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## Connections between principal leadership orientations and the implementation of professional learning communities

William J. Ady

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ABSTRACT  
CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP ORIENTATIONS AND THE  
IMPLEMENTATION OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

William J. Ady, Ed.D.  
Department of Leadership, Educational Psychology, and Foundations  
Northern Illinois University, 2017  
Kelly Summers, Director

The primary purpose of this study was to survey certified teachers in large urban secondary schools in Northern Illinois to examine the relationship between different leadership frame orientations and their impact on successful PLC implementation. The study participants were chosen because all teach in secondary schools that have a high at-risk population defined as any secondary school that receives Title I funding. Participants completed a survey that asked about their perception of their principal's leadership frame orientation (leadership style) and also their perception of how successful their PLCs were functioning to see if there was a relationship between different leadership orientations and the successful implementation of PLCs. This was predominantly a quantitative study with some qualitative questions included to gain a deeper understanding of the teachers' perceptions of their principals.

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CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP ORIENTATIONS AND THE  
IMPLEMENTATION OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

BY

WILLIAM J. ADY

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Dissertation Director:  
Dr. Kelly H. Summers

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## DEDICATION

To my beautiful wife, Tracy, who has believed in and supported me. I hope she is proud of me. She always pushes me to be the best I can be. Without her, I could not have accomplished this.

To my two daughters, Elizabeth and Samantha, and my step-daughter, Megan, I am very proud of all three of you. I hope my commitment to persevere and stay the course has shown you the value of resilience and persistence. The obstacle is indeed the path! In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, always “do what you are afraid to do.”

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## CHAPTER 1

### OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

#### Introduction

Educators and school officials are continually pressured to figure out ways to improve teacher instruction and increase student learning. This push can be traced back to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965. Following ESEA, continuing pressure mounted from the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Race to the Top (RTTT) with the advent of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and most recently with the approval of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

Throughout the 49 years since the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965, there has been a call for the U.S. education system to increase expectations and accountability for teachers and administrators to improve student learning (DuFour & Marzano, 2015). Implementation of teacher teams, known as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), is one way educators have chosen to impact student learning (DuFour, 2004). PLCs are designed so teachers can collaborate to identify what is important for students to learn and also to be able to identify where students may be struggling in order to change teacher instruction to help those students. PLCs involve teachers working in teams to answer four essential questions: What do we want our students to learn, how will we know they have learned it, what do we do if they have not learned it, and what do we do if they have learned it? Teacher teams then look closely

at student data to make decisions to improve instruction. Like any new initiative, PLCs must be implemented with fidelity in order to have any chance of impacting student learning. The process of implementing change like PLCs is often considered a major systems change. As such, change theory is reviewed below.

### Theoretical Framework

To succeed, teachers and administrators in PLC schools must be committed to implementing PLCs with fidelity and, more specifically, what Fullan (2006) describes as a deep *theory of action* to see it through. Fullan suggests that regardless of the change initiative put into place, it must be implemented with a theory of action. This theory of action is rooted in Argyris's (2000) belief that a "theory in use is not good enough, of itself. The people involved must also push to the next level, to make their theory of action explicit" (p.3). In other words, PLCs will only work if those involved in implementing PLCs have a deep understanding and commitment to what it will take to make PLCs successful. Fullan contends that there are seven core premises that must be in place for a change initiative to be successful: a focus on motivation, building capacity with a focus on results, learning in context, changing context, a bias for reflective action, tri-level engagement and a persistence and flexibility to stay the course.

Fullan's (2006) contention is that the theory of action must be specified by those individuals who are actually implementing the PLCs and that if the theory of action is not understood by those involved, then the PLCs will fail to produce the desired results. Fullan identifies three common reasons that PLCs fall short: the term "PLC" spreads faster than the actual concept, staff treat PLCs as the latest innovation rather than a deep systems change, and PLCs are

mistakenly cast as changing the culture of individual schools rather than the entire school district.

### Problem Statement

As previously noted, there is increased pressure on teachers and school leaders to raise student achievement, dating all the way back to ESEA and most recently with 43 states now adopting the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and now ESSA. Despite pressure and policies to improve student achievement, many schools and districts continue to fail at creating lasting, meaningful change that positively impacts student achievement. In recent years, PLCs have been presented as one way to increase student achievement; however, the idea of PLCs by themselves is not enough to increase student achievement. The implementation of PLCs requires a significant change in school and district structures, which requires a change in culture (DuFour & Fullan, 2013; Fullan, 2006). Many attempts to implement PLCs have failed to increase student achievement because they have not been implemented with the appropriate level of commitment and theory of action (Fullan, 2006) or the appropriate type of leader to implement the type of change PLCs represent to an organization. This study will examine the association between leadership behaviors and effective implementation of PLCs.

## Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the characteristics of effective PLCs and how effective leadership practices are related to this type of educational change. The participants in this study are teachers from urban secondary schools (middle and high school) that have similar demographics and poverty rates of 70% or higher. The teachers were participating in PLCs at the time of the study. Bolman and Deal's (1990) Leadership Frames Orientation Survey was used to examine their perceptions of the leadership behaviors of their principals. Participants taking the Bolman and Deal survey rated their leader on questions that describe leadership from the four leadership frames: Structural, Human Resource, Political, and Symbolic. A survey adapted from the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF, 2014) was used to measure teacher perceptions of the level of PLC implementation in the PLC critical elements (reflective dialogue, deprivatization of practice, focus on learning, collaboration, shared norms and values, assessment for learning), human resources (openness to improvement and risk taking, trust and respect, collegial support/celebration of expertise, supportive leadership, socialization), and structural conditions (time to meet and talk, physical proximity, interdependent teaching roles, communication structures, teacher empowerment).

## Significance of Study

Researchers have examined the impact of leadership on student performance but very few studies have examined the impact of leadership on PLCs specifically. As noted earlier, the advent of PLCs represents significant change for some organizations because highly effective

PLCs require a change or shift in the culture of the school or district. Fullan (2006) suggests that PLCs are about building new collaborative cultures. This study attempted to determine what leadership orientation or orientations are most likely to be associated with successful PLCs and to help create the type of collaborative culture that is necessary for PLCs to thrive by functioning at a high level.

The information gleaned from this study can help district leaders design effective principal leadership programs and leadership academies that will serve to improve leadership skills necessary for implementing change successfully and more specifically, to aid leaders in facilitating successful PLCs.

### Research Questions

This quantitative study examined the relationship between leadership and the successful implementation of PLCs. The following questions guided this study:

- 1) What is the association between different leadership orientations and PLC implementation?
- 2) Is there a specific leadership orientation that is more likely to be associated with successful PLC implementation?

### Delimitations

The participants in this study were limited to staff engaged in grade-level/content area PLCs in urban secondary schools (middle and high school) that have similar demographics and poverty

rates. The use of self-report survey data from secondary schools that fit the specific characteristics is also a delimitation.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### Introduction

This study examines the relationship between leadership and how different leadership orientations relate to the implementation of PLCs. Fullan's (2006) change theory serves as the theoretical framework for this study. The constructs that will be examined in this literature review are leadership (leadership orientations) and PLCs (Professional Learning Communities). Chapter 2 provides research on both the current and historical views of educational leadership, research on PLCs, and the impact of leadership on the success or failure of PLCs.

#### Defining PLCs – What Is a Professional Learning Community?

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have been around in one form or another for many years, and there have been different terms used to describe them. Even before the term “PLC” became common, Senge (1990) used the term *learning organizations* to describe employees in the business world working together to achieve success. Senge stated, “We can build learning organizations, organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together” (p. 3). Senge outlines five disciplines necessary for a learning organization to thrive: shared vision, mental models, systems thinking, personal mastery and team learning (Senge,



1990). The last two disciplines, *shared vision* and *team learning*, are two ideas that are described by DuFour and Fullan (2013) as critical to the success of PLCs.

DuFour has written about PLCs and their potential impact on student learning but emphasizes that PLCs must be implemented with fidelity in order to be successful (DuFour, 2007). DuFour (2004) discusses the need for educators to continually reflect on their teaching in order to embed student learning and teacher collaboration into the culture of the schools. In some schools, because of PLCs, there has been a shift in focus from teaching to collaboration and a fixation on what students are learning (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many, 2010). Hord (2007) describes PLCs as a community of educators working collaboratively toward a “shared mission and goals staff members see as their common purpose” (p. 1). DuFour and Fullan (2013) present six essential characteristics of PLCs: 1) shared mission, vision, values and goals; 2) a collaborative culture with a focus on student learning; 3) collective inquiry into best practice and current reality; 4) action orientation or *learning by doing*; 5) a commitment to continuous improvement; and 6) a results orientation. DuFour and Fullan also state that PLCs have three big ideas supporting those six characteristics: 1) a relentless focus on learning for all students, 2) a collaborative culture and collective effort to support student and adult learning, and 3) a results orientation to improve practice and drive continuous improvement. Although there are six essential characteristics of PLCs, and three big ideas, perhaps the cornerstone of all PLCs is a focus on four critical questions (DuFour & Fullan, 2013, p.15):

1. What is it we want our students to learn?
2. How will we know if each student is learning each of these skills, concepts, and dispositions?

3. How will we respond when some of our students do not learn?
4. How will we enrich and extend the learning for students who are already proficient?

Eaker and Keating (2009) also discuss the importance of changing the school culture when trying to successfully implement PLCs in a school setting. They stress that regardless of the organizational structures put in place (which are also important), the only way for real change to take place and for PLCs to be successful is to change the actual culture of the school. Eaker and Keating discuss three cultural shifts integral to the success of PLCs: 1) changing from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning, 2) a shift in the work of teachers that is collaborative, and 3) a shift in focus from inputs to student outcomes or a focus on results. Stoll et al. (2006) discuss an essential characteristic of a PLC as having a shared purpose, focus, vision with a relentless commitment to student learning, and an organized and shared responsibility for student improvement. Stoll et al. also say that PLCs must be a rigorous examination of teaching practice and what is actually going on in the classroom.

The ideas that DuFour, DuFour, Eaker and Many (2006) and Stoll et al. (2006) outline share common characteristics. The cultural shifts that DuFour et al. (2010) outline all have to do with changing what we do in order to impact student learning. This in itself relates to the teachers learning about what they may need to change in order to improve student learning. It is an examination of teaching practice, which for teachers is job-embedded learning. Learning and self-reflection are also done collaboratively in a PLC. Through the collaborative process of the PLC, teachers can then see if what they are doing is translating into student results in the classroom. Through the examination of student data, PLCs can then make decisions to alter or change instructional strategies going forward. This entire process of collaborating, with a focus

on practice and student results' are the cornerstone of effective PLCs. As Stoll et al. (2006) also say this process is a shared responsibility where teachers are relentless in seeing results in the classroom. For PLCs to be successful there must be a cultural shift where the teachers own and are comfortable with the process (DuFour et al., 2010). There is no judgment of peers. PLCs are learning organizations where staff can learn from each other and from what the data is telling them. The end result of this fluid PLC process is that students are learning.

Successful PLCs have specific identifying characteristics as outlined above. For the purpose of this study it is important to subscribe to a specific and consistent definition of a PLC. Jessie calls a PLC "a group of individuals who meet to achieve common goals for their grade level and for the school. Instead of simply sharing data, they respond to data, which requires a sense of mutual accountability and changing classroom practices" (Jessie, as cited in DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many, 2006). Building off of this work, more recently DuFour, DuFour, Eaker and Many (2010) defined PLCs as an "ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve" (p.11). Because this is the most up-to-date and all-encompassing definition of a PLC, it was used as the guiding definition of a PLC in this study. As a reminder, DuFour and Fullan (2013) specify six characteristics necessary for a successful PLC:

1. Shared mission, values, vision and goals;
2. A collaborative culture with a focus on learning;
3. Collective inquiry into best practice and current reality;
4. Action orientation;
5. A commitment to continuous improvement;
6. A results orientation (DuFour & Fullan, 2013, p. 14)

Each of these characteristics is described in greater detail below.

It is essential for any PLC to have a shared mission, values, vision and goals. These unite staff, keep them focused and give them a sense of direction. When there is a shared mission amongst the staff, the members of the learning community have a focus (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Nothing can be accomplished without a goal and in the world of PLCs that goal must be shared by everyone. The mission or vision cannot be something that is perceived as a top-down directive. Everyone in the organization must be on board. Senge (1990) refers to the importance of having a shared vision as the fourth discipline in his book *The Fifth Discipline*. He describes this shared vision as having to do with the people within the learning organization having a shared idea and understanding of the future they seek to create (Senge, 1990). This is also the first of DuFour and Fullan's (2013) six characteristics of a PLC: *shared mission, values, vision and goals*. Senge, like DuFour and Fullan, stress just how important it is for the learning organization (school) to have a shared vision that everyone believes in and lives every day.

The second characteristic of a PLC, a collaborative culture, emphasizes the importance of teachers working together and in a sense deprivatizing the educational environment. Many staff are resistant to or even afraid of collaborating with other teachers and any form of collaboration "often stops at the classroom door" (DuFour, 2004, p.6). But in successful PLCs, staff realize how important it is to collaborate with each other. Having professional dialog and being able to reflect on teaching practice and to analyze data with other teachers are essential (DuFour, 2004). Senge's fifth discipline, team learning, supports this notion. Senge promotes the importance of a collaborative culture in a learning organization when he describes team learning as a focus on group interaction through dialog and informed discussion (Senge, 2000).

Most people in any organization would agree that it is important for people to be able to problem solve and work together. In fact McLaughlin and Talbert (2001) agree that the ability to work in teams is a necessary skill to be successful in the global marketplace. Mednick (2004) states, “Through ongoing collaboration with peers, each teacher has the opportunity to continuously improve instruction for all students” (p.1). This supports DuFour and Fullan’s second characteristic of a PLC, *a collaborative culture with a focus on learning*.

The third characteristic of a PLC is collective inquiry. Collective inquiry is a process where teachers within the PLC constantly question and look for ways to improve student achievement. DuFour (2004) states that teachers should work together to engage in an “ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning” (p. 6). “This discipline of reflection and inquiry skills is focused around developing awareness of attitudes and perceptions – your own and those around you” (Senge, 2000). “Schools must examine all existing practices, procedures, and policies in light of that fundamental purpose and ensure they align with and reinforce high levels of learning for all students” (DuFour & Fullan, 2013, p. 14). Fullan and DuFour also state emphatically that “schools cannot achieve the fundamental purpose of learning for all if educators work in isolation” (p.14). Collective inquiry is made possible when time is made for teachers to collaborate. School leaders and teachers should work together to carve time into the schedule for teachers to be able to do this.

