorse advancements in organizational practice with potential impacts on society at large.

The areas of inquiry of this study were guided by the seven fields of school leadership, as articulated by Danish Ministry of Children and Education (UVM, 2015, 2024); therefore, the core areas explored were rooted in the competency areas which the Danish authorities consider as imperative focal points. Development of policies pertaining to this wide set of leadership fields is potentially enriched by academic work that respectfully explores these topics, as the considerations of the outcomes may guide future considerations and organizational practice. Furthermore, deeper explorations, like the ones offered in this study may offer Danish 0–9 school leaders new points to consider regarding adaptability under adverse conditions and advance proactive policy and organizational goals.

Conclusion

Danish 0–9 school leaders represent a professional group that is considered to have importance and impact on Danish society (UVM, 2015; Winter, 2021). Despite this role as having substantial perceived value, the roles and tasks of this position are not well defined, highly multifaceted, and must balance conflicting demands (Aisinger 2021; Moos, 2021; Storgaard & Frederiksen, 2023; Wiedemann 2021a). The nature of these jobs is not solely focused on tending to the well-being and operation of their schools but is influenced by political considerations (Bøje & Frederiksen, 2021; Laursen, 2024; Pedersen, 2014; Wiedemann, 2021a). Over the last few decades, the role of the Danish 0–9 school leader has changed from being an expert teaching practitioner and democratic leader of school staff, to a more top-down bureaucratic manager of school organizations (Laursen, 2024; Moos; 2021; Pedersen, 2014; Wiedemann 2021b). Studies that directly

ask Danish 0–9 school leaders about their perceptions, experiences, and important considerations of their work, are important as they define what is actually happening in practice. This real-life knowledge can help to enhance understandings that can guide leadership preparation and decision making.

Throughout the exploration of Danish 0–9 school leaders' perspectives and experiences of their work during the COVID-19 crisis, this qualitative study offered a unique opportunity to examine how these professionals saw the most important competencies and components of their work, at a time when their efforts had to concentrate on the most critical aspects of their job to keep their school organizations operational at least, and thriving through the crisis at best. During the research phase of this project, there was very little qualitative research available pertaining to Danish 0–9 school leaders regarding the COVID-19 crisis, making this study a novel undertaking. Additionally, the focus of this study on the seven fields of school leadership (UVM, 2015, 2024) along with the conceptual framework of psychological safety put emphasis on relevant competencies and interpersonal interactions, as opposed to simply reporting on participants' thoughts about their work during the COVID-19 lockdowns. This design made the exploration of the related topics a unique enterprise.

Although some of the key findings were consistent with previous studies, for instance issues pertaining to the practicalities of teaching online (Lundtofte, 2021), perceived downgraded instructional outcomes and issues pertaining to vulnerable students (EVA, 2021a), and the nebulously defined emphasis on trying to operationalize well-being as a strategy for leadership (Laursen, 2024), many of the findings of this study

pushed the boundaries of what had been established as part of the scholarly record. I think there were meaningful key findings presented in this study. These will be briefly revisited here.

Firstly, there was consensus between school leader participants' perceptions, that the educational programs offered during the lockdowns were inferior replacements for face-to-face instruction, and most participants felt the quality was getting worse over time as it was difficult to keep instruction fresh and interesting. Additionally, feelings of disconnectedness were a source of difficulty for teachers' ability to maintain and sustain educationally productive teacher/student relationships as well as the school leader/teacher relationships.

Another key finding was that school leaders had no conceptual model or framework to refer to or apply to help guide their work through the COVID-19 experience. In lieu of a model or strategy, evidence in this study strongly suggests that school leaders perceived the best way to support school operations was to emphasize support for well-being as much as possible, as a blanket approach to supporting school constituents. This was consistent with Laursen's (2024) findings. I posit that the strategy of supporting the concept of well-being in schools was an ambiguous game plan and did not make up for a strategy model or framework to guide school leaders through the crisis.

