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## Superintendent Leadership during Economic Austerity: A Multiple Case Study

Douglas Paul Finch  
*University of Nevada, Las Vegas*

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SUPERINTENDENT LEADERSHIP DURING ECONOMIC AUSTERITY:  
A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

by

Douglas Paul Finch

Bachelor of Arts in Education  
Brigham Young University, Provo  
1997

Master of Education in Educational Leadership  
Brigham Young University, Provo  
2000

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the

**Executive Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership**

**Department of Educational Leadership  
College of Education  
The Graduate College**

**University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
December 2012**

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## THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

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Douglas Finch

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Superintendent Leadership during Economic Austerity: A Multiple Case Study

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### **Executive Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership**

Department of Educational Leadership

Robert McCord, Ed.D., Committee Chair

James Hager, Ph.D., Committee Member

Pamela Salazar, Ed.D., Committee Member

LeAnn Putney, Ph.D., Graduate College Representative

Tom Piechota, Ph.D., Interim Vice President for Research &  
Dean of the Graduate College

**December 2012**

## **Abstract**

### **Superintendent Leadership during Economic Austerity: A Multiple Case Study**

by

Douglas Paul Finch

Dr. Roberts S. McCord, Examination Committee Chair  
Professor of Educational Leadership  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

In contrast with recent decades of economic growth and stability, today's education funding landscape appears to be entrenched in a pattern of diminishing financial resources that may persist for a number of years. This is occurring also amid unprecedented efforts by lawmakers and public officials to intervene in school reform work. School leaders, specifically superintendents of the public school districts, are expected to make difficult leadership decisions in cutting back and downsizing the district organization while still maintaining an innovative and positive environment in schools. The effective leader must be well informed of best practices in positively influencing critical determinants of the district's organization in these critical times.

Researchers have stressed that there is a need to examine dynamic, evolutionary processes within organizations and populations of organizations (Cameron & Whetten, 1981; Kimberly & Quinn, 1984; Tushman and Anderson, 1986). A universally accepted concept from the biological sciences is the idea of organizations taking on a "life" that can be compared to living organisms. Management researchers have developed various models to depict the life cycle of organizations, including phases or stages of birth, growth, decline, renewal (or revival) and death (Dodge, Fullerton, & Robbins, 1994; Greiner, 1972; Hanks, Watson, Jansen, & Chandler, 1993; Miller & Friesen, 1983).

Among the early studies of economic life cycles is the seminal work of Danny Miller and Peter Friesen (1984). They identified primary factors or determinants to an organization's phase in the life cycle: situation, structure, decision-making style, and strategy. Every organization exhibits organizational life cycle characteristics and can be affected by contextual factors and leadership choices from these four determinants. However, while this research was initially prevalent in business and public organization models, a lack of research interest in the public realm has persisted.

Public education leaders, especially superintendents, need to demonstrate significant leadership during times of economic decline. Better information, including a synthesis of the literature from empirical and statistical studies in this area, is needed. Furthermore, a study of superintendents in their "natural setting" through qualitative research and thematic analysis is needed to explain their experiences in leading schools through years of economic austerity. The outcome of this research was the development of a leadership framework that informs public school superintendents who deal with seasons of economic austerity, and a contribution to the research and knowledge base of best practices for managing organizational decline.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The Great Recession of 2007–2009 traveled “like a vicious storm” across state and local budgets, leaving a “broad—but far from uniform—trail of wreckage in its wake” (Klein, 2011, p. 16). The majority of states has been significantly impacted and has worked to absorb the economic impact of budget shortfalls since 2007. For example, the Michigan Association of School Administrators reported that districts started out making cosmetic adjustments but eventually “ended up with aggressive cuts [targeted] at the classroom” (Klein, 2011, p. 17). Clark County School District in Nevada eliminated more than 500 school employees’ positions in 2010, as well as support for many after-school fine arts programs. While American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds helped in many cases fill the fiscal gap in the short term, many state and local officials faced a post-stimulus “funding cliff” as much federal funding was set to end in 2011 (Klein, 2011, p. 18).

Even with the initial economic free fall of 2007 appearing to have ended, states and school districts continue to see their tax bases wither. At least 46 states struggled to close budget shortfalls heading into fiscal year 2011, resulting in deep reductions in jobs, programs, and services. Even as the economy recovers, financial analysts project the rebound for school districts will lag behind other sectors, in part due to dependency on property taxes. For policymakers, the challenge “will be to make choices that address the urgent budgetary concerns facing schools, while meeting long-term academic and financial priorities” (Cavanagh, 2011, p. 6).

Critics of federal aid view the imminent cuts in education funding not as a crisis but as a necessary correction. According to Guthrie and Peng (2010), the federal government's dramatic new school-funding role continues a pattern of insulating public schools from economic downturns. They argued that schools maintain an appearance of being in "perpetual financial crisis," while being able to maintain a steadily increasing per-pupil spending trend for the past 60 years (Guthrie & Peng, 2010, p. 19). Some observers feel that "school budgets have become bloated over time, and that the recent recession could actually bring benefits by compelling district officials to re-examine how they spend money" (Cavanagh, 2011, p. 10).

Unprecedented federal interventions promoted by the U.S. Department of Education not only impacted education budgets, but also required progressive policy revisions. The "Race to the Top" program provided competitive grants that encouraged bold policy changes to improve student achievement (Cavanagh, 2011). As a result, several states overhauled their policies of employee evaluation and compensation and developed common academic objectives and assessments. The federal stimulus targeted not only job recovery, but also an effort to stimulate innovation (Cavanagh, 2011). In an attempt to promote a more market-driven model of schooling, federal officials have increasingly required a link between school operations and improved outcomes. This involvement of the federal government appears to be part of a national agenda for greater influence and control of what has been traditionally and constitutionally local control of public schooling (Barber, 2004).

In contrast with recent decades of economic growth and stability, today's education funding landscape appears to be entrenched in a pattern of diminishing

financial resources that may persist for a number of years. This is occurring simultaneously with efforts by lawmakers and public officials to intervene in school reform work. School leaders, specifically superintendents of public school districts, are expected to make difficult leadership decisions in managing these factors and, in many cases, downsizing the district organization while attempting to maintain an innovative and positive environment in schools. A superintendent must be skilled and well informed of best-practice leadership for times of economic austerity.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Amid the economic austerity and growing state and federal government intervention comes a call for educational leaders to strategically determine a feasible course of economic responsibility while pursuing increased educational outcomes. The practitioner wanting to seek best-practice research can find a number of empirical studies in education and public administration mostly conducted 20 to 30 years ago. However, the lack of sustained economic decline over that past few decades has resulted in limited research on decline management strategies. There is a noticeable scarcity of contemporary studies on this topic (Bozeman, 2010).

During the 1970s and continuing through the 1980s, a number of significant studies were done in business and public administration on organizational life cycle theory and management strategies for decline. However, with the eventual recovery of the U.S. economy in the late 1980s, only a handful of new contributions to public administrators' work in decline and cutback management have emerged (Pandey, 2010). Other business-related fields have produced a steady stream of relevant work (Carmeli &

Schaubroeck, 2006; Fisher & White, 2000; McKinley, 1993; Weitzel & Jonsson, 1989).

With economists predicting prolonged seasons of economic uncertainty in the public sector, a long overdue renewal of interest in studying public administration leadership strategies for financial austerity is imminent, timely, and critical.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Researchers have stressed there is a need to examine dynamic, evolutionary processes within organizations and populations of organizations (Cameron & Whetten, 1981; Kimberly & Quinn, 1984; Tushman & Anderson, 1986). A universally accepted concept from the biological sciences is the idea of organizations taking on a “life” that can be compared to living organisms. Management researchers have developed various models to depict the life cycle of organizations, including phases or stages of birth, growth, maturity, renewal (or revival), and decline (or death) (Dodge, Fullerton, & Robbins, 1994; Greiner, 1972; Hanks, Watson, Jensen, & Chandler, 1993; Miller & Friesen, 1983).

Among the early studies of economic life cycles is the seminal work of Danny Miller and Peter Friesen (1984). They identified contextual and leadership determinants that influence an organization’s phase in the life cycle. These primary determinants are situation, structure, decision-making style, and strategy. Situation refers to the context the firm exist in and to its make-up, including size, heterogeneity of markets, number of employees, and diversity of ownership. Structure is the firm’s working culture, its relationships and reporting groups, varying from simple to complex, departmental to divisional, and centralized to decentralized. Decision-making style varies from an

authoritarian perspective to an open participative model. Leadership styles can be generalized to initiators, managers, and responders (Hall & Hord, 2006). Strategy consists of the manager's approach from innovation to conservatism or from diversification to efficiency depending on the perceived leadership decisions necessary in each phase (Miler & Friesen, 1984, p. 1164). Hall and Hord (2006) identified six functions of leadership interventions or strategies: developing, articulating, and communicating a shared vision; planning and providing resources; investing in professional learning; checking on progress; providing continuous assistance; and creating a context supportive of change.

These four determinants and the organizational life cycle serve as the theoretical framework of this study. It allows the researcher to study movement within or between stages, as well as to consider administrative responses to the various phases of organizational development. Baird and Meshoulam (1988) concluded that the organizational life cycle model's prescription is that the firm's managers must change the goals, strategies, and strategy implementation devices of the business to fit the new set of issues. Thus, different stages of the company's life cycle require alterations in the firm's objectives, strategies, managerial processes, culture, and decision-making.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to develop a leadership framework for superintendents managing school districts during economic decline. Whetten (1987) suggested that organization downsizing or restructuring are the most common responses of public administrators during times of economic austerity and the resulting

organizational decline. He argues that this approach is due to a manager's primary focus on the processes of internal management rather than strategic responses to decline. Because of the inevitable continuation of cycles of growth and decline in economic markets and the resulting influence on public funds, it is requisite that a strategic leadership framework for superintendents for managing decline be developed.

### **Significance of the Study**

Some researchers argue that while public organizations rarely die (Kaufman, 1976), they are certainly reorganized, reformed, or reborn as frequently as private sector organizations (Starbuck & Nystrom, 1981; Stevenson, 1986). Timing for research in this area is critical as economists cautiously project economic recovery while policymakers consider a myriad of reorganizing and restructuring policies. This blend of reorganization dynamics and agency transformation provides fertile ground for theory building (Light, 1997). Therefore, it is significant and timely to study leadership during phases of decline.

Researchers have developed a framework for examining the dynamics of organizational evolutionary processes and the contextual and leadership determinants for movement within and between these generalized phases. School organization exhibits these characteristics and can be affected by leadership choices. However, while this research was initially prevalent in business and public organization models, a lack of research interest in the public realm has persisted (Pandey, 2010).

Bozeman (2010) warned that the study of decline and cutback management is episodic and leads to short-term, disjointed strategies for managing that momentary event in the organization's life cycle. He further concluded that what is needed is a historically



informed, longitudinal, and strategically oriented study to develop a valid perspective of varied organizational environments. Decline is one of many interrelated economic environmental states requiring strategic management. While this study focuses on educational leaders' response to impacts of the recent economic decline, it will inform managers and policymakers of the broader implications for long-term strategic management. This broader perspective not only focuses on short-term strategies for managing decline, but also leadership structures and styles that lead to revitalization and growth.

### **Research Questions**

The primary research question for this study is, "How do effective school superintendents lead when faced with managing the district during economic austerity?" To assist in examining this research question, the following secondary questions are investigated and addressed:

1. How do effective superintendents influence district structures to positively impact the district's response to financial shortfalls?
2. How do decision making styles influence superintendents' effectiveness in working with district stakeholders during economic decline?
3. How do effective superintendents use leadership strategies to guide the district during budget austerity?

### **Methods and Procedures**

The researcher uses a qualitative research approach to investigate and address the

posed research questions. When research questions are exploratory or explanatory inquiries of contemporary events that the investigator does not have control over, a case study methodology is appropriate (Yin, 2009, p. 8). This research method is selected to be explanatory of superintendent leadership characteristics and choices (dependent variable) that positively influence a school district experiencing economic decline (independent variable).

A review of leadership research in both business and public administration guided the researcher in developing an initial framework for superintendent fiscal leadership during decline. Using literal replication logic and explanation building technique, cross-case synthesis and a series of two iterations with case study interviews (recorded and transcribed) refined the leadership framework. This study focuses on initial development of leadership theoretical constructs and lays the groundwork for future research using theoretical replication to more thoroughly examine rival theories.

Two criteria were used for the purposeful selection of two superintendents for this case study. First, the participants were identified as exemplary candidates for their length of term and effectiveness as a superintendent by the former and current state superintendents. Second, the participants were chosen through consideration of their school district's student enrollment growth during the past five years. Specifically, one school district had relatively unchanged student enrollment, while another had increasing enrollment. This additional distinguishing factor determined the degree to which a school district had received any annual funding for enrollment growth amid other funding shortfalls.

As part of each case's data collection procedure, publicly accessible archival

records and documents were examined to describe the context or situation of each participating superintendent. Specifically, the researcher reviewed annual financial reports and proposed budgets accessible through the district's webpage. This information (district size, growth, and financial trends) was used as noted in the selection of the candidate and also to confirm or confound information from the interview (triangulation) and develop the rich qualitative description of the context of each case.

The data gathered through the interview process and document review was organized and analyzed using a Complementary Analysis Research Matrix Application (CARMA). This tool was designed to help in the collection and analysis of data so results could be applied to the appropriate setting (Putney, Wink, & Perkins, 2006). This analysis approach used literal replication logic and explanation building technique. Expected and evident results from the case study interviews were compared and contrasted and thus confirmed or confounded the leadership theoretical model. An additional iteration of this technique provides a refined model and recommendations for further studies.

This analytical strategy relies on theoretical propositions that have led the researcher to this case. The theoretical proposition is that organizational leaders who recognize the need for interventions and strategic change in their organizations for long-term competitiveness may also realize the need to adjust organizational activities and structures at varying stages of the life cycle (Child, 1972). Therefore, rival explanations to this theoretical proposition are considered to strengthen the internal validity of the study.

## **Limitations and Delimitations**

Limitations exist in case study research that may threaten internal validity. These may include explanatory conclusions the researcher may draw in an attempt to explain causal relationships between economic conditions and superintendent leadership when potentially other factors may influence the variables of the study. In this research, this could include personal, political, or historical factors. The candor and truthfulness of the participants are also limiting factors. Furthermore, given that inferences are drawn throughout the case study, conclusions can be drawn on a particular event that cannot be observed directly by the researcher (Yin, 2009, pp. 42–43).

Another limiting factor for this study is the lack of random sampling of public school superintendents. The lessons learned are not intended to be transferable or generalizable to other school districts or leadership contexts. Furthermore, cases that may illustrate rival explanations or theories will not be examined by this study. This research initiates a line of inquiry in a theoretical field with relatively limited literature. The focus of this work, then, is to develop a theoretical model of effective leadership through direct or literal replication of a few exemplary cases.

Delimitations of this qualitative study narrow the scope of what is examined and the conclusions it will report. A purposeful theoretical sampling of superintendents experiencing economic decline will illustrate the influence of Miller and Friesen's (1984) determinants (situation, structure, decision-making style, and strategy) through a multiple case study. While there may be other factors or lenses to examine effective leadership, this study is delimited by this theoretical framework.

## Definitions of Key Terms

1. ***Organizational Life Cycle Theory.*** A universally accepted concept from the biological sciences that organizations take on a “life” that can be compared to living organisms. The theory explains the dynamic, evolutionary processes within organizations and populations of organizations (Cameron & Whetten, 1981; Kimberly & Quinn, 1984; Tushman & Anderson, 1986).
2. ***Birth Phase.*** The period in which a new firm is attempting to become a viable entity. The prime distinguishing features of the firms in this phase are that they are young, dominated by their owners, and have simple and informal structures (Miller & Friesen, 1984).
3. ***Growth Phase.*** A period expected to occur once a firm has established its distinctive competences and enjoyed some initial product-market success. The emphasis is on rapid sales growth and amassing resources. A functionally based structure is established, some authority is delegated to middle managers, and procedures are formalized (Miller & Friesen, 1984).
4. ***The Maturity Phase.*** A period when sales levels stabilize, the level of innovation falls, and a more bureaucratic organization structure is established as the goal becomes to function smoothly and efficiently (Miller & Friesen, 1984).
5. ***The Renewal or Revival Phase.*** A stage of diversification and expansion of product-market scope, when the organization adopts divisionalized structures to cope with the more complex and heterogeneous markets. Leaders place an emphasis upon more sophisticated control and planning systems (Miller & Friesen, 1984).

6. ***The Decline or Death Phase.*** Encroaching stagnation as markets dry up, firms begin to decline with them. Profitability drops because of the external challenges and because of the lack of innovation (Miller & Friesen, 1984).
7. ***Determinants of the Organizational Life Cycle Typology.*** Variables of situation, structure, decision-making styles, and strategy that cause each stage of the organizational life cycle to exhibit certain significant differences (Miller & Friesen, 1984).
8. ***Situation.*** The environment the organization exists in, including the firm's size, growth, maturity, and heterogeneity of governing board and stakeholders (Miller & Friesen, 1984).
9. ***Structure.*** The working culture of an organization, the relationships and reporting groups that increase in sophistication as the firm moves through the first four phases of the life cycle. These structural changes include department differentiation, participative management, internal communications, sophisticated information systems, performance controls, and delegation for routine decisions. Structural sophistication lessens in the decline phase when structure tends to frustrate effective adaptation (Miller & Friesen, 1984).
10. ***Decision-Making Style.*** As the administrative task becomes increasingly difficult, more analysis is used in making decisions with more points of view to be taken into account, and more effort is required to integrate decisions that are compatible and complementary. Decision-making style varies from an authoritarian perspective to an open participative model (Miller & Friesen, 1984). Leadership styles can be generalized to initiators, managers, and responders (Hall & Hord, 2006).

11. **Strategy.** The manager's approach from innovation to conservatism or from diversification to efficiency, depending on the perceived leadership decisions necessary in each phase (Miler & Friesen, 1984, p. 1164). There are six functions of leadership strategies: developing, articulating, and communicating a shared vision; planning and providing resources; investing in professional learning; checking on progress; providing continuous assistance; and creating a context supportive of change (Hall & Hord, 2006).

## **Conclusion**

This dissertation is divided into 5 chapters and an appendix section. The first chapter has presented a brief introduction of the area of organizational life cycle leadership, statement of the problem, theoretical framework, rationale for the study, research questions, and the qualitative research methodology. Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive review of the literature on organizational life cycles and leadership strategies for different phases. The third chapter describes the research methods, how the cases were selected, and how the data was collected and analyzed. The validation strategies used to increase the validity and reliability, and the role and background of the researcher are also presented in Chapter 3. A report of the findings from the case study is outlined in Chapter 4, including a description of the researcher's analysis process. The final chapter of this dissertation is dedicated to summarizing the study and outlining the researcher's summative conclusion and recommendations. The appendix section contains the IRB documents, and criteria and requests for selection of participants, and includes relevant case study database, such as the interview protocol and transcripts, district

demographic summaries, and the CARMA tools used for collecting and analyzing the case study data.



## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of Related Literature**

#### **The Great Recession**

The majority of states has been significantly impacted by and has worked to absorb the economic impact of budget shortfalls since 2007. Five years later, school districts in the majority of states continue to deal with the economic decline through retrenchment and cutbacks in programs and services. Even with a recovering economy, improvements in public school funding will lag behind other area due in part to their dependency on property taxes. School leaders are therefore compelled to “make choices that address the urgent budgetary concerns facing schools, while meeting long-term academic and financial priorities” (Cavanagh, 2011, p. 6).

Organization restructuring or retrenchment (or downsizing) are the most common responses for leaders of public administration, health care, and educational leadership during times of economic austerity and the resulting organizational decline. Whetten (1987) suggested this approach is due to managers’ primary focus on the processes of internal management rather than strategic responses to decline. Because of the inevitable cycles of growth and decline in economic markets and the resulting influence on public administrators, it is important that frameworks for the development of leadership models be developed. Therefore, the researcher focuses this review of the literature on organizational life cycle theory and business and public administration models of effective leadership.

## **The Organizational Life Cycle Model**

Researchers have stressed there is a need to examine dynamic, evolutionary processes within organizations and populations of organizations (Cameron & Whetten, 1981; Kimberly & Quinn, 1984; Tushman & Anderson, 1986). A universally accepted concept from the biological sciences is the idea of organizations taking on a “life” that can be compared to living organisms. This organizational life cycle model describes its life cycle stages or phases as birth, growth, maturity, renewal (or revival), and decline (or death) (Dodge, Fullerton, & Robbins, 1994; Greiner, 1972; Hanks, Watson, Jensen, & Chandler, 1993; Miller & Friesen, 1983.)

**Stages.** To better articulate this organizational life model, the whole has been broken down into steps or stages. A life cycle stage can be defined as a loose set of organizational activities and structures (Dodge, Fullerton, & Robbins, 1994; Hanks, Watson, Jensen, & Chandler, 1993; Quinn & Cameron, 1983). These activities include decision-making, information processing, and operational procedures. Structural issues include reporting relationships, the distribution of power, and department or divisional organization. Life cycle stages are needed for description because these activities and structures change over time (Van de Ven, 1992).

Another widely accepted definition of these stages is “clusters of problems that social systems must resolve, and that the inherent nature of these problems suggests a roughly sequential ordering” (Whetten, 1987, p. 337). Whetten further argued, “these problem sets should be specified at the level of organizational subsystems (e.g. management, technology, structure) to avoid the implication that all facets of an organization process simultaneously, in lock-step fashion, through a small number of

organizational-level developmental stages” (pp. 337–338). He offered three important qualifications in applying this philosophical model:

1. Movement from one stage to another should not be viewed as progression to a more sophisticated or more effective level of development.
2. A recycling phenomenon occurs when groups encounter crises, particularly in the latter stages of development, and may need to revert to an earlier stage to resolve problems.
3. Problems associated with growth are essentially different than challenges inherent in decline stages.

Baird and Meshoulam (1988) concurred that organizations move from one stage to another because the fit between the organization and its environment is so inadequate that the organization’s efficiency and/or effectiveness is seriously impaired or the organization’s survival is threatened.

**Determinants.** Miller and Friesen’s (1984) typology of four determinants is widely cited in the literature as a framework for studying movement between stages, as well as administrative responses to the various phases of organizational development. Baird and Meshoulam (1988) concluded that the organizational life cycle model’s prescription is that the firm’s managers must change the goals, strategies, and strategy implementation devices of the business to fit the new set of issues. Thus different stages of the company’s life cycle require alterations in the firm’s objectives, strategies, managerial processes (planning, organizing, staffing, directing, controlling), technology, culture, and decision-making. Miller and Friesen (1984) based life cycle identification on four primary factors: situation, structure, decision-making style, and strategy.