Action orientation, the fourth characteristic of a PLC, could also be described as “learning by doing” (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). Learning by doing is simply that: teachers learn best by putting best practices into their teaching and then analyzing the results and making adjustments based on what they have learned. Action orientation could also be described as action research. When teachers work together in their PLCs, they not only analyze results of student assessment

scores, but they research best practices to implement in their classrooms. They realize that learning by doing or action orientation is a continual process and never ends. Teachers realize that if they are constantly learning by doing, then their students will be able to do the same. Teachers in the learning organization must constantly challenge the status quo and always experiment and look for new ways to improve student learning while aligning that learning to the mission and vision of the school (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Learning by doing requires teachers to constantly analyze student data together in their PLCs and to continually look for ways to improve their teaching based on the results of that data (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). Teachers in a PLC must be action oriented and understand fully that the best and most effective way to learn is by actually doing something or, more specifically, in the “context of taking action and they value engagement and experience as the most effective teachers” (DuFour et al., 2010).

The fifth characteristic, a commitment to continuous school improvement, means teachers must be on board and committed to learning themselves so that they can help students to learn and improve. DuFour and Fullan’s first big idea of PLCs: “*a relentless focus on learning for all students*” (p. 14), is similar to this fifth characteristic of PLCs discussed by DuFour and Fullan (2013). Teachers must be committed and this commitment and drive should be relentless and unwavering. Teachers in the learning organization must embrace this idea and believe that all students can learn. Teachers who are committed to continuous improvement constantly challenge the status quo and are always looking for ways to improve and to get better (DuFour et al. 2010). Teachers in a high-functioning PLC are never satisfied with the status quo and are open to continuous learning and the limitless possibilities for where their teams can go. Continuous improvement also means that sometimes teachers and administrators must “confront

the brutal facts” (Collins, 2001). Unless teachers challenge themselves to get better and to continuously improve they cannot go from good to great.

A results orientation is the sixth essential characteristic of a PLC described by DuFour and Fullan (2013). Having a learning organization with a results orientation means that everything a school or PLC does is driven by data or evidence. There must be a system in place where teachers can analyze evidence of student learning to inform future decision making so that not only student learning can improve but so that teachers both individually and collectively can improve themselves (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). “Members of a PLC realize that all of their efforts must be assessed on the basis of results rather than intentions” (DuFour et al. 2010, p.13). Unless you have something to measure what it is you are trying to accomplish, it is impossible to know if you are truly successful or not. As DuFour et al. (2010) states “Unless initiatives are subjected to ongoing assessment on the basis of tangible results, they represent random groping in the dark rather than purposeful improvement”(p.13).

More recently, Marzano has used these same PLC principals as part of his High Reliability Schools (HRS) model for school improvement (Marzano, 2016). The premise of this model is that two schoolwide structures must be in place for PLCs to be effective: time for collaboration and the formation of collaborative teams (Marzano, 2016). In addition to the four critical questions of a PLC that DuFour and Fullan (2013) articulate: *what is it we want our students to learn, how will we know if our students are learning, how will we respond when our students do not learn, how will we enrich and extend the learning for students who are proficient*, Marzano adds fifth and sixth questions:

5. How will increase our instructional competence?
6. How will we coordinate our efforts as a school?

These last two questions build on the other four questions addressing teacher development and leadership. Marzano describes in his HRS model, which includes PLCs at the heart of the model, the characteristics of effective PLCs as those having mutual support and trust among teachers, shared vision and values, focus on improving student learning, focus on teacher growth and professional development, intentional and systematic support of the collaborative model and an inquiry-based approach and use of evidence (Marzano et al., 2016). Marzano's HRS model builds off of DuFour's model with an added emphasis on leadership, where the leader (principal) must focus on "specific leadership attributes that enable substantial change" (p.113) and that some leadership responsibilities should "be distributed to collaborative teams (p.113).

It should also be noted that while all PLCs essentially subscribe to these characteristics, the actual PLC team make-up can be very different from school to school. For example, in some schools, PLCs are made up of grade-level content-area teams or entire content-area teams, whereas in other schools PLCs or learning communities are more interdisciplinary being made up of teachers representing various content areas (Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008). For the current study, PLC teams were defined by who specifically is on the team but rather that the members on the team are adhering to the PLC principles outlined in DuFour's definition.

### History of Education Initiatives Leading into PLCs

While there has been a lot of discussion of PLCs over the past ten to fifteen years in the world of education, PLCs can be traced farther back. Bullough (2007) writes about a study sponsored by the Progressive Education Association (PEA) that ran from 1930 to 1942. It was called the "eight year study" signifying the eight years a typical student would spend in high school and



college. While the study was multi-faceted, in large part it was an attempt to get teachers to change the way they thought about educating students, among other things, the shifting role of the teacher to include giving the teacher leadership opportunities. The focus in the classroom was less on the teacher and more on the student, which is a core principle in today's modern Professional Learning Community. Another core PLC principle prevalent throughout the eight-year study was that of using data to drive decision making.

Although the eight-year study was one of the first to examine principles now referred to as part of the core of a PLC, much of the recent push for improving student achievement can be traced back to several key historical events beginning with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 1965). The ESEA became law under President Johnson as part of the "War on Poverty." The passing of ESEA marked the first time the United States government became directly involved in education by promoting high academic standards and accountability. With the passing of ESEA, federal money could be used to fund education programs (Cross, 2010). Over the next several years, every president with the exception of Richard Nixon, who resigned in office, signed legislation to reauthorize ESEA, perhaps most notably President Bush, who renamed ESEA "The No Child Left Behind Act" in 2001 (Cross, 2010). Most recently, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in December of 2015. ESSA provides focused support to high schools where students struggle to graduate. Prior to ESSA and NCLB, much of the recent push for improving student achievement was the result of a 1983 publication entitled *A Nation at Risk*.

*A Nation at Risk* was a letter to the nation that analyzed the quality of education in America and then gave recommendations for how to improve it. *A Nation at Risk* came about from then-Secretary of Education T.H. Bell, who created the National Commission on Excellence in

Education to look into the quality of education at the time. The end product was this report. It was an effort to shine a light on an educational system that could be improved. Some of the recommendations that came out of *A Nation at Risk* included the improvement of teaching and raising student achievement and student learning (United States, 1983). These are both critical pieces to PLCs and the intent of Professional Learning Communities (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). The bottom line is to change the school environment to improve student learning. PLCs represent one way to do that (DuFour, 2004).

Building off of *A Nation at Risk*, more recently the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 put even more pressure and emphasis on raising student achievement with increased accountability on teachers and school officials. Many large urban school districts where student performance is generally lower were perhaps impacted by these new regulations the most (Azzam, Perkins-Gough & Thiers, 2006). NCLB forced school districts to demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on state achievement tests. With increased pressure and demands to improve student performance, schools needed new strategies to do this (Patterson, 2006). While the intention of NCLB was to raise student achievement, it did not provide a roadmap or set of strategies for how to accomplish this task. Adding more pressure to school officials was the fact that the bar for making AYP increased every year, making it difficult for even the most high-achieving schools to continue making AYP.

More recently, in 2009, President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which created Race to the Top (RTTT). This bill included \$100 billion in federal money for education. The passage of this bill led to many adopting the Common Core State Standards (Cross, 2010). This effort was led by the National Governor's Association for Best Practices along with the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). This joint group led the

Common Core State Standards initiative working together in an effort to “establish consensus on expectations for student knowledge and skills that should be developed in Grades K-12” (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011, p. 103). According to the 2013 *Closing the Expectations Gap* annual report, there are currently 42 states including the District of Columbia and four territories that have adopted the Common Core Standards in English language arts and math (Achieve, 2013). With most states having adopted the Common Core State Standards, there will also be increased accountability for students in schools to master these standards. By and large, states view these new Common Core State Standards as being “more rigorous than their previous articles” (Kober & Rentner, 2012, p. 1). Like every major education initiative, CCCS is not without its critics or pitfalls.

Throughout the past 52 years since the passage of the first iteration of ESEA in 1965, the U.S. education system has experienced significant change. There have been increased expectations and accountability for teachers and administrators to improve student learning. Beginning with ESEA and then the government’s publishing of *A Nation at Risk*, the reauthorization of ESEA as No Child Left Behind, the advent of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and most recently now the ESSA in 2015, educators and school officials have been forced to figure out ways to change the learning environment to improve teacher instruction and increase student learning. Professional Learning Communities was one idea that came about to impact teaching and student learning (DuFour, 2004). Change can be difficult (Fullan, 2011), and if change involves a new initiative like PLCs, the new initiative must be implemented with fidelity in order for it to have any chance of succeeding. It also requires a leader who is resolute with deep human values and would never give up (Fullan, 2011).

Vescio and colleagues (2008) suggest PLCs can be difficult to implement. Simply put, they can also bring about their share of struggles as teachers adapt to being part of a PLC. There have been cases cited where PLCs were not effective and teachers were not accepting or willing to adapt to the change (Patterson, 2006). DuFour (2007) points out the importance of not getting lost in the PLC language. He says that some schools throw PLC terms around and say they are implementing PLCs when in fact they are not. When the PLC fails to demonstrate results, then the entire initiative can be abandoned. DuFour (2007) examines a case where this occurred with two middle schools described by Jean Patterson (2006) in an article she wrote for the *Middle School Journal*. In this article Patterson describes two middle schools, Lewis Middle School and Clark Middle School. While these two schools claim to have been implementing PLCs, DuFour (2007) argues they may have not been implemented with fidelity. In this particular study, information was gleaned from each middle school on the effectiveness of PLCs through teacher and administrative focus groups that consisted of the principals, assistant principals and instructional coaches. Interview questions were given both in groups and individually. All questions dealt with staff perceptions about how they believed PLCs were being implemented in their respective schools. Information from these focus groups showed disconnect between staff and administration perceptions of PLCs, which would explain why the PLCs were not successful.

For example, at Lewis Middle School, it was clear that staff and administration had differing perceptions. For the most part, administration felt PLCs had been implemented collaboratively with staff, whereas many staff felt PLCs were a top-down initiative and were imposed on them. Many teachers felt they had little to no input on how PLCs or learning communities would be implemented in their school. Administration seemed to have a clear understanding of what a

PLC was and this definition included such statements as “A community of learners is people working together for the greater good” (p.25). However, many staff could not give a clear definition of what a PLC was, even though they were part of it. In fact one teacher asked “What is a learning community? What is it?” (p. 25). Another flaw was in how Lewis Middle School organized its PLC teams. Lewis actually increased the size of its teams to about eight per team. This made it much harder to collaborate and problem solve about students and student learning because the teams were too large. Many staff complained that because of the larger teams, it was much more difficult to communicate with other team members (Patterson, 2006).

The other school in the study, Clark Middle School, also had its share of issues. Clark was also an urban middle school of about 550 students and 30 staff members. Again, like the staff at Lewis Middle School, the staff at Clark Middle School felt PLCs were the vision and idea of the principal and that PLCs were something they were told to do with little input from the teachers themselves. Many staff at Clark liked the middle school concept and the middle school grade-level teaming better than the PLCs. There also appeared to be some confusion among the staff with PLC terms and definitions. For example, staff would use the term “team” to describe both the PLC team and also the grade-level team which made things unclear. In this case, as with the other middle school, communication appeared to be, according to Patterson (2006), one of the key underlying issues that led to the PLCs not being successful. In both schools, it appeared from the interviews and focus groups the PLC initiative was something being done *to* them instead of being a collaborative venture. It would also seem that in both cases, the principals in each building did not provide a clear vision with clearly defined terminology to lead successful PLCs (DuFour, 2007). In both cases, staff were confused as to what a PLC or learning community really was. Patterson (2006) concludes that she believes DuFour’s ideas concerning

PLCs may be something worth considering but at the same time refers to PLC ideas as a “recipe-driven process” and goes on to say that “recipe-driven processes have not been effective for realizing deep cultural change” (p. 28).

In response to Patterson’s (2006) research, DuFour (2007) points out that not much stock should be put into Patterson’s findings because the staff was often confused. DuFour counters Patterson by saying that the schools in her study did not focus on the actual practices of PLCs but rather on less significant things such as “terminology, structures, and perceptions” (DuFour, 2007). DuFour also emphasized the importance of staying the course. It takes time for PLCs to work. According to DuFour, “The professional learning concept does not offer a short cut to school improvement” (p.5). Persistence is necessary for PLCs to have a chance to take root. In the case of the two schools studied by Patterson (2006), DuFour would argue that not enough time was allowed to truly implement PLCs. DuFour makes the case that with any significant change and especially a change in the overall culture of a school, it is important to weather the storm, so to speak. PLCs require a deep cultural change of an organization or the type of change that challenges the status quo or the way things have always been done. A deep cultural change like PLCs is “absolutely doable, but it is undeniably difficult” (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). The type of change that is necessary for PLCs to be successful will undoubtedly cause conflict, depends on trial and error and never ends as PLCs are a continual learning process where “you never arrive” (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). In the case of the two middle schools that Patterson studied, the effort required was not clearly understood according to DuFour (2007). For PLCs to be effective, they must be implemented with fidelity and they must be centered on the three big ideas outlined previously: a relentless focus on learning for all students, a collaborative culture and collective effort to support student and adult learning and a results oriented orientation to

improve practice and drive continuous improvement in order to have a chance to be effective (DuFour & Fullan, 2013).

### Impact of PLCs on Student Learning

As mentioned earlier, the intent of creating successful PLCs is to establish a community of learners or action researchers who collaborate in order to improve both staff and student learning. Vescio et al. (2008) studied the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice and student learning. They asked two questions. First, “In what ways does teaching practice change as a result of participation in a PLC and, what aspects of the PLCs support these changes?” The second question asked, “Does the literature support the assumption that student learning increases when teachers participate in a PLC and what aspects of the PLCs support increased student learning?” (p. 81) In their study, Vescio et al. reviewed 11 empirical studies of teachers working in educational environments where the characteristics of PLCs were evident and were carried out by those teachers. According to Vescio et al., 8 of the 11 studies included student achievement data in their results of how PLCs can support student learning. The end result of their study was that in most cases when teaching practice changed, student learning improved. In fact, in response to the second question about whether or not the literature supports the assumption that student learning increases when teachers participate in PLCs, the authors concluded, “The answer is a resounding and encouraging yes” (Vescio, et al., 2008, p. 87). In the Vescio and colleagues article a total of eight studies were reviewed. In all eight of these studies, student learning showed improvement. One study in particular that examined one middle school covering a three-year period, was very encouraging. Over a three-year period, this

particular middle school showed state achievement scores increasing from about 50% in the core subjects of reading, writing, math and social studies to over 90% just two years later after PLCs were implemented. Vescio et al. concluded that when teachers commit to PLCs and participate fully, their teaching practice is impacted in a very positive way because the teachers become more focused on students and student learning. Once the teachers become more student centered, the overall culture of the building is changed because of increased collaboration. Increased collaboration creates an environment where everyone is problem solving together and working toward a common goal of increased student learning. Teachers are collaborating and learning how to be better teachers as they learn from each other. As they become better teachers, the students are the beneficiaries.