An unexpected finding in this study was a lack of evidence that the school leader participants considered the use of academic data as either a feasible or integral method for developing their schools' teaching, even during times of normal operation. It has been reported on that Danish 0–9 school leaders do not have enough time to professionally

accomplish what they feel responsible for doing (Bøje & Frederiksen, 2021; Lieberknecht, 2020), which may explain the lack of enthusiasm for implementing data-driven strategies as they are time-consuming. Although the participants in this study did not posit that academic data was useless, the participants shared very little enthusiasm for the practice of applying results-based data to the development of the school's teaching and shared examples of why it was difficult or perhaps even wasted effort to attempt the practice.

Another key finding that was consistent with the findings of many Danish scholars, was evidence that supported the idea that school leaders have moved away from concerning themselves with being expert teaching practitioners in favor of a managerial role (Bøje & Frederiksen, 2021; Moos, 2021; Pedersen, 2014; Wiedemann 2021b). Supporting this idea was the evidence that virtually all participants were not personally involved in leading competency building efforts pertaining to online teaching. Sometimes they revealed that they were personally not knowledgeable of the technical aspects of online teaching. In half of the interviews, references were made to an individual or a couple staff members at schools who were identified as the technical support resource for the school. Staff were told to speak with these technical supporters to learn how to teach online. Staff were also encouraged to help one another to gain necessary skills. This method for training may have had adverse impacts on staff members who were not well-connected or well-supported interpersonally in their workplaces. This was considered as evidence of a possible absence of leadership regarding competency and capacity development. More research is needed to better understand what is to gain and what may

be lost by following the trend of distancing school leadership from the practice of teaching.

In keeping with the key finding above relating to school leaders' connection to teaching practice, findings in this study suggest that school leaders may have been unaware of how much teachers needed support and guidance in the development of online teaching skills. To boost well-being and reduce stress, school leaders self-reported that interactions relating subject discipline and cross-professional work were mostly cancelled and removed from meeting schedules. Although this decision was seen as supporting well-being, and therefore necessary at the time, it greatly reduced opportunities for collaboration in different subject and team constellations of work groups. Considering the lack of an organized and coherent online teaching training strategy, this step away from practical guidance and collaboration may have exposed staff who were not self-initiating professional development, or who may not have had strong interpersonal connections with colleagues to have been under-supported during this time.

Finally, the operationalization of well-being as a hazelly defined strategy, did not address what participants themselves referred to as being meaningful pertaining to their own well-being which was that they considered the work teams that they operated in as being highly impactful on their experiences. The nature of the collaboration of the leadership teams that they belonged to were important to their experiences of well-being. Some participants met with colleagues outside of their work location to collaborate and share work experiences to feel connected to and reaffirmed. Two participants who

worked at small schools pointed out the disadvantage of being part of such a small leadership team with less opportunities for supporting one another.

These results, particularly those relating to opportunities for collaboration and the support of well-being as hinging on the interpersonal relationships that are present in work groups, supported the conceptual framework of psychological safety as a useful framework to examine the types of relationships, beliefs and behaviors that were consistent with well-being and adaptation in individuals and groups during the school lockdowns. It is my sincere hope that the findings of this study will be helpful for the development of further research relating to Danish 0–9 school leadership theory or help to enhance preparation or practice to better support school leaders and those that look to them for guidance in times of crisis and calm.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol English

Opening the interview:

I greet the interviewee professionally, first by identifying myself, then by affirming that my knowledge of the participant's identity is correct. This will most likely be done in Danish, unless the participant prefers to speak English. I defer to the native or chosen language of the two by the participant. I ask the participant to tell me a little about themselves, and this may be followed with some polite small talk, however, as soon as I perceive it to be an opportune moment, I will briefly talk about the consent form which the participant signed. I will reaffirm that the participant understands and volunteers to engage in the interview.

Upon verbal consent, the two of us will sit down where I will have water and glasses available and my recording devices in full view. I will remind the participant that I will start recording now, and then begin with my first question. Throughout this entire process, will strive to keep my interpersonal style professional, yet friendly and attentive. As the interview is semi-structured, it is unlikely that I will proceed in a linear fashion through the numbered questions within each RQ category, however each RQ will be explored deliberately with questions designed to evoke perceptions and experiences the participants can convey relating to the RQs. Therefore, in reference to time constraints, it may be necessary to move the conversation along from time to time, making sure all the RQs are explored.