**Situation.** Situation refers to the context the firm exists in and its make-up, including size, heterogeneity of markets, number of employees, and diversity of ownership (Miller & Friesen, 1984). To a large degree, this is a contextual determinant that impacts the organization's maturity and market diversity and niche but is to a large degree not directly affected by the firm's leader.

**Structure.** Structure is the determination of reporting relationships, varying from simple to complex, departmental to divisional, and centralized to decentralized (Miller & Friesen, 1984). In his review of the literature on change, Boyd (1992) defined two components that influence the context and structures that support or inhibit implementation. He claimed that change is best supported in a context where the physical aspects of an organization and the human elements (beliefs, values, attitudes, etc.) interact positively.

Hall and Hord (2006) contended that a supportive school context decreases staff isolation, increases the organization's capacities, builds positive relationships among stakeholders, and focuses unceasingly on increased effectiveness for student benefits. In an effective change culture, participants seek changes in order to improve their practice. Leadership functions in this area are focused on structures that enhance staff capacity through modeling effective routines, delegation, relationship building, and addressing crucial conflicts that undermine the improvement process. Additional leadership attention should be paid to developing information systems and externally disseminating timely information regarding the value and impact of the implemented change. This communication is critical in managing community perceptions and increasing visibility of successful implementers and the organization's growth (pp. 193–196).

**Decision-making style.** Decision-making style varies from the one-person authoritarian perspective to an open participative model (Miller & Friesen, 1984). Hall and Hord (2006) described leadership style as “the overall tone and pattern of a leader’s approach” (p. 211). They argued that change facilitator style provides the context for understanding and interpreting the actions of a change leader. The three general styles of change leadership they identified were (1) initiators, (2) managers, and (3) responders. The three leadership styles can be summarized to a degree as initiators “make it happen,” managers “help it happen,” and responders “let it happen” (p. 219).

Hall and Hord (2006) defined an initiator as a leader focused on the long-term benefits of the school organization rather than on making people happy in the short term. Initiators motivate others by articulating a vision of what the school or district can become. Members of the organization may report feeling pressure to perform as they are pushed to do things that will move the school vision forward. Initiators are knowledgeable about how systems operate and use political structures to secure resources and permission to innovate. They consciously question and analyze staff members and their own performance. To demonstrate movement toward the desired outcome, initiators pay close attention to the processes of assessment, instruction, and curriculum. They work with a passion for the school organization’s benefit and employ a “strategic sense” in managing daily activities while keeping a firm hold on the big picture for the school (p. 214).

Managers were described by Hall and Hord (2006) as leaders who focus on administrative and organizational efficiency. They tend to the details of resources, schedules, and logistics that generally lead to successful program implementation.

Managers don't rush into change when initiatives are proposed. They buy themselves time to study and learn more about an innovation and consider whether or not to implement the change into the school organization. This additional time often allows for a well-planned and efficient implementation of an initiative. Managers are likely to be hesitant to delegate and work long and hard to meet the needs of the staff and get tasks done.

The third category of leadership style is responder. Hall and Hord (2006) characterized this style as leaders who consistently ask about concerns and check on how staff members feel about general issues at work, yet are less effective in resolving concerns and facilitating change. Generally void of vision for where the school organization is headed, their primary concern is what is happening now. The responder is more than willing to let others take the lead and is very deliberate in making decisions. When faced with the mandate to implement change, the responder tends to minimize the significance of the innovation, claiming, "We're already doing similar things just with different names or labels." Their leadership is focused on hiring and empowering independent people and getting out of their way. The responder's leadership talk is typified as chatty, social, and listening to concerns.

The three change leadership styles appear to be inherent in a leader's personality and self-perceptions and are not easily changed (Hall & Hord, 2006). Leaders may change their style as a result of major changes in circumstances (situation) or with the passage of time but are more likely to adjust their behaviors to the needs of each leadership situation. In other words, effective change leaders use different strategies in response to the dynamic needs of their organization.

**Strategy.** Strategy consists of the approaches managers employ from innovation to conservatism or diversification to efficiency depending on the perceived leadership decisions necessary in each phase (Miller & Freisen, 1984, p. 1164). Leadership is critical to the successful implementation of innovative policies, programs, and processes required to guide a school organization during times of economic decline. Strategies and interventions both big and small make the difference between effective change implementation and superficially or ineffectively putting the innovation into practice. District superintendents must use their knowledge in planning, monitoring, and assisting the school district's efforts to adapt and improve (Hall & Hord, 2006).

Hall and Hord (2006) defined leadership interventions (strategies) as “any action or event that influences the individuals involved or expected to be involved in the process” (p. 186). They described functions they deemed necessary for making change happen and serve as a framework of strategies for effective change leaders:

- Developing, articulating, and communicating a shared vision.
- Planning and providing resources.
- Investing in professional learning.
- Checking on progress.
- Providing continuous assistance.

**Model benefits.** The literature has identified theoretical and practical benefits of applying the life cycle analogy. The model serves as a useful diagnostic tool for understanding and anticipating problems and experiences encountered by members of an organization. The model sensitizes leaders to the necessary shift in priorities, goals, and appropriate criteria of effectiveness over the course of an organization's life span. The

model provides essential contextual information to be considered when analyzing the structural properties and internal processes of the organization. Organizational leaders are provided an understanding of the cluster of problems inherent in different stages, as well as insights for managing inter-stage transitions (Cameron & Whetten, 1983).

A predicament that has long intrigued researchers who adhere to this model is why some organizations renew themselves (Lester & Parnell, 1999), move backwards from maturity to growth (Miller & Friesen, 1984), or escape the paralysis of decline by re-entering the growth, maturity, or renewal stages. One possible explanation for the findings of Miller & Friesen (1984) and others (Lester, 2004; Lester & Parnell, 1999) is the concept of strategic choice (Child, 1972). To provide long-term competitiveness and viability, effective leaders recognize the need to implement change and strategic interventions at varying stages of their organization's life cycle.

### **Organizational Life Cycle Research**

Though a number of business and management theorists referred to developmental stages in the early to mid-1900s, Mason Haire (1959) is generally recognized as one of the first to publish a study that used a biological model for organizational growth. Haire (1959) argued that organizational growth and development followed a regular sequence. The further proliferation and study of an organizational life cycle model intensified in the following decades, and by the 1970s and 1980s, it was well established as a key component of the overall study of organizational development. From the approaches of these studies and the theoretical frameworks, theorists have developed a number of iterations of organizational life cycle models. Life cycle stages vary per



model depending on how the researcher defines an actual stage (Hanks, 1990).

### **Resource models.**

***The Social Resources Model.*** Arthur Stinchcombe (1965) attempted to show that the era during which an organization is founded has lasting effects on its later structure. According to Stinchcombe (1965), the social resources available at the time of an organization's founding largely determine its structure, taking advantage of economic, technical, and environmental conditions.

***The Slack-Structure Model.*** The model of Frank Tuzzolino and Barry Armandi (1980) suggested that the organizational life cycle has five developmental stages, each associated with a certain organizational structure. They introduced into the model the concept of organizational slack, defined as payments to organizational members in excess of what the organization absolutely must pay them in order to have them function adequately to maintain the organization. The newly created and the dissolving organizations have hardly any slack; the growing and declining organizations have some slack; and the stable bureaucratic organization has considerable slack. The stages and structure are:

1. Creation → Ad hoc Structure
2. Growth → Organic Structure
3. Stabilization → Bureaucratic Structure
4. Decline → Recentralization Structure
5. Dissolution → Absence of structure

### **Crisis models.**

***The Situational Confrontation Model.*** Gordon Lippitt's (1969) model maintained

that the way an organization confronts crises defines the stage of life cycle growth.

Organizations must successfully and appropriately overcome each phase's crisis if they are to move on to next phase. He argued that organizations decline either due to drastic changes in the external environment or because they fail to recognize and confront significant crises. Lippitt (1969) identified six critical situations or confrontations most likely to occur in the following order:

- *Launching the venture.* What and how much are we willing to risk personally and financially to keep this venture going?
- *Survival and sacrifice.* How much are we willing to sacrifice personally and financially to keep this organization going?
- *Achieving stability.* Are we willing to be formally organized? Are we willing to accept and enforce discipline?
- *Pride and reputation.* Are we willing to engage in self-examination? Will we combat outside threats to the organization's reputation?
- *Developing uniqueness.* Are we willing to put into effect the changes that will make us unique?
- *Contributing to society.* Are we willing to help society without expecting a direct return? Will we use our resources to improve the quality of human life?

***The Evolution – Revolution Model.*** Larry Greiner (1972) envisioned organizations as developing through evolutionary periods, each concluded by a revolution. This model focused on organizational growth and the role of managerial procedures critical to the organization's progression. Greiner's model (see Table 1) is predictive of how an organization evolves from birth to maturity, including recommended structures and

procedures for organizational leaders.

Table 1: Greiner's (1972) Organizational Growth Model

<b>Stages/Phases</b>	<b>Situation/Structure</b>	<b>Decision-making style/Strategies</b>
Phase 1: Creativity	Crisis of leadership; formalized management practices must be adopted.	Organizational structures introduced; specialized job assignments.
Phase 2: Direction	Crisis of autonomy; top-level managers must delegate authority and decision-making with lower-level management.	Delegation; decentralization of organization structure; greater responsibility given to middle-level administration.
Phase 3: Delegation	Crisis of control; highly divergent, fractionalized organization.	Coordinating techniques; more oversight by top management.
Phase 4: Coordination	Crisis of red tape; levels of organization gradually lose confidence; excess bureaucratic procedures, dampened innovation.	Strong interpersonal collaboration, conflict resolution, and spontaneity through teaming, supported by professional development.
Stage 5: Collaboration	Crisis of exhaustion; psychological saturation, exhaustion of teamwork and innovation	New simplified structures and programs allowing for periodic rest, reflection, and revitalization.

### **Decline and inertia models.**

***The Whetten Model.*** David Whetten (1980) described decline as reductions in such significant resources as employees, profits, assets, customers, etc. His framework suggested that decline results in increased stress on organizational members, more interpersonal conflict, low morale, and high turnover. Whetten (1980) indicated four sources of organizational decline: atrophy, vulnerability, loss of legitimacy, and environmental entropy.

- *Atrophy.* Organizations can lose their edge and fail to adjust to change. Decline caused by lack of responsiveness to change can occur at any life-cycle stage, in both young and old organizations.

- *Vulnerability.* Young organizations, particularly those in their infancy, are highly susceptible to failure. Organizations that decline before they really get going are often started by people with strong technical backgrounds but without knowledge in other important areas, such as marketing and finance.
- *Loss of legitimacy.* An organization must identify and maintain a legitimate niche or it will likely not survive.
- *Environmental entropy.* An organization must avoid environment entropy (tendency toward increased disorder and erosion), or decline may soon follow.

Whetten (1980) described several possible organizational responses to decline, among them defending, responding, preventing, and generating. The response chosen will depend on the organization's capacity to anticipate, accept, or embrace the impending change (see Figure 1).

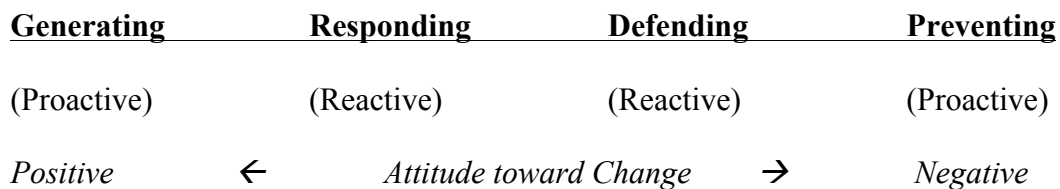


Figure 1: Whetten's (1980) Response to Change Continuum

**The Ford Model.** Joffrey Ford (1980) presented a model characterizing management and structures of organizations in decline. He noted that an increase in number of administrators was generally greater during decline than during the growth stages of the life cycle, that declining organizations are more highly structured than growing organizations, and that structural changes occur more rapidly during growth than

during decline. Ford (1980) noted that decline caused structural hysteresis resulting in a near impossibility in reestablishing the original structure after the decline had ended.

***The Inertia Model.*** Michael T. Hannan and John Freeman (1984) theorized that as organizations move through the life cycle, they have an increasing tendency toward inertia, an unwillingness or inability to change. They hypothesized that during the initial stages of the life cycle, organizations experiment with different tactics, programs, and structures, attempting to find an effective approach. Once the organization arrives at a successful combination of strategies, it tends to retain and repeat successful patterns. As an organization moves through its life cycle, inertia sets in as the organization reproduces the successful structures of the past. From their review of organizations facing inevitable change or restructuring, Hannan and Freeman (1984) concluded that smaller, younger organizations respond more rapidly to threats and opportunities than larger, more mature organizations.

**Non-profit models.** Sanjay Pandey (2010) concluded that since the early 1980s only a handful of new studies on non-profit or public administrators' work in decline and cutback management have emerged. Bill Mulford (2004) noted in his review of organizational life cycle literature that only a few studies comparable with those done in business have tested this theoretical framework in educational organizations. He cited the work of William Sexton (1976) in examining the development of Catholic schools and institutions and the resulting four phases of development (see Table 2).

In a more recent study, Jonathon Rakich and Marvin Feit (2001) examined a life cycle model in health care public policy (see Table 2). They argued that stages are dynamic and non-linear considering "that a public policy issue may (a) cycle within a

stage, (b) move between and through multiple stages and/or (c) possibly recycle back to an earlier stage” (p. 23). Rakich and Feit (2001) also presented a typology of public policy issue movement and evolution. These identified paths are linear, unidirectional, and recursive with the influencing factors of facts, stakeholders, other issues, scope of issue, and technology. These two models reference stages of progression and leadership strategies somewhat unique to the non-profit organizational environments (see Table 2).

Table 2: Organizational Life Cycle Studies in Non-Profit Organizations

<b>Author/Study</b>	<b>Stages/Phases</b>	<b>Situation/Structure</b>	<b>Decision-making style/Strategies</b>
Sexton (1976) “The development of a Catholic institution”	Formation	High personal commitment and sacrifice; increasing demands and complexity.	Specialization of work, rulemaking, and hierarchical structures.
	Conflict	Mission clarity, staff harmony, and commitment erode.	Implementation of decision-making processes, role clarification, and goal reaffirmation.
	Normative	Conflict becomes constructive and stimulating.	Building personal respect and mutual confidence.
	Communal	Staff fully identify with the institution.	Building and reinforcing mission and role understanding.
Rakich & Feit (2001) “A life cycle model of public policy issues in health care”	Anticipatory	Pre-issue.	Goodwill and environmental scanning.
	Emergence	Issues emerge.	Communication and stakeholder building.
	Enactment	Legislation or regulations enacted.	Proactive information and political work.
	Implementation	Legislation or regulations implemented.	Negotiations, litigation, and compliance.

## Organizational Growth

A review of the literature reveals patterns and similarities in models for

organizational growth life cycles. Smith, Mitchell, and Summer (1985) concluded that as an organization moves from inception to maturity, it tends to shift from a lack of formal structure to formal centralization to formal decentralization. During the three phases, top managers are characterized as first generalists, then specialists and planners. The organization's communication processes begin informally and eventually become very formal. Table 3 outlines a typology of growth stages typical of organizations.

Table 3: Smith, Mitchell, and Summer's (1985) Characteristics of Growth Stages

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Inception stage</b>	<b>High-growth stage</b>	<b>Maturity stage</b>
Type of structure	No formal structure.	Centralized; formal.	Decentralized; formal.
Age and size	Young and small.	Older and larger.	Oldest and largest.
Growth rate	Inconsistent but improving.	Rapid.	Slowing and declining.
Communication and planning	Informal; face-to-face; little planning.	Moderately formal; budgets.	Very formal; 5-year plans; rules and regulations.
Decision-making method	Individual judgment; entrepreneurial.	Professional management; analytical tool specialists.	Professional management; bargaining strategists; planners.
Make-up of top-level management staff	Generalists.	Specialists.	Strategists; planners.
Reward system	Personal and subjective.	Impersonal and systematic.	Impersonal, formal, and totally objective.

Quinn and Cameron (1983) published reviews of nearly 30 life cycle models from the literature on group and organizational development. Their resulting model provides four foundational growth stages: entrepreneurial, collectivity, formalization and control, and structural elaboration and adaptation (see Table 4). They suggested that these stages are sequential in nature and occur as a hierarchical progression that is not easily reversed. This growth model and its determinants have served as a taxonomy that would be built upon by many subsequent researchers both in business and nonprofit organizations

(Bailey & Grochau, 1993; Bigelow, Fahey, & Mahon, 1993; Hasenfeld & Schmid, 1989; Rakich & Feit, 2001).

Table 4: Quinn and Cameron's (1983) Growth Stages Determinants

<b>Stages/Phases</b>	<b>Situation/Structure</b>	<b>Decision-making style/Strategies</b>
Entrepreneurial	Early innovation, niche formation.	Creativity, flexibility, resource acquisition.
Collectivity	High cohesion, commitment.	Morale, development of human resources.
Formalization and control	Stability, institutionalization.	Goal setting, efficiency, communication, stability.
Structure elaboration and adaptation	Domain expansion, decentralization.	Flexibility, resource acquisition and growth.

Mulford (2004) presented a comparison of conceptualizations of organization development (Greiner, 1972; Heron, 1973; Mulford, 2002; Quinn & Cameron, 1983; Sexton, 1976; Silins & Mulford, 2002) that primarily represented the growth and maturity phases. He employed the organizational life cycle, organizational learning, and group development stages literature to an analysis of development of the National College for School Leadership during its establishment phase. He suggested that a rigorous examination of how educational organizations develop over time and the implications would lead to ways to make the organization more effective.

### **Organizational Decline**

Most scholarly works focusing on organizational life cycles have been conceptual and hypothetical in content with only a small minority attempting to test empirically the organizational life cycle model. Organizational theorists are inclined to concentrate on the earlier growth stages of the life-cycle model. Whetten (1980) proposed several



possible explanations for the lack of attention to decline processes:

- Practical problems associated with gaining access to collect data in dying organizations.
- Researchers' bias and inclination to study growth processes due to society's preoccupation with youth, vigor, and virility.
- Research is supported by an entrenched establishment in which managers are rewarded primarily for their ability to foster and sustain growth.
- Not all mature organizations decline and die, casting doubt that these stages are necessarily added to the standard life cycle model.

In the 1980s, researchers noted that declining organizations experience problems associated with shrinking resources and diminished morale that were qualitatively different from problems associated with growth (Cameron, Whetten, & Kim, 1987; Nystrom & Starbuck, 1984). A longitudinal study of 36 corporations by Miller and Friesen (1984) proposed five life cycle stages, namely birth, growth, maturity, revival, and decline. They traced changes in the organizational structure and managerial processes as the business firms proceeded through the stages (see Table 5).

Table 5: Miller and Friesen's (1984) Five-Stage Model

<b>Stage/Phase</b>	<b>Causes/Characteristics</b>	<b>Leadership Strategies</b>
Birth	Simple organizational structures.	Centralized authority.
Growth	Increasingly sophisticated organizational structures.	Decentralized authority; middle and lower-level managers.
Maturity	Concern for internal efficiency.	Control mechanisms and processes.
Revival	Divisionalized structures; complex and heterogeneous markets.	Diversification; expansion of product-market scope; sophisticated control and planning systems.
Decline	Stagnation, profitability, and innovation drop.	Liquidation; conservatism; consolidation; price cutting.

Compared to studies of organizational growth, limited empirical research has investigated the causes and characteristics of decline. Cutback management and organization decline models have emerged mainly from case studies and theoretical treatises (Jick & Murray, 1982; Levine, 1979; McKinley, 1993; Mone, McKinley, & Barker, 1998). Hannan and Freeman (1984) argued that decline is caused by an organization's inability to compete successfully for a shrinking resource base or by a failure to shift into new activities. Decline may also come as a result of a decrease in a niche's carrying capacity for current activities and a qualitative shift in a niche to support new activities (Zammuto & Cameron, 1985).

Nystrom and Starbuck (1984) warned that organizations could become overconfident in their ability to dominate a market, known as "success breeds failure." This confidence is manifest in a reduction in both product development and the emphasis on quality. These conceited leaders appear unresponsive to customer feedback and poorly anticipate problems or fail to respond to them in the early stages. Whetten (1987) described this as the "Midas Touch" problem when leaders hold an egotistical view of their prior causes for success. Finally, a risk for decline exists in large organizations as they become cumbersome, rule-bound, and unable to respond to rapidly changing environments. Leaders are generally not aware of slight changes in growth or decline, sliding imperceptibly into trouble (Whetten, 1987).

Whetten (1987) further stated that while there is a lack of empirical research in the literature on antecedents of decline in organizations, there is consensus that decline produces dysfunctional consequences at both the individual and organizational levels.

“These outcomes of decline erode organizational effectiveness and undermine member satisfaction and commitment,” making decline management operationally difficult and politically hazardous (p. 345). Dysfunctional consequences include an increase in conflict, secrecy, rigidity, centralization, formalization, scapegoating, and conservatism. Meanwhile, there can be a decrease in morale, innovativeness, participation, leader influence, and long-term planning (Cameron, Whetten, & Kim, 1987).

Leaders in declining organizations have critical decisions to make to manage these consequences with limited resources at their disposal. Levine (1979) argued that leader credibility suffers leading to high rates of leader turnover. Leaders can use slack resources to meet operational needs, while across-the-board cutbacks can be used to minimize political fallout and retrenchment (Whetten, 1980). There is a temptation for efficiency to take priority over effectiveness (Cameron & Whetten, 1983). Innovation is seen as a cause of decline rather than a solution; therefore, risk taking and creativity decrease (Mone, McKinley, & Barker, 1998).

Rather than an inevitable path to death, organizational decline can be a necessary stimulant of renewal. In mature organizations, the shock of failure in the marketplace is the key stimulant for major change and innovation (Nystrom & Starbuck, 1984). A line of research has developed around “turnaround management” that focuses on increased productivity, prioritization of organization commitments, and renewed personal dedication. Whetten (1987) suggested that with rare exception, organizations experience meaningful renewal “only after the internal organizational and personal consequences are so pervasive and severe that a consensus around the need for drastic action has grudgingly emerged” (p. 345).

## **Leadership Strategies in Organizational Life Cycles**

Researchers of organizational life cycle models have wondered why some organizations move unpredictably between life cycle stages, and even avoid some phases altogether (Lester & Parnell, 1999; Miller & Friesen, 1984). One possible explanation for the findings of Miller & Friesen (1984) and others (Lester, 2004; Lester & Parnell, 1999) is the concept of strategic choice (Child, 1972). Organizational leaders who recognize the need for interventions and strategic change in their organizations for long-term competitiveness may also realize the need to adjust organizational activities and structures at varying stages of the life cycle.