The research on PLCs so far would indicate that there has been some success but there have also been struggles. It would appear from the research already presented that the fate of PLCs, their success or failure, could have something to do with the type of leadership within a school district or building. PLCs by their very nature are a collaborative process. Collaboration of staff and administration is a key component of PLCs (DuFour, 2004, 2007). PLCs require collaboration and a leader willing to distribute leadership rather than a leader who dictates to his or her staff what to do.

While this study examines several leadership theorists, Fullan's change theory (2006) will serve as the overarching theory guiding this study. Fullan believes that implementing change initiatives, regardless of how sound they may be, will not be successful unless there is a *theory of action*. This theory of action is rooted in Chris Argyris' (2000) belief that a theory alone is not good enough by itself. The people who are engaged in the work to be done need to be willing to



push things to the next level in order to make their theory of action, or the how to, clear for everyone.

Fullan (2006) outlines seven core premises that are necessary for change. Fullan states that these core premises are paramount for using change knowledge. Those seven premises are:

1. A focus on motivation
2. Capacity building with a focus on results
3. Learning in context
4. Changing context
5. A bias for reflective action
6. Tri-level engagement
7. Persistence and flexibility in staying the course (Fullan, 2006, p.8)

Each of these seven core premises will be described below.

The first premise, *a focus on motivation*, may be the most important of the seven premises. In fact, Fullan makes the point that the other six core premises are essentially about accomplishing the first premise, a focus on motivation. According to Fullan (2006), improvement is not possible unless the people involved with the change or improvement are motivated. Fullan also states that with all changes, there will undoubtedly be obstacles or bumps in the road; therefore, motivation cannot be expected to be achieved in the beginning. Motivation must be built upon by small success or small victories along the way.

*Capacity building with a focus on results* is described by Fullan as getting the whole group to raise their level of expectations in order to close the education gap. Specifically, Fullan (2006)

says that capacity building is a “strategy to increase the collective effectiveness of a group to raise the bar and close the gap of student learning” (p.9). In order for this to happen within an organization or school, it requires a leader to help develop both individual and collective knowledge and competencies, resources and motivation (Fullan, 2006). Fullan also believes that one of the reasons that many change initiatives fail is because they do not emphasize the importance of building the leadership capacity necessary to take an initiative to the next level. Everyone involved must be accountable for results. This focus on results is what Fullan refers to as *positive pressure* (Fullan, 2006). Fullan believes that you must build capacity first before any judgment takes place. This concept also helps motivate those staff within the organization because they know they won’t be judged for making mistakes before they have had the chance to learn and build their individual and collective capacities.

*Learning in context* is Fullan’s third premise. Learning in context means that there must be opportunities for staff to learn within the setting in which they work. Elmore (2004) and Fullan (2006) describe improvement as a function of learning to do the right thing in the settings where you work (Fullan, 2006, p. 73). Elmore goes on to emphasize that in most school settings there just aren’t enough opportunities for staff to practice their craft and to learn in their work or classroom setting. Learning in their classroom setting would include being observed by colleagues as well as being able to observe them. This would not be limited just to the same school but being able to observe in other schools as well, fostering a collaborative community of job embedded learning.

Fullan’s fourth premise, *changing context*, refers to a theory of action having the ability to change the larger context which the smaller context is in. For example, a classroom cannot be successful if the premises are not also embraced by the building and in turn the district. Fullan

calls this *lateral capacity building* where classrooms, schools and districts are all actively engaged in learning from each other. With lateral capacity building, knowledge can be shared back and forth, and because those within the system can relate to the larger system, they are more motivated and more likely to improve.

*A bias for reflective action* is Fullan's fifth premise and Fullan emphasizes that in order for the first four premises to be in sync, they must be driven by this fifth premise. Fullan stresses the critical importance of reflecting by referring to Dewey's insight that it is not that we learn by doing but that we learn by thinking about what we are doing. Simply put, Fullan believes that people "learn best through doing, reflection, inquiry, evidence, more doing and so on" (Fullan, 2006, p.10).

*Tri-level engagement* is the sixth core premise of Fullan's change theory. When Fullan talks about tri-level, he is referring specifically to the school and community, the district and the state. Fullan points out that the three levels do not necessarily need to be aligned but that all three should be connected and there should be interaction among the three. Fullan believes that if there is tri-level engagement with all three levels connected that then the system can change itself (Fullan, 2006).

Finally, Fullan's seventh premise, *persistence and flexibility in staying the course*, refers to the strong resolve that a leader and his organization need in order to navigate the bumpy roads and obstacles that present themselves along the way. Fullan also uses the term "resilience" which he defines as *persistence plus flexibility*. It is important for organizations to understand that there will be barriers and those barriers to change and ultimately improvement are inevitable. A leader and the organization must be flexible, and persistence and flexibility are built into the action theory (Fullan, 2006).

In conclusion, Fullan discusses three factors that organizations should be aware of that could potentially prevent change from being successful. First, Fullan points out that change knowledge does not constitute a quick fix to a problem even though there may be external pressure from politicians to change or improve things quickly. Secondly in order for true systemic change to occur, it is important for many leaders to possess change knowledge simultaneously for change to be consistent and successful. This can prove to be very difficult considering the lack of stability and high turnover in leaders in organizations and specifically in our schools. Thirdly implementing change theory represents significant change, or what Marzano refers to it as *second-order change* (Marzano, Waters and McNulty, 2005). Change on this level requires a deep change in culture which is not easy for many. Deep cultural change requires people to change the way they think about things and to get out of their comfort zone. Fullan gives the example of *deprivatizing* teaching where teachers are open to the idea of observing their peers and also open to being observed by their peers to improve their teaching. For some staff, this is not an easy thing to do.

### Leadership Styles in Education

Leadership is important for the success of any organization. Just as every person is different and there are different personalities, there are also myriad leadership styles that exist both in the business world and in education. Burns (1978) defines leadership as “leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivation – the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations – of both leaders and followers” (p.19). The importance of leadership to the success of a school cannot be overstated. “Only principals who are equipped to

handle a complex, rapidly changing environment can implement the reforms that lead to sustained improvement in student achievement” (Fullan, 2002, p. 16). The next section of this paper focuses on several types of leadership styles.

One of the first leadership theorists, James MacGregor Burns, believed there are basically two types of leadership: transactional and transformational (Burns, 1978). Burns believed that leaders relied too much on a misguided view of what real power is. Burns believed that authentic power has less to do with *things* and more to do with relationships and, more specifically, “deeply human *relationships* in which two or more persons engage with one another” (Burns, 1978, p.11). Burns discussed what he believed are two types of leadership: transactional and transformational. Burns describes *transactional* leadership as when two people exchange one thing of value for another, whereas *transformational* leadership involves a change that benefits “both the relationship and the resources of those involved” (Stewart, 2006), which in turn increases the level of commitment and the capacity to accomplish shared goals. Burn’s views on leadership are important because they laid the groundwork for subsequent and more evolved theories.

Building on the work of Burns, Bernard Bass created what he called the Full Range of Leadership model which incorporates both transactional and transformational leadership (Bass, 1991). Bass also created the *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire* (MLQ), now in its fifth version. The MLQ is arguably one of the most widely used measures of leaderships and is intended to measure leadership based on a total of 141 leadership statements that could be classified as either transactional or transformational (Stewart, 2006).

Bass’s Full Range of Leadership model consists of seven components. Four of the components are transformational in nature and three are transactional. They are as follows:

*Transformational Components:*

1. Charismatic Leadership, or Idealized Influence – Transformational leaders are role models; they are respected and admired by their followers. Followers want to emulate them. The leader has a clear vision, purpose and is not afraid to take risks.
2. Inspirational Motivation – The leader motivates others and creates enthusiasm and challenges his followers.
3. Intellectual Stimulation – The transformational leader is constantly looking for new ways of doing things and works to push others to be creative and to take risks and never publicly criticizes others.
4. Individualized Consideration – The transformational leader attends to the needs of others and also seeks to develop them. The leader creates an environment that is supportive and where interactions with followers are encouraged and the leader is aware of individual concerns. (Bass, 1998, as cited by Stewart, 2006)

*Transactional Components:*

1. Contingent Reward – The leader assigns work and rewards the follower for carrying out the task.
2. Management-by-Exception – The leader monitors the follower and corrects when necessary.
3. Laissez-Faire or Non-Leadership Behavior – Leadership behaviors are ignored and there are no transactions carried out. (Bass, 1985, as cited by Stewart, 2006)

Bass believed that the best leaders possess both transactional and transformational skills and referred to this as the two-factor theory of leadership (Avolio & Bass, 1988). The ideal leader who uses the Full Range of Leadership model would “practice the transformational components more frequently and the transactional components less frequently” (Stewart, 2006, p.13).

Transformational leadership was one response to the issues associated with the instructional leadership model because it does not rely on the principal being the “center of expertise, power, and authority” (Hallinger, 2003, p. 330). Transformational leadership “occurs when leaders broaden and elevate the interests of their employees, when they generate awareness and acceptance of the purposes and mission of the group, and when they stir their employees to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group” (Bass, 1991 p. 21). According to Bass, a leader who is transformational is considerate and pays close attention to his or her employees. A transformational leader is also one who mentors their employees in order to help them grow and develop to realize their full potential (Bass, 1991). From this description, transformational leadership might be best used when looking at an organization through Bolman and Deal’s (2013) Human Resource Frame because it is very people centered.

Originating from Bass’s transformational leadership concept, Leithwood and Sharratt (1998) created a model for transformational leadership with seven components: individualized support, shared goals, vision, intellectual stimulation, culture building, rewards, high expectations and modeling. It should be noted that the components to this model are not limited to the principal only, but for both the teachers and the principal (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999), but it is the principal’s responsibility to create these conditions and environment for shared leadership. Hallinger (2000) distinguishes transformational leadership from instructional leadership in that transformational leadership is leadership that is shared or distributed among others instead of one

person being the ultimate leader, such as the principal leading and controlling from the top. With transformational leadership, the change starts from the bottom up (Day et al., 2001).

Transformational leadership requires leaders to impact second-order change as opposed to first-order change. Instructional leadership is intended to focus on first-order change in ways such as directly influencing the curriculum or teacher instruction, whereas a transformational leader would seek to create second-order change. In second-order-change, the principal or leader would need the skills to create the right type of environment or an environment where the teachers are empowered to continuously learn and then can share what they have learned with their peers (Lambert, 2002). In other words transformational leaders increase the teachers' capacity to impact first-and second-order change. Transformational school leaders have three fundamental goals to support this: 1) Helping staff members develop and maintain a collaborative, professional school culture; 2) fostering teacher development; and 3) helping teachers to solve problems together more effectively (Leithwood, 1992).

Another leadership type that has been compared to transformational leadership in some respects is *servant leadership* (Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2003). The term "servant leadership" was first coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in his 1970 essay, "The Servant as Leader" (Greenleaf, 1970). In that essay, Greenleaf stated, "The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The best test is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?" (p. 15).

Larry Spears, the current CEO of the Greenleaf Center, identified 10 characteristics that are critical to the development of servant leaders: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion,



conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people and building community (Spears, 2010).

Sipe and Frick (2009) in their book *Seven Pillars of Servant Leadership: Practicing the Wisdom of Leading by Serving* discuss servant leadership in much the same way, outlining seven characteristics or pillars that are essential for a servant leader to practice. Sipe and Fricks (2009) developed these pillars from a statement that Greenleaf made himself: “A servant leader is a person of character who puts people first. He or she is a skilled communicator, a compassionate collaborator who has foresight, is a systems thinker, and leads with moral authority” (Greenleaf, 1970). The seven pillars of servant leadership according to Sipe and Fricks are: the leader is a person of strong character, puts people first, skilled communicator, compassionate collaborator, has foresight, systems thinker and leads with moral authority (Greenleaf, 1970).

Bolman and Deal (2013) also refer to the concept of servant leadership in their book *Reframing Organizations, Artistry, Choice and Leadership* by making a strong correlation between servant leadership and their Human Resource Frame, saying that “human resource theorists typically advocate openness, caring, mutuality, listening, coaching, participation, and empowerment. They view the leader as facilitator and catalyst who uses emotional intelligence to motivate and empower subordinates. The leader’s power comes from talent, caring, sensitivity, and service, rather than position or force” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 361). Bolman and Deal also quote directly from Greenleaf in their book, stating that followers “will freely respond only to individuals who are chosen as leaders because they are proven and trusted as servants...The servant leader makes sure that the other people’s highest priority needs are being served” (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 3) There is a strong connection here from what Greenleaf is saying to Bolman and Deal’s human resource assumption: “Organizations exist to serve human needs

rather than the converse” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 122). Servant leadership in its true essence could probably be reflected in the following from Lao Tsu’s Tao Te Ching translated by Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English (1972): “The Master doesn’t talk, he acts. When his work is done, the people say, ‘Amazing, we did it all by ourselves!’” (p. 19).

Stone et al. (2003) talk about the similarities and differences between transformational leadership and servant leadership. The similarities include the valuing of people, listening, empowering followers, risk-sharing, vision, trust, influence, respect or credibility, integrity, and modeling or teaching (Stone et al., 2003). They also point out that while many of the concepts are the same, that there is one principal difference between the two and that is the focus of the leader. While both forms of leadership pay attention to and show concern for their followers, the servant leader’s main responsibility is *service* to his followers. In other words, where the transformational leader is focused on the organization and specifically in getting commitment from followers by empowering them to accomplish the objectives of the organization, the servant leader is focused on his or her followers and service to them rather than on results. The servant leader believes that by focusing on one’s followers, he or she can be trusted to serve in the best interest of the organization and in turn to accomplish the organization’s objectives (Stone et al. 2003).

Bolman and Deal (2013) talk about leadership through four leadership frame orientations. “A frame is a mental model – a set of ideas and assumptions – that you carry in your head to help you understand and negotiate a particular territory” (Bolman and Deal, 2013, p.10). These leadership frame orientations are the Structural Frame Orientation, the Human Resource Frame Orientation, the Political Frame Orientation and the Symbolic Frame Orientation. Bolman and Deal present these four leadership frame orientations as a type of lens for how to lead an

organization. Each of these leadership frame orientations has unique characteristics and features. The Structural Frame Orientation is very hierarchal and top-down with a “fixed division of labor and a set of rules for governing performance” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 48). The Human Resource Frame Orientation, on the other hand, is people centered where the “most important asset is our people” (p. 117). In the Human Resource Frame Orientation, people and human needs are important. Two of the basic assumptions in the Human Resource Frame Orientation are that “organizations exist to serve human needs rather than the converse” and “people and organization need each other” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 122). In the Political Frame Orientation, the organization is made up of coalitions and interest groups and it is important for a leader to understand the various power sources within the organization in order to effectively lead. Finally, the Symbolic Frame Orientation has everything to do with understanding and respecting the culture of the organization. In order for a leader to effectively lead, he must spend time learning what is already important to the organization. “People create symbols to resolve confusion, find direction, and anchor hope and faith” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 253). Understanding Bolman and Deal’s four leadership frame orientations is important because each leadership frame orientation requires a different type of leadership and leader. Ideally, it is valuable if a leader can possess the skills to effectively lead through any lens and be able to recognize what frame a particular situation calls for.