The interview structure and questions:

RQ 1

1. 1.What are the first thoughts that come to you when you think back about the time your school pivoted to online learning during COVID-19 times?
2. How did you perceive the adaptation process to the new online learning environments of the teaching teams you worked with?
3. What kinds of activities did you see individuals or teaching teams engage in when shifting to the new learning environments? How did the teachers share their experiences and get help?
4. Can you share your experiences in helping individuals or teams cope with or adapt to the changes?

RQ 2

5. Tell me about how it was to respond to national and municipal objectives, when you were managing the school lockdowns.
6. Tell me about how it was to respond to strategies agreed to by the school board.
7. How were the school vision goals and strategic initiatives impacted by the COVID-19 school lockdowns?

RQ 3

8. How did you perceive the role of results-based goals such as standardized tests and exit exams during the COVID-19 shutdowns at your school? How were your broad academic goals and strategies impacted?
9. What were your experiences in reconciling the established vision and strategic objectives for the school's pedagogical work with the realities brought on by the school closures?

RQ 4

10. Can you talk about how your perceptions of staff competency changed or stayed the same during the shift to online learning in your school? Did you perceive a need for new competency goals in the staff?
11. How did you experience the process of managing the processes of competency development while the school adapted to an online learning model?

RQ 5

12. Can you tell me about the how subject group and grade level teams responded to the new teaching paradigm? How did these groups evolve as the shutdowns continued?
13. Did your school have other teams of different professional constellations in place before the switch to online learning due to COVID-19? If yes, then, what did you notice about these types of teams' interactions? Did group members' beliefs about their fellow group members impact the value of interactions?
14. To what degree did you attempt to guide or assist in subject or cross-professional interactions?
15. To what degree did you attempt to guide or assist in subject or cross-professional interactions?

RQ 6

16. What was your experience in managing well-being of school constituents during the COVID-19 school lockdowns? Can you tell me a story about well-being within a teaching team?

17. How did you perceive the levels of commitment of workers and teams during this time frame? Can you tell me a story about one of these times?
18. Did you experience varying levels of motivation in individual staff or teaching teams during this time? Can you tell me a story about one of these times?

RQ 7

19. How did you manage associations the school had with the larger community during the COVID-19 crisis?
20. Did you perceive there to be a meaningful impact on cooperative agreements with outside agencies and school constituents during this time?

Closing the interview:

At the 45-minute mark, I will let the participant know that I am aware that we are approaching the last few minutes and ask the participant if they feel like there is something that they would like to revisit from our conversation or clarify. At the 50-minute mark, unless the participant insists to continue, I will conclude the interview by thanking the participant with gratitude and give the person the 70 Danish crown gift certificate to a café called Espresso House which is akin to Starbucks. As this process plays out, I will ask the participant if it would be acceptable to contact them for any follow up questions, and whether I may send them a transcript of the conversation, so that they can see that their words were properly recorded, with no expectation for feedback. After this, I will thank them again and turn off the recording devices. The interview will be completed.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol Danish

Åbning af interviewet:

Jeg hilser på deltageren ved at identificere mig selv, derefter ved at bekræfte, at mit kendskab til deltagerens identitet er korrekt. Dette vil højst sandsynligt foregå på dansk, medmindre deltageren foretrækker at tale engelsk. Jeg vil altid rette mig efter deltagerens modersmål eller valgte sprog. Jeg vil bede deltageren om at fortælle mig lidt om sig selv, og dette kan følges op med lidt høflig smalltalk, men så snart jeg opfatter det som et passende øjeblik, vil jeg kort tale om hvert punkt, der behandles samtykkeerklæringen (bilag E i engelsk og F på dansk) som deltageren har underskrevet. Jeg vil bekræfte, at deltageren forstår og frivilligt deltager i interviewet.

Efter mundtligt samtykke, hvis vi møder fysisk, sætter vi os ned, hvor der er vand til rådighed og min mikrofon optager synligt for alle. Jeg vil minde deltageren om, at jeg vil begynde at optage nu, og derefter begynde med mit første spørgsmål. Gennem hele denne proces vil jeg stræbe efter at holde min interpersonelle stil professionel, men alligevel venlig og opmærksom. Da interviewet er semi-struktureret, er det usandsynligt, at jeg vil fortsætte lineært gennem de nummererede spørgsmål inden for hver RQ-kategori, men hver RQ vil blive udforsket bevidst med spørgsmål designet til at fremkalde opfattelser og oplevelser, som deltagerne kan formidle vedrørende RQ'erne. Med henvisning til tidsbegrænsninger kan det derfor være nødvendigt at forkorte dele af samtalen, sådan at alle RQ'er udforskes.