As two of the determinants of an organizational life cycle stage or phase deal with managers' attributes and skills, the role of an organization's leadership is critical. Consistent with many of the models presented, Mintzberg (1984) suggested that all organizations' leaders begin as an autocracy, transition to an instrument or missionary to the organization's mission, and eventually become a routinized closed system of power. In these mature organizations, Mintzberg argued, "administrators tend to augment their own power, and the full-time insiders in general come to think of the organization increasingly as a vehicle to serve themselves rather than serving some outsider or some noble mission" (p. 216). He noted that during the numerous transitions when power structures are also characterized by conflict and confrontation and shaky alliances, a level of vulnerability exists which can lead to the organization's decline and death.

David Whetten (1987) summarized his analysis of organizational life cycle models by suggesting that management initiatives can influence the incidence and amplitude of

the growth and decline cycles, as well as dampen or aggravate their natural consequences. As for facilitating organizational growth, Child and Kieser (1981) suggested four vehicles, the first two approaches being strategic and the second two being operational:

1. Growth in an organization's existing domain.
2. Growth through diversification into new domains.
3. Growth through technological development.
4. Growth through improved managerial techniques.

Whetten (1987) suggested that decline management generally addresses situations when organizations fall victim to a depleted pool of resources (strategic) or to poor management (operational). He argued that failing organizations are either coping with losses along with other organizations in the field or are falling short of meeting the organization's niche capacity through leadership's failure to remain competitive (pp. 348–349).

A number of strategies and processes have evolved from the management of organizational decline literature. Bibeault (1982) identified a four-stage process to turnaround management. His work focused on operational problems and thus included the necessary step of management replacement: (1) management change, (2) evaluation, (3) emergency actions, and (4) stabilization and return-to-normal growth.

Working with organizations in declining industries, when resources are dwindling or restricted due to factors management cannot control, requires a different approach. Harrigan (1980) and Porter (1980), two researchers in separate studies, outlined the difficult choices managers face. They suggested leaders must aggressively gain a larger

share of the dwindling market, create a specific niche to exploit a unique competitive advantage, “harvest” the organization through a controlled divestiture, or exit quickly through immediate liquidation.

Jick and Murray (1982) provided a conceptual and theoretical grounding to organize a review of relevant literature and a basis for empirical studies of the effects of funding cutbacks on public sector organizations. They presented a framework considering the literature on strategic decision responses and attitudinal and behavioral responses likely to arise from cutback crises, including seven internal response strategies and seven alternative strategies to halt externally imposed cutbacks. Internal strategies included rational priority planning, externally oriented political cuts, internally oriented political cuts, across-the-board cuts, delay, abdication, and passivity. The external strategies were rational argumentation, alternative sources of funds, external political threats, external political promises, coalition forming, coalition joining, and passivity (p. 144–145).

Jick and Murray (1982) concluded that the most immediate factors shaping choice of strategic decision responses are what the key decision-makers perceive to be the causes of the cuts in the first place (political or rational) and their felt power vis-à-vis funding agencies, other relevant external bodies, and other internal groups and individuals (pp. 164–165).

Weitzel and Jonsson (1989) warned managers against dysfunctional response to the onset of organizational decline: (1) The organization is blind to the early stages of decline; (2) it recognizes the need for change but takes no action; (3) it takes action but the action is inappropriate; (4) a point of crisis; and (5) the organization is forced to

dissolve.

Researchers argue that while public organizations rarely die (Kaufman, 1976), they are certainly reorganized, reformed, or reborn as frequently as private sector organizations (Starbuck & Nystrom, 1981; Stevenson, 1986). Public organizations must frequently downsize effectively due to these external influences. Whetten (1987) recommended three sequential stages to managing retrenchment (downsizing) effectively:

1. Anticipate an emerging budget problem early to allow for conserving resources to blunt the impact of inevitable cuts. Seek out experienced advice and come to grips with the problem early on.
2. Convey a clear message that the organization is capable of handling the crisis, involving relevant stakeholders in the decision-making process. Avoid certain conservatism and panic by taking the opportunity to revitalize and overhaul inefficient processes or departments. Strive to retain high-quality members by shifting attention to a clear vision of future opportunities and quality work.
3. Implement the prioritized downsizing program, helping members cope with their insecurity, stress, and anxiety. Preserve some organizational slack for continued investment in ongoing innovations.

Organization retrenchment is a literature strand concentrated in areas of public administration, health care, and educational leadership. Whetten (1987) suggested this connection is due to these managers' primary focus on the processes of internal management rather than strategic responses of decline. In these contexts, shrinking enrollments, diminishing state funds, or legislative mandates are frequently not in the domain of influence for these leaders. Behn (1980) suggested three characteristics of

retrenchment effective managers must handle: deadlines, conflicts, and threats. He argued that retrenchment necessitates centralization of leadership and decision-making authority for decisions and the new reality to be accepted.

Whetten (1987) argued that management of decline is both operationally difficult and politically hazardous. While his research suggested that innovation is the life-blood to revitalizing an organization, in many cases managers are hesitant to invest limited resources and demonstrate the political will to invest in changes. Mone, McKinley, and Barker (1998) examined the impact organizational decline has on innovation. They summarized in their examination of organization life cycle literature that decline interferes with an organization's capacity to innovate, especially in government organizations, whereas other research implies decline stimulates innovation. Factors they identified that influence the likelihood to innovate are outlined in Figure 2.

**Environmental Moderator**

Level of Institutionalized Organizational Mission

More – Negative effect on innovation

Less – Positive effect on innovation

**Organizational Moderators**

Power Structure

Diffused – Negative effect on innovation

Concentrated – Positive effect on innovation

Uncommitted Resources

Few – Negative effect on innovation

Many – Positive effect on innovation

**Decision-maker (Leadership) Moderator**

Attributions of Decline

Uncontrollable – Negative effect on innovation

Controllable – Positive effect on innovation

Temporary – Negative effect on innovation

Permanent – Positive effect on innovation

Figure 2: The Impact of Decline on Innovation (Mone, McKinley, & Barker, 1998)



Mone, McKinley, and Barker's (1998) framework provides a model for analyzing organizational decline and innovation in both corporate and government institutions. For corporate business, innovations during decline were widely discontinuous, as moderator levels can vary significantly, while in university and government agencies, leadership demonstrated change responses more conservative and incremental as the moderator levels typically influenced innovation negatively.

Glassberg (1978) argued that public-sector leaders should look to private organizations for examples of responses to substantial budget declines. This is due to businesses experiencing greater variability and vulnerability in changing markets and the considerable investment management researchers have made on business models. He gave criteria for organizations to consider incremental (defending the base) or quantum (significant change in ongoing expenses) budget cuts. Glassberg (1978) contended that leadership in austere times tends to centralize power, yet a brokering style of leadership may become ineffective in quantum cuts, while "civil entrepreneur" style is better suited for times of ongoing budgetary change.

As an example of shared leadership by a superintendent, Rosenblatt, Rogers, and Nord (1993) detailed the decline of a school district that responded flexibly and retained its adaptive capacity. In their case study, the authors demonstrated the importance of interpretive frameworks in determining perceptions of organizational decline and responses to it. They identified three important leadership characteristics: the superintendent's leadership ability, the way he managed others' perceptions of the situation (urgency without crisis), and his creation of a structured participation process.

## **Conclusion**

Amid economic austerity and growing state and federal government intervention comes a call for educational leaders to strategically determine a course of economic responsibility while pursuing increased educational outcomes. The practitioner wanting to seek best practice research can find a number of studies in education and public administration, primarily completed 20 to 30 years ago. However, there appears to be limited interest in furthering research on managing strategies for public school leaders during economic decline as evidenced by the scarcity of recent studies (Pandey, 2010).

While business management models of leadership during different phases of organizational life cycles have been extensively studied and refined, limited research in public or government organizations beyond decline or cutback management has been conducted (Bozeman, 2010). This study outlines the characteristics of effective leaders during economic austerity.

Current public education superintendents face significant challenges in guiding their school districts skillfully through the challenging phases of organizational life cycle, decline, and renewal. This study develops and explains an effective leadership framework in the context of organizational situation, structure, decision-making style, and leadership strategies (Hall & Hord, 2006; Miller & Friesen, 1984).

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

This chapter outlines the process of gathering and analyzing the data for this study. A qualitative research approach was used to determine and explain the leadership approaches of effective superintendents. Creswell (2007) indicated that qualitative research provides a “complex, detailed understanding of the issue” (p. 40). This study uses this naturalistic approach, specifically a case study methodology, to inductively research the experiences of district superintendents in their authentic and “natural settings” (Creswell, 2007, p. 75).

The researcher is interested in understanding the thoughts and behaviors of superintendents faced with leading school districts during times of economic austerity. In order to have a richer understanding of leadership characteristics, the study involves two superintendents in a multiple case study design (Stake, 1995). The researcher’s intent is not to generalize the case study’s findings to a population (school superintendents) but that the findings will identify generalizations for the development of a leadership theoretical model (Yin, 2009). The desired outcome of this work, then, is to develop a leadership framework of best practices to inform current and future practitioners and as groundwork for future studies.

### **Research Design**

Yin (2009) argued that three factors should be considered in determining the qualitative research methodology: the type of research questions, the extent of control of

behavioral events, and the focus on contemporary or historical events. In this study, the research questions are “how” questions, the investigator does not have control over actual behavior events, and the focus is on contemporary events, thus a case study methodology is appropriate (Yin, 2009, p. 8). This research method is selected to be explanatory of superintendent leadership characteristics and choices that positively influence a school district experiencing economic decline.

Creswell (2007) described case study research as “a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system or multiple bounded systems over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case-based themes” (p. 73). Case studies are constructed to describe and explain or to assess and evaluate a phenomenon (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996, p. 549). In the past half-decade, a remarkable phenomenon of prolonged financial austerity has settled in on local, national, and global markets. This economic decline has impacted virtually every private business and public organization in ways not seen since the late 1970s. Theory and model development of effective leadership during these remarkable, yet critical moments in an organization’s life cycle is worthy of a rich and reflective study.

The researcher will use a multiple-case replication design. This approach is ideal for providing in-depth understanding of the conditions and potential causal links in which a particular phenomenon occurs (Yin, 2009, pp. 53–54). Furthermore, this method may provide analytical benefits intended to counter skepticism of the uniqueness or “artifactual conditions” surrounding a single case (Yin, 2003, p. 61). The cases for this study were carefully selected using literal replication logic to predict similar results and

refine an initial leadership framework. Future studies may use theoretical replication logic to further strengthen this theoretical model to predict contrasting results for anticipated reasons.

Five components of research design are especially important for case studies (Yin, 2009, p. 27). The first component is the study's research questions. The primary research question for this study is, "How do effective school superintendents lead when faced with managing the district during economic austerity?" To assist in investigating this primary question, the following secondary questions were examined and addressed:

1. How do effective superintendents influence district structures to positively impact the district's response to financial shortfalls?
2. How do decision-making styles influence superintendents' effectiveness in working with district stakeholders during economic decline?
3. How do effective superintendents use leadership strategies to guide the district during budget austerity?

The second component of a case study research design is the propositions to be examined by the case study. As a proposition for leadership framework for managing organization decline, the researcher has synthesized the findings of studies in both business and public administration. A principal proposition in the literature is the concept of strategic choice: leaders who recognize the need for interventions and strategic change in their organizations for long-term competitiveness may also realize the need to adjust organizational activities and structures at varying stages of the life cycle (Child, 1972). Management initiatives can influence the incidence and amplitude of decline phases and their natural consequences (Whetten, 1987). Leaders of decline must identify the external

bodies and internal groups of individuals that can help guide the organization's strategic response (Jick & Murray, 1982). It is critical for managers to identify budget problems early, convey a clear message of ability to handle the crisis, and implement a prioritized downsizing (Whetten, 1987). While managers of public entities tend to become conservative, careful investment in innovation and professional learning can revitalize the organization (Mone, McKinley, & Barker, 1998). Public leaders may be inclined to centralize decision-making authority (Behn, 1980), yet organizations like school districts can respond flexibly and adaptively during decline through developing a structured participation process (Rosenblatt, Rogers, & Nord, 1993).

The third component of case study design is the unit of analysis. Yin (2009) suggested that the primary research question guides the development a unit of analysis for a qualitative study. The superintendent of a public school district is the unit of analysis. It is important to note that this study is not attempting to compare and contrast school districts, but is focused on superintendent leadership. Utah State Code states that "the superintendent of each school district is the budget officer of the district," therefore neither district business administrators nor school board members are the appropriate district authority for this study (Utah State Legislature, 1988). Due to the delimitating factors and the intended scope of this study, the school leaders analyzed in this research are current district superintendents from Utah who have worked in their assignments since at least 2008.

The fourth component of the case study design is linking the research data to the propositions. The data gathered through the interview process, as well as document review, were organized and analyzed using a Complementary Analysis Research Matrix

Application (CARMA). This tool was designed to help in the collection and analysis of data so results could be applied to the appropriate setting (Putney, Wink, & Perkins, 2006). This analysis approach used literal replication logic and explanation building technique. Expected and evident results from the case study interviews were compared and contrasted and thus confirm or confound the leadership framework. An additional iteration of this technique provides a refined theoretical framework and recommendations for further studies.

In order to link the research data to the propositions, this study used Miller and Friesen's (1984) organizational life cycle determinants as the framework for studying leaders' strategic choices (Child, 1972). However, the situation determinant is by definition the environment the organization exists in and thus is largely out of the realm of influence of the public sector manager. Therefore, this study was organized around the life cycle determinants of structure, style, and strategy. The researcher's goal was to use this format to explain and refine this working model of effective leadership of public school superintendents faced with sustained economic austerity.

Finally, the last component of case study design is the criteria for interpreting the findings. The CARMA tool was used to organize the data collection process and provide the criteria for interpreting the results (see Analysis of Data). In an effort to identify and address rival explanations for this study's findings of effective fiscal superintendent leadership, Table 6 enumerates the rival explanations that were considered by the researcher (Yin, 2009, pp. 133–136). Data associated with these rival explanations was collected and examined to increase the confidence of the findings of this study.

Table 6: Interpreting Findings: Rival Explanations

<b>Type of Rival</b>	<b>Description (possible evidence)</b>
Direct Rival	Another intervention/factor other than the superintendent's leadership accounts for the district's effective response to austerity.
Commingle Rival	Other interventions/factors (superintendent preparation/experience, expertise of the other district staff) combined with structure, decision-making style, and strategy contributes to the effectiveness of the superintendent's fiscal leadership.
Implementation Rival	The decline process of downsizing (retrenchment) and cutback spending, not the superintendent's leadership, accounts for the effective district response to budget shortfalls.
Rival Theory	A theory different than the organizational life cycle model and the factors associated with the role of the superintendent explains the results better.
Super Rival	A force larger than (state or federal influences) but including the superintendent's leadership accounts for the effective district response to budget shortfalls.
Societal Rival	Social trends (increased accountability/transparency, or community engagement/resources), not any particular superintendent leadership factor or intervention account for the effective district response to budget shortfalls.

**Quality of research design.** Yin (2009) summarized the four tests that are commonly used for establishing the quality of any empirical social research. This design will address these important areas of validity (construct, internal, external) and reliability. To strengthen construct validity, this study used two primary sources of evidence (interviews and archival document analysis), established a chain of evidence, and used key informants (former superintendents, dissertation committee members) to review drafts of the case study report. Explanation building data analysis, including the use of the CARMA tool to guide the researcher from observations to inferences and implications, and also taking into account rival explanations built the internal validity of this study. The purpose of selecting the replication logic in the multiple-case replication design was to strengthen external validity. Finally, by using a case study protocol and developing a case study database, the researcher increased the reliability of the research (Yin, 2009, pp. 40–45, 79).



## **Case Study Protocol**

### **Field procedures.**

***Document-archival record review.*** As part of the collection of multiple primary sources of evidence and to inform the researcher prior to the interview, archival public documents for the two school districts were reviewed. According to Utah State Code, each district must prepare an annual budget with supporting documents with revenues and expenditures for the preceding, current, and succeeding fiscal year, including estimates of the district's essential expenditures and financial conditions (Utah State Legislature, 1988). Because of the statewide expectation of this budget report, this information is readily available to the public and comparable in information and format. Furthermore, public information on the district's official internet site or at the central office was also reviewed by the researcher to gain additional information on the general make-up of the school district. This quantitative information made the participant interview less laborious and helped the researcher understand the context of each case study environment.

***Pilot study.*** A former superintendent served as a candidate for a pilot case study to refine the case study protocol. The researcher used the interview protocol, reflectively analyzed the effectiveness of the questions, and devised potential follow-up questions. Following the pilot case, the interview and document-archival record review was revised.

***Interview protocol.*** The researcher gained access to selected exemplary district superintendents through direct contact to each district leader by e-mail and phone. Approval of the research project and IRB (Human Subject Protection) notifications and

assurances was secured. (See Appendix A for IRB Approved Documents.)

Procedural reminders and lines of inquiry guided the researcher in collecting and organizing the data and ensured the proper sequencing of data collection and the thoroughness and consistency of each case. The researcher developed open-ended questions based on the study's central focus to obtain specific information and allow for comparison across cases. This protocol is a semi-structured interview (Knox & Burkard, 2009) and allows for open and flexible conversation in the interview with freedom and adaptability to probe the interviewee's stories in more detail.

Turner (2010) presented important elements of effective research questions. He argued that wording should be open-ended; questions should be neutral, asked one at a time and worded clearly; and care should be taken in asking "why" questions. Creswell (2007) detailed the importance of constructing questions that keep participants focused, including using follow-up questions to obtain optimal responses.

In developing an interview protocol, Yin (2009) suggested that the questions be posed to the investigator serving as reminders of the information that needs to be collected and why. Each question is also accompanied by a list of likely sources of evidence. These "level 2" questions represent the line of inquiry the interviewer keeps in mind, while "level 1" questions are those asked of the interviewees. "Level 1" questions may or may not be posed according to the conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee. The interviewer may pose emerging questions as appropriate according to the interview conversation to answer the question of inquiry (p. 106–109). (See Appendix B for Interview Protocol.)

The interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the superintendents and

lasted 60 to 90 minutes. With permission from the participants, the interviews were recorded and transcribed.

**Selection of participants.** Unlike random sample surveys, case studies are not representative of entire populations, nor do they claim to be. Generalizations about the results cannot be made because of the small sample size and the lack of random sampling (Boyce & Neale, 2006). For this study, case selection is theory-driven, ideally where the study cases attempt to collectively illustrate every causal path in the model suggested by the theory. Yin (2009) called this multiple-case study approach one of “replication logic,” where cases are selected either to replicate findings or to illustrate contrasting results based on theoretically predictable reasons. This study utilizes a literal replication approach to predict similar results through the iterate analysis technique of explanation building.

The researcher identified representative cases as a manageable initial investigation of theoretical models on superintendent leadership during economic austerity. Specifically, two representative cases were studied. Therefore, prior knowledge of the exemplary outcomes of the cases was critical for the case selection. Because there were numerous possible candidates for this study, recommendations from people knowledgeable about current superintendents in Utah was used to screen each candidate. The current and former state superintendents in Utah were queried to identify potential candidates for the case study. The operational criteria for case selection of the district superintendents included:

- Superintendents who had served or were currently serving in school districts experiencing funding decreases during recent periods of economic decline (2007–2011).
- Superintendents who had shown an effective and innovative approach to superintendent leadership during budget shortfalls (prioritizing cutbacks, utilizing resources, staffing changes, engaging stakeholders, etc.).

In addition, one state superintendent suggested accessibility and willingness to share and participate as important criteria. This feedback assisted in further narrowing the field of potential participants. (See Appendix C for Request for Participant Recommendations.)

Finally, while providing an informal overview of potential documents and archival records to review, a school district accounting director identified an important defining characteristic in selecting participating school districts. He argued that a discriminating factor in identifying exemplary cases is to consider school districts' major source of income from the state office. Because the Utah state legislature has consistently decided to fund growth, the amount of new revenue each district received during the past years of austerity has varied significantly. School districts with growth typically absorbed operating expenses and maintained flat budgets with this income, while other districts had to retrench and downsize existing positions or programs to offset associated budget shortfalls. Therefore, this study selected two school districts that fit into these contrasting situations to reveal a broader range of and potentially context-specific effective leadership approaches.

**Analysis of data.** The data gathered through the interview and document review processes provided literal replication design with confirming or confounding evidence

through which a superintendent leadership framework can be refined. For analysis of the determinants of situation, structure, and decision-making style, cross-case synthesis techniques were used to treat each individual case as a separate study, aggregating the finding along patterns of common and unique characteristics between the cases. To provide a cumulative analysis of the leadership strategies determinant, the cases were used as a series of iterations in the explanation building technique. Initial theoretical constructs from the literature were revised following examination of the initial case. Then the revised model was subsequently compared to the facts of the second case. Through this iterative mode, evidence from multiple cases allowed the researcher to reexamine and refine a theoretical framework from multiple perspectives (Yin, 2009, pp. 141–144).

The CARMA tool was used to organize the data collection process and provide the criteria for interpreting the results through the iterative process. CARMA uses a three-part critical praxis framework, including (1) NoteTaking, (2) NoteMaking, and (3) NoteRemaking (see Table 7 below).

Table 7: Complementary Analysis Research Matrix Application (CARMA)

<b>NoteTaking</b>		<b>NoteMaking</b>	<b>NoteRemaking</b>	
Intervention Expectations	Evident Implementation	Interpret Results	Conclusions	Recommendations for Future
Expectations for intervention strategies.	Evident outcomes of implemented strategies.	Compare & contrast expected with evident.	What are the implications for participants?	Modify or maintain? In what way?

In the NoteTaking phase, the researcher observes the situation through multiple perspectives and describes what is taking place. In this study, the researcher observed and recorded the expected outcomes of the superintendent’s strategic choice and the evident

impacts on the school district. The next phase, NoteMaking, involves interpretation of the results, comparing and contrasting the expected with the evident outcomes of the leadership choices. The last phase, NoteRemaking, entails reflection and analysis through which conclusions and recommended future action to modify the environment (Feenstra, 2010). (See Appendix D for CARMA Template.)

Evidence of the identified six rival explanation categories was also gathered and analyzed. A database of documentary evidence with an annotated bibliography of the interviews and findings from document review was carefully kept and provided as part of the Case Study Report.