Each of Bolman and Deal’s four leadership frame orientations has certain assumptions that are unique and apart from the others. For example, in the Structural Frame Orientation:

- Organizations exist to achieve established goals and objectives.
- Organizations increase efficiency and enhance performance through specialization and appropriate division of labor.
- Suitable forms of coordination and control ensure that diverse efforts of individuals and units mesh.
- Organizations work best when rationality prevails over personal agendas and extraneous pressures.
- Structures must be designed to fit an organization's current circumstances to include its goals, technology, workforce, and environment.
- Problems arise and performance suffers from structural deficiencies, which can be remedied through analysis and restructuring. (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 45)

The Human Resource Frame Orientation contains the following assumptions:

- Organizations exist to serve human needs rather than the converse.
- People and organizations need each other. Organizations need ideas, energy and talent; people need careers, salaries, and opportunities.
- When the fit between individual and system is poor, one or both suffer. Individuals are exploited or exploit the organization or both become victims.
- A good fit benefits both. Individuals find meaningful and satisfying work, and organizations get the talent and energy they need to succeed. (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 117)

The Political Frame Orientation contains the following assumptions:

- Organizations are coalitions of assorted individuals and interest groups.
- Coalition members have enduring differences in values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality.
- Most important decisions involve allocating scarce resources – who gets what.
- Scarce resources and enduring differences put conflict at the center of day-to-day dynamics and make power the most important asset.
- Goals and decisions emerge from bargaining and negotiation among competing stakeholders jockeying for their own interests. (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 188)

Finally, the Symbolic Frame Orientation contains the following assumptions:

- What is most important is not what happens but what it means.
- Activity and meaning are loosely coupled; events and actions have multiple interpretations as people experience life differently.
- Facing uncertainty and ambiguity, people create symbols to resolve confusion, find direction, and anchor hope and faith.
- Events and processes are often more important for what is expressed than for what is produced. Their emblematic form weaves a tapestry of secular myths, heroes and heroines, rituals, ceremonies, and stories to help people find purpose and passion.
- Culture forms the superglue that bonds an organization, unites people, and helps an enterprise to accomplish desired ends. (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 248)

Each of these four leadership frame orientations has characteristics that lend themselves well to the successful implementation of PLCs. While PLCs require an organizational culture change, there are certain PLC structures that comprise effective PLCs. For example, a leader must put certain structures in place that will allow for PLCs to take place. Time must be carved into the master schedule. Teachers must be grouped by content area or department so they can collaborate together. These PLCs then can focus on established goals and objectives or create their own goals that are in concert with the established building-level goals and objectives. Each of these characteristics is representative of Bolman and Deal's Structural Frame Orientation.

PLCs thrive on teachers collaborating together. This human element is reflective of Bolman and Deal's Human Resource Frame Orientation where people and organizations need each other. In effective PLCs, the teachers find meaning in the day-to-day work. Teachers share data and ideas with others in their PLC and support each other. A leader with human resource skills can help to foster this supportive environment by creating a PLC environment where staff are not afraid to exercise initiative and to take risks. When staff feel supported by their leader and their peers in this way, it increases the chances of the PLC being effective.

When Bolman and Deal describe the Symbolic Frame Orientation they refer to culture as being the superglue that bonds an organization. Because PLCs are themselves a culture change, if implemented effectively, the PLCs themselves can unite and hold the organization/building together. The PLCs become the culture or the way of doing things.

Last, Bolman and Deal's Political Frame Orientation speaks to conflict, coalitions, bargaining and negotiation. While these descriptions may have a negative connotation, a leader could use his or her political savvy by working with teacher leaders and/or union representatives within the building to sway others to participate in PLCs and make the effort to give them a chance to take

root. Often, teachers are pessimistic about trying new things for fear of them going away in a few years with the next change in leadership. Being aware of these politics and of the political leaders within the building could serve the building leader well in attempting to implement successful PLCs.

All four leadership frame orientations have necessary components to a successful organization. Each of Bolman and Deal's leadership frame orientations may be more applicable to a specific situation than another depending on what the situation calls for. The ability for a leader to use multiple leadership frame orientations is associated with the leader's effectiveness (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Somewhat similar to Bolman and Deal's leadership frame orientations is what Thomas Sergiovanni (1984) describes in his theory as *leadership forces*. Sergiovanni believes that schools should strive for excellence rather than settle for competence. Sergiovanni describes excellent schools as those that go beyond just achieving high test scores; they also strive for students to master critical thinking and problem-solving skills, interpersonal competence, curiosity and creativity and to develop a love for learning (Sergiovanni, 1984). He also talks about the role leadership plays in creating excellent schools and the impact of weak leaders on a school, saying, "Schools managed by incompetent leaders simply don't get the job done. Typically, such schools are characterized by confusion and inefficiency in operation and malaise in human climate. Student achievement is lower in such schools" (Sergiovanni, 1984, p.6). He talks about *leadership forces*, which are leadership aspects that directly impact the success (or lack of) of a school. He also says these leadership forces are critical to maintaining or creating the necessary changes to improve schools. Sergiovanni identifies these five key leadership forces as technical, human, educational, symbolic and cultural (Sergiovanni, 1984).

The leader who possesses technical skills is one who is able to effectively manage the organization by being skilled at planning and being able to manage time. In concert with Bolman and Deal's (2013) Structural Frame Orientation, the technical leader would also be one who is effective creating and managing organizational structures. Simply put, the technical leader must be able to be organized enough to put structures in place that will ensure success (Sergiovanni, 1984).

The leader who is adept with human skills (or according to Sergiovanni is a "human engineer" [p. 8]) understands and is able to focus on human relationships and interpersonal skills. This type of leader understands the importance of building relationships and being able to provide encouragement as well as to be able to provide opportunities for growth and professional development (Sergiovanni, 1984). Bolman and Deal's (2013) Human Resource Frame Orientation mirrors this leadership aspect or leadership force as well, as an important leadership lens for a leader to be able to apply. The leader who understands the importance of being a human engineer recognizes and believes that "organizations exist to serve human needs rather than the converse" and that "people and organizations need each other, and a good fit benefits both" (Bolman & Deal, p. 117, 2013).

Next, the educational leader, what Hallinger (2003) would refer to as the instructional leader, is one who plays the role of "clinical practitioner" (Sergiovanni, 1984, p. 8). A leader with these skills not only has an awareness but also knowledge of curriculum and instruction (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005) so he or she is able to provide guidance, supervision, evaluation and staff development for staff (Sergiovanni, 1984).

The leader with a Symbolic Frame Orientation understands and emphasizes those things in an organization that are important or are of value. The symbolic leader's actions also convey to



staff what he or she values. Some of those actions could include being visible around the school and visiting classrooms; focusing on educational issues rather than managerial tasks; and “presiding over ceremonies, rituals, and other important occasions; and providing a unified vision of the school through proper use of words and actions” (Sergiovanni, 1984, p. 9). A leader utilizing symbolic leadership forces would recognize that “culture forms the superglue that bonds an organization, unites people, and helps an enterprise accomplish desired ends” and also that “events and processes are often more important for what is expressed than for what is produced. Their emblematic form weaves a tapestry of secular myths, heroes and heroines, rituals, ceremonies, and stories to help people find purpose and passion” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 248).

Finally, the importance of building and maintaining a strong school culture is of critical importance to the school leader. Marzano et al. (2005) lists culture as one of the 21 leadership responsibilities for a leader to be successful and in turn for the school to be successful. Sergiovanni says that the cultural leader is seeking to “define, strengthen, and articulate those enduring values, beliefs, and cultural strands that give the school its unique identity” (1984, p. 10). DuFour and Fullan also stress the importance of creating a collaborative school culture (2013, p. 14). DuFour, DuFour, Eaker and Many (2010) also talk about the importance of leaders helping staff to make specific cultural shifts: from a focus on teaching to collaboration, from an emphasis on what was taught to a fixation on what students learned, from providing individual teachers with curriculum documents such as state standards and curriculum guides to engaging collaborative teams in building shared knowledge regarding essential curriculum (DuFour, et al., 2010).

One of the most widely used terms to describe the type of principal or leader to lead a school district or school is that of *instructional leader*. This role of principal as instructional leader emerged in the 1980s in response to research on effective schools (Stewart, 2006). The effective schools movement of the 1980s relied on the principal to be the educational expert (Marks & Printy, 2003). The most common description of instructional leadership comes from Philip Hallinger (2000). Hallinger (2000) developed a three-dimensional model to describe instructional leadership that includes the following components: defining the school's mission, managing the instructional program and promoting a positive school learning climate.

Hallinger (2000) further divided these three dimensions into ten instructional leadership functions: framing the school's goals, communicating the school's goals, supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating the curriculum, monitoring student progress, protecting instructional time, promoting professional development, maintaining high visibility, providing incentives for teachers, and providing incentive for learning (Hallinger, 2000). Instructional leadership is perhaps most closely associated with Bolman and Deal's Structural Frame Orientation because it is more top-down in nature and the leader is in more of a managerial role as opposed to having a transformational relationship to staff (Hallinger, 2000). Dimmock (1995) supports this claim and believes that instructional leadership is too prescriptive and relies on a top-down management style and suggests that a bottom-up style to leadership is more effective (Stewart, 2006). Another issue associated with the concept of instructional leadership is that the principal is often not the educational expert when it comes to curriculum and in fact has less expertise in specific curricular areas than the teachers who teach in those areas (Hallinger, 2003). "The role of the principal as instructional leader is too narrow a concept to carry the weight of the kinds of reforms that will create the schools that we need for the future" (Fullan, 2002, p.16).

More recently, Marzano and his colleagues presented a leadership model. Marzano and colleagues conducted a meta-analysis of 69 studies in 2,802 schools in order to correlate the leadership behavior of the principal in relation to student achievement (Marzano, et al., 2005). From this study, Marzano and his colleagues identified 21 leadership responsibilities that when applied lead to success and more specifically student achievement. Like Leithwood, Marzano and his colleagues divided these 21 leadership responsibilities into first-order and second-order change (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005). The 21 leadership responsibilities of a school leader that were identified are:

1. Affirmation – celebrate success and also recognize failures
2. Change Agent – leader’s ability to challenge the status quo
3. Contingent Rewards – recognizing individual efforts and rewarding individual staff for successes
4. Communication – clear communication and the leader should be open and accessible
5. Culture – leader must create a culture that fosters change
6. Discipline – leader must protect his staff from outside interference or distractions so they can do their job
7. Flexibility – leader must adapt to the situation and everyone must have a voice
8. Focus – change should be aimed at clear, concrete goals
9. Ideals/Beliefs – leader’s core values
10. Input – leader should seek staff input when making decisions
11. Intellectual Stimulation – leader makes staff aware of professional development opportunities and best practices

12. Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment – extent to which leader is directly involved
13. Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment – leader must be aware of and have access to best practices
14. Monitoring/Evaluation – leader must evaluate and monitor the system
15. Optimizer – leader must be optimistic
16. Order – leader must have clear routines and rules in place for both staff and students
17. Outreach – leader must be an advocate with the community and be in compliance with regulations and also publicize school accomplishments
18. Relationships – leader must build relationships with staff and be aware of personal lives
19. Resources – leader must take care of basic staff needs (classroom materials, paper, etc.)
20. Situational Awareness – leader must be aware of opportunities and also emerging threats
21. Visibility – leader must be visible and transparent (Marzano et al., 2005, pp. 42-43)

Through their meta-analysis, Marzano and colleagues go on to break down which leadership responsibilities are associated with first-order and second-order change. Marzano and colleagues found that all 21 leadership responsibilities are necessary for first-order change to some degree or other but only seven of those leadership responsibilities are specifically related to second-order change. Those related to second-order change are knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment, optimizer, intellectual stimulation, change agent, monitoring/evaluating, flexibility, and ideals/beliefs (Marzano et al., 2005). Interestingly, Marzano and colleagues also go on to emphasize that four of the first-order leadership responsibilities (culture, communication, order and input) could be negatively impacted by second-order change, so

leaders should be aware and sensitive to this when implementing second-order change (Marzano et al., 2005).

Marzano and colleagues go on to say that the 21 leadership responsibilities in isolation will not be effective unless they are embedded within a comprehensive plan consisting of the following: develop a strong leadership team, distribute some responsibilities throughout the leadership team, select the right work, identify the order of magnitude implied by the selected work, and match the management style to the order of magnitude of the change initiative (Marzano et al., 2005).

Note that the leadership responsibilities are embedded within the plan and can be distributed among the leadership team, which would reinforce the fact that no leader can possess every strength or be exemplary in every leadership responsibility. Having a solid leadership team is necessary for this, and hence the first step of the plan: Develop a strong leadership team.

In his book *Good to Great*, Collins (2001) talked about how organizations go from simply being good to being great. In his book, Collins refers to a study that he and his colleagues conducted over five years involving various companies. Over the five years, Collins and his colleagues sought to find out what specific qualities great organizations had in comparison to companies that were just good or even worse. At the end of the five-year study, Collins came up with three stages of development for these companies. Each of these stages contains two key concepts that are critical to that particular stage. The stages and concepts associated with each stage are: Stage 1) Disciplined People – Level 5 Leadership and First Who...Then What; Stage 2) Disciplined Thought – Confront the Brutal Facts and Hedgehog Concept; and Stage 3) Disciplined Action – Culture of Discipline and Technology Accelerators (Collins, 2001).

To explain each concept further, when Collins talks about Level 5 leadership, he does so within a hierarchy. A Level 1 leader is one who is highly capable and is able to make “productive contributions through talent, knowledge, skills, and good work habits” (Collins, 2005, p. 10). A Level 2 leader is a step higher on the hierarchy. The Level 2 leader is a “contributing team member who works “effectively with others in a group setting” (p. 10). The Level 3 leader is considered to be a competent manager and is one who is able to organize “people and resources toward the effective and efficient pursuit of predetermined objectives” (p.10). Next, the Level 4 leader is an effective leader who is able to move people to commit to a “compelling vision and stimulates the group to high performance standards” (p. 10). At the top of the hierarchy is what Collins refers to as the Level 5 leader and the key to the success of any organization.

Collins believes that what makes the Level 5 leaders so unique and also so effective is that they possess a combination of both humility and an unwavering resolve or will. Collins uses Abraham Lincoln as an excellent example of level 5 leadership. Collins describes Lincoln as a president who never let his ego interfere with his decision making or of his pursuit of leading a nation through a civil war. Collins states that “Level 5 leaders are a study in duality: modest and willful, shy and fearless” (Collins, 2005, p. 4). Level 5 leaders according to Collins do not like taking credit for things going well, but rather like to give credit to those around him. At the same time, when things go wrong, the level 5 Leader is the first one to take the blame. “Level 5 leaders have ambition not for themselves but for their companies” (Collins, 2005, p.6). To sum up the characteristics of the Level 5 leader, Collins used the window and the mirror analogy. The Level 5 leader looks out the window to give credit and in the mirror to assign blame or

responsibility. The ineffective leader looks out the window to assign blame and in the mirror to take credit (Collins, 2005).