Interviewstrukturen og spørgsmål:

Vedrørende forskningsspørgsmål 1

IQ1. Hvad er de første tanker, der kommer til dig, når du tænker tilbage på dengang, din skole skiftede til onlinelæring under COVID-19?

IQ 2. Med de teams du arbejdede med, hvordan oplevede du tilpasningsprocessen til de nye online læringsmiljøer

IQ 3. Hvilke type handling så du enkeltpersoner eller undervisningsteams engagere sig i, da de skiftede til de nye læringsmiljøer? Hvordan delte lærerne deres oplevelser og fik hjælp?

IQ 4. Kan du fortælle mig om nogle af dine erfaringer med at hjælpe personer eller teams til at håndtere eller tilpasse sig ændringerne?

Vedrørende forskningsspørgsmål 2

IQ 5. Fortæl mig om, hvordan du oplevede at skulle arbejde ud fra de nationale og kommunale retningslinjer, da du styrede skolenedlukningerne?

IQ 6. Fortæl mig om, hvordan det var at reagere på strategier, som skolebestyrelsen var blevet enige om.

IQ 7. Hvordan blev skolens visionsmål og strategiske initiativer påvirket af COVID-19-nedlukningerne af skolerne?

Vedrørende forskningsspørgsmål 3

IQ 8. Hvad var dit perspektiv på, at nationaltest og afgangseksamener blev sat på pause under COVID-19 nedlukningerne? Hvordan blev dine brede akademiske mål og strategier påvirket deraf?

IQ9. Hvad var dine erfaringer med at forene den fastlagte vision og strategiske mål for skolens pædagogiske arbejde med realiteterne som skolelukningerne?

Vedrørende forskningsspørgsmål 4

IQ 10. Kan du fortælle om, hvordan din opfattelse af medarbejdernes kompetencer ændrede sig eller forblev den samme under skiftet til online læring på din skole?

IQ 11. Oplevede du et behov for nye kompetencemål i medarbejderstaben?

IQ 12. Hvordan oplevede du at skulle styre processerne for kompetenceudvikling, mens skolen tilpassede sig en online læringsmodel?

Vedrørende forskningsspørgsmål 5

IQ 13. Kan du give mig nogle eksempler på, hvordan faggrupper og klassetrin reagerede på det nye undervisningsparadigme? Hvordan udviklede disse grupper sig, da nedlukningerne fortsatte?

IQ 14. Med hensyn til de andre tværfaglige teams på din skole (ordblindeudvalg/sorggrupper mm), som fandtes før skiftet til online læring, hvad bemærkede du så af ændringer af interaktioner blandt disse typer teams? Blev kvaliteten af gruppe-medlemmernes interaktioner påvirket?

IQ 15. I hvilken grad forsøgte du at vejlede eller hjælpe i emne- eller tværfaglige interaktioner?

Vedrørende forskningsspørgsmål 6

IQ 16. Hvad var din erfaring med at styre trivsel for skolens brugere under COVID-19-skolenedlukningerne? Kan du fortælle mig en historie om trivsel i et undervisningsteam?

IQ 17. Hvordan opfattede du niveauet af engagement hos medarbejdere og teams i løbet af denne tidsramme? Kan du fortælle mig en historie om det?

IQ 18. Oplevede du forskellige niveauer af motivation hos individuelle medarbejdere eller undervisningsteams i løbet af denne tid? Kan du fortælle mig en historie om det?

Vedrørende forskningsspørgsmål 7

IQ 19. Det næste spørgsmål handler om de brobygninger din skole har. Hvordan håndterede du samarbejdet mellem skolen og de foreninger som i har samarbejde med under nedlukningerne?

IQ 20. Hvordan håndterede du foreninger, som skolen havde med det større samfund under COVID-19-krisen?