### **Significance of the Study**

According to Kaufman (1976), public organizations rarely die. However, experience has shown that they are certainly reorganized, reformed, or reborn as frequently as private sector organizations (Starbuck and Nystrom, 1981; Stevenson, 1986). Timing for research in this area is critical as economists cautiously project economic recovery while policymakers consider a myriad of reorganizing and restructuring policies. This blend of reorganization dynamics and agency transformations provides fertile ground for theory building (Light, 1997). Therefore, it is significant to study leadership during phases of decline (and retrenchment) to inform school district leadership on the body of research available and lay groundwork for future studies. Current public education superintendents face significant challenges in guiding their school districts skillfully through the challenging organizational life cycle phases of decline and renewal.

## **Limitations and Delimitations**

Yin (2009) acknowledged limitations in case study research exist that threaten internal validity. These may include explanatory conclusions the researcher may draw in an attempt to explain causal relationships between economic conditions and superintendent leadership, when potentially other factors may influence the variables of the study. In this research, this could include personal, political, or historical factors. Furthermore, by the mere fact that inferences are drawn throughout the case study, conclusions can be drawn on a particular event that cannot be observed directly by the researcher (p. 42–43).

Not all public school superintendents or participant samples that may illustrate potential rival theories were examined by this study. This research initiates a line of inquiry in a theoretical field with relatively limited literature. The focus of this work, then, is to examine and illuminate a theoretical model of effective leadership through direct or literal replication of a few exemplary cases. The lessons learned are not intended to be transferable or generalizable to other school districts or leadership contexts.

Delimitations of this qualitative study narrow the scope of what is examined and conclusions it will report. A purposeful sampling of superintendents experiencing retrenchment leadership will illustrate the influence of Miller and Friesen's (1984) determinants (situation, structure, decision-making style, and strategy) through a multiple case study. While there may be arguably other rival explanations, factors, or lenses to consider organizational life cycle leadership, this study is delimited by this theoretical framework.

### **Summary of the Student Researcher's Role**

The role of the student researcher was to consult with the faculty researcher in conducting all phases of the study. This included conducting in-depth interviews and reviewing archival records and documents as part of the data collection process. The student researcher also worked with knowledgeable professionals in analyzing the data in refining the proposition's theoretical model. Finally, the student researcher reported the final results, conclusions, and recommendations for further studies.



## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings and Analysis**

In this chapter, an analysis of the research data collected in the multiple case studies is presented to illustrate patterns of superintendent leadership for developing a leadership framework for managing school districts during economic shortfalls. This study represents a long overdue renewal of interest in studying public administration leadership strategies for financial austerity.

This reflective case analysis narrative reports superintendents' perceptions of their leadership during economic decline. According to Leedy (1997), researchers using the reflective analysis strategy draw readers into the participants' experiences (p. 158). Yin (2009) outlined the question-and-answer case study report format as a way to present the contents of the case study database in a shortened and readable final product. This approach allows readers to examine the answers to the same questions within each case study to begin making their own cross-case comparisons. This format also facilitates the development of a cross-case analysis tailored to the specific interests of readers (Yin, 2009, pp. 171–172).

The primary research question for this study was, “How do effective school superintendents lead when faced with managing the district during economic austerity?” Two purposefully selected representative cases were reviewed using the Miller and Friesen (1984) organizational life cycle determinants of organization situation, structure, decision-making style, and strategies. The district situation of each superintendent's leadership was detailed from the responses of the focused interviews. Public archival-

documents (enrollment history and projections, comprehensive annual financial report, proposed budget) from the school districts confirmed the demographic and financial contexts (see Appendix F for District Financial and Demographic Data). Significant excerpts from the interviews related to the other determinants were analyzed to confirm or dispute the theoretical propositions found in the literature regarding fiscal decline leadership (see Appendix E for Interview Transcripts). The areas of structure and decision-making style were examined by comparing approaches that were unique or common between the leaders. Leadership strategies were analyzed using the Complementary Analysis Research Matrix Application (CARMA) praxis format to compare intended and evident outcomes of the two leaders. Finally, an examination of the potential rival explanations of the influence of the superintendents in fiscal leadership was provided to increase confidence in the findings of the study.

### **District Situation**

Situation refers to the context the firm exists in and its make-up, including size, heterogeneity of markets, number of employees, and diversity of ownership (Miller & Friesen, 1984). To a large degree, this is a contextual determinant that impacts the organization's maturity, market diversity, and niche but is to a large degree not directly affected by the firm's leader.

As part of the subject selection process, two varying situations were identified to consider district leaderships' use of student enrollment growth funding while other revenue sources remained flat or decreased. The researcher hypothesized that districts that are able to absorb shortfalls using growth funding are able to retain most existing

programs and services and are in a significantly different financial situation than those who literally have to downsize and cut expenses to balance budgets. Therefore, a district experiencing consistent enrollment growth and another district with a pattern of flat or decreasing enrollment were purposefully selected.

**District 1.** Serving around 8,500 students in 19 schools, District 1 is located in a primarily rural network of communities. The district is a significant employer in the area, with approximately 1,300 teachers, administrators, and support staff. The district has enjoyed a tradition of positive relationships and rapport with the county’s residents.

Due to a few consecutive years of significant increasing enrollment, the district experienced growth and expansion during the early part of the last decade (see Figure 3). This growth required the district to make a number of boundary changes, add additional buildings, and reconfigure schools. In 2005, the district worked with the local college to open a charter school to provide additional options for families and help mitigate some of the effects of the enrollment fluctuations. Of note, the percentage of non-Caucasian students in the district increased from 9% to 12%. This impacted the cultural and language services the district needed to provide patrons. The overall student enrollment growth continued until the economy began to slow in 2008.

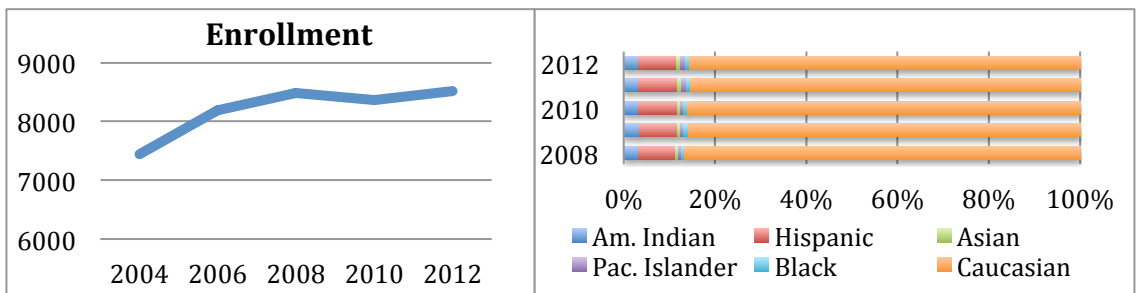


Figure 3: District 1 Demographics

The stalled economy, particularly in the construction and development sectors, had a direct impact on the district's demographics. Property values that had initially skyrocketed fluctuated wildly with the economic decline. Many developers went bankrupt and left the area. With the decline in many contracted or seasonal industries, the district's student enrollment growth leveled off.

The decline in the local and state economy impacted the revenue sources for the school district. As a stopgap, the district used available federal stimulus funds and fund balance savings to meet the annual budget needs. The district use of federal revenues climbed from approximately \$4 million to \$7.5 million between 2008 and 2010. The use of federal stimulus funds continued to represent 15% of the overall budget through 2011 (see Figure 4). This significant increase in federal money, which is short-term funding, will inevitably leave the district facing a tough reality of returning to a budget without these stimulus funds. To avoid a reliance on often unpredictable and conditional federal funding, the local and state revenues need to rebound significantly.

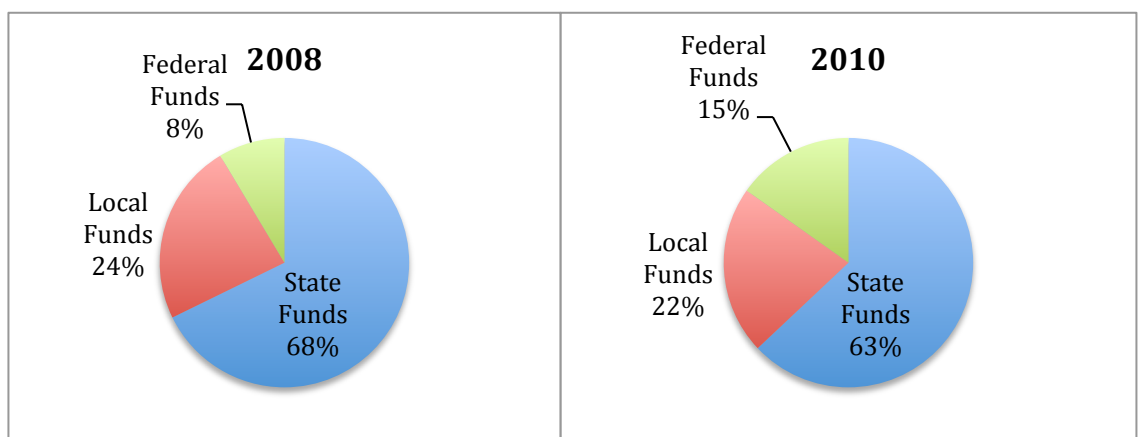


Figure 4: District 1 Revenue Sources

Though the decreased enrollment rates have helped remedy the pains associated with significant growth, decreased revenue has created unique leadership challenges. Tightened budgets and limited fiscal resources have required the district to restructure and prioritize spending. In an effort to retain community confidence and employee morale, the district has tried to keep people employed. Cutbacks have generally been absorbed through attrition of positions such as retirements or voluntary resignations without impacting class size (see Table 8).

Table 8: District 1 Pupil/Teacher Ratios

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>ELEMENTARY</b>	<b>SECONDARY</b>
07-08	23.4	24.9
08-09	23.9	24.0
09-10	23.5	24.1
10-11	23.8	24.4
11-12	23.8	24.2

While other districts have raised pupil/teacher ratios to offset funding shortages, especially at the secondary level, it is noteworthy that District 1 has only the slightest increase in elementary ratios, and even lowered secondary class size. In order to do this, the district has used one-year contracts and district-wide furlough days to balance operating budgets. Additionally, the district has determined to continue funding “step and lane” salary schedule pay increases by using the district’s fund balance reserves.

The district optimistically anticipates a recovering economy as it sees funding shortfalls leveling off and future budgets that will not rely as heavily on reserves and

federal funds to continue ongoing programs and services. However, the potential of a stalling economic recovery and the uncertainty of future federal money still looms large, putting the district in a potentially tenuous financial situation.

**District 2.** District 2 is one of the largest school districts in the state with approximately 6,000 employees. The area it serves has experienced consistent business and residential growth, sending on average 2,000 additional students to school each year (see Figure 5). The student population has increased from 47,000 to over 70,000 during the past decade.

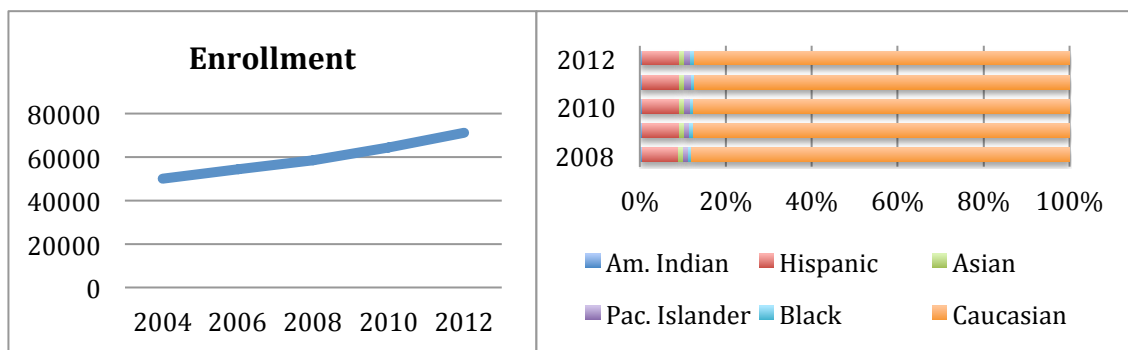


Figure 5: District 2 Demographics

Traditionally, the school district has had the lowest per-pupil expenditures in the state (see Figure 6). This low per-pupil rate is primarily a function of “productivity” contract models the district uses to pay teachers for teaching additional hours or class periods without hiring additional teachers. This approach saves in fixed costs, including building utilization and fewer contract employees. As a growing district, this frugal approach has limited the number of additional schools needed compared to school districts using traditional teacher contract models.

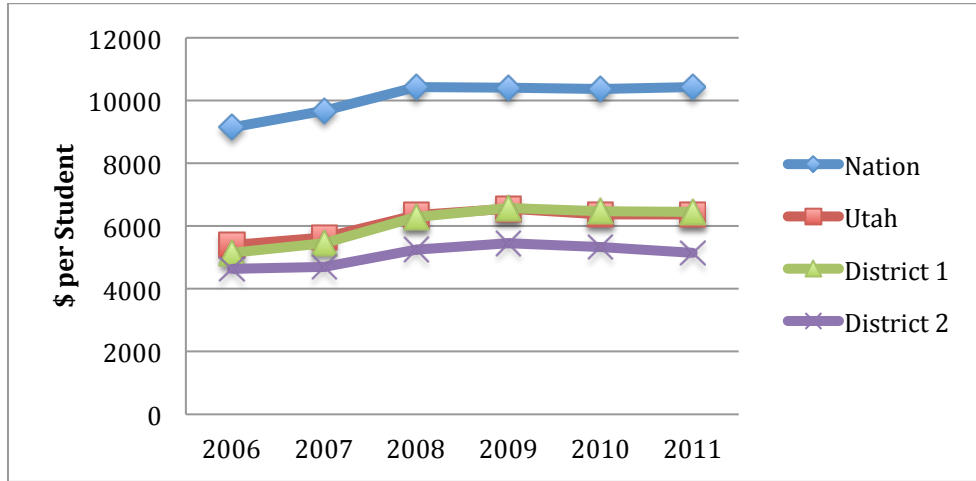


Figure 6: Comparison of Per-Pupil Expenditures

With the demand for schools with continuous enrollment growth, district leadership persisted in expanding and building schools, benefiting from lower land, materials, and construction costs. In 2011, the district successfully passed a \$210 million bond to build, update, and expand school facilities. Growth funding continued to flow from the state and was primarily used to fund ongoing costs, the most significant being personnel expenses. Refusing to reduce instructional days through the use of furloughs, the district opted in 2008 to significantly increase the pupil/teacher budgeting ratio.

Table 9: District 2 Pupil/Teacher Budgeting Ratios

YEAR	ELEMENTARY	SECONDARY
07-08	24.7	26.5
08-09	26.2	28.3
09-10	26.2	28.3
10-11	26.2	28.3
11-12	26.2	28.3

That same year, the district hired significantly fewer new employees and raised class size by approximately two students on both the elementary and secondary levels (see Table 9).

The district has taken a conservative and calculated approach to managing budget shortfalls between 2008 and 2011 (see Figure 7). Though not a significant portion of the annual budget, the district also suspended administrative conference and travel expenses and reduced field trips and extracurricular travel to influence public perceptions of the district priorities. By trimming back on capital projects and reducing transportation and supply expenses, the district was able to keep teacher contracts and compensation intact and avoid reducing school days. Teacher “step and lane” salary increases, including performance incentive pay, continued through the negotiation and budgeting process. This approach sustained employee confidence and morale. The availability of growth funding reduced the effects of the austerity on ongoing operation budgets, while one-time federal funding was spent on pilot programs and extra services.

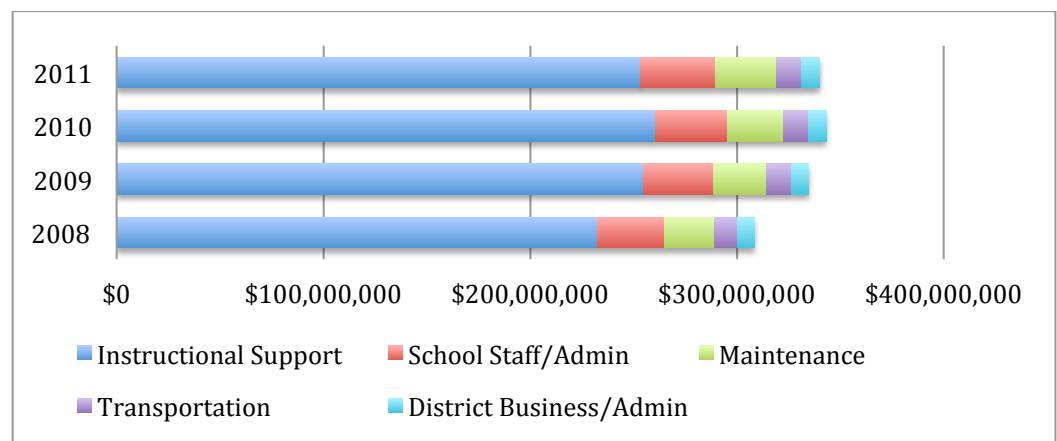


Figure 7: District 2 Expenses by Category



Now with bulging class sizes and the escalating cost of health and retirement benefits, district leadership is hopeful that a recovering economy can soon provide additional funds to lower pupil/teacher ratios and increase compensation. Regardless, the district continues to benefit from enrollment funding and is strategically positioned with fund balance reserves and possibilities of restructuring to weather a continued storm of economic decline.

### **District Structure**

Organizational structures provide the framework and network through which a leader can have influence on colleagues and customers. Miller and Friesen (1984) defined these structures as the reporting relationships of a firm, varying from simple to complex, departmental to divisional, and centralized to decentralized. In this section, the influence of the superintendents on these reporting relationships is examined. Boyd (1992) claimed that change is best supported in a context where the physical aspects of an organization and the human elements (beliefs, values, attitudes, etc.) interact positively. Therefore, having discussed the physical aspects of district situation, attention is now given to analyzing the work of the superintendent on the human elements and relationships within a school district: district structures.

Hall and Hord (2006) suggested that leadership functions are focused on structures that enhance staff capacity through modeling effective routines, delegation, relationship building, and addressing crucial conflicts, including developing information systems and externally disseminating timely information. Interview questions were crafted to answer

the research question “how do effective superintendents influence district structures to positively impact the district’s response to financial shortfalls?” The analysis of the interview responses on these critical leadership functions is organized as communication systems, department differentiation, and employee relations and culture.

**Communication systems.** The responses of the superintendents identified some clear themes about the importance of using communication systems to effectively guide their districts during economic austerity. Ongoing meetings with employee representative groups to communicate internal factors were critical to providing a unified and collaborative plan. This communication included transparent and regular communication with the employee union representatives. District 1’s superintendent noted “we take a hands-on approach to how we’re going to move forward by presenting a proposal and asking for a response from employees in the direction we’re heading.” This hands-on and shared leadership approach was also evident in the reflective words of Superintendent 2:

I have worked with a number of representative groups in presenting the district’s plans for strategic cuts. I meet regularly with teacher, classified, and administrative association representatives, school cluster (teacher and principal) representatives, and district community council representatives to discuss the plans of the district and request reactions and feedback.

As noted in Superintendent 2’s reference to community councils, a strategic structure was implemented to involve external stakeholders in important financial discussions. Superintendent 1 recounted the involvement of local state legislators through a debriefing of the annual legislative session where education budgets and funding formulas were determined. This collaborative effort brought the best problem solving to

the table and broadened the buy-in and support of proposed solutions.

When making critical financial decisions, the leaders proactively and strategically engaged stakeholders. Superintendent 2 noted, “I have found that I have increased this communication during the past years due to the additional number of financial decisions we’ve had to make.” He further explained, “we’ve tried to be strategic rather than reactive in the way we’ve communicated our plans to deal with the financial challenges.” Superintendent 1 confirmed the effectiveness of this approach to proactively increase communication when he recalled:

I have focused on open communication by not only having an open door, but also by going out to talk with people about how the district is doing and the decisions it makes. We’ve worked hand-in-hand with our community. This approach has been very positive.

In conclusion, it was essential for the district leaders to facilitate open and engaging communication regarding financial shortfalls. Furthermore, they actively solicited feedback regarding the proposed plans for dealing with the financial challenges. It is important to note that effective leadership required an increased level of communication, both in effort and structures to guide the organization through the work of downsizing and restructuring.

**Department differentiation.** Restructuring, reorganizing, and even downsizing an organization’s leadership structures are additional responses to economic decline witnessed in the superintendents’ responses. Both leaders reported the necessity of structural changes, though the needs of each district were varied based on demographics and enrollment growth. Superintendent 1 saw a clear need to cut back in district

administrative staff, though leadership responsibilities continued to grow:

We've tried to cut back on our district administrative staff. Dealing with the numerous bills that are passed each year is a burden on the diminished district staff. As part of downsizing, the district leadership responsibilities have been restructured requiring directors to take additional responsibilities. We've combined assignments and responsibilities.

As an area of contrast, Superintendent 2 did not report significant administrative staff reductions, but rather reorganized leadership assignments and structures to deal with the restructuring needs from enrollment growth. He related, "To better keep a pulse on the growing district, I have worked to break the district into smaller divisions." His emphasis was to strengthen interactions within the growing district through this restructuring.

In summary, the purposefully selected leadership situations yielded two varied leadership responses to department differentiation. Both districts were subject to proportionate budget cutbacks, yet a crucial source of ongoing funding was still available to District 2 with its increasing student enrollment. Without a significant increase in ongoing money, Superintendent 1 was faced with downsizing staff positions and combining assignments to keep the organization going. The use of one-time money from a fund balance or federal stimulus money to support ongoing expenses was a calculated risk he was willing to take though it would create a funding cliff when the one-time money was gone. Unenviable was his leadership situation to balance fiscal responsibilities with managing employee morale. Meanwhile, Superintendent 2 was able to reorganize his district structures to deal with the district growth, all while mitigating

many of the effects of the financial shortages. Confirming the researcher's hypothesis, the enrollment growth funding was an advantage to the superintendent's influence on district structures to strengthen the response to fiscal austerity.

**Employee relations and culture.** Attention to employee relationships and organizational culture is another structure leaders can influence. This human side of the work environment is key to managing morale and commitment during difficult leadership moments brought on by economic austerity. As evident in the interview responses, increased leadership visibility and engagement with stakeholders were integral to the leadership approaches of the superintendents.

Superintendent 1 reported that he had "restructured responsibilities to get the directors to be out in the buildings, attending faculty meeting and collaborative group meetings weekly." Superintendent 2 strategically planned for ways to get district leadership out in schools by making "weekly school visits with members of the board [of education]." These efforts to be visible and to communicate with employees in the buildings were a way to strengthen relationships and build trust.

District culture was strengthened through opportunities for "open access" and stakeholder input. Especially in the larger district, Superintendent 2 noted the effectiveness of holding community input meetings at the local school level. This sincere effort to meet with employees and patrons face-to-face was culturally embedded in the structures of these two districts. This tradition of relationship building supported the superintendents' work of guiding the district during economic hard times.