Another individual who has studied leadership in both the business world and also in education is Michael Fullan. Recently, Fullan has also collaborated with Richard DuFour in their book, *Cultures Built to Last* (DuFour & Fullan, 2013), to lay out a plan for educators to successfully implement PLCs by working to change the entire culture of the educational system. Fullan has also written several books and articles about leadership. Fullan talks about the importance for principals to lead cultural change. According to Fullan, “Only principals who are equipped to handle a complex, rapidly changing environment can implement the reforms that lead to sustained improvement in student achievement” (Fullan, 2002). Fullan also believes that the “cultural change principal” (p. 17) must be able to look at the big picture of the organization and be able to “transform the organization through people and teams” (Fullan, 2002, p. 17). It is easy to see connections here to transformational leadership and also the idea of PLCs. There is also a connection here between Bolman and Deal’s Human Resources Frame Orientation that was outlined earlier.

In one of his articles, Fullan outlines five characteristics of an effective cultural change principal:

1. Moral Purpose – The principal is vested and responsible for not only making a difference in the lives of his own students but is also concerned with the success of other schools and the entire system.
2. Understanding Change – The principal recognizes how difficult the change process is and that it is hard work. He also encourages and welcomes dissenting opinions as that is part of the change process.

3. Improving Relationships – The principal understands the critical importance of building relationships. He knows that if relationships improve, so too will the organization.
4. Knowledge and Creation Sharing – The principal knows that the sharing of knowledge within the organization is the key to growth and improvement for everyone.
5. Leadership and Sustainability – The leader must work to develop “the social environment, learning in context, and cultivating leaders at many levels,” or in other words, build leadership capacity. (Fullan, 2002, pp.17-18)

Analyzing these five components, it is easy to see strong connections again with the idea of transformational leadership and also with Marzano’s What Works in Schools Model (Marzano, et al., 2005). This also seems to lay the groundwork for Fullan’s change theory which came about a few years later. For example, when Fullan discusses knowledge and creation sharing here, that is directly connected to Fullan’s second, third and fourth premises, capacity building with a focus on results and learning in context and changing context. In all of these the focus is on collaboration and learning together to improve student learning. When Fullan talks about moral purpose here, it ties in with Fullan’s first premise, a focus on motivation. Leadership and sustainability tie in directly with Fullan’s sixth and seventh premises, tri-level engagement and persistence and flexibility to stay the course. In both cases, Fullan outlines the importance of connecting leadership capacity and sharing at all levels, not just at the teacher or building level. Sustainability is directly connected to being persistent and being able to stay the course and see things through. It’s clear that Fullan’s earlier work laid the foundation for his change theory. While adhering to these same qualities of effective leaders, several years later Fullan wrote *The Six Secrets of Change* (Fullan, 2008). In this book, Fullan outlines six components that he refers



to as secrets that a leader should exercise for an organization to be successful. The six secrets that Fullan discusses are:

1. Love your employees – It is important for a leader to not only focus on his customers but also his employees.
2. Connect peers with purpose – The leader provides direction for his employees and they interact and learn with their peers in “relation to results” (p. 12).
3. Capacity building prevails – The leader invests in the development of both the individual and the system.
4. Learning is the work – The leader creates an environment where the organization’s learning is job embedded. The work of the educators is learning best practices and sharing those best practices with each other in order to impact student learning.
5. Transparency rules – Everything is out in the open: the assessment results and what is being done to get those results. The leader works to create an environment where everything is out in the open so that it can be analyzed and improved upon.
6. Systems learn – The leader creates an environment where everyone is learning all the time. “It means being humble and confident at the same time and having the conceptual ideas and practical tools to operate in complex, unpredictable environments” (Fullan, 2008, p.111).

Fullan also talks about the importance for leaders to focus on and implement what he calls the *right drivers* (Fullan, 2011). When Fullan refers to the right drivers a leader needs to focus on for change to take place, he is referring to capacity building, group work, instruction, and systemic solutions (Fullan, 2008).

Fullan makes the claim that many leaders today, especially in the United States with increasing pressure to improve student learning, focus on the wrong drivers, which Fullan identifies as accountability, individual teacher and leadership quality, technology and fragmented strategies (Fullan, 2008). Fullan states that it is not wrong for leaders to incorporate these wrong drivers into the school improvement process, but they simply should not be *the* drivers or what is actually *driving* the change or the school improvement. For real change to take place, for schools to improve, the leader should focus on the right drivers because capacity building, group work, instruction and systemic solutions work because they impact the school or organizational *culture*, which consists of values, norms, skills, practices and relationships of the organization (Fullan, 2008). Marzano talks about culture as well, saying that a leader must be sensitive to culture when implementing significant change (Marzano, 2005).

It would appear that many comprehensive educational (or business) leadership models incorporate the idea of job-embedded learning as a necessary component to impact change. As previously mentioned, one of the six characteristics of a high-performing PLC is that the PLC members have an “action orientation or learning by doing” (DuFour, Eaker, and Many, 2010, p. 14). It would stand to reason, then, that if a school is going to become a community of learners to improve the organization and in turn student learning, the principal or educational leaders must exemplify this themselves. “Only the learners eventually become effective change leaders” (Fullan, 2011, p. 118).

## Summary and Research Questions

The review of literature examined the history behind PLCs and the need for them beginning with the eight-year study sponsored by the Progressive Education Association from 1930 to 1942 (Bullough, 2007), the passing of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 1965), the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983), the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, and most recently the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act that created Race to the Top and the adoption by most states of the Common Core State Standards. Additionally, several leadership theories were examined. Those theories examined were Fullan's change theory, Bolman and Deal's reframing organizations through four frames, Sergiovanni's leadership forces, Marzano's What Works in Schools Model, and Greenleaf's servant leadership theory. The review of these various leadership theories illustrated some similarities as well as some differences. Fullan's change theory is the guiding theory that is driving my study.

While there is much existing research on leadership theories, there are very few studies on the direct link between leadership types and their impact on the successful implementation of PLCs. There is much more to learn in this regard and the information gleaned from this study can provide valuable insight that can lead to targeted professional development for principals and educational leaders everywhere.

As stated previously, this is a quantitative study examining the relationship between leadership and the successful implementation of PLCs. There are many leadership types discussed within this chapter, but Fullan's change theory (2006), which incorporates many of these leadership characteristics, provided the theoretical framework guiding this study. Burns's

(1978) definition of leadership (“inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivation – the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations – of both leaders and followers” [p.19]) supports Fullan’s theoretical framework for change leadership.

As stated previously, PLCs are defined as “an ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve” (DuFour, et al., p.11). This study examined how leadership impacts teachers’ ability to participate successfully in this process. The following questions guided this study:

**Research Question 1:** What is the association between different leadership orientations and PLC implementation?

*Hypothesis 1a – Leadership orientations that are more supportive and people centered will have a positive association with PLC implementation.*

PLCs by their very nature rely on the ability of a leader to establish a collaborative culture where the staff is supported and not afraid to take risks. Collaboration of staff and administration is a key component of PLCs (DuFour, 2004, 2007). PLCs require collaboration and a leader who is supportive and willing to distribute leadership rather than a leader who dictates to his or her staff what to do. In accordance with the PLC concept, Fullan describes in his change theory the importance of capacity building in order to get the whole group (PLC) to raise their level of expectations to close the achievement gap, specifically stating that capacity building is a “strategy to increase the collective effectiveness of a group to raise the bar and close the gap of student learning” (p.9). Fullan makes it clear that this requires a leader to help

develop both individual and collective knowledge and competencies, resources and motivation (Fullan, 2006). Bass uses the term “transformational leader” to describe a leader who is considerate and pays close attention to his or her employees and helps them to grow and develop, which relates well to Bolman and Deal’s Human Resources Frame Orientation because it is supportive in nature and takes care of people.

*Hypothesis 1b – Leadership styles that are more hierarchical or “top-down” will be less likely to have a positive association with PLC implementation (or will have a negative association with PLC implementation).*

While putting structures in place is important in any organization, if not done the correct way, they can cause confusion and have a negative impact on a staff’s ability to implement PLCs successfully, as was outlined in the case study of Lewis Middle School and Clark Middle School (Patterson, 2006). There was a clear disconnect between administration and the staff in these schools. In Lewis Middle School, for example, the administration felt that the PLCs had been implemented collaboratively with staff, whereas many staff felt the PLCs were more of a top-down mandate with little training or explanation for what they were (Patterson, 2006). Fullan refers to Patterson’s article and the confusion of staff in the unsuccessful implementation of the PLCs in his own article as a response that reinforces the importance of supportive leadership in the success of PLCs.

**Research Question 2:** Is there a specific leadership orientation that is more likely to be associated with successful PLC implementation?

*Hypothesis 2a – Leaders who possess those skills associated with Bolman and Deal’s Human Resource Frame Orientation will be more likely to have a positive association with the successful implementation of PLCs.*

In their book *Reframing Organizations, Artistry, Choice and Leadership*, Bolman and Deal describe the Human Resource Frame Orientation as one that advocates “openness, caring, mutuality, listening, coaching, participation, and empowerment” and go on to say that this type of leader derives his or her power from being able to care for and support people rather than leading from “position or force” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 361). Leading from position or force would be more closely related to Bolman and Deal’s Structural Frame (Bolman & Deal, 2013). These characteristics of the Human Resources Frame Orientation support DuFour and Fullan’s essential characteristics of PLCs, specifically a shared mission, vision, values and goals and a collaborative culture with a focus on student learning (DuFour & Fullan, 2013).

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

This was a quantitative, correlational and cross-sectional study designed to analyze the relationship between leadership and the successful implementation of PLCs. The goal of this study was to see if different leadership orientations are more likely to influence the success of PLCs. The results of this study will serve to inform leadership training for school leaders who are implementing PLCs in their buildings. By determining whether one leadership orientation, and therefore characteristics within that leadership orientation, is more likely to be associated with successful PLCs, leaders can focus their own professional development to improve in those areas that support a specific leadership orientation.

#### Participants

Participants in this study were urban secondary school teachers, grades six through twelve with diverse demographics and high poverty rates who also participate in grade-level/content-area PLCs. I chose secondary schools for this study because there is not a lot of existing research on the association between leadership and PLC implementation. I also chose secondary schools because of my own experience as a middle school principal. Schools were defined as high-poverty if they receive Title I funding. Of the 14 schools invited to participate in the survey, 11

chose to participate. In those 11 participating schools, 265 respondents started the survey but nine dropped out before completion. As a result, 256 teachers were initially included in the data set. Seventy-eight of the 256 respondents failed to answer all items in the questionnaire. Any participant who had missing data was deleted from the sample. Therefore, the final sample included 178 participants.

### Research Design

The research design for this study was quantitative, correlational and cross-sectional in nature. This design was chosen to determine if there is a relationship between the constructs being examined in this study. The participants were asked to complete an online survey through Qualtrics that would identify their principals' leadership orientations and also their self-reported levels of PLC implementation. The participants' responses to the survey items on level of PLC implementation were compared to their perceptions of their principals' leadership orientations. The independent variable in this study was perceived principal leadership orientations (e.g. Structural, Human resource, Political, Symbolic). The dependent variable in this study was the perceived level of PLC implementation.

### Measures

Following an extensive literature review of leadership and leadership orientations that have been linked to education and also PLCs, it was determined that the following questionnaires would be used to measure leadership orientations and level of PLC implementation.



### Leadership Orientations Survey Instrument

Bolman and Deal's Leadership Frames Orientation Survey (Bolman & Deal, 1990) was used to analyze staff perceptions of the leadership styles of their principals. There are three sections to the survey. In the first section, staff rated their leader on a scale of 1 to 5 on leadership statements that described leadership from the four leadership frames: Structural, Human Resources, Political and Symbolic. The number ratings are represented as follows: 1 = Never, 2 = Occasionally, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, and 5 = Always. Examples of survey items include: "Thinks very clearly and logically," "Shows high levels of support for others," "Shows exceptional ability to mobilize people and resources to get things done." In the second section of the survey, staff were asked to look at six forced-choice items where they would priority rank their principal from 1 to 4. For example, the first item ranked is, "The individual's strongest skills are: a. Analytic Skills, b. Interpersonal skills, c. Political skills, d. Ability to excite and motivate." Each descriptor ties directly to one of Bolman and Deal's four frames. In the third section, staff were asked to assign an overall rating for their principal on a scale of 1 to 5: 1 "Bottom 20%," 3 "Middle 20%" and 5 "Top 20%." Staff were asked for example, "Compared to other individuals that you have known with comparable levels of experience and responsibility, how would you rate this person on: 'overall effectiveness as a manager' etc." The fourth section of the survey asked staff to provide some personal background information that described their working relationship with their principal. Table 1 below shows the reliability statistics for the leadership orientations based on approximately 1,300 colleague ratings for a multisector sample of managers in both business and education.

Table 1. Leadership Orientations Survey Part 1 (Bolman &amp; Deal, 1990)

Subscale	Question Number	Wording
Structural Frame  Alpha = .92	1	Thinks very clearly and logically.
	5	Strongly emphasizes careful planning and clear time lines.
	9	Approaches problems through logical analysis and careful thinking.
	13	Develops and implements clear, logical policies and procedures.
	17	Approaches problems with facts and logic.
	21	Sets specific, measurable goals and holds people accountable for results.
	25	Has extraordinary attention to detail.
	29	Strongly believes in clear structure and a chain of command.
Human Resources Frame  Alpha = .93	2	Shows high levels of support and concern for others.
	6	Builds trust through open and collaborative relationships.
	10	Shows high sensitivity and concern for others' needs and feelings.
	14	Fosters high levels of participation and involvement in decisions.
	18	Is consistently helpful and responsive to others.
	22	Listens well and is unusually receptive to other people's ideas and input.
	26	Gives personal recognition for work well done.
	30	Is a highly participative manager.

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Table 1. (Continued)

<b>Subscale</b>	<b>Question Number</b>	<b>Wording</b>
Political Frame  Alpha = .91	3	Shows exceptional ability to mobilize people and resources to get things done.
	7	Is a very skillful and shrewd negotiator.
	11	Is unusually persuasive and influential.
	15	Anticipates and deals adroitly with organizational conflict.
	19	Is very effective in getting support from people with influence and power.
	23	Is politically very sensitive and skillful.
	27	Develops alliances to build strong base of support.
	32	Serves as an influential model of organizational aspirations and values.
Symbolic Frame  Alpha = .93	14	Fosters high levels of participation and involvement in decisions.
	12	Is an inspiration to others.
	20	Communicates a strong and challenging vision and sense of mission.
	28	Generates loyalty and enthusiasm.
	8	Is highly charismatic.
	16	Is highly imaginative and creative.
	24	Sees beyond current realities to create exciting new opportunities.
	31	Succeeds in the face of conflict and opposition.