IQ 21. Synes du at der var kort- eller langsigtede konsekvenser i forhold til de samarbejdsaftaler, som skolen havde før skolenedlukningerne

Afslutning af Interviewet:

Efter cirka 45-minutters vil jeg lade deltageren vide, at jeg er opmærksom på, at vi nærmer os de sidste få minutter og spørge deltageren, om de føler, at der er noget, deltageren tænker er relevant at tale om i forhold til deres perspektiver og erfaringer om deres rolle som skoleleder under COVID-19 krisen, eller om de gerne vil vende tilbage til noget fra vores samtale eller afklare. Ved 50-minutters mærket, medmindre deltageren insisterer på at fortsætte, vil jeg afslutte interviewet med at takke deltageren og tale med deltageren om "member check" processen. Til sidst skal deltageren få gavekortet til Espresso House. Efter dette vil jeg takke dem igen og slukke for optageenhederne. Interview er afsluttet.

Appendix C: Initial Contact Letter English

Danish 0–9 School Leader Perceptions and Experiences of School Leadership During the COVID-19 Pandemic Shift to Online Learning

Dear _____ ,

My name is Daniel Palomares. I am the organizing researcher of this study, which is a doctoral capstone and dissertation project through Walden University USA.

You are invited to take part in a research study about the experiences Danish 0–9 school leaders had carrying out their jobs during the COVID-19 school lockdowns, when teaching went online. The title of this research study is: *Danish 0–9 School Leader Perceptions and Experiences of School Leadership During the COVID-19 Pandemic Shift to Online Learning*. To inform your decision whether to participate, and what it would involve for you, I have included additional information in this letter of invitation as well as the included consent form. Please contact me with any questions if anything you read is not clear or if you would like more information, by phone at 42 60 93 66 or email daniel.palomares@waldenu.edu.

The purpose of this study is to explore the Danish 0–9 school leader perceptions and experiences of the role of school leadership during the shift from face-to-face to online learning during the 2020-2021 COVID-19 pandemic. It is hoped that the interviews will identify common issues, workplace solutions or relevant understandings that can help school leaders in future situations.

I am writing to respectfully request your participation in this study. I have included a consent form for your ease of review. I will follow this initial communication with an email communication, in approximately a week's time.

WHY HAVE YOU BEEN INVITED TO TAKE PART?

I believe that you were employed as a Danish 0–9 school leader during the COVID-19 school lockdowns during the school years 2019-2020 and/or 2020-2021. For this reason, you meet the criteria for inclusion in my participant group. We have never met, so there is no personal bias that could influence the interview process or the analysis of interview data. Simply put, I am interested in collecting data from school leaders who I do not know and who match your professional profile.

If you would like to reach out to me with questions, queries, or your interest in engaging as a participant in this study, my email address is daniel.palomares@waldenu.edu.

Respectfully,
Daniel Palomares

Daniel Palomares
Doctoral Candidate, Ed.D.
Walden University USA
daniel.palomares@waldenu.edu

Appendix D: Initial Contact Letter Danish

Dansk 0–9 skolelederes opfattelser og oplevelser af skoleledelse under COVID-19-pandemiens skifte til online læring

Kære _____ ,

Mit navn er Daniel Palomares. Jeg er den organiserende forsker af denne undersøgelse, som er en Ed.D. afhandlingsprojekt gennem Walden University USA.

Du er inviteret til at deltage i et forskningsstudie om de oplevelser, danske 0–9 skoleledere havde med at udføre deres job under COVID-19 skolenedlukningerne, da undervisningen gik online. Titlen på dette forskningsstudie er: *Danish 0–9 School Leader Perceptions and Experiences of School Leadership During the COVID-19 Pandemic Shift to Online Learning* For at du kan tage en beslutning hvorvidt du vil deltage, og hvad det ville indebære for dig, har jeg inkluderet yderligere oplysninger i dette invitationsbrev samt den medfølgende samtykkeformular. Kontakt mig venligst, hvis du har spørgsmål, hvis noget du læser, ikke er klart, eller hvis du ønsker mere information, telefonisk på 42 60 93 66 eller e-mail daniel.palomares@waldenu.edu.