In review, the district leaders were visible and accessible to employees and thus better suited to manage the relationships and culture of the organization during fiscal

shortfalls. Through structures that engaged others in meaningful and collaborative input opportunities, leaders engendered trust and commitment from key stakeholders.

**Summary.** Table 10 summarizes leadership approaches for influencing structures to impact the district’s response to economic shortages. The common approaches represent a confluence of practices that were reported by the interviewed superintendents. As outlined in this section, the context surrounding some of the unique approaches of the district leaders, especially student enrollment growth, was important to consider.

Table 10: Superintendent Influence on District Structure

<b>Superintendent 1 Unique Approaches</b>	<b>Both Superintendents’ Common Approaches</b>	<b>Superintendent 2 Unique Approaches</b>
Communication Systems: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Electronic communication.</li> <li>• Local legislator debriefing.</li> <li>• Open door, open access for stakeholders.</li> <li>• Bring all district employees together.</li> </ul>	Communication Systems: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting with employee representative groups.</li> <li>• Openly communicate financial position.</li> <li>• Facilitate community input (formal and informal).</li> </ul>	Communication Systems: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased and strategic communication</li> <li>• Proactive emphasis.</li> </ul>
Department Differentiation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restructure downsizing into combined responsibilities.</li> </ul>	Department Differentiation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cut administrative staff.</li> <li>• Combine assignments.</li> </ul>	Department Differentiation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reorganize growing district into more clusters.</li> </ul>
Employee Relations and Culture: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Open access” philosophy for employees.</li> </ul>	Employee Relations and Culture: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership visibility and school-level engagement.</li> </ul>	Employee Relations and Culture: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal and staff lead local community input meetings.</li> </ul>

A superintendent has influence on organizational structures that can support the district’s response to economic shortfalls. The impact of a superintendent’s decision-making style is also a necessary consideration for developing a leadership framework and is the next area of analysis.

## Decision-making Style

Leaders apply a deliberate approach in solving problems and getting things done. A leader's approach can vary from a one-person authoritarian perspective to an open participative model (Miller & Friesen, 1984). Hall and Hord (2006) described decision-making style as "the overall tone and pattern of a leader's approach," which provides the context for understanding and interpreting the actions of a leader (p. 211). The superintendents interviewed for this study provided specific details related to their decision-making style during the past years of fiscal austerity. This section is dedicated to identifying the decision-making style of the interviewed superintendents and the influence that approach had on district stakeholders.

The research on change facilitator style by Hall and Hord (2006) provided a model for categorizing the tone and approach of the district superintendents. Hall and Hord's (2006) model identified three decision-making styles: initiators, managers, and responders (see Table 11).

Table 11: Change Facilitator Styles (Hall & Hord, 2006)

<b>Initiators</b>	<b>Managers</b>	<b>Responders</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Clear and strongly held vision.</li><li>• Listen and then decide.</li><li>• Knowledgeable and well informed.</li><li>• Focus on achievement and student success.</li><li>• High expectations.</li><li>• Aggressively seek resources.</li><li>• Willing to bend rules.</li><li>• Politically smart with strategic sense.</li><li>• Creative use of policies.</li><li>• Support teachers.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Controlling budgets and resources are primary considerations.</li><li>• Rules, procedures, and policies frame their view</li><li>• Limited delegation.</li><li>• Try to attend all meetings and events.</li><li>• Work long hours.</li><li>• Protect staff.</li><li>• Cushion changes at the beginning.</li><li>• Once started, implement innovations quickly and efficiently.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Concern with what's happening now.</li><li>• Few ideas about future directions.</li><li>• Concern about others' feelings and perceptions.</li><li>• Hire strong employees, delegate, others take the lead.</li><li>• Delay in making decisions.</li><li>• Decisions made one at a time.</li><li>• Struggle in making big decisions.</li><li>• Affective influence.</li><li>• Downplay size and significance of innovations.</li></ul>

Superintendent 1 reported numerous characteristics associated with the manager decision-making style. He described himself as “hands on,” hard working, and protective of his staff with the challenges brought on by the economic shortfalls. He demonstrated a hesitancy to delegate and would rather take on additional assignments personally to get things done. Additionally, his emphasis on visibility and being among the people at meetings and events further typified the manager decision-making style. Another telling characteristic was his calculated approach to implementing change: “We don’t implement new programs or innovations on a whim. We read and study to determine the feasibility before we implement.”

Other leadership characteristics of Superintendent 1 exemplified a responder’s style through his care and concern for the feelings and perceptions of employees and the public. However, the majority of his traits characterized the style of manager.

The decision-making style of Superintendent 2 also bridged multiple categories. He was focused on the processes associated with professional development and student achievement (initiator). He was keenly aware of and involved in the district’s essential resources, including budgets, policies, and procedures (manager). He employed a systematic process of tending to stakeholders’ feelings and perception through “open door” employee and community input meetings (responder). A revealing theme of his decision-making style was evident in his approach to allowing employees to “solve their own problems,” to “delegate most everything,” and to respect the “channels for follow-up and corrections.” These approaches aligned best with the style of a responder.

In addition to identifying the decision-making style of each superintendent, the goal



of this study was to identify the influence of these decision-making styles on district stakeholders. As noted with leadership structures, both superintendents found benefit in having open communication with district employees to develop relationships. With this approach to building rapport with employees, the superintendents reported that they were able to “keep an open door where people can walk in and talk,” and strived to “communicate and make transparent decisions.” This approach supported the development of trusting and loyal relationships.

The district leaders also employed varying approaches that impacted their school district stakeholders. Superintendent 1, while working in a smaller school district experiencing limited enrollment growth, demonstrated a decision-making style that is very personal and “hands on.” He worked hard to develop deep personal relationships with coworkers:

I emphasize face-to-face interactions and work to know people by name. I encourage and send notes to employees to give specific feedback. I spend a good deal of my mornings writing notes, returning emails, and responding to what people are doing. That has been an effective tool for me.

This personalized approach certainly strengthened the sense of empathy and trust between the district employees and their leader. This influence impacted his staff’s feelings of commitment and tolerance toward the discomforts and stresses of retrenchment.

Concerned about the assignment and workload in the schools, the style of Superintendent 1 was to shoulder even more responsibility. He took on supervision of additional areas directly to be a “part of the solution.” As an indication of how he

deliberately used this approach as a way to motivate, he explained, “I try and send the message that I’m willing to do and work as hard as anyone else in the district and make sure that people see that.” This personal dedication and inclination to protect staff set a tone in the district culture of hard work, patience, and ownership.

The decision-making style of Superintendent 2 was characterized by his focus on the district’s structures for getting things done. His approach to motivating employees was to “delegate and give clear expectations, and then follow up with people.” He stated that availability to communicate with employees was important, but emphasized, “I respect the channels for following up on concerns or making corrections.” He insisted that school and department leaders are best suited for work with people’s concerns and resolving problems. Working in a large district experiencing consistent growth, he deliberately did not allow himself to be distracted or engrossed in matters he had delegated, only intervening when necessary.

Evident in the approach of Superintendent 2 was a tone of leadership deeply founded in attention to the consistency and integrity of the district processes. This decision-making style provided stakeholders with a predictable pattern of management and was focused on procedures and guiding principles, rather than emotion-based decisions. Employees in the district felt a sense of security and reassurance due to the consistent and reliable routines of the district’s leader.

Another vital approach of Superintendent 2 was his attention to handling the perceptions of stakeholders through an “open door” policy of and engaging them in the work of formulating solutions. By being “in touch” with the feelings and views of the key participants, he controlled potential feelings of crisis and built confidence that the

leadership was capable of solving management challenges. Guiding the problem-solving process, he guided stakeholders' impulsive needs to implement "quick-fix" changes to solve financial dilemmas. As a stated philosophy to implementing change, Superintendent 1 explained: "Never make change just for change's sake. Change should be for improvement. I believe change will happen when groups of people identify ways they want to grow."

A purposeful approach has led to careful and systemic implementation of innovations in District 2. Though cautious and deliberate, the long-term impact was increased stakeholder confidence in and support for the school district. This trusting relationship with his district leadership was manifest in his approach to "delegate most everything and trust my staff to get it done." Furthermore, the impact of this rapport with community representatives was evident in the superintendent's expression that the "the district community council keeps a pulse on the community and watches out for me."

To summarize decision-making style, the common and distinctive approaches of the two superintendents set a tone for the districts' responses to challenges and critical decisions associated with economic austerity. Superintendent 1 took significant ownership in the workload and morale of his employees by emphasizing personal relationship building and visibility. True to his manager style, he endeavored to protect his staff and cushion the effects of the inevitable cutbacks and restructuring.

Superintendent 2 built alliances with key stakeholders through careful attention to their feelings and perception and strategically provided structures for consistency and confidence in the school district's capacity to handle the financial challenges. His style of responder was effective in guiding the districts conservative and calculated approach. The

influences of the superintendents are further explained in the next section by reflecting on the strategies the leaders used to guide their districts during economic shortages.

### **Leadership Strategies**

Looking at the last organizational life cycle determinant, the researcher collected and analyzed strategies the leaders used to direct their districts during economic austerity. Leadership strategies consist of the approaches managers employ from innovation to conservatism or diversification to efficiency depending on the perceived leadership decisions necessary in each phase (Miller & Freisen, 1984, p. 1164). District superintendents must use their knowledge in planning, monitoring, and assisting the school district's efforts to adapt and improve (Hall & Hord, 2006). This final area of inquiry used these three leadership functions to organize and analyze the strategies superintendents used to guide their district during years of austerity.

As an analysis approach for developing a leadership strategies framework, the researcher utilized a series of iterations in the explanation-building technique. Initial theoretical positions from the literature were revised following examination of the initial case (Superintendent 1). This revised framework was then improved comparing the results to the facts of an additional case (Superintendent 2). Through this iterative mode, evidence from multiple cases allowed the researcher to reexamine and refine a theoretical framework for leadership strategies from multiple perspectives (Yin, 2009, pp. 141–144).

The Complementary Analysis Research Matrix Application (CARMA) tool was used to organize the data collection process and provide the criteria for interpreting the results. This tool was designed to help in collecting and analyzing data so results could be

applied to the appropriate setting (Putney, Wink, & Perkins, 2006). CARMA uses a three-part critical praxis framework, including (1) NoteTaking, (2) NoteMaking, and (3) NoteRemaking. In this study, the researcher detailed from the interviews the expected outcomes of the superintendents' strategic choices and the evident impacts on the school districts (NoteTaking). The next phase, NoteMaking, involved interpreting the results by comparing and contrasting the expected with the evident outcomes of the leadership strategies, which led to identifying meaningful implications for leaders dealing with decline. Finally, recommendations for leaders and further studies (NoteRemaking) will be provided in the concluding chapter of this study.

As an initial theoretic proposition for leadership strategies framework for managing school districts during economic decline, the researcher synthesized the findings of studies in both business and public administration. Glassberg (1978) argued that public-sector leaders should look to private organizations for examples of responses to substantial budget declines. A principal proposition in the literature is the concept of strategic choice: leaders who recognize the need for interventions and strategic change in their organizations for long-term competitiveness may also realize the need to adjust organizational activities and structures at varying stages of the life cycle (Child, 1972). Hall and Hord (2006) concluded that leadership is critical to the successful implementation of innovative policies, programs, and processes required to guide a school organization. Strategies and interventions both big and small make the difference between effective change implementation and superficially or ineffectively putting the innovation into practice. Further, Whetten (1987) suggested that management initiatives influence the incident and amplitude of decline phases and their natural consequences.

**Planning leadership strategies.** The researcher considered the literature from previous studies to develop an initial leadership framework for planning leadership strategies (see Table 12). Approaches gathered from the available research included identifying and engaging the external and internal stakeholders in developing a shared vision and strategic response, recognizing budget problems early, and conveying a clear message that the organization can handle the crisis.

Table 12: Summary of Research on Planning Leadership Strategies

Facilitator interventions for developing shared vision include engaging school staff and community in identifying the guiding beliefs and values, determining area for improvement, selecting solutions, and developing clear mental images of the resolutions (Hall & Hord, 2006).
Leaders of decline must identify the external bodies and internal groups of individuals that can help guide the organization's strategic response (Jick & Murray, 1982).
It is critical for managers to identify budget problems early, convey a clear message of ability to handle the crisis, and implement a prioritized downsizing (Whetten, 1987).
Organizations like school districts can be flexible and adaptive during decline through developing a structured participation process (Rosenblatt, Rogers, & Nord, 1993).

The first iteration of analysis of planning leadership strategies during declines was done using the data from the interview of Superintendent 1. The researcher organized the responses of the interviewee in a CARMA tool to compare the intended and evident outcomes of the strategies Superintendent 1 employed (see Appendix G for CARMA for Superintendent Leadership Strategies). From the researcher's interpretation of these results, it was evident that through a conservative, open, and collaborative approach, the

superintendent developed cooperative strategic plans, high trust, and supportive stakeholders and increased transparency and openness with stakeholders, which strengthened the district's position in dealing with the challenge of downsizing. The significant implication for leadership was that the time and energy spent in relationship building to create a shared vision gave high returns in stakeholder support in implementing strategic plans and financial strategies.

As a second iteration, the researcher also examined the planning strategies used by Superintendent 2 in his response to economic austerity. Confirming the strategy of stakeholder participation, Superintendent 2 emphasized how engaging in a collaborative approach with employees and community resulted in stronger alignment between the goals and priorities of a district and the way money was spent. He used a strategic rather than reactive approach in communicating plans to deal with financial challenges, thus responding to the early signs of decline and building confidence and rapport with stakeholders of his ability to handle the crisis. As an important leadership implication, he related his high level of involvement in the financial responsibilities of this district. His approach demonstrated that using increased communication regarding shared vision and plans with stakeholder allowed the district to be strategic rather than reactive during financially challenging times.

In the final assessment of planning strategies, the resulting framework from the research and iterations of the case studies provided the following strategies:

- Identify and engage the external and internal stakeholders in developing a shared vision and strategic response.
- Recognize budget problems early.

- Convey a clear message that the organization can handle the crisis.
- Build trusting relationships by increasing transparency and openness.
- Strategically increase communication with stakeholders.

Superintendents using these planning strategies were flexible and adaptive during decline through developing a structured participation process. These approaches provided stronger alignment between the goals and priorities of a district and the way money was spent, strengthened stakeholder confidence and support in implementing strategic plans and financial strategies, and allowed the district to be strategic rather than reactive during financially challenging times.

**Monitoring leadership strategies.** Research on monitoring leadership strategies was studied by the researcher to develop an initial leadership framework (see Table 13). Studies suggested that effective leaders use formal and informal systems to monitor and support employee morale and participation; assist employees through coaching, consulting, and follow-up; and remain unpretentious and responsive to feedback.

Table 13: Summary of Research on Monitoring Leadership Strategies

Leaders are generally not aware of slight changes in growth or decline, sliding imperceptibly into trouble (Whetten, 1987).
Leaders keep a hand on the pulse of progress through collecting information and feedback using formal and informal systems and assisting staff through coaching, consulting, and follow-up (Hall & Hord, 2006).
Conceited leaders appear unresponsive to feedback and poorly anticipate problems or fail to respond to them in the early stages of decline (Nystrom & Starbuck, 1984).
During decline, there can be a decrease in morale, innovativeness, participation, leader influence, and long-term planning (Cameron, Whetten, & Kim, 1987).



The interview responses of Superintendent 1 were analyzed as the first iteration for analysis of monitoring leadership strategies during decline. Similar to planning strategies, the CARMA tool was used by the researcher to compare the intended and evident outcomes of the reported strategies (see Appendix G for CARMA for Superintendent Leadership Strategies). The analysis confirmed and expanded the proposed framework that personal, empathetic, and visible leadership sent a message of sincere concern to staff members. Formal systems of interviewing as well as informal monitoring through visibility in schools were used to assess employee needs. A willingness to adjust and correct expectations and support based on stakeholder feedback further edified the proposed framework. A significant strategic approach was the personalized and face-to-face work of monitoring employee needs and providing encouragement and assistance. This emphasis on open and upfront communication resulted in improved levels of employee trust and morale by sending the message that leadership wanted to part of the solution.

Considering the experiences of Superintendent 2 as a second iteration, the researcher confirmed the significance of applying systems to monitor and support employees. By reorganizing the district into smaller divisions with increased supervisor contact, the superintendent was able to keep a pulse on employees' needs and morale. Also, through meeting regularly with established community councils, he was able to keep in touch with community perceptions. Additionally, the superintendent used routines of regular visits to schools, employee input meetings, and an "open door" policy to facilitate stakeholder dialogue and solicit feedback. The superintendent's emphasis on using existing leadership structures and staff empowerment for providing support and

solving problems at the school or department level further confirmed his approach to assisting employees. As a significant implication for leaders, this approach of utilizing cabinet, building-level, and community leadership channels to monitor needs and build relationships resulted in support and problem solving at the local level.

In reflection of the research and two confirming iterations that refined the proposed monitoring strategies, the following framework materialized:

- Use formal and informal systems to monitor and support employee morale and participation.
- Assist employees through coaching, consulting, and follow-up.
- Remain unpresumptuous and responsive to feedback.
- Provide open and up-front expectations and feedback (concern, praise, and correction).
- Use community councils to manage external stakeholders' perceptions.
- Respect and support leadership channels for site-based problem solving.

Considering the use of these strategies, important implications for superintendents included employee morale, participation, leader influence, and long-term planning.

Leaders who carefully monitored the progress of the organization and were willing to accept feedback were able to assess needs and provide timely assistance. A personalized approach that was open and upfront helped keep employee trust and morale healthy.

Finally, problems were solved more frequently at the local level using community and district leadership structures.

**Assisting leadership strategies.** The researcher further studied assisting strategies that effective leaders used to support their organization during organizational

decline. An initial framework of leadership interventions was developed through a review of previous research literature (see Table 14). Prior studies have concluded that effective managers use assisting strategies to increase productivity and commitment through growth and expansion, and even promote conservatism and consolidation through across-the-board cuts. Other assisting strategies include providing structures for technology utilization and professional learning, resources to meet operational needs, and careful investment in innovations to revitalize the organization.

Table 14: Summary of Research on Assisting Leadership Strategies

Turnaround managers use strategies of increased productivity, prioritization of organization commitments, and renewed personal dedication (Whetten, 1987).

To facilitate recovery in a declining organization, leaders must promote growth in an organization through expanding existing or new domains, increasing technological development, and improving managerial techniques (Child & Kieser, 1981).

Leaders can use slack resources to meet operational needs, while across-the-board cutbacks can be used to minimize political fallout and retrenchment (Whetten, 1980).

Managers tend to use liquidation, conservatism, consolidation, and price cutting strategies during organizational decline (Miller & Friesen, 1984).

Facilitators provide resources by developing policies, programs, and guidelines to facilitate growth, including opportunities to develop new understandings and skills and expertise. “Learning is the basis of and the corollary to change” (Hall & Hord, 2006, p. 191–192).

In mature organizations, the shock of failure in the marketplace is the key stimulant for major change and innovation (Nystrom & Starbuck, 1984).

While managers of public entities tend to become overly conservative, careful investment in innovation and professional learning can revitalize the organization (Mone, McKinley, & Barker, 1998).

The proposed framework for assisting leadership strategies was also refined using the iterative approach. The interview responses of Superintendent 1 were analyzed as the first iteration again using the CARMA tool (see Appendix G for CARMA for Superintendent Leadership Strategies). Numerous approaches reported by Superintendent 1 concurred with the findings from the research. Strategies were employed to use fund balances (slack resources) to hold class size and teacher compensations harmless, while cutbacks were focused on extracurricular activities and travel. As a conservative approach, retiring or resigning employees were not replaced, and staff responsibilities were consolidated. Superintendent 1 exemplified a renewed personal commitment by personally taking on additional assignments and working 12-hour days. Teacher professional learning transitioned from individualized to collaborative teamwork, with an emphasis on better utilization of technology. Finally, a conservative approach was taken to innovations by carefully studying feasibility before implementation.

As a second iteration, the researcher compared the assisting strategies used by Superintendent 2 with the proposed framework. The approaches of Superintendent 2 also confirmed many of the suggested assisting strategies as he made across-the-board cutbacks through increased pupil/teacher ratios, supported innovation through the use of stimulus funding and pilot programs, and developed and empowered employees through professional learning collaborative teams and delegation.

A leadership framework for assisting leadership strategies was refined and confirmed by the two iterations from the case studies. Effective superintendents use the following strategies to assist their districts during economic austerity:

- Increase productivity, prioritize organization commitments, and renew personal dedication.
- Use slack (fund balance, stimulus) resources to meet operational needs, while using across-the-board cutbacks to minimize political fallout and retrenchment.
- Employ conservatism and consolidation strategies.
- Develop policies, programs, and guidelines to facilitate growth.
- Promote growth through expanding existing or new domains.
- Improve managerial techniques (collaborative teaming, delegation).
- Provide opportunities for employees to develop new understandings, skills, and expertise.
- Carefully invest in innovation, increasing technological development, and professional learning to revitalize the organization.

Meaningful implications for superintendents were found in the literature and case studies regarding assisting strategies. Careful alignment of spending and cutbacks with the district's shared vision helped employees economize resources and work collaboratively to endure the stresses of downsizing. Delegation and developing collaborative teams promoted growth and allowed the superintendent to focus on the overall responsibility of district leadership. The political fallout and retrenchment was minimized through carefully calculated cutbacks and the use of slack funds. Finally, the shock of shortfalls by the district was a key stimulant for renewed personal commitment and innovation.

As a final consideration of leadership strategy frameworks, the cases examined in this study identified two superintendents who were able to effectively adapt and lead

during the decline brought on by economic shortfalls without needing to be replaced. Bibeault (1982) suggested that turnaround management might require a change in a firm's leadership, who would then work to evaluate the crisis, execute emergency actions, and stabilize the organization. The leadership strategy frameworks presented and confirmed by this research and the associated implications provide a proven for superintendents leading during economic austerity.

### **Rival Explanations**

To increase the confidence of the findings for this study, rival explanations were identified and addressed by the researcher. Data associated with these rival explanations was collected and examined to more clearly delineate the degree to which other potential causes impacted the way the school district handled the fiscal challenges of the recent economic decline.

The researcher examined the interview data in several areas to detect potential rival explanations, as outlined by Yin (2009, pp. 133–136). First, other possible interventions that could account for the results observed were examined (direct rival). Additionally, the degree to which the superintendents were involved was assessed to gauge if longstanding existing processes and procedures (implementation rival) accounted for the financial response of the district.