Reliability data for the Structural Frame is based on, 1309 complete cases for eight data items.

Reliability data for the Human Resources Frame is based on, 1331 complete cases for eight data

items. Reliability data for the Political Frame is based on, 1268 complete cases for eight data

items and reliability data for the Symbolic Frame is based on, 1315 complete cases for eight data items.

Additional questions from the Leadership Orientations Survey can be found in Table 2 below.

These additional questions asked the teachers to rank order from 1 to 4 for characteristics that best describe their school principal. The teacher would use a 1 for the term that best describes the principal and a 4 for the term that least describes the principal.

Table 2. Leadership Orientations Survey Part 2 ( Bolman & Deal, 1990)

<b>Question</b>	<b>Leadership Characteristic Rate each one a 1, 2, 3, or 4</b>
The individual's strongest skills are:	<input type="checkbox"/> Analytical skills <input type="checkbox"/> Interpersonal skills <input type="checkbox"/> Political skills <input type="checkbox"/> Ability to excite and motivate
The best way to describe this person is:	<input type="checkbox"/> Technical expert <input type="checkbox"/> Good listener <input type="checkbox"/> Skilled negotiator <input type="checkbox"/> Inspirational leader
What this individual does best is:	<input type="checkbox"/> Make good decisions <input type="checkbox"/> Coach and develop people <input type="checkbox"/> Build strong alliances and a power base <input type="checkbox"/> Energize and inspire others
What people are most likely to notice about this person is:	<input type="checkbox"/> Attention to detail <input type="checkbox"/> Concern for people <input type="checkbox"/> Ability to succeed, in the face of conflict and opposition <input type="checkbox"/> Charisma
This individual's most important leadership trait is:	<input type="checkbox"/> Clear, logical thinking <input type="checkbox"/> Caring and support for others <input type="checkbox"/> Toughness and aggressiveness <input type="checkbox"/> Imagination and creativity
This person is best described as:	<input type="checkbox"/> An analyst <input type="checkbox"/> A humanist <input type="checkbox"/> A politician <input type="checkbox"/> A visionary

### Professional Learning Communities Survey

The Professional Learning Communities Survey (National School Reform Faculty, 2014) was used to assess the level of PLC implementation as perceived by teachers participating in PLCs. The survey consists of 15 questions divided up into three sections of five questions each (Table 3). The first section, Critical Elements consists of statements such as, “Faculty/staff members talk with each other about their situations and the specific challenges they face.” The second section, Human Resources, consists of statements such as, “The school leadership keeps the school focused on shared purpose, continuous improvement, and collaboration.” The third section, Structural Conditions, consists of statements such as, “There is a formal process that provides substantial & regularly scheduled blocks of time for educators to conduct on-going self-examination & self-renewal.” Staff then rated each of the 15 statements in the three sections on a scale of 1 to 5 with a 1 = Not at All, 2 = Somewhat, 3 = 50%, 4 = To a Large Degree and 5 = To a Great Extent. If someone rated, “Faculty/staff members talk with each other about their situations and the specific challenges they face,” as a 5 (or To a Great Extent), that would signify in that teacher’s perception that faculty/staff members are able to do that and have open dialog to a great extent. The higher the question number was rated, the more fully implemented or developed was that characteristic of the PLC. The lower the question was rated, the lower the implementation or development level of that PLC characteristic.

Table 3. PLC Survey (National School Reform Faculty [NSRF], 2014, pp.3-6)

<b>Subscale</b>	<b>Question Number</b>	<b>Wording</b>
Critical Elements	1.1 Reflective Dialog	a. Faculty/staff members talk with each other about their situations and the specific challenges they face.
	1.2 Deprivatization of Practice	b. Teachers share, observe, & discuss each other's teaching methods and philosophies.
	1.3 Collective Focus on Student Learning	c. Teachers assume that all students can learn at reasonably high levels & that teachers can help them.
	1.4 Collaboration	d. Teachers not only work together to develop shared understandings of students, curriculum & instructional policy, but also produce materials & activities that improve instruction, curriculum, & assessment.
	1.5 Shared Norms and Values	e. Through words & actions teachers affirm their common values concerning critical educational issues and in support of their collective focus on student learning.
Human Resources	2.1 Openness to Improvement	a. Teachers take risks in trying new techniques and ideas and make efforts to learn more about their profession.
	2.2 Trust and Respect	b. Teachers feel honored for their expertise within the school as well as within the school district, the parent community and other significant groups

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Table 3. (continued)

Subscale	Question Number	Wording
	2.3 Cognitive and Skill Base	c. Within the school there are formal methods for sharing expertise among faculty members so that marginal and ineffective teachers can improve.
	2.4 Supportive Leadership	d. The school leadership keeps the school focused on shared purpose, continuous improvement, and collaboration.
	2.5 Socialization	e. The staff imparts a sense that new teachers are an important and productive part of a meaningful school community.
Structural Conditions	3.1 Time to Meet and Talk	a. There is a formal process that provides substantial & regularly scheduled blocks of time for educators to conduct on-going self-examination & self-renewal.
	3.2 Physical Proximity	b. Teachers have common spaces, rooms, or areas for discussion of educational practice.
	3.3 Interdependent Teaching Roles	c. There are recurring formal situations in which teachers work together (team teaching integrated lessons, etc.)
	3.4 Communication Structures	d. There are structures & Opportunities for an exchange of ideas, both within and across such organizational units as teams, grade levels, & subject departments.
	3.5 Teacher Empowerment & School Autonomy	e. Teachers have autonomy to make decisions regarding their work guide by the norms and beliefs of the PLC.

### Additional Survey Questions

There were several additional survey questions that were asked to gain additional information in regard to principal leadership, satisfaction level with PLCs and demographics.

Those additional questions are listed below.

- Please rate your school principal's overall effectiveness as a leader on a scale of 1 to 5 with a 1 being *not at all effective* and a 5 being *extremely effective*.
- Please rate the overall effectiveness of how your school principal facilitates the PLC process with a 1 being *not at all effective* and a 5 being *extremely effective*.
- How many years have you been a teacher in your current building?
- How many years has your building principal been the leader of your school?
- How many years have you worked in your current school district?
- How many years have you been part of a Professional Learning Community (PLC)?
- Please rate your overall satisfaction of the PLC process on a scale of 1 to 5 with a 1 being *extremely satisfied* and a 5 being *extremely dissatisfied*.
- Please explain/give insight into your answer.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being *strongly agree* and a 5 being *strongly disagree*, rate how you feel that PLCs are an effective use of time.
- Please explain/give insight into your answer.



## Study Procedure

Chosen districts and schools were contacted via e-mail with the survey links sent to all participating schools and districts. The link took each participant to the online survey where additional information about the study was provided. All participants' identities and responses were anonymous. Responses were collected and stored online. When data collection was complete, participants' responses were downloaded and then deleted from storage. This process resulted in 256 participants representing 11 principals. Nine individuals who had the opportunity to participate chose to opt out of the survey. The survey was sent to a total of 14 schools total with 11 participating. Those 11 schools comprised the data for this analysis. School e-mail addresses were obtained from schools participating in this study. Participants were sent an e-mail with a link that took them to the survey. Before taking the survey, participants were provided with a detailed rationale for the study and its purpose. At that time, participants were also asked to provide informed consent. Those participants who provided consent were then directed to the survey. The identities and responses for all participants were completely anonymous. Participants responded to the online survey via Qualtrics. Once all data was collected, the participant's responses were downloaded and deleted from Qualtrics storage within 6 months.

## Proposed Data Analysis

This study examined the relationship between the independent variable of principal leadership style and the dependent variable of level of PLC implementation. There were two research questions being asked in this study. Question 1 examined the direct relationship between

leadership and level of PLC implementation. Question 2 examined whether or not a specific leadership orientation was more conducive to the successful implementation of PLCs versus another.

**Research Question 1:** What is the association between different leadership orientations and PLC implementation?

*Hypothesis 1a – Leadership orientations that are more supportive and people centered (Symbolic Frame or Human Resources Frame) will have a positive association with PLC implementation.*

*Hypothesis 1b – Leadership orientations that are more hierarchical or “top-down” (Structural Frame) will be less likely to have a positive association with PLC implementation (or will have a negative association with PLC implementation).*

**Research Question 2:** Is there a specific leadership orientation that is more likely to be associated with successful PLC implementation?

*Hypothesis 2a – Leaders who possess those skills associated with Bolman and Deal’s Human Resources Frame will be more likely to have a positive association with the successful implementation of PLCs.*

Both questions examined the direct relationship between a specific leadership orientation and the level of PLC implementation. Table 4 below illustrates the direct alignment between the research question and what data instrument was used to measure the relationship between the

independent variable (leadership orientation) and the dependent variable (level of PLC implementation).

Table 4. Alignment Between Research Questions and Data Collection Instruments

Research Questions	Leadership Orientations (Other) <sup>2</sup>	Professional Learning Communities Survey
1. How do different leadership orientations impact the successful implementation of PLCs?	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
2. Is there a specific leadership orientation that is more likely to impact successful PLC implementation?	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

This chapter provides descriptive statistics and a preliminary analysis of the data for each research question. Question 1 examines how different leadership orientations relate to PLC implementation. Question 2 examines whether or not there is a specific leadership orientation that is more likely to be associated with successful PLC Implementation. Finally, additional findings from the data are presented along with implications for educational leaders.

#### Preliminary Analyses

Of the 265 respondents who started the survey, nine dropped out before completion. As a result, 256 teachers were initially included in the data set. Seventy-eight of the 256 respondents failed to answer all items in the questionnaire. Any participant who had missing data was deleted from the sample. Therefore, the final sample included 178 participants. See Table 5 for descriptive demographic statistics of the full study sample. In addition to the demographic information, participants indicated that building principals had been leaders of their school for an average of 4.19 (3.31) years, with a range of 1-10 years.

Table 5. Demographic Descriptive for the Total Sample

Question	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean (sd)
Number of Years in Building	178	1	24	7.16 (5.00)
Number of Years in a PLC	178	1	27	4.86 (2.49)

In addition to the information presented above, participants indicated that building principals had been leaders of their school for an average of 4.19 (3.31) years, with a range of 1-10 years.

### Instruments

There were two instruments administered for this study: the Leadership Frames Orientation Survey (Bolman & Deal, 1990) and the PLC Survey (National School Reform Faculty, 2014, pp.3-6) Data from these instruments were initially examined utilizing descriptive statistics.

***Leadership Orientations.*** As previously noted, the Leadership Frames Orientation Survey assessed participant perceptions of their principal's leadership orientation by rating the principal from a 1 (*Never*) to a 5 (*Always*) on leadership characteristics related to each of the four Leadership Frame Orientations. Those four leadership frame orientations are Structural, Human Resource, Political and Symbolic. Mean scores for the Leadership Orientation Survey Form (Other) used in this study are presented in Table 6.

All reported reliability coefficients for each factor of the survey in this study were comparable with means reported by Bolman (2010) during validity and reliability testing. Please see table 7 for a comparison of reliability coefficients in this sample and in the normative samples provided by the survey developers.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for Primary Study Variables

	N	Min	Max	Mean	sd
Structural Frame subscale	178	2	5	3.52	.849
Human Resource Frame subscale	178	1	5	3.22	1.045
Political Frame subscale	178	1	5	3.32	.944
Symbolic Frame subscale	178	1	5	3.12	1.091
PLC survey Critical Elements subscale	178	2	5	3.48	.709
PLC survey Human Resources subscale	178	1	5	3.01	.803
PLC survey Structural Conditions subscale	178	1	5	3.30	.906
Overall level of PLC implementation	178	2	5	3.26	.675

Table 7. Reliability Coefficients

Leadership Orientation Reliability Coefficients- Normative Sample	Leadership Orientation Reliability Coefficients- Current Sample	PLC Survey Reliability Coefficients- Normative Sample	PLC Survey Reliability Coefficients- Current Sample
Structural Frame .92	Structural Frame .92	Critical Elements Subscale -Not provided	Critical Elements Subscale .89
Human Resource Frame .93	Human Resource Frame .95	Human Resource Subscale- Not provided	Human Resource Subscale .82
Political Frame .91	Political Frame .94	Structural Conditions Subscale- Not provided	Structural Conditions Subscale .82
Symbolic Frame .93	Symbolic Frame .96		

***Professional Learning Communities.*** This survey asked teachers to rate the level of implementation of their PLC from 1 (*Not at All*) to a 5 (*To a Great Extent*) in three different areas. Those three areas are Critical Elements, Human Resources and Structural Conditions. In each of these areas teachers were asked to respond to five survey items. For example, in the area of Critical Elements a teacher had to rate from a 1 to 5 whether or not *faculty/staff members talk with each other about their situations and the specific challenges they face*. In the area of Human Resources, an example of a survey item rated 1 to 5 is *supportive leadership*. An item example rated 1 to 5 in the area of Structural Conditions is *time to meet and talk*. Means for reliability and validity could not be found for the Professional Learning Communities Survey, but means for reliability based on the responses from the 178 quantitative responses in this study can be found Table

### **Research Question 1**

What is the association between different leadership orientations and PLC implementation?

*Hypothesis 1a – Leadership orientations that are more supportive and people centered will have a positive association with PLC Implementation. - Supported*

Analyses were conducted to address Research Question 1, Hypothesis 1a. Pearson correlations were calculated to examine associations between individual Leadership Orientation behaviors and level of PLC implementation in three different subgroups: Critical Elements, Human Resources and Structural Conditions. In addition, Pearson correlations were calculated to examine the relationship between individual leadership orientation behaviors and level of PLC implementation overall by combining and averaging those three PLC survey subgroups. See

Table 8 for Pearson correlations among individual leadership orientation behaviors and PLC implementation.

Table 8. Correlations Among Primary Study Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Structural Frame subscale	1	---	---	---	---	---	---
2. Human Resource Frame subscale	.786**	1	---	---	---	---	---
3. Political Frame subscale	.794**	.857**	1	---	---	---	---
4. Symbolic Frame subscale	.808**	.916**	.912**	1	---	---	---
5. PLC survey Critical Elements subscale	.262**	.339**	.304**	.326**	1	---	---
6. Human Resource subscale	.616**	.698**	.698**	.750**	.517**	1	---
7. PLC survey Structural Conditions subscale	.352**	.510**	.486**	.531**	.488**	.629**	1
8. Overall level of PLC implementation	.494**	.624**	.601**	.649**	.774**	.859**	.867**

Note: \*\*Significant at the  $p < .001$  level

Significant correlations were found between all four leadership frame orientations and overall level of PLC implementation. The Structural Frame Orientation and overall level of PLC implementation had a correlation of .494. While the Structural Frame Orientation had the lowest correlation among the four frames, it was still statistically significant. The Human Resource Frame Orientation and overall level of PLC implementation had a correlation of .624. The Political Frame Orientation and overall level of PLC implementation had a correlation of .601.