Formålet med denne undersøgelse er at undersøge de danske 0–9 skolelederes opfattelser og oplevelser af skolelederens rolle under skiftet fra fysisk til online læring under COVID-19-pandemien 2020-2021. Det er håbet, at interviewene vil identificere fælles problemer, arbejdspladsløsninger eller relevante forståelser, der kan hjælpe skoleledere i fremtidige situationer.

Jeg anmoder med respekt om din deltagelse i denne undersøgelse. Jeg har inkluderet en samtykkeformular og vil følge denne indledende kommunikation med en e-mail-kommunikation om cirka en uges tid.

HVORFOR ER DU BLEVET INVITERET TIL AT DELTAGE?

Dersom du var ansat som skoleleder under COVID-19 skolenedlukningerne i skoleårene 2019-2020 og/eller 2020-2021. Af denne grund opfylder du kriterierne for optagelse i min deltagergruppe. Vi har aldrig mødtes, så der er ingen personlig bias, der kan påvirke interviewprocessen eller analysen af interviewdata. Kort sagt er jeg interesseret i at indsamle data fra skoleledere, som jeg ikke kender, og som matcher din faglige profil.

Hvis du gerne vil deltage, eller har yderligere spørgsmål, kan du kontakte mig enten på e-mail- daniel.palomares@waldenu.edu eller på telefon 42609366.

Med Respekt,
Daniel Palomares

Daniel Palomares
Ed.D. kandidat
Walden Universitet USA
daniel.palomares@waldenu.edu

Appendix E: Follow-Up Email English

Dear _____,

Approximately one week ago, I sent a letter through the postal system to you via your workplace (*name of school here*). The letter contained an invitation to participate in a research study that I am conducting, titled:

Danish 0–9 School Leader Perceptions and Experiences of School Leadership During the COVID-19 Pandemic Shift to Online Learning

This invitation also included an additional information documentation, related to more in-depth information related to the research study.

I am hoping to attract participants for this study that have your professional profile and background, so I hope that you will considering participation. To inform your decision whether to participate, and what it would involve for you, please take time to read the attached information letter (earlier sent to you by post) and consent form files carefully.

Please contact me with any questions that you may have, if anything you read is not clear, if you would like more information, or whether you would like to participate. Interviews can be in person, or via a video conferencing environment of your choice. I recognize that your time is valuable, so I desire to work within the parameters of your scheduling availability.

Contacts and Questions:

Please contact Daniel (the researcher) by phone at 42 60 93 66 or email daniel.palomares@waldenu.edu.

All questions are welcome.

Thank you so much for your consideration of this important study.

Daniel Palomares

This study is in partial fulfillment of a Doctorate in (EdD) Education in Leadership and Administration – Walden University

Approval number for study 05-24-23-0521000.

Expires on 23/5/2024

Appendix F: Follow-Up Email Danish

Kære _____,

For cirka en uge siden sendte jeg et brev til (*skolens navn her*) stilet til dig. Brevet indeholdt en invitation til at deltage i en forskningsundersøgelse, som jeg gennemfører, med titlen:

Dansk 0–9 Skolelederes opfattelser og oplevelser af skoleledelse under COVID-19-pandemiens skifte til online læring

Denne invitation indeholdt også dokumentation relateret til mere dybdegående information til forskningsundersøgelsen.

Jeg har brug for deltagere til denne undersøgelse, der har netop din faglige profil og baggrund, så jeg håber, at du vil deltage. Hvorvidt du vil deltage, og hvad det ville indebære for dig, skal du tage dig tid til at læse vedhæftede informationsbrev (tidligere sendt til dig med posten) og samtykkeformularfiler omhyggeligt.

Kontakt mig venligst hvis du ønsker at deltage, har yderligere spørgsmål eller noget information ikke er klart. Interviews kan være personligt eller via videokonference efter eget valg. Jeg anerkender, at din tid er værdifuld, så jeg ønsker at arbejde inden for parametrene for din tilgængelighed.

Kontakt og spørgsmål:

Daniel (forskeren) på telefon 42 60 93 66 eller mail daniel.palomares@waldenu.edu.

Alle spørgsmål er velkomne.

Mange tak for din overvejelse af denne vigtige undersøgelse.

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