Superintendent 1 reported the influence of an experienced and expert business manager who was “hands on in making financial decisions.” He explained that he worked effectively with the business manager in an effective partnership of analyzing financial situations and viable solutions. Regarding this working relationship, he expounded, “My

involvement has not been ‘hands off’ and tell me what you’ve done. We have worked cooperatively and as a partnership all the way through this.” Therefore it was clear that Superintendent 1 was intimately involved in the district’s leadership response.

Superintendent 2 similarly reported a healthy working relationship with his business department. He outlined a teamwork approach with clear roles for his district’s business and administration leaders, clearly identifying the significant role he had in decision-making:

The education arm and the business arm of this district must work together as a team. Yet each department needs to know their role. The education administrators shouldn’t unnecessarily determine the business decisions, nor should the business staff dictate the educational decisions. We need to work together and focus on our assignments and working well together.

Both district leaders were influenced and influential in a strong working relationship with other expert staff in the district. Referring to state code guidelines, they made it clear that they held responsibility to administer the financial decisions of the school district and to “oversee and give the parameters with the budgets.” These responses made it clear that the superintendents were engaged in and played a significant role in their districts’ responses to the economic downturn, thus discounting direct and implementation rivals.

The presence of unique fiscal training or experience was scrutinized to determine if another variable was exerting atypical influence (commingling rival). Both superintendents cited their work as principals as the experience through which they gained understanding of financial procedures, audits, and strategies for managing school

budgets efficiently and effectively. Because principalship is a typical career path for district superintendents, their specific training and prior experience are not significant factors to consider as a commingling rival explanation for their leadership effectiveness.

Noted as a limitation of this study, this work was bounded by the organizational life cycle model and the four determinants outlined in the literature review. These theories served as the contextual framework for this work. While a rival theory may have provided an alternative framework for making meaning of the phenomenon examined the researcher designed this study clearly acknowledging this limitation.

Finally, the researcher considered the potential influence of contextual factors such as external influencers or social trends (super and societal rivals). Contextual factors were specifically considered in this study to identify the organizational life cycle stages of the two districts. Namely, the financial and demographic situations were expounded to lay the backdrop for the leadership choices of the two superintendents. Other external and societal factors were investigated to identify potential variables of significant influence. In response to questions regarding these contextual factors, both district leaders minimized the impact of these variables. Superintendent 1 responded that recent trends and external demands have not “changed our decisions, per se, but the processes have become more transparent to continue to build community trust.” To refute the inclination to trend toward vogue leadership approaches to transparency, Superintendent 2 explained: “The increased demand for accountability and community engagement has been a large part of my belief system from the get-go. It has always and continues to influence my leadership in this district.”

While Superintendent 1 conveyed indiscernible influence on his decision-making



by recent external influences, Superintendent 2 related that societal trends have been his long-standing leadership approach. Therefore, the researcher concluded that super and societal rivals play a nominal role in the variables of this study.

In the final assessment of rival explanations, it is clear that the superintendents were both directly involved in and responsible for the fiscal decision decisions in their districts. As carefully selected case examples of strong district leaders, the subjects of this study proved to have regular and unexceptional financial training and were not abnormally influenced by external influences. Therefore, sufficient confidence was secured that consequential results may be inferred from this research within the limitation and delimitations of this study

## **Summary**

In this chapter, an analysis of the research data collected in the multiple case studies was presented to illustrate patterns of superintendent leadership for developing a leadership framework for managing school districts during economic shortfalls. The primary research question that guided the analysis process was, “How do effective school superintendents lead when faced with managing the district during economic austerity?” The study’s two purposefully selected representative cases were reviewed using the Miller and Friesen (1984) organizational life cycle determinants of organization situation, structure, decision-making style, and strategies and yielded inferences and implications for public school administrators. The final chapter of this study will address the researcher’s conclusions, interpretations, and suggestions for future research.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

In this chapter, the researcher provides an overview and summary of this study on superintendent leadership during fiscal austerity. This section is devoted to synthesizing and evaluating the results using the existing literature and the researcher's perspective to develop conclusions that refine a leadership framework and inform practitioners. Finally, the researcher offers his conclusions and recommendations for future practice and research.

#### **Summary of the Study**

Patterns of economic austerity and increased state and federal government involvement have created a dynamic environment where strong fiscal leadership is essential for school districts to be responsive and adapt to the challenges brought on by budget shortfalls. Effective educational leaders are needed determine a feasible course of economic responsibility while pursuing increased educational outcomes. A superintendent looking for literature on best practices of fiscal leadership in this unique context finds limited research on decline management strategies due to the lack of sustained economic decline over that past few decades. There is a noticeable scarcity of contemporary studies on this topic (Bozeman, 2010). This study represents a long overdue renewal of interest in studying public administration leadership strategies for financial austerity.

The researcher wanted to identify approaches and practices of effective school

superintendents when faced with managing their districts during economic austerity. The conceptual framework for this study was the organizational life cycle model and the contextual and leadership determinants that influence an organization's phase in the life cycle, as identified by Miller and Friesen (1984). These primary determinants were situation, structure, decision-making style, and strategy and served as the framework for this study.

The researcher used a qualitative research approach to investigate and address the research questions. A case study methodology was selected to be explanatory of superintendent leadership characteristics and choices. Two criteria were used for the purposeful selection of two superintendents for the case studies: First, the participants were identified as exemplary candidates for their length of term and effectiveness as a superintendent as recommended by the former and current state superintendents, and second, the participants were chosen through consideration of their school districts' student enrollment growth to provide one growing district and another with flat or declining enrollment.

Interviews and district archival records were analyzed to study the leadership experiences of the participants during the Great Recession of 2007–2009. A review of leadership constructs in both business and public administration guided the researcher in developing an initial framework for superintendent fiscal leadership during decline. Finally, cross-case synthesis and literal replication logic were used to examine the situation, structure, decision-making style, and strategies of the two participants to develop a refined leadership framework.

## **Summary of the Findings**

**Effects of situation.** The researcher hypothesized that the demographic and population growth of the two purposefully selected school districts would result in two distinctly different fiscal leadership contexts. The analysis of District 1 that experienced limited or no enrollment growth revealed tightened budgets and diminished fiscal resources. This required district leaders to significantly restructure, downsize, and prioritize spending. Budgets relied in part on fund balance reserves and federal stimulus funds to continue ongoing programs and services. The district also used one-year contracts and district-wide furlough days to help balance the operating budgets, fund employee salaries, and minimize layoffs. The district made a concerted effort not to increase pupil/teacher ratios.

In the growing District 2, the availability of growth funding reduced the effects of the austerity on budgets. State and local funds generated through increased student enrollment were used to offset some of the budget shortages and fund operational costs such as personnel expenses. Early in the financial crisis, the district raised class size, essentially eliminating a teacher contract per 400 students across the board, to create significant savings in the ongoing operation expenses. This allowed the district to spend federal stimulus funds on pilot programs and additional services. The district also used fund balance reserves money for one-time incentive bonuses and teacher collaboration grants.

**Leadership influences on structure.** The superintendents used the districts' structures to support their responses to economic shortfalls. The leadership structures examined by this study were communication systems, department differentiation, and

employee relations and culture.

A cross-case synthesis of the two superintendents' use of communication structures demonstrated that it was essential for the district leaders to facilitate open and engaging communication regarding financial shortfalls. Furthermore, they actively solicited feedback regarding the proposed plans for dealing with the financial challenges. It was important to note that both superintendents increased communication to collaboratively guide their districts through the work of reprioritizing and problem solving.

The purposefully selected leadership situations yielded two varied leadership approaches to department differentiation. As noted in the summary of the effects of structure, Superintendent 1 was faced with being shorthanded due to downsizing and restructuring and thus combined department assignments to keep the district going. Superintendent 2 was able to retain most existing positions and reorganize his department structures to systematically respond to the district's growth needs. While Superintendent 1 implemented restructuring and retrenchment of departments, Superintendent 2 took the opportunity to reorganize assignments to provide more support to the smaller clusters of the growing district.

To strengthen connections with employees and the district's culture, both district leaders worked to be visible and accessible. The superintendents reported leadership benefits through engaging employees and patrons in meaningful and collaborative input opportunities. Closely connected with the findings of the communication structures, the leaders' visibility, openness, and accessibility engendered trust and commitment from stakeholders.

The experiences of the superintendents confirmed the findings of prior studies on leadership influence on organizational structures. For example, Child (1972) asserted that strategic leaders adjust organizational activities and structures for long-term viability. The leaders' careful consideration of their district external and internal stakeholder groups reinforced the concept of strategic response suggested by Jick and Murray (1982). Community input was actively sought and considered by leaders while also making shared decision-making with employee a priority. Verifying Whetten's (1987) assertion of building stakeholder trust, the superintendents reported that by providing proposals for solutions to stakeholders and being open to feedback, they sent the clear message that the leadership structures were accessible and able to handle a prioritized response to the shortfalls.

**Impacts of decision-making style.** Each district leader used a distinct tone and approach to solving problems and getting things done. The researcher identified the decision-making styles of the interviewed superintendents and their influences on district stakeholders. The categories of initiator, manager, and responder were used to characterize the decision-making style of the district superintendents (Hall & Hord, 2006).

Superintendent 1's style was categorized as a manager as he took significant personal ownership in solving problems, emphasized visibility, and worked long hours "to be part of the solution." He protected his staff by personally taking on additional management responsibilities. He also demonstrated a responder style through his approach of expressing concern for the feelings and perceptions of employees through note writing and personal contacts. In analysis of the effects of his style, he was able to

develop trusting and loyal relationships with employees. Other impacts included strengthened employee commitment and tolerance toward the discomforts and stresses of retrenchment.

By allowing employees to “solve their own problems,” to “delegate most everything,” and to respect the “channels for follow up and correction,” Superintendent 2 demonstrated a responder style. His approach was also characterized by his attention to stakeholders’ feelings and perceptions through formal and informal channels. He bridged into other styles through his focus on professional development and support of innovative programs (initiator) and his direct involvement in managing the district’s finances (manager). His approach similarly developed trusting and loyal relationships with employees and also an increased sense of security and reassurance through his open communication and conservative financial approach. He was further able to increase confidence in stakeholders of the district’s capacity to proactively solve financial and management challenges.

The findings of the study are aligned with research on leadership approaches during austere times. Glassberg (1978) argued that a “civil entrepreneur” style, characterized by collaborative work to improve an organization, is better suited for times of ongoing budgetary change than is a centralized power, brokering style of leadership. The superintendents both used a collaborative decision-making approach to support employees and patrons. They also structured the participation of stakeholders by asking for feedback to the district’s proposed solutions. This method corroborates with a similar case study of superintendent approaches to dealing with decline. The findings demonstrated the importance of managing stakeholders’ perceptions through a structured

participatory process (Rosenblatt, Rogers, & Nord, 1993).

**Impacts of leadership strategies.** The researcher analyzed strategies the leaders used to direct their districts during economic austerity. Using the leadership functions of planning, monitoring, and assisting, the researcher employed a series of iterations in the explanation building technique to refine an initial theoretical framework from the literature.

Research on planning strategies for creating and communicating a shared vision for the organization was confirmed by the experiences of the superintendents. These strategies suggested that effective leaders identify and engage the external and internal stakeholders in developing a shared vision and strategic response (Hall & Hord, 2006; Jick & Murray, 1982; Rosenblatt, Rogers, & Nord, 1993); recognize budget problems early (Whetten, 1987); and convey a clear message that the organization can handle the crisis (Whetten, 1987). Additional planning strategies found in the superintendents' approaches were building trusting relationships by increasing transparency and openness and strategically increasing communication with stakeholders.

Additionally, an analysis of literature on monitoring strategies and the experiences of the study's participants provided a framework for effective approaches to checking progress and providing assistance to stakeholders. Strategic leaders use formal and informal systems to monitor and support employee morale and participation (Cameron, Whetten, & Kim, 1987; Hall & Hord, 2006); assist employees through coaching, consulting, and follow-up (Hall & Hord, 2006); and remain unassuming and responsive to feedback (Nystrom & Starbuck, 1984; Whetten, 1987). Analysis of the interviewed superintendents' experiences also suggested three additional monitoring



strategies:

- Provide open and upfront expectations and feedback (concern, praise, and correction).
- Use community councils to manage external stakeholders' perceptions.
- Respect and support leadership channels for site-based problem solving.

Finally, the iterative process confirmed numerous research conclusions on assisting strategies for providing resources and professional learning opportunities to staff. Effective leaders:

- Increase productivity, prioritize organization commitments, and renew personal dedication (Whetten, 1987).
- Use slack (fund balance, stimulus) resources to meet short-term operational needs while using across-the-board cutbacks to minimize political fallout and retrenchment (Whetten, 1980).
- Employ conservatism and consolidation strategies (Miller & Friesen, 1984).
- Develop policies, programs, and guidelines to facilitate growth (Hall & Hord, 2006).
- Improve managerial techniques (collaborative teaming, delegation) (Child & Kieser, 1981).
- Provide opportunities for employees to develop new understandings, skills, and expertise (Hall & Hord, 2006).
- Carefully invest in innovation, technological development, and professional learning to revitalize the organization (Mone, McKinley, & Barker, 1998; Child & Kieser, 1981; Hall & Hord, 2006).

An assisting strategy from the literature not evident in the case studies was promoting

growth through expanding existing or new domains (Child & Kieser, 1981).

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The findings of this study provided an organized summary of the contextual and leadership factors that superintendents use to manage their districts during periods of austerity and decline. This concluding section is dedicated to making practical suggestions for what should be done in light of this research and a rationale for additional or follow-up studies.

**Implications of situation.** It is evident that the two district situations created distinctly different financial situations for the two superintendents. The availability of growth funding provided District 2 with ongoing money to spread out in the budgeting process to absorb some of the financial shortages. Meanwhile, District 1 was compelled to restructure and downsize the organizations and look to sources of one-time money as a stopgap for the budget deficits. Both districts made decisions regarding cutbacks in ongoing budget expenses.

District 1 reduced contract days across the board and decided to not rehire positions vacated through retirements or resignations. However, this approach still required the district to rely on some one-time money from reserves and federal stimulus funds for ongoing expenses. Without new ongoing funding, the district was left in a precarious situation to determine how deep to cut operating expenses without severely impeding professional growth and employee morale. Because of the district's reliance on "soft" funding, future reductions in expenses will be required without increases in ongoing funds.

Meanwhile, District 2 raised the budgeted pupil/staff ratios and thus absorbed the lost contract positions with enrollment growth funding and hired significantly fewer employees. It was evident that this approach provided the district with an improved ongoing budget situation with balance between income and expenses. A combination of the access to ongoing growth funds and the decisions to cut continuing expenses allowed District 2 to spend one-time money on initiatives to stimulate growth and student achievement (grants and innovation) and improve employee morale (incentive bonuses).

As a recommendation for action, superintendents should make budgeting decisions that align ongoing expenses with reliable and continued income. Districts can soften the initial blow of budget shortfalls with one-time money amid the challenges of managing the needs of employees and patrons, but a strategy for alignment in the annual fiscal situation must be promptly adopted to avoid repeated setbacks that severely hamper leadership's future fiscal options. As a potential area for further research in this area, a follow-up study with these school districts and their future financial decisions could shed further light on these conclusions. If current patterns of austerity and enrollment continue, how would the districts adjust their ongoing budgeting priorities?

### **Responses to secondary research questions.**

*Question 1: How do effective superintendents influence district structures to positively impact the district's response to financial shortfalls?* The researcher concluded that leaders use communication and relationship building, as well as department structures that engage stakeholders, in the organizations' responses to the challenges brought on by financial shortfalls. Common approaches were found in communication structures and attention to employee relationships. However, a varied approach to

department differentiation was evident due to the contrasting financial situations of the districts.

In conjunction with reorganizing assignments and responsibilities among fewer individuals, Superintendent 1 worked to manage employee stress and morale through visibility and supportive communication. Undoubtedly, relationships were strained as people were being asked to do more with less. Open dialogue about the priorities of the restructuring process helped identify the importance of protecting jobs and pupil/teacher ratios at the expense of employees taking unpaid furlough days and additional assignments. Similarly, Superintendent 2 worked collaboratively with community councils and employee representative groups to develop a plan to protect instruction days and employee compensation while potentially reducing instructional effectiveness with increased class size. Stakeholders were given forums to participate in these prioritization discussions where outcomes and consequences of the recommended solutions were discussed.

Boyd (1992) suggested that during decline, the human elements of an organization must interact positively with the physical aspects that are compelled to change and adjust. The interaction of the human elements (communication and relationship structures) and the physical aspects (department differentiation) were considered to draw conclusions. With reduced positions and ongoing budget shortages, Superintendent 1 implemented the consolidation approach of retrenching and required employees to work harder to maintain district functions. The interaction of the human elements and physical aspects was stressful and demanding. In contrast, Superintendent 2 was able to take a proactive and innovative approach of perceiving district needs,

delegating responsibilities, and differentiating structures to support stakeholders. This approach of Superintendent 2 provided a more enduring and stable interaction between the communication and relationship elements and the department structures of the district.

As a recommendation for action, superintendents must utilize district structures to increase leadership visibility, accessibility, and engagement with employees and patrons during times of economic austerity. This approach allows a superintendent to manage the feelings and perceptions and build critical confidence with stakeholders in the district's capacity to manage the problem. Additionally, longitudinal research on the stability and interaction between human elements and physical aspects of these or similar structures would provide compelling evidence to confirm or refute Boyd's (1992) assertion.

*Question 2: How do decision-making styles influence superintendents' effectiveness in working with district stakeholders during economic decline?* The researcher concluded that a collaborative style of decision-making was effective for managing decline. The two participants exemplified two different primary styles of leadership yet realized significant benefits by emphasizing strong leadership that utilized communication and relationship building. Superintendent 2 mainly exemplified a responder style by realizing the need for increased and strategic communication to hear, manage, and respond to feedback. This approach positively impacted the confidence, reassurance, and devotion of employees and patrons. Though Superintendent 1 reported numerous manager tactics, his deep concern for the workload he was asking employees to shoulder led him to expand his use of communication and affective influence (responder style). The outcomes of his approach were increased trust, loyalty, commitment, and tolerance in stakeholders.

This bridging of decision-making styles was a point of particular interest to the researcher. Hall and Hord (2006) suggested that decision-making styles appear to be inherent in a leader's personality and self-perceptions and are not easily changed. In reflection, the superintendents used decision-making style to influence stakeholders primarily based on the needs dictated by the district's situation. This may have even required that a seasoned leader develop and expand his approach based on the influence the context required. For instance, Superintendent 1 demonstrated many characteristics of a manager; however, his district financial dilemma required him to strengthen relationship and employee morale to handle for the inevitable stresses of retrenchment. While mostly characterized as a responder, Superintendent 2 bridged into management style to methodically organize his budget and develop systematic procedures to tightly manage his resources. He also showed characteristics of an initiator by supporting pilot program initiatives funded through stimulus funding.

Finally, the researcher concluded that leaders respond to the context they operate in and determine a tone or approach to organization needs that may not be inherent in their usual decision making style. This conclusion was consistent with the assertions of Hall and Hord (2006) that a leader may change his style as a result of major changes in circumstances or with the passage of time but is more likely to adjust his behaviors to the needs of each leadership situation.

In light of these conclusions, the researcher recommends that superintendents realize that while their leadership style may serve them well in prior or current contexts, developing new capacities to respond to the challenges of decline may be required, particularly in those approaches related to effective communication. As an area for

further research, the effectiveness of leaders with different primary decision-making styles could reveal approaches that are best suited for decline leadership. To confirm the conclusions of this study, do other successful superintendents with varying styles also develop and bridge into responder tactics to manage decline?

*Question 3: How do effective superintendents use leadership strategies to guide the district during budget austerity?* Though repetitive of the previous conclusions, the analysis of leader strategies provided a comprehensive and categorized directory of interventions and approaches that effective leaders use to guide their organization during decline. The iterative approach using literal replication design provided a confirmed predictable generalization for a leadership framework.

Whetten (1987) suggested that it is critical for managers to identify budget problems early. A meaningful example of the benefits of this early response is found in the way Superintendent 2 acted quickly to protect his district's financial position. As an early response to the operating budget shortfalls, the superintendent decided to considerably reduce ongoing contract expenses by increasing pupil/teacher ratios. This approach did not require employee layoffs because the district was in a pattern of annually hiring more employees than this would require in contracts reduced. Therefore, fewer new teachers were hired and employees shouldered the increased class sizes district wide. District 2 remained strategically positioned with fund balance reserves and possibilities of restructuring to deal with any future budget shortages. District leaders were also able to use one-time funds to seed revitalizing initiatives and pilot programs. This approach to innovation confirmed the literature findings that the shock of failure in the marketplace is the key stimulant for major change and innovation in mature

organizations (Nystrom & Starbuck, 1984).

**Recommendations for further research.** One strategy identified in the research literature was not evident in the researcher's data: promoting growth through expanding existing or new domains (Child & Kieser, 1981). This strategy may be more relevant with business leaders who have wider influence over funding sources through market diversification, product domains, and niche products and services. School district funding is generally determined by federal, state, and local formulas primarily based on student enrollment. However, in this era of increased choices for the public in educational providers, funding tied to school outcomes, and sizeable grant opportunities, studies that identify effective initiatives to attract and retain patrons and strategies for securing non-traditional funding will certainly prove progressive and beneficial.

The researcher identified five strategies from the analysis that were not specifically enumerated in the literature. Though these approaches may arguably represent best practice leadership in any context, the explicit naming of these strategies by the interviewees suggests their prominence in the hierarchy of interventions. It is recommended that similar research be conducted to verify, validate, and confirm these interventions as researched practices critical for effective decline management. Also, the efficacy of this framework at a school level could be examined through a similar study of principal leadership. Furthermore, to allow generalization of the findings to other public administration settings, non-education leadership contexts could also be studied using a similar methodology.

The researcher further recommends future studies to strengthen these findings by more thoroughly examining rival theories and developing a more robust framework. This



could be accomplished by using a theoretical replication design and altering elements of the theoretical framework (different life cycle stages, dissimilar district contexts) or specific consideration of the rival explanations to predict contrasting results but for anticipated reasons (Yin, 2009, p.54–59).

**Conclusions regarding the contextual framework.** An unanticipated connection between the stages of the organizational life cycle, the context factors (situation, structure), and leadership approaches (decision-making style, strategies) became evident in the analysis of the findings of this study. The researcher’s initial expectations in using the organizational life cycle and determinants model were that the relationship would be rationalistic and cyclical (see Figure 8). The researcher conjectured that contextual factors determined the stage of the life cycle, which then initiated leadership approaches to influence the district’s context.