The Symbolic Frame Orientation and overall level of PLC implementation had the highest correlation of .649. Central concepts of the Symbolic Frame Orientation include a leader who is cognizant of and pays attention to the culture of the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Culture relates directly to the people within that organization.

The Human Resource Frame Orientation's central concepts include the importance of relationships and aligning organizational and human needs (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Both the Human Resource Frame Orientation and the Symbolic Frame Orientation correlation scores would support the hypothesis that more people-centered leadership orientations impact the successful implementation of PLCs.

Additionally, study results show significant correlations among all three of the PLC Survey subscales and each of the four leadership orientation frames. The lowest correlation, though still significant, was between the Structural Frame Orientation and the PLC Critical Elements subscale at .262. The correlation between the Symbolic Frame Orientation and PLC Human Resource was .750. This was the highest correlation between any two variables.

***Hypothesis 1b:** Leadership orientations that are more hierarchical or “top-down” will be less likely to have a positive association with PLC implementation (or will have a negative association with PLC implementation). - **Partially Supported***

Further analyses of my data were conducted to answer Research Question 1, Hypothesis 1b. Pearson correlations were calculated to test for relationships between the Structural Leadership Frame Orientation and the overall level of PLC implementation. Central concepts of the Structural Frame Orientation include rules and policies, and this frame is associated with

more top-down organizations such as factories or the military (Bolman & Deal, 2013). While the correlation between the Structural Frame Orientation and overall level of PLC implementation was significant (above .001), it was noticeably lower than the correlation between the other three leadership orientations and overall level of PLC implementation. This is why this hypothesis was determined to be partially supported.

In order to verify that the magnitude of the difference in correlations was significant, a calculation of differences between two different correlations with one variable in common was conducted utilizing the method outlined by Lee and Preacher (2013). First, the Structural Frame Orientation and overall level of PLC implementation correlation of .494 was compared to the Human Resource Frame Orientation and overall level of PLC implementation correlation of .624, while taking into account the correlation between the Structural Frame Orientation and Human Resource Frame Orientation of .786. Results of the analysis yielded a z-score of -3.29,  $p < .001$ , indicating a statistically significant difference between these correlations. The correlation between the Human Resource Frame Orientation and overall level of PLC implementation is significantly greater than the correlation between the Structural Frame Orientation and overall level of PLC implementation.

Second, the Structural Frame Orientation and overall level of PLC implementation correlation of .494 was compared to the Political Frame Orientation and overall level of PLC implementation correlation of .601, while taking into account the correlation between the Structural Frame Orientation and Political Frame Orientation of .794. Results of the analysis yielded a z-score of -2.72,  $p < .01$ , indicating a statistically significant difference between these correlations. The correlation between the Political Frame Orientation and overall level of PLC

implementation is significantly greater than the correlation between the Structural Frame Orientation and overall level of PLC implementation.

Third, the Structural Frame Orientation and overall level of PLC implementation correlation of .494 was compared to the Symbolic Frame Orientation and overall level of PLC implementation correlation of .649, while taking into account the correlation between the Structural Frame Orientation and Symbolic Frame Orientation of .808. Results of the analysis yielded a z-score of -4.22,  $p < .001$ , indicating a statistically significant difference between these correlations. The correlation between the Symbolic Frame Orientation and overall level of PLC implementation is significantly greater than the correlation between the Structural Frame Orientation and overall level of PLC implementati

### **Research Question 2**

Is there a specific leadership orientation more likely to be associated with successful PLC implementation?

*Hypothesis 2a: Leaders who possess those skills associated with Bolman and Deal's Human Resource Frame Orientation will be more likely to have a positive association with the successful implementation of PLCs. - Partially Supported*

To address Research Question 2, Hypothesis 2a, correlations were computed between the Human Resource Frame Orientation and the overall level of PLC implementation. Based on the results of this study, the relationship between the Human Resource Orientation and overall level of PLC implementation was statistically significant with a correlation of .624. This was the

second highest correlation behind the Symbolic Frame Orientation at .649 and why Hypothesis 2a was determined to be partially supported. It should also be pointed out though that the Political Frame Orientation also had a correlation of .601, which is also statistically significant. All three of these Leadership Orientations were much higher than the Structural Frame Orientation at .494 which again reinforces why the data in this study partially supports Hypothesis 2a.

### Additional Findings

#### Qualitative Follow-Ups

##### Principal Effectiveness.

In addition to the questions asked from the Leadership Frames Orientations Survey and the Professional Learning Communities Survey, there were additional survey items included to obtain qualitative information from participants regarding their perceptions of leadership effectiveness and satisfaction with the PLC process. One of the additional survey items asked was, *Please rate the overall effectiveness of how your school principal facilitates the PLC process.* There were 178 quantitative responses, with participants choosing between 1 (*Not at All Effective*) and 5 (*Extremely Effective*). Of the 178 quantitative responses, 39.88% (71) indicated they felt the school principal's facilitation of the PLC process was *Effective* (4) or *Extremely Effective* (5). Ratings of *Minimally Effective* (2) to *Not at All Effective* (1) represented 37.07% (66) of participants.

Effective principals. Of the 178 quantitative responses to this survey item, 16 of the 71 responses who rated the school principal as *Effective* (4) or *Extremely Effective* (5) provided

comments that centered on two themes: Visibility and Providing Guidance and Support. Those themes and comment examples can be found in Table 9.

Table 9. Principal Effectiveness Facilitating the PLC Process (High Scores)  
(Scored 4- *Effective* or 5-*Extremely Effective*)

Theme: Visibility	Theme: Guidance and Support
Comment Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Visits during PLC time               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● When we have questions on goals for our students or need ideas on how to handle things he is always there to talk and discuss anything with us.</li> <li>● Either the principal or a representative attends the meetings several times throughout the year.</li> <li>● Our principal meets with PLC leaders to discuss goals and progress</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Comment Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provides advice and guidance</li> <li>● Gentle guidance.</li> <li>● Fights for PLC time at the district level for teachers</li> <li>● Gives us freedom to work as teachers</li> <li>● Our principal used to give us a guided sheet to do at each meeting. The sheet prohibited us from actually accomplishing our goals....we discussed this with him and he supported our concerns.</li> </ul>
Number of theme comments: 4	Number of theme comments: 12
Number of participants who provide scores of 4 or 5: 71 out of 178 Total number of comments provided: 25	

Ineffective principals. Of the 178 quantitative responses to this survey item, 41 of the 66 respondent who rated the school principal *Not at All Effective* or *Minimally Effective* provided comments that centered on two themes: Lack of Principal Leadership and Lack of Communication. Those themes and comment examples can be found in Table 10.

Table 10. Principal Effectiveness Facilitating the PLC Process (Low Scores)  
(Scored 1 *Not At All Effective* or 2 *Minimally Effective*)

Theme: Lack of Leadership/Engagement	Theme: Lack of Communication
<p>Comment Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● There is very little leadership and even less communication.</li> <li>● The principal or administration rarely checks in with groups.</li> <li>● My school principal does not attend my PLC meetings.</li> <li>● Our building principal is barely visible in the building</li> <li>● He doesn't really facilitate the PLC process.</li> <li>● Our principal asks for input from very few teachers in the building...key players in the building are being missed.</li> </ul>	<p>Comment Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The principal has not communicated with us at all in regards to PLC nor has an administrator ever come to my PLC this year.</li> <li>● There is very little leadership and even less communication.</li> <li>● Our principal asks for input from very few teachers in the building...key players in the building are being missed.</li> <li>● We don't get much feedback.</li> </ul>
Number of theme comments: 25	Number of theme comments: 6
Number of participants who provide scores of 1 or 2: 66 out of 178 Total number of comments provided: 41	

### PLCs Are an Effective Use of Time

Another survey item asked respondents to rate the following statement: *I feel that PLCs are an effective use of my time.* There were 178 usable responses with participants choosing between 1 and 5 with a 1 being *Strongly Disagree* and a 2 being *Somewhat Disagree*. Of the 178 quantitative responses, 51.68% (92) answered 4 *Somewhat Agree* or 5 *Strongly Agree*. Ratings of 1 *Strongly Disagree* and 2 *Somewhat Disagree* represented 29.21% (52) of participants.

Effective use of time. Of the 178 quantitative responses to this survey item, 18 of the 92 responses who chose 4 *Somewhat Agree* or 5 *Strongly Agree* provided comments that centered

on one theme: Collaboration and Sharing of Ideas. Comments associated with that theme can be found in the Table 11.

Table 11. PLCs Are an Effective Use of Time (High Scores)  
(Scored 4 *Somewhat Agree* or 5 *Strongly Agree*)

Theme: Collaboration/Sharing of Ideas
<p>Comment Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Collaboration time with peers is valuable.</li> <li>● Our PLCs work well to collaborate, create and discuss/brainstorm solutions.</li> <li>● Allows opportunities to collaborate with others.</li> <li>● It allows me time to collaborate and also get insight from others about students and curriculum.</li> <li>● PLCs are essential component to effective teaching.</li> <li>● The collaboration between teachers and the concepts being taught is invaluable.</li> </ul>
Number of comments: 18
Number of participants who provide scores of 4 or 5: 92 out of 178 Total number of comments provided: 54

Ineffective use of time. Of the 178 quantitative responses to this survey item, 21 of the 52 responses who chose 1 *Strongly Disagree* or 2 *Somewhat Disagree* provided comments that centered on one theme: Lack of Clarity and Vision. Comments associated with that theme can be found in the Table 12.

Table 12. PLCs Are an Effective Use of Time (Low Scores)  
(Scored 1 *Strongly Disagree* or 2 *Somewhat Disagree*)

Theme: Lack of Clarity Around Vision
<p>Comment Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● There's never a clear vision of what we should accomplish. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● I don't think we were trained properly in the right way to do PLCs.</li> <li>● Veteran teachers are unwilling to change up what they have done forever.</li> <li>● Maybe if clear expectations were set up we may get more out of the PLC process.</li> <li>● Until structured correctly, they are a big waste of time.</li> <li>● Not everyone is on the same page as what our goal as a PLC is.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Number of comments: 21
Number of participants who provide scores of 1 or 2: 52 out of 178 Total number of comments provided: 34

### Overall Satisfaction with PLC Process

One other survey item asked was: *Please rate your overall satisfaction of the PLC process.*

There were 178 usable responses, with participants choosing between a 1 and a 5 with a 1 being *Extremely Dissatisfied* and a 5 being *Extremely Satisfied*. Of the 178 quantitative responses, 44.94% (80) answered 4 *Somewhat Satisfied* or 5 *Extremely Satisfied*. Ratings of 1 *Extremely Dissatisfied* or 2 *Somewhat Dissatisfied* represented 29.21% (52) of participants.

Satisfied with PLC process. Of the 178 quantitative responses to this survey item, 22 of the 80 responses who rated overall PLC satisfaction a 4 or 5 again provided comments that centered on the theme of Collaboration and Sharing of Ideas. Comments associated with that theme can be found in the Table 13.



Table 13. Overall PLC Satisfaction (High Scores)  
 (Scored 4 *Somewhat Satisfied* or 5 *Extremely Satisfied*)

Theme: Time to Collaborate and Share Ideas
Comment Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The opportunity to collaborate with teachers is beneficial.</li> <li>● Our time together is extremely beneficial.</li> <li>● It allows teachers to communicate at a given time and place.</li> <li>● Opportunities to examine strategies to achieve teaching goals with others.</li> <li>● The time to collaborate is helpful to make me a better teacher.</li> <li>● I see growth in the teachers. They are more open to new ideas and are very collaborative on what is best for students.</li> <li>● It's almost always a good thing when teachers are all in the same room talking about goals and ideas to make life better for students.</li> </ul>
Number of comments: 22
Number of participants who provide scores of 4 or 5: 80 out of 178 Total number of comments provided: 55

Not Satisfied with the PLC process. Of the 178 quantitative responses to this survey item, 25 of the 43 responses who rated overall PLC satisfaction a 1 or 2 provided comments that centered on two themes: Apathy of PLC Members and Lack of Support or Guidance from Principal. Comments associated with that theme can be found in the Table 14.

Table 14. Overall PLC Satisfaction (Low Scores)  
 (Scored 1 *Extremely Dissatisfied* or 2 *Somewhat Dissatisfied*)

Theme: Apathy/PLC Members Don't Care	Theme: Lack of Support or Guidance
Comment Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● My team does not contribute or see time spend as being a priority.</li> <li>● So many teachers do not value it.</li> <li>● Others do little or nothing to help the group.</li> <li>● It is useless time.</li> </ul>	Comment Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● There is little guidance.</li> <li>● The PLC program is forced and not given any direction.</li> <li>● There is minimal guidance.</li> <li>● No follow up or guidance on implementing.</li> <li>● Seems like a mandated process.</li> <li>● My PLC often feels a lack of organizational support.</li> </ul>
Number of comments: 17	Number of Comments: 8
Number of participants who provide scores of 1 or 2: 52 out of 178 Total number of comments provided: 43	

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

Recall that the purpose of my study was to examine associations among leadership styles and PLC implementation. To that end, several noteworthy findings emerged. As a reminder, Bolman and Deal's (2013) four frames are presented in Table 15.

Table 15. Overview of the Four-Frame Model

	<b>Structural</b>	<b>Human Resources</b>	<b>Political</b>	<b>Symbolic</b>
<b>Metaphor for Organization</b>	Factory of machine	Family	Jungle	Carnival, temple, theater
<b>Central Concepts</b>	Rules, roles, goals, policies, technology, environment	Needs, skills, relationships	Power, conflict, competition, organizational politics	Culture, meaning, metaphor, ritual, ceremony, stories, heroes
<b>Image of Leadership</b>	Social architecture	Empowerment	Advocacy	Inspiration
<b>Basic Leadership Challenge</b>	Attune structure to task, technology, environment	Align organizational and human needs	Develop agenda and power base	Create faith, beauty, meaning

\*Taken from Bolman and Deal, 2013, pg. 19

Research Question 1 sought to uncover how Bolman and Deal's (2013) leadership orientations were associated with PLC implementation. While I hypothesized that leadership

orientations that were more supportive and people centered would have a *more* positive association with PLC implementation, my study findings clearly showed that all four leadership frame orientations were statistically significantly associated with PLC implementation. Not only did each leadership frame orientation correlate with overall PLC implementation (Structural Frame Orientation was the lowest), but each leadership frame orientation also correlated with each subscale of PLC implementation (Critical Elements, Human Resources, Structural Conditions). The lowest correlation was between the Structural Frame Orientation and PLC Critical Elements. The research clearly shows all four leadership frame orientations were associated with successful PLC implementation in my particular study of secondary schools in one large urban school district.