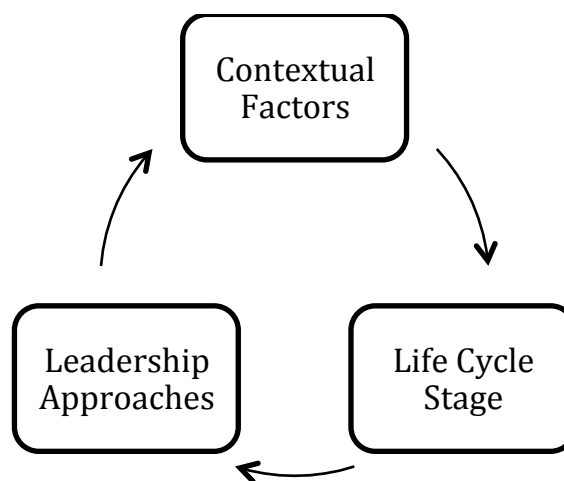


Figure 8: Cyclical Model of the Conceptual Framework

However, the analysis of the impacts and influences of these determinants

revealed a more complex relationship. A significant realization for the researcher was the back-and-forth influences between the leadership approaches and the context factors. The researcher concluded that there was evidence of interplay between the impacts of the leadership approaches and the contextual factors of the school district. For example, the varied contexts of the two districts dictated by student enrollment impacted the superintendents' leadership strategies, even prompting them to develop new decision-making approaches. Conversely, strategies to downsize or innovate impacted operating budgets; decision-making styles influenced communication structures, and so forth. The interplay between the determinants was integrally connected and interactive with the life cycle stage. The researcher concluded that a more dynamic and interconnected model better represented the conceptual framework (see Figure 9).

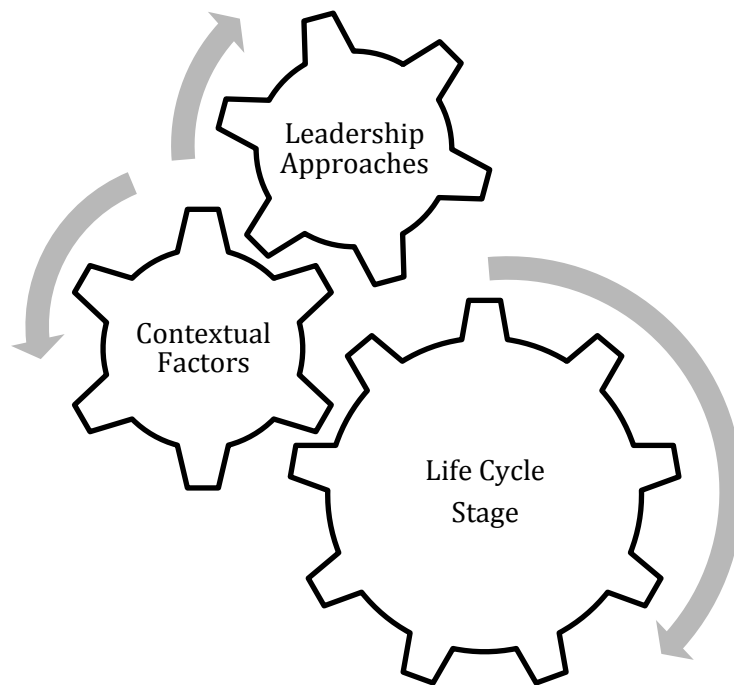


Figure 9: Interconnected Model of the Conceptual Framework

## **Summary and Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to develop a leadership framework for superintendents managing school districts during economic decline. Because of the inevitable continuation of cycles of growth and decline in economic markets and the resulting influence on public funds, this research was timely in creating a strategic leadership framework for superintendents managing decline.

The findings and implications of each area of inquiry were considered in the context of existing literature to develop conclusions. The researcher concluded that enrollment growth and its accompanying funding was a significant contextual factor that influenced leadership approaches. Effective communication evident in district structures as well as decision-making styles was critical to strengthening relationships and building stakeholder support and confidence. While leadership styles may be unique to the personalities and values of each leader, perceived needs and contextual challenges can cause a manager to develop and utilize new approaches. Finally, strategies and interventions found in business and public management studies for planning, monitoring, and assisting stakeholders were confirmed through the iterative analysis process. In the final assessment of the conceptual framework, the influence of the determinants of the organizational life cycle model was best depicted as interactive and interconnected.

The researcher considered the meaning, causes, and consequences of these results and applicable research to deduce and recommend future actions and research.

Recommendations for future research included longitudinal studies on the interactions between human elements and physical aspects of district structures, inquiries into effective decision making styles for decline management, identification of innovative

methods to influence enrollment and access non-traditional funding, and validation of the leadership strategies uniquely identified in this study. Additionally, the researcher recommends follow-up studies on the confirmed findings of this research using theoretical replication logic. Such studies would strengthen the conclusions of this work, contribute to the body of research on decline management, and inform practitioners.

## Appendix A

### IRB Approved Documents



### Social/Behavioral IRB – Expedited Review Approval Notice

#### **NOTICE TO ALL RESEARCHERS:**

*Please be aware that a protocol violation (e.g., failure to submit a modification for any change) of an IRB approved protocol may result in mandatory remedial education, additional audits, re-consenting subjects, researcher probation, suspension of any research protocol at issue, suspension of additional existing research protocols, invalidation of all research conducted under the research protocol at issue, and further appropriate consequences as determined by the IRB and the Institutional Officer.*

**DATE:** March 8, 2012

**TO:** **Dr. Robert McCord**, Educational Leadership

**FROM:** Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects

**RE:** Notification of IRB Action  
Protocol Title: **Superintendent Leadership During Economic Austerity: A Multiple Case Study**  
Protocol #: 1201-4005M  
Expiration Date: March 7, 2013

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This memorandum is notification that the project referenced above has been reviewed and approved by the UNLV Social/Behavioral Institutional Review Board (IRB) as indicated in Federal regulatory statutes 45 CFR 46 and UNLV Human Research Policies and Procedures.

The protocol is approved for a period of one year and expires March 7, 2013. If the above-referenced project has not been completed by this date you must request renewal by submitting a Continuing Review Request form 30 days before the expiration date.

#### **PLEASE NOTE:**

Upon approval, the research team is responsible for conducting the research as stated in the protocol most recently reviewed and approved by the IRB, which shall include using the most recently submitted Informed Consent/Assent forms and recruitment materials. The official versions of these forms are indicated by footer which contains approval, and expiration dates.

Should there be *any* change to the protocol, it will be necessary to submit a **Modification Form** through ORI - Human Subjects. No changes may be made to the existing protocol until

modifications have been approved by the IRB. Modified versions of protocol materials must be used upon review and approval. Unanticipated problems, deviations to protocols, and adverse events must be reported to the ORI – HS within 10 days of occurrence.

If you have questions or require any assistance, please contact the Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects at [IRB@unlv.edu](mailto:IRB@unlv.edu) or call 895-2794.



## **Informed Consent**

### **Department of Educational Leadership**

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**TITLE OF STUDY: SUPERINTENDENT LEADERSHIP DURING ECONOMIC AUSTERITY: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY**

**INVESTIGATOR(S): Dr. Robert S. McCord, Douglas P. Finch**

**CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: 702-895-4167, 801-319-6633**

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#### **Purpose of the Study**

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to examine superintendent leadership approaches to budget shortfalls during seasons of economic austerity.

#### **Participants**

You are being asked to participate in the study because you fit these criteria:

- Have served or are currently serving in school districts experiencing funding decreases during recent periods of economic decline (2007–2011).
- Have shown effective and innovative approaches to superintendent leadership during budget shortfalls (prioritizing cutbacks, utilizing resources, staffing changes, engaging stakeholders, etc.).

#### **Procedures**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:  
Participate in a personal interview.

#### **Benefits of Participation**

There may not be direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. However, we hope to learn effective leadership approaches to budget shortfalls that will inform current and future public school superintendents.

#### **Risks of Participation**

There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks. This may include uncomfortable feelings when asked certain questions, etc.

***Approved by the UNLV IRB. Protocol #1201-4005***

***Received: 03-07-12 Approved: 03-08-12 Expiration: 03-07-13***

### **Cost /Compensation**

There may not be financial cost to you to participate in this study. The study will take approximately one hour of your time. You will not be compensated for your time.

### **Contact Information**

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact **Dr. Robert McCord at 702-895-4167, or Doug Finch at 801-319-6633**. For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact **the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794 or toll free at 877-895-2794 or via email at IRB@unlv.edu**.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with the university. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

### **Confidentiality**

All information gathered in this study will be kept completely confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. While the subjects and their school districts will not be named, some contextual examples and other responses may indirectly identify a participant. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for indefinitely after completion of the study.

### **Participant Consent:**

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date

---

Participant Name (Please Print)

***Approved by the UNLV IRB. Protocol #1201-4005***

***Received: 03-07-12 Approved: 03-08-12 Expiration: 03-07-13***



## **Audio Recording Addendum to Consent Form**

### **Audio Recording Consent:**

We are asking for your permission to allow us to audio record the interview as part of that research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the study. The recording(s) will be used to accurately capture the contents of the interview that will then be analyzed by the research team. The recording(s) will include a coded identifier for organizational purposes. The recording(s) will be stored indefinitely in a locked file cabinet with no link to subjects' identity.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date

---

Participant Name (Please Print)

***Approved by the UNLV IRB. Protocol #1201-4005***

***Received: 03-07-12 Approved: 03-08-12 Expiration: 03-07-13***

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Protocol**

#### **Superintendent Leadership during Economic Austerity**

### **Interview Protocol**

**Main research question:** How do effective school superintendents lead when faced with managing the district during economic austerity?

All of the questions outlined below may or may not be posed according to the conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee. The interviewer may pose emerging questions (not listed below) as appropriate according to the interview conversation to answer the main question of inquiry. Each interview is anticipated to last approximately 60–90 minutes.

**Begin the Interview – Review the Informed Consent and secure participant’s approval signature.**

- Before we begin, what questions or concerns do you have regarding your participation in this study?

**Part I – What has been the superintendent’s financial leadership role in the school district?**

- How would you characterize the degree of your involvement in your district’s fiscal leadership?

- What training or experiences have you had that prepared you for your financial leadership responsibilities as a superintendent?
- How would you describe a theory or perspective that guides your fiscal leadership?
- To what degree does the unique expertise of other district staff members significantly influence the district's financial decisions?
- To what degree do community, state, or federal policymakers influence your ability to make financial decisions?
- How have social trends (increased community engagement, accountability, and transparency) influenced your fiscal leadership during recent budget shortfalls?

**Part II – What are the recent demographic and financial trends for the school district?**

- What have been the general demographic trends for your school district for the past five years?
- How have demographic changes (or the lack thereof) influenced the school district's financial situation?

**Part III – What has the superintendent done to influence district structures and what have been the effects?**

- What information and communication systems (internal and external) have you worked to implement in the district and how would you evaluate their effectiveness?

- Describe the department differentiation structures you use at the district level.
- How have you communicated with employees the financial challenges the district has been facing?
- How have you involved others in making district financial decisions?
- If you could implement some traditions and routines in your district to strengthen employee relationships, what would you propose?

**Part IV – What characteristics typify the superintendent’s decision making style and how has it impacted the district’s stakeholders?**

- What is your approach to motivating people you work with?
- What are the principles you use for evaluating your employees’ and your own performance?
- How do you approach learning about or implementing new innovations in education for your school district?
- What school processes do you find draw your closest attention and scrutiny?
- When big projects or issues arise, what types of responsibilities to you take on yourself and which do you delegate?

**Part V – What leadership strategies have the superintendent used and what have been the outcomes?**

- In a perfect world, how would you provide or adjust the shared vision, resources, professional learning, and implementation support for your staff during recent years of economic decline?

- In reflection, what have been the strengths and areas for growth in the strategies you have used?

**Conclude the interview – The interviewer will make arrangements to send a transcribed copy of the interview to the superintendent to confirm accuracy.**

## Appendix C

### Request for Participant Recommendations

October 2, 2011

Dear Utah State Superintendent,

I am a doctoral student working in the Alpine School District working to design a qualitative study on Superintendent Leadership. I am writing requesting your expert perspective for identifying possible case study superintendents in Utah. Dr. Robert McCord (UNLV), my faculty chair, recommended I ask for your assistance in identifying up to 5 superintendents to consider for my study. Here is a brief overview of my research purpose and some general selection criteria for case study candidates:

#### Purpose of Study:

The purpose of this study is to explain and describe leadership processes superintendents employ in managing organizational decline. The study will synthesize the contemporary studies of business models and public administration research in a review of the literature on organizational life cycle leadership. A multiple-case study of Utah public school superintendents experiencing recent economic austerity will study superintendents' effective use of key leadership factors (situation, structure, decision-making style, and strategy).

#### Criteria for Case Study Superintendents:

- Have served or are currently serving in school districts experiencing funding decreases during recent periods of economic decline (2007–2011).
- Have shown effective and innovative approaches to superintendent leadership during budget shortfalls (prioritizing cutbacks, utilizing resources, staffing changes, engaging stakeholders, etc.).

I appreciate your expert and essential feedback in identifying the participants for my study. I hope this work will inform and contribute to the knowledge base and best practices for our state's superintendents who, it appears, may continue to deal with seasons of economic austerity.

Respectfully Yours,

Doug Finch  
UNLV Doctoral Student

## Appendix D

### CARMA Templates

#### Superintendent Leadership during Economic Austerity Complementary Analysis Research Matrix Application (CARMA)

##### Data Collection through NoteTaking

**Main research question:** How do effective school superintendents lead when faced with managing the district during economic austerity?

**What leadership strategies have the superintendent used and what have been the outcomes?**

<b>Expected vs. evident</b>	<b>Describe what was expected or intended by the leader</b>	<b>Describe what evidently happened</b>
Planning: Creating and communicating a shared vision		
Monitoring: Checking progress and providing assistance		
Assisting: Providing resources and professional learning opportunities		

##### Data Analysis through NoteMaking

<b>Interpretation of results</b>	<b>Compare &amp; contrast expected with evident</b>	<b>What are the implications for participants?</b>
Planning: Creating and communicating a shared vision		
Monitoring: Checking progress and providing assistance		
Assisting: Providing resources and professional learning opportunities		

### Recommendations for Future Action through NoteRemaking

Recommendations for future	Maintain or modify in what way?
Planning: Creating and communicating a shared vision	
Monitoring: Checking progress and providing assistance	
Assisting: Providing resources and professional learning opportunities	



## **Appendix E**

### **Interview Transcripts**

#### **Superintendent Leadership during Economic Austerity**

##### **Interview #1**

**Main research question:** How do effective school superintendents lead when faced with managing the district during economic austerity?

All of the questions outlined below may or may not be posed according to the conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee. The interviewer may pose emerging questions (not listed below) as appropriate according to the interview conversation to answer the main question of inquiry. Each interview is anticipated to last approximately 60–90 minutes.

**Begin the Interview – Review the Informed Consent and secure participant’s approval signature.**

- Before we begin, what questions or concerns do you have regarding your participation in this study?
  - None.

**Part I – What has been the superintendent’s financial leadership role in the school district?**

- How would you characterize the degree of your involvement in your district’s fiscal leadership?

- One of the strengths of our district is the experience of our business manager. He has served his entire 38-year career in our district. He is one of the informal leaders that has steered much of what's gone on in the state. He has such a history and knowledge of things. My involvement has been working directly with him. We work together with all of this. My involvements have not been hands off, and tell me what you've done. We have worked cooperatively and as a partnership all the way through this.
- What training or experiences have you had that prepared you for your financial leadership responsibilities as a superintendent?
  - The high school principalship, including work as an assistant principal, was very helpful. It helped me on a school-wide basis. I've had the opportunity to open a high school. I had a pretty good feel for procedurally what should happen. I learned about checks and balances, including audits. As a superintendent, I learned how the various taxing entities are coordinated. I have participated on the district level in the restructuring of the county RDA and coordinating that effort with all involved. I hit the ground running with this assignment. With this district the size that it is, it allows me to be able to be very hands on.
- How would you describe a theory or perspective that guides your fiscal leadership?
  - My approach has been to stay within budget. I make decisions that I believe are conservative and strategic to stay within a framework we can afford. We try and push as much of our funds into instruction and

classrooms. Philosophically, we operate pretty thin administratively, contrary to some of our critics' perceptions.

- To what degree does the unique expertise of other district staff members significantly influence the district's financial decisions?
  - The business manager is very experienced and is hands on in making financial decisions. Our district has been in a pattern of significant growth for the past decade. The staff continues to give the district a small-district feel despite the significant growth.
- To what degree does community, state or federal policy makers influence your ability to make financial decisions?
  - There has been more transparency, and that has been a good thing. We have gone through a couple of truth-in-taxation hearings. We meet with each staff or group twice each year to discuss financial concerns. We have developed high trust with our community, and we have enjoyed support each time we have approached them with needs.
- How have social trends (increased community engagement, accountability and transparency) influenced your fiscal leadership during recent budget shortfalls?
  - The recent social trends have not changed our decisions, per se, but the processes have become more transparent to continue to build community trust.

**Part II – What are the recent demographic and financial trends for the school district?**

- What have been the general demographic trends for your school district for the past five years?
  - Nine years ago, we began growing by double-digit percentages. The minority subgroups have grown as the percentage of Caucasian students has decreased from 91% to 88%. The ELL population was growing significantly. However, with the decline in some industries over the past few years, including construction, we have seen many in our most at-risk, lowest levels of ELL students have left the district.
  - The district has made a number of boundary changes. We built two new schools and reconfigured the schools based on proposed growth. While some of the growth and development of some outlying areas has remained stable, the local area property values that had initially skyrocketed have fluctuated wildly with the recent economic decline. Locally, many developers went bankrupt. The district opened a charter school on the local college campus and works cooperatively with other educational providers to anticipate enrollment trends. This partnership helped us manage the enrollment fluctuations during the peaks of increase and decline during the past decade.
- How have demographic changes (or the lack thereof) influenced the school district's financial situation?
  - The recent years of limited or no enrollment growth have brought stability to the district. State and government jobs have remained in place for many. Within the district, the ELL population has decreased. Eighty-five

percent of our budget is in personnel. The district has wanted to keep people employed and not cut back jobs, so the philosophy has been that if we all absorb, then we can maintain jobs. Attrition of positions through retirements or voluntary resignation has generally not been replaced. The district has cut back through one-year-only contracts and district wide furloughs (two days). This was communicated and confirmed with employees as a cooperative strategy we would all take A-Z, including me. Step-and-lane has been funded the past few years through using fund balance reserves (\$3.6 million). We anticipate that things are leveling off and we will not need to dip into reserve funds this upcoming year. This has been a fairly good process for us in that it has caused us to reflect on what's important in our district. We've cut back on travel and extracurricular activities, etc.

**Part III – What has the superintendent done to influence district structures and what have been the effects?**

- What information and communication systems (internal and external) have you worked to implement in the district and how would you evaluate their effectiveness?
  - I have focused on open communication by not only having an open door, but also by going out to talk with people about how the district is doing and the decisions it makes. Open Forum radio and improved website have been a priority to our board of education. On a scale of 1-10, I'd say we

are a 9. We've worked hand-in-hand with our community. This approach has been very positive.

- Describe the department differentiation structures you use at the district level?
  - We've tried to cut back on our district administrative staff. Dealing with the numerous bills that are passed each year is a burden on the diminished district staff. As part of downsizing, the district leadership responsibilities have been restructured requiring directors to take additional responsibilities. We've combined assignments and responsibilities. We've wanted to send the message that we want to be a big part of the solution as schools and teachers need to take on more students and greater assignments. For example, as superintendent, I now directly oversee technology and professional development. I am concerned about the principals' assignments and workload as we implement Senate Bill 64.
- How have you communicated with employees the financial challenges the district has been facing?
  - I use electronic communication through the website and regular email. I coordinate with the respective employee representative groups and even invite our local state legislators to attend our debriefing of the legislative session. We bring everyone together to openly communicate the district's financial position. We take a hands-on approach to how we're going to move forward by presenting a proposal and asking for a response from employees in the direction we're heading. Our district is the "perfect

storm” where we get all of our employees in an auditorium and we can visit with them in one body.

- How have you involved others in making district financial decisions?
  - Business manager, open door with all employees through a variety of forums.
- If you could implement some traditions and routines in your district to strengthen employee relationships, what would you propose?
  - I have restructured responsibilities to get the directors to be out in the buildings, attending faculty meetings and collaborative groups on Wednesdays. From a philosophical viewpoint, we have an open door, open access to every employee. From a structural base, we are in the faculty meetings, their data teams. We have Wednesday early-outs, and the district uses the first Wednesday of the month as district directors. The second Wednesday is for school use, and the third and fourth Wednesdays are for individual use.

**Part IV – What characteristics typify the superintendent’s decision making style and how has it impacted the district’s stakeholders?**

- What is your approach to motivating people you work with?
  - I openly communicate and make transparent decisions. I have a hands-on style. I try and send the message that I’m willing to do and work as hard as anyone else in the district and make sure that people see that. I’m always out there doing that. I emphasize face-to-face interactions and work to

know people by name. I encourage and send notes to them to give feedback. I spend a good deal of my mornings, I'm here at 5 am and I write notes, return emails, and respond to what people are doing. That has been an effective tool for me.

- What are the principles you use for evaluating your employee's and your own performance?
  - I use the evaluation instruments that are in place. One of the things we do is to train for consistency of use of the instruments district wide. We train supervisors regularly and emphasize open and upfront feedback. If there is a need for correction, I will respond to that. We train supervisors for their use and emphasize open and upfront feedback.
- How do you approach learning about or implementing new innovations in education for your school district?
  - We don't implement new programs or innovations on a whim. We read and study to determine the feasibility before we implement.
- What school processes do you find draw your closest attention and scrutiny?
  - Leadership visibility to build trust and strong relationships.
- When big projects or issues arise, what types of responsibilities to you take on yourself and which do you delegate?
  - I manage the accountability and visibility needs. I work 12-hour days in order to get my responsibilities done. I have two areas (technology and professional development) that I have not delegated.



**Part V – What leadership strategies have the superintendent used and what have been the outcomes?**

- In a perfect world, how would you provide or adjust the shared vision, resources, professional learning, and implementation support for your staff during recent years of economic decline?
  - I believe in taking a holistic approach. Openness is the key to shared vision. Educators need to grow professionally by being clear on what we teach and how we teach it. I develop strategic plans to accomplish goals. Our work is evidence and results driven. I conduct quarterly interviews with my staff and exit interviews with building leaders to require individuals to return and report on their stewardship.
- In reflection, what have been the strengths and areas for growth in the strategies you have used?
  - I ask questions continually of staff to determine if we have pushed things too far with expectations, and I make adjustments to keep trust and morale healthy. I want to give teachers professional development time with latitude for them to use the hours as necessary. I would cut back on expectations for this work individually to move to collaborative teamwork. The district's technology implementation should be part of the solution to job effectiveness, not something that hinders it.

**Conclude the interview – The interviewer will make arrangements to send a transcribed copy of the interview to the superintendent to confirm accuracy.**

## **Superintendent Leadership during Economic Austerity**

### **Interview #2**

**Main research question:** How do effective school superintendents lead when faced with managing the district during economic austerity?

All of the questions outlined below may or may not be posed according to the conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee. The interviewer may pose emerging questions (not listed below) as appropriate according to the interview conversation to answer the main question of inquiry. Each interview is anticipated to last approximately 60–90 minutes.

**Begin the Interview – Review the Informed Consent and secure participant's approval signature.**

- Before we begin, what questions or concerns do you have regarding your participation in this study?
  - No questions, everything is clear.

**Part I – What has been the superintendent's financial leadership role in the school district?**

- How would you characterize the degree of your involvement in your district's fiscal leadership?

- While I allow the business services staff to do their work, I am very involved in the financial responsibilities of this district. State code outlines that I am the primary financial officer in this district. I oversee and give the parameters with the budgets, such as maintenance and operations.
- What training or experiences have you had that prepared you for your financial leadership responsibilities as a superintendent?
  - My experience in preparing for my financial responsibilities as a superintendent was the high school principalship. I always had a high interest in understanding and managing a school's finances efficiently and effectively.
- How would you describe a theory or perspective that guides your fiscal leadership?
  - The way the district spends its money tells the priorities of the leaders. It is important that there is alignment between the goals and priorities of a district and the way money is spent.
- To what degree does the unique expertise of other district staff members significantly influence the district's financial decisions?
  - The education arm and the business arm of this district must work together as a team. Yet each department needs to know their role. The education administrators shouldn't unnecessarily determine the business decisions, nor should the business staff dictate the educational decisions. We need to work together and focus on our assignments and working well together.

- To what degree does community, state or federal policy makers influence your ability to make financial decisions?
  - The state legislators and state office highly influence our work as a district in terms of determining the state curriculum and annual state budgets, which account for a large part of our funding each year. We work within the guidelines they set to implement effective solutions in our school district. We have also tried hard the past few years to initiate greater awareness and feedback from the local community through the “What Counts” process and the district community councils. For instance, the greatest area of concern and feedback recently been class size.
- How have social trends (increased community engagement, accountability and transparency) influenced your fiscal leadership during recent budget shortfalls?
  - This increased demand for accountability and community engagement has been a large part of my belief system from the get-go. It has always and continues to influence my leadership in this district.

**Part II – What are the recent demographic and financial trends for the school district?**

- What have been the general demographic trends for your school district for the past five years?
  - There has been an average growth of 2,000 students each year for the past 12 years. The population of the district has increased from 47,000 to nearly 70,000 during my time as superintendent. At the same time, the

minority population of students has increased proportionately in some areas and significantly in some areas of the district.

- How have demographic changes (or the lack thereof) influenced the school district's financial situation?
  - We've needed to focus on meshing cultures and meeting the district's needs through growth funding. We've had to cut back in the ratios for some staff support positions, including administration, but we have continued to fund things like we should.

**Part III – What has the superintendent done to influence district structures and what have been the effects?**

- What information and communication systems (internal and external) have you worked to implement in the district and how would you evaluate their effectiveness?
  - I have worked with a number of representative groups in presenting the district's plans for strategic cuts. I meet regularly with teacher, classified, and administrative association representatives, cluster, teacher and principal representatives, and district community council representatives to discuss the plans of the district and request reactions and feedback. I have found that I have increased this communication during the past years due to the additional number of financial decisions we've had to make.
- Describe the department differentiation structures you use at the district level?

- To better keep a pulse on the growing district, I have worked to break the district into smaller divisions. We have gone from five to eight clusters.
- How have you communicated with employees the financial challenges the district has been facing?
  - The cluster meetings have teacher and employee representatives who are able to give feedback and express concerns from the schools. We've tried to be strategic rather than reactive in the way we've communicated our plans to deal with the financial challenges.
- How have you involved others in making district financial decisions?
  - I respect the autonomy and responsibility of each of the supervisors. They are important components in carrying out the K-12 supervision work. The District Community Council keeps a pulse on the community and watch out for me.
- If you could implement some traditions and routines in your district to strengthen employee relationships, what would you propose?
  - I would continue the tradition of Tuesday morning school visits with members of the board, working with cluster groups, and holding employee input sessions. One additional thing that was helpful this year was a community meeting held this last month at every school, led by the building principal.

**Part IV – What characteristics typify the superintendent's decision making style and how has it impacted the district's stakeholders?**

- What is your approach to motivating people you work with?
  - I delegate and give clear expectations and then follow up with people. I'm not a "hammer guy," but I will be if it is necessary. I keep an open door where people can walk in and talk with me. I try and listen to people, yet I respect the channels for following up on concerns or making corrections.
- What are the principles you use for evaluating your employee's and your own performance?
  - Building trust with those you work with is very important to me. I also watch how people solve problems. It's important to be able to generally solve your own problems. Finally, it's important to be yourself and be natural in the way you lead and build relationships.
- How do you approach learning about or implementing new innovations in education for your school district?
  - Never make change just for change's sake. Change should be for improvement. I believe change will happen when groups of people identify ways they want to grow.
- What school processes do you find draw your closest attention and scrutiny?
  - The PLC process in schools is what I really try and pay attention to. I watch closely the curriculum we teach and the training that we provide for teachers and principals. It's important that schools have the resources they need and that the district supervisors are in close touch with the school and department leaders.

- When big projects or issues arise, what types of responsibilities do you take on yourself and which do you delegate?
  - I delegate most everything and trust my staff to get it done. I can't get bogged down with any single task and risk losing the overall perspective I need to keep.
- How has the recent season of economic austerity influenced your decision making style?
  - I believe I've remained steady on the course.

**Part V – What leadership strategies have the superintendent used and what have been the outcomes?**

- In a perfect world, how would you provide or adjust the shared vision, resources, professional learning, and implementation support for your staff during recent years of economic decline?
  - I'm pretty "vanilla." I try to be thoughtful and methodical. I use cabinet-level discussions to dialogue regularly with the supervisors about the district's needs.
- In reflection, what have been the strengths and areas for growth in the strategies you have used?
  - I love to develop people and watch them grow. I wouldn't necessarily see anything that I would do differently.
- What new leadership strategies have you implemented due to sustained budget shortfalls?



- I have been more open in communicating with district stakeholders the shared vision of the district.

**Conclude the interview – The interviewer will make arrangements to send a transcribed copy of the interview to the superintendent to confirm accuracy.**

## Appendix F

### District Financial and Demographic Data

#### Student Enrollment

SCHOOL YEAR	DISTRICT 1 ENROLLMENT	DISTRICT 2 ENROLLMENT
2003–2004	7,443	50,049
2004–2005	7,743	52,107
2005–2006	8,189	54,243
2006–2007	8,486	55,423
2007–2008	8,643	58,465
2008–2009	8,344	60,818
2009–2010	8,365	64,534
2010–2011	8,483	68,508
2011–2012	8,512	71,098

#### STUDENT ETHNIC POPULATION 2007-2008

	DIST 1	DIST 2
AMERICAN INDIAN	281	295
HISPANIC	693	5,007
ASIAN	58	630
PACIFIC ISLANDER	56	672
BLACK	66	456
CAUCASIAN	7,473	51,301
NO RESPONSE	16	104
TOTAL ENROLLMENT	8,643	58,465

**STUDENT ETHNIC POPULATION  
2008-2009**

	<b>DIST 1</b>	<b>DIST 2</b>
AMERICAN INDIAN	286	319
HISPANIC	702	5,222
ASIAN	56	698
PACIFIC ISLANDER	55	787
BLACK	76	488
CAUCASIAN	7,164	53,175
UNDECLARED	5	129
TOTAL ENROLLMENT	8,344	60,818

**STUDENT ETHNIC POPULATION  
2009-2010**

	<b>DIST 1</b>	<b>DIST 2</b>
AMERICAN INDIAN	266	324
HISPANIC	710	5611
ASIAN	63	771
PACIFIC ISLANDER	47	874
BLACK	86	518
CAUCASIAN	7184	56286
UNDECLARED	9	150
TOTAL ENROLLMENT	8365	64534

**STUDENT ETHNIC POPULATION  
2010-2011**

	<b>DIST 1</b>	<b>DIST 2</b>
AMERICAN INDIAN	305	373
HISPANIC	811	5,973
ASIAN	92	828
PACIFIC ISLANDER	96	1,007
BLACK	91	565
CAUCASIAN	8,081	59,647
TOTAL ENROLLMENT *	9,476	68,508

\*Multiple ethnicities are allowed.

**STUDENT ETHNIC POPULATION  
2011-2012**

	<b>DIST 1</b>	<b>DIST 2</b>
AMERICAN INDIAN	309	396
HISPANIC	790	6,104
ASIAN	92	844
PACIFIC ISLANDER	100	1,026
BLACK	78	605
CAUCASIAN	8,126	61,955
TOTAL ENROLLMENT *	9,495	71,908

\*Multiple ethnicities are allowed.

### PUPIL/TEACHER RATIOS

YEAR	DISTRICT 1		DISTRICT 2	
	ELEMENTARY	SECONDARY	ELEMENTARY	SECONDARY
07–08	23.4	24.9	24.7	26.5
08–09	23.9	24.0	26.2	28.3
09–10	23.5	24.1	26.2	28.3
10–11	23.8	24.4	26.2	28.3
11–12	23.8	24.2	26.2	28.3

### PER PUPIL EXPENDITURES

Year	Nation	Utah	District 1	District 2
2002	\$7,524	\$4,706	\$5,068	\$4,201
2003	\$8,044	\$4,651	\$4,504	\$4,111
2004	\$8,310	\$5,009	\$4,891	\$4,158
2005	\$8,701	\$5,250	\$5,077	\$4,397
2006	\$9,145	\$5,397	\$5,140	\$4,629
2007	\$9,683	\$5,645	\$5,463	\$4,708
2008	\$10,439	\$6,353	\$6,293	\$5,249
2009	\$10,414	\$6,564	\$6,571	\$5,461
2010	\$10,377	\$6,375	\$6,474	\$5,323
2011	\$10,425	\$6,378	\$6,445	\$5,145

## FINANCIAL INFORMATION

<b>FISCAL YEAR 2008</b>		
	<b>DISTRICT 1</b>	<b>DISTRICT 2</b>
STATE REVENUES	\$ 31,090,986	\$ 234,855,581
LOCAL REVENUES	\$ 10,848,678	\$ 60,962,556
FEDERAL REVENUES	\$ 3,948,807	\$ 18,504,099
<b>TOTAL REVENUES</b>	<b>\$ 45,888,471</b>	<b>\$ 314,322,236</b>
INSTRUCTIONAL EXPENSES	\$ 29,330,153	\$ 223,114,057
STUDENT SUPPORT	\$ 1,553,633	\$ 9,392,787
INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF	\$ 1,556,328	\$ 14,074,585
SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION	\$ 3,004,132	\$ 18,485,270
BUSINESS	\$ 1,006,744	\$ 1,707,208
BUILDING MAINTENANCE	\$ 5,125,664	\$ 24,233,594
STUDENT TRANSPORTATION	\$ 2,072,329	\$ 11,208,947
DISTRICT/GEN ADMINISTRATION	\$ 406,193	\$ 6,105,977
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$ 44,055,176</b>	<b>\$ 308,322,434</b>

<b>FISCAL YEAR 2009</b>		
	<b>DISTRICT 1</b>	<b>DISTRICT 2</b>
STATE REVENUES	\$ 33,977,203	\$ 238,277,535
LOCAL REVENUES	\$ 10,857,295	\$ 62,292,503
FEDERAL REVENUES	\$ 6,976,584	\$ 39,305,516
<b>TOTAL REVENUES</b>	<b>\$ 51,811,082</b>	<b>\$ 339,875,554</b>

INSTRUCTIONAL EXPENSES	\$ 34,378,822	\$ 244,435,135
STUDENT SUPPORT	\$ 1,489,362	\$ 10,289,459
INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF	\$ 1,586,123	\$ 13,846,831
SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION	\$ 3,237,297	\$ 20,108,793
BUSINESS	\$ 1,063,201	\$ 1,841,221
BUILDING MAINTENANCE	\$ 5,538,431	\$ 25,569,198
STUDENT TRANSPORTATION	\$ 2,355,605	\$ 11,958,027
DISTRICT/GEN ADMINISTRATION	\$ 432,297	\$ 6,687,715
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$ 50,081,138</b>	<b>\$ 334,736,379</b>

<b>FISCAL YEAR 2010</b>		
	<b>DISTRICT 1</b>	<b>DISTRICT 2</b>
STATE REVENUES	\$ 31,330,613	\$ 239,085,483
LOCAL REVENUES	\$ 10,865,246	\$ 64,318,911
FEDERAL REVENUES	\$ 7,561,189	\$ 35,182,707
<b>TOTAL REVENUES</b>	<b>\$ 49,575,048</b>	<b>\$ 338,587,101</b>
INSTRUCTIONAL EXPENSES	\$ 34,361,963	\$ 250,199,989
STUDENT SUPPORT	\$ 1,498,363	\$ 10,263,980
INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF	\$ 1,495,673	\$ 14,308,117
SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION	\$ 3,188,766	\$ 20,871,022
BUSINESS	\$ 1,088,198	\$ 1,770,063
BUILDING MAINTENANCE	\$ 5,507,731	\$ 26,864,957
STUDENT TRANSPORTATION	\$ 2,227,667	\$ 12,108,576
DISTRICT/GEN ADMINISTRATION	\$ 405,344	\$ 6,842,565
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$ 49,773,705</b>	<b>\$ 343,229,269</b>

<b>FISCAL YEAR 2011</b>		
	<b>DISTRICT 1</b>	<b>DISTRICT 2</b>
STATE REVENUES	\$ 31,808,579	\$ 244,698,220
LOCAL REVENUES	\$ 10,987,921	\$ 68,067,541
FEDERAL REVENUES	\$ 7,469,268	\$ 36,659,873
<b>TOTAL REVENUES</b>	<b>\$ 50,265,768</b>	<b>\$ 349,425,634</b>
INSTRUCTIONAL EXPENSES	\$ 34,364,384	\$ 242,612,210
STUDENT SUPPORT	\$ 1,600,589	\$ 10,831,465
INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF	\$ 1,234,845	\$ 14,092,542
SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION	\$ 3,101,681	\$ 22,007,454
BUSINESS	\$ 1,086,901	\$ 1,754,926
BUILDING MAINTENANCE	\$ 5,615,015	\$ 29,678,609
STUDENT TRANSPORTATION	\$ 2,250,660	\$ 12,126,393
DISTRICT/GEN ADMINISTRATION	\$ 419,025	\$ 6,966,157
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$ 49,673,100</b>	<b>\$ 340,069,756</b>



**Appendix G**  
**CARMA for Superintendent Leadership Strategies**

**Superintendent 1**

<b>Expected vs. evident</b>	<b>Describe what was expected or intended by the leader</b>	<b>Describe what evidently happened</b>
<b>Planning: Creating and communicating a shared vision</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Philosophy of be conservative and stay within budget.</li> <li>2. Openness is the key to shared vision. Increased transparency and improved communication systems to let people know how the district is doing and the decisions it makes.</li> <li>3. Emphasize a small district feel. Meet with employees twice each year to discuss financial concerns, present proposals and ask for a response from employees.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cause us to reflect on what's important in our district. Develop strategic plans to accomplish goals.</li> <li>2. Develop high trust and strong relationships with our community and employees. Enjoy support each time we approach the community with needs.</li> <li>3. Able to get all of our employees in an auditorium and visit with them in one body. Communicate and confirm a cooperative financial strategy with employees. Approach has been very positive.</li> </ol>
<b>Monitoring: Checking progress and providing assistance</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Write notes, return emails, and respond to what people are doing. Get to know people by name through face-to-face interactions.</li> <li>5. Conduct regular interviews with district leaders and get them out in building attending faculty meetings and collaborative groups. Leadership visibility.</li> <li>6. Assess the effects of high expectations on employees.</li> <li>7. Emphasize open and upfront feedback (employee evaluation).</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Communicate regularly with employees is an effective tool.</li> <li>5. Support and concern for administrator assignments and workload. Send the message we want to be part of the solution.</li> <li>6. Make adjustments to keep trust and morale healthy.</li> <li>7. "If there is a need for corrections (employee evaluation), I respond to that."</li> </ol>
<b>Assisting: Providing</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. Push our funds into instruction and classrooms.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. 85% of budget is in personnel.</li> <li>9. District has kept people</li> </ol>

<b>resources and professional learning opportunities</b>	<p>Cut back on travel and extracurricular activities.</p> <p>9. Absorb and maintain jobs, where possible.</p> <p>10. Funding the salary schedule each year.</p> <p>11. Cut back on district administrative staff. Leadership responsibilities have been restructured requiring directors to take additional assignments.</p> <p>12. Hands-on approach by superintendent. Directly supervises two areas</p> <p>13. Don't implement new programs or innovations on a whim.</p> <p>14. Provide teacher professional development with greater latitude for use of time.</p>	<p>employed and not cut jobs. No replacement of retirements and resignations.</p> <p>10. Used fund balance reserves toward employee compensation.</p> <p>11. Operate thin administratively.</p> <p>12. Work 12-hour days in order to get my responsibilities done. Send the message of willing to do and work as hard as anyone else</p> <p>13. Read and study to determine the feasibility before implementation.</p> <p>14. Move from individual learning activities to collaborative teamwork. Need for better technology implementation to enhance rather than hinder job effectiveness.</p>
<b>Interpretation of results</b>	<b>Compare &amp; contrast expected with evident</b>	<b>What are the implications for participants?</b>
<b>Planning: Creating and communicating a shared vision</b>	Conservative, open, and collaborative approach developed cooperative strategic plans, high trust, and supportive stakeholders.	Time and energy spent in relationship building to create a shared vision gave high returns in stakeholder support in implementing strategic plans and financial strategies.
<b>Monitoring: Checking progress and providing assistance</b>	Personal, empathetic, and visible leadership sent a message of sincere concern and willingness to adjust and correct based on stakeholder feedback.	Personalized and face-to-face work in monitoring employee needs and providing encouragement and assistance kept trust and morale healthy.
<b>Assisting: Providing resources and professional learning opportunities</b>	Emphasis on holding instruction and teacher compensations harmless while cutting back and restricting kept people employed, working hard, funded partly by reserve funds. Teacher professional learning transitioned from individualized to collaborative teamwork, better enhanced by technology.	Careful alignment of spending and cutbacks with shared vision helped employees economize resources and work toward collaborative teaming to endure stresses downsizing.

## Superintendent 2

Expected vs. evident	Describe what was expected or intended by the leader	Describe what evidently happened
<b>Planning: Creating and communicating a shared vision</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Very involved in the financial responsibilities of this district. Work within the guidelines state legislators set to implement effective solutions.</li> <li>2. Work with representative groups in presenting the shared vision and the district's plans for strategic cuts.</li> <li>3. Initiate greater awareness and feedback from the local community.</li> <li>4. Meet regularly with employee representative groups to discuss the plans of the district and request reactions and feedback.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Alignment between the goals and priorities of a district and the way money was spent.</li> <li>2. Accountability and community engagement continue to influence leadership.</li> <li>3. Implement a district community council. The "What Counts?" feedback process. Identify community concern regarding class size.</li> <li>4. Increase communication with stakeholders due to the additional number of financial decisions needing to be made. Strategic rather than reactive in communicating plans to deal with financial challenges.</li> </ol>
<b>Monitoring: Checking progress and providing assistance</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Divide the district into smaller divisions to keep a pulse on the growing district. District supervisors are in close touch with schools and department leaders.</li> <li>6. Hold weekly school visits with members of the board of education, employee input sessions, community input at school sites.</li> <li>7. Open door for people to walk in and talk with me. Give clear expectations and then follow up.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Cabinet leadership dialogue regularly about the district's needs.</li> <li>6. Community council keeps a pulse on the community and watches out for me.</li> <li>7. Build relationship and trust with coworkers. Respect (leadership) channels for following up on concerns or making corrections. Important that employees generally solve their own problems.</li> </ol>
<b>Assisting: Providing resources and professional learning</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. Use available (stimulus) funding to programs that address increasing minority population needs in affected areas.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. Cut back in ratios for staff support positions and administration district wide.</li> <li>9. Closely monitor the curriculum taught and training for teachers</li> </ol>

<b>opportunities</b>	<p>9. Pay attention to Professional Learning Community work in schools and teams. Develop people and watch them grow.</p> <p>10. Never change for change's sake.</p> <p>11. Delegate most everything and trust staff to get it done.</p>	<p>and principals. Resources needed for schools identified.</p> <p>10. Change happens when a group wants to grow.</p> <p>11. Superintendent keeps overall perspective of district leadership. Wouldn't do things differently.</p>
<b>Interpretation of results</b>	<b>Compare &amp; contrast expected with evident</b>	<b>What are the implications for participants?</b>
<b>Planning: Creating and communicating a shared vision</b>	Engaging in a collaborative approach with employees and community resulted in increased and strategic communication to deal with financial challenges.	High involvement by leader with increased communication regarding shared vision and plans with stakeholder allowed district to be strategic rather than reactive.
<b>Monitoring: Checking progress and providing assistance</b>	Reorganized district into smaller divisions with increased supervisor contact, board visits, employee input, and open door provided a pulse on the community through dialogue, relationships, and staff empowerment.	Utilizing cabinet, building-level, and community leadership channels to monitor needs and build relationships resulted in problems generally being solved at school or department levels.
<b>Assisting: Providing resources and professional learning opportunities</b>	Attention to learning community collaborative work, developing staff capacity, and delegation brought about attention to curriculum and training and identification of resources needed to help teams grow. Staff ratios increased due to stimulus funds spent toward on-time expenses (pilot programs).	Developing individual and organizational capacity through providing resources for innovation and training, along with effective delegation, allowed the leader to focus contently on the overall responsibility of district leadership.

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## **Vita**

Graduate College  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Douglas Paul Finch

### Home Address:

734 North Riverwalk Drive  
American Fork, Utah 84003

### Degrees:

Bachelor of Arts, Mathematics Education, 1997  
Brigham Young University

Master of Education in Educational Leadership, 2000  
Brigham Young University

### Dissertation Title:

Superintendent Leadership during Economic Austerity: A Multiple Case Study

### Dissertation Examination Committee:

Chairperson: Robert S. McCord, Ed. D  
Committee Member: James Hager, Ed. D  
Committee Member: Pamela S. Salazar, Ed. D  
Graduate Faculty Representative: LeAnn G. Putney, Ph. D