All four leadership frames are important, but it is clear from my study sample that the Symbolic Frame Orientation (culture, heroes, inspiration, meaning, create faith) and the Human Resource Frame Orientation (family, relationships, align both organizational and human needs, empowerment) were the most highly correlated with each other and both of these orientations were also most highly correlated with the overall level of PLC implementation. More specifically, the Symbolic Frame Orientation and the Human Resource Frame Orientation correlated highest with each of the PLC subscales (Critical Elements, Human Resource and Structural Conditions). This is important because contained within those subscales are characteristics that define effective PLCs such as *reflective dialogue, collaboration, trust and respect, supportive leadership* “and” *teacher empowerment*. This is meaningful because if there is an association between leaders who possess attributes of the Symbolic Frame Orientation and/or Human Resource Frame and effective PLCs, we can focus principal professional development on developing these attributes. In his High Reliability Schools model, Marzano

(2016) builds off of DuFour's PLC model with an added emphasis on leadership. Marzano believes the leader (principal) must focus on "specific leadership attributes that enable substantial change" (p. 113). We know from the Patterson (2006) and DuFour (2007) articles regarding PLCs in two middle schools that the PLC implementations were not successful because leaders did not emphasize the importance of principal leadership in facilitating the PLC process. The qualitative data gleaned from interviews of teachers in those two middle schools revealed a pronounced disconnect between staff and administration. Staff felt PLCs were something done *to* them rather than a collaborative effort. While administrators seemed to have a clear understanding of what PLCs were supposed to be, this understanding was not clearly communicated with staff. In both middle schools there was little or no input from teachers in the PLC process and as a result they were not successful.

The information gleaned from my study can help leaders focus on attributes in all four leadership orientations because results indicate all four frame orientations are important and support each other. Although all were meaningful, the attributes within the Symbolic and Human Resource Frame Orientations can be prioritized; leadership trainings can (and should) emphasize those attributes. These attributes can also be a focus and can be reinforced in monthly principal and even assistant principal meetings. As a real-world example, in my school district, I play a part in the professional development of principals. We devote a chunk of time for self-reflection and monthly written reflections are also part of our routine. Self-reflection questions could focus on how principals (and other leaders) have been intentional about improving those attributes within the Symbolic or Human Resource Frame Orientations or how they have been impacted by leaders who exhibited those attributes. Below are some examples of Symbolic Frame Orientation self-reflection questions:

*Think of a time when you shared a story with your staff that helped to convey your message clearly. Think of a time when someone inspired you. What did that leader do that inspired you?*

Here are some examples of Human Resource Frame Orientation self-reflection questions:

*What are three things you've done over the last year to connect and build relationships with your staff? How do you empower your staff?*

Perhaps leaders could reflect back on a situation or initiative they were involved in where their actions were more aligned with attributes from another frame orientation such as the Political or Structural Frame Orientation and they could think about how they could have approached that initiative or issue from the Symbolic and or Human Resource Frame Orientation. If we look back to the PLC study that was analyzed in the Patterson (2006) and DuFour (2007) articles we see clear examples of leaders/principals who implemented PLCs from a Structural Frame Orientation. The teachers were put into groups. The principals communicated the PLC vocabulary and key terms. But that was the extent of the rollout for the PLCs in those schools. The principals attempted to implement the PLCs through a strict Structural Frame Orientation, but structure alone is not enough. I believe that in these examples, if the leaders had approached PLC implementation utilizing key attributes from other frame orientations, the PLCs would have had a greater chance to succeed. For example, if the principal had simply included the teachers in the PLC planning process, thereby *empowering* them, (Human Resource Frame Orientation) they would be more vested in the process and more motivated to see them succeed. Even more so, leaders could look for ways to “strike a balance” wherein they try to incorporate all four frames rather than rely too much on a single frame orientation.

Attributes of the Symbolic Frame Orientation correlate nicely with Fullan's (2006) change theory. Two of Fullan's premises in particular, *a focus on motivation* and *persistence and flexibility in staying the course* (Fullan), require leaders who can create a strong culture, provide inspiration, especially in difficult times, and can who can also create conditions where teachers have faith in the PLC process and find meaning in the change initiative so they feel as though they are part of something bigger than themselves. These are attributes of a Symbolic leader.

Attributes of the Human Resource Frame Orientation also relate to Fullan's Change Theory. *Capacity building* and *a bias for reflective action* are Human Resource Frame Orientation qualities. A leader who is building leadership capacity in his staff is empowering his staff to own the PLC process. The Human Resource leader is also building relationships with staff and the PLC process itself, when done successfully, will allow teachers a forum to *reflect* both individually and perhaps, more importantly for the success of PLCs, collaboratively.

So, what is the relationship between leadership frame orientations and PLC implementation? The data from my study indicates all four leadership frame orientations are significantly associated with successful PLC implementation. Each leadership frame orientation is more likely to be associated with PLC implementation if other leadership frame orientations are in play and working together. The data from my study also clearly shows that the Symbolic Frame Orientation has the strongest association with PLC implementation, followed closely by the Human Resource Frame Orientation.

Research Question 2 sought to determine if there was a leadership frame orientation that was more likely to be associated with successful PLC implementation. I hypothesized that Bolman and Deal's (2013) Human Resource Frame Orientation would have the most significant association. The Human Resource Frame Orientation did have a significant association, as did

all four frames, but it was not the most significant. The most significant association was from leaders exhibiting qualities of the Symbolic Frame Orientation. PLC implementation requires a significant culture change. According to DuFour and Fullan (2013), a deep cultural change like PLCs is “absolutely doable, but is undeniably difficult.” The Symbolic leader must pay attention to and work to create the type of culture where PLCs can thrive. The Symbolic Frame Orientation had the strongest association (the highest correlation between any of the frame orientations and PLC subscales) with the Human Resource PLC subscale, which contains Symbolic elements such as *trust and respect* and *supportive leadership*. The Symbolic frame was also highly associated with successful PLC elements such as having a *collective focus on student learning* and *shared norms and values*. This is important because if educational leaders know there is a correlation between leaders who possess attributes of the Symbolic Frame Orientation and we know specific parts of successful PLCs that Symbolic leaders correlate the highest with, we can focus principal professional development on specific Symbolic Frame Orientation attributes that we know will help to impact PLC implementation. Because we know that implementing PLCs is a deep cultural shift or change, we can also deduce that if we can focus professional development on these certain attributes, principals will be more equipped to influence any type of educational change initiative.

Change can be difficult (Fullan, 2011) and if change involves a new initiative like PLCs, the new initiative must be implemented with fidelity in order for it to have any chance of succeeding. This requires a leader who is resolute with deep human values and would never give up (Fullan, 2011). This type of persistence and flexibility in staying the course is Fullan’s seventh premise of his change theory (Fullan, 2006, p.8). Previously I made mention of examples of PLCs in districts that were both successful (as in the case of the Vescio et al. study from 2008)



and also unsuccessful (as in the case of the Patterson study from 2006). It was clear from the qualitative comments from the Patterson study that the leaders in those schools were not able to inspire or motivate and did not learn from their initial mistakes. They did not stay the course and were not persistent in their efforts to make PLCs successful.

Is there a specific leadership orientation more likely to impact successful PLC implementation? The data from my study clearly show there is. The Symbolic Frame Orientation, more than any of the other leadership orientations, is more likely to be associated with successful PLC implementation.

## ADDITIONAL STUDY FINDINGS

### Principal Effectiveness Facilitating the PLC Process

Qualitative questions included in my survey helped provide valuable insight and common themes associated with how teachers view principals who are effective at facilitating PLCs. For example, teachers who rated their principal favorably in facilitating the PLC process said their principal was visible (Symbolic Frame Orientation and Human Resource Frame Orientation) and provided guidance and support (Human Resource Frame Orientation). These qualities align with the findings of Research Questions 1 and 2 for how all four leadership orientations impact PLC implementation and also how principals possessing attributes of the Symbolic Frame (and to a slightly lesser degree the Human Resource Frame Orientation) are more likely to impact successful PLC implementation. The consistent responses from teachers that led to these themes (visibility, guidance and support) would indicate that both the Symbolic Frame Orientation and

the Human Resource Frame Orientation would be more likely to impact PLC implementation as perceived by the teachers in my study.

Themes that emerged from teachers who rated the principal less favorably were lack of leadership/leader engagement (Symbolic Frame Orientation) and lack of communication (Symbolic Frame Orientation “meaning” and also the Human Resource Frame Orientation “connecting with people and relationships”). These themes again align to both research questions, supporting the idea that teachers respond to leaders who provide leadership, communicate well and connect with people, or in Bolman and Deal’s terms, have characteristics more closely aligned with the Symbolic Frame Orientation or the Human Resource Frame Orientation. Again, this is important because it very clearly illustrates what teachers want in a leader because in this case the teachers were stating these leader attributes were missing.

The qualitative comments, whether positive or negative, in most cases reflected the same leader qualities. It just so happens that in cases where teachers reported less successful PLC implementation, those qualities were lacking, whereas in cases where PLC implementation was rated as more successful, the leaders already possessed those qualities. We can refer back to the Patterson (2006) article as to what happens to PLCs when they are not implemented the right way. Patterson refers to teacher comments about not having any input into the PLC process but rather simply being told that (referring to PLCs) “this is what we are going to do” (p.26). Patterson also noted that there were significant gaps in communication between teachers and administrators. There was no previous discussion about the PLCs; PLCs were simply something that the teachers in Patterson’s study felt were imposed on them. Another interesting point Patterson makes is “because change had only occurred at the structural level, teachers at both schools did not see the benefits of learning communities” (p.27). This supports results from my

study suggesting that while having a Structural Frame Orientation is significant or important by itself, it is not enough to impact change. It would also explain why by itself it had the lowest correlation with successful PLC implementation. As a leader who provides professional development to principals, I should focus on those Symbolic or Human Resource qualities that are most important, but at the same time I should not ignore the fact that other frame orientations are still important.

My study results suggest teachers have better experiences and respect for their principal facilitating the PLC process when they are engaged in the PLC process; provide guidance, support, and strong leadership; and are visible. All of these themes support characteristics of both the Symbolic Frame Orientation and Human Resource Frame Orientation where the leader is involved and supportive. Refer back to Table 15 at the beginning of this chapter for descriptions of each leadership frame.

Participant responses regarding their principal's effectiveness at facilitating PLCs help to explain why PLCs are more likely to be successful. There were both negative and positive comments from teachers regarding how effective they believe their principal is at facilitating the PLC process. Negative comments included, "Our building principal is barely visible." "The principal has not communicated with us at all in regards to PLC nor has an administrator ever come to my PLC this year." Positive comments included, "Our principal meets with PLC leaders to discuss goals and progress." "Provides advice and guidance."

Participant comments, in general, were all connected to the importance of being visible, establishing collaborative relationships and providing a vision and guidance. These qualities are all connected to Bolman and Deal's (2013) Human Resource Frame Orientation and Symbolic Frame Orientation. Teachers in this study who reported successful PLCs had leaders who were

more oriented toward these two leadership frames, with the Symbolic Frame Orientation (visionary) being the most significant. Teachers in this study who reported unsuccessful PLCs also reported their leaders were lacking in these qualities and wanted their leader to be more like that.

Patterson (2006) criticized PLCs as being a “recipe-driven process” and that “recipe-driven processes have not been effective for realizing deep cultural change” (p.28). This comment was made in reference to a study she conducted of two middle schools that were largely unsuccessful. DuFour (2007) countered this conclusion stating the PLCs in Patterson’s study were not implemented with fidelity. A deeper look at the qualitative data from the study clearly shows that most staff felt there was a large disconnect between the building administration and teachers, with teachers having very little input into the process and feeling it was a top-down initiative. One staff member made the comment, “What is a learning community? What is it?” (p.25). Comments like this illustrate an obvious lack of communication and the principal’s ability to effectively engage staff and facilitate the PLC process. The attitudes of the staff who were interviewed in that study were very similar to the attitudes of staff who had unsuccessful PLC experiences in my study.

### PLCs Are an Effective Use of Time

Teachers were also asked if they felt PLCs were an effective use of their time and then were asked to give any qualitative thoughts to support their response. Themes that emerged from teachers who said their PLCs were an effective use of time were collaboration and sharing of

ideas, which aligns to the Human Resource Frame Orientation, which had the second highest correlation to PLC implementation in the quantitative results of my study.

A theme that emerged from teachers who said their PLCs were not an effective use of time was lack of clarity around a vision (Symbolic Frame Orientation). This relates back to Research Question 2 by providing support for the fact that there may be a leadership orientation more likely to impact successful PLC implementation, the Symbolic Frame Orientation. With that being said, this theme again would support the idea that teachers want a leader who possesses characteristics of both the Symbolic Frame Orientation and Human Resource Frame Orientation. Symbolic Frame Orientation leaders are visionary and seek to provide meaning and make connections through stories and anchors. The Symbolic Frame Orientation leader understands the importance of building and maintaining a strong culture. The Human Resource Frame Orientation leader believes in empowering and creating positive relationships. He or she takes care of people and makes them feel valued. When relationships are positive, then collaboration and sharing of ideas can occur because it is safe to do so. This piece also ties directly back into the Symbolic Frame Orientation idea of creating and also nurturing a strong and safe culture.

Comments from this survey item also help to illustrate what could be the difference between PLCs that are successful and those that are not. Some positive comments include:

“Collaboration time with peers is valuable.” “It allows me time to collaborate and also get insight from others about students and curriculum.” Some negative comments include: “There never was a clear vision of what we should accomplish.” “I don’t think we were trained properly in the right way to do PLCs.”

Participant comments support the idea that teachers want a leader who can provide a strong vision and they want to work in an environment where they can build relationships, collaborate,

and feel valued. DuFour and Fullan (2013) talk about the three big ideas of a PLC, one of which is *a collaborative culture and collective effort to support student and adult learning*. This particular big idea is supportive of the idea of relationship building, which is a characteristic of the Human Resource Frame Orientation, but it takes a visionary leader with a Symbolic Frame Orientation to create that type of vision and environment where that can occur. Along those same lines, in Fullan's change theory (2006) he refers to seven premises that are essential for change to take place. Those premises include *learning in context*, *a bias for reflective action*, and *tri-level engagement* that all involve people (teachers and administrators in this case) working together and reflecting. This can only take place if teachers have the time to collaborate and build relationships. It is easy to see the connection here to the Human Resource Frame Orientation. Still, another one of Fullan's premises for change is *persistence in staying the course*. This seventh and final premise that Fullan outlines in his change theory (2006) is the essence of what a leader with a Symbolic Frame Orientation must do. The leader is out front, providing a vision, support and strength in the face of adversity or when there are bumps in the road. There is a definite connection between the Symbolic Frame Orientation, Human Resource Frame Orientation, successful PLCs and what teachers want and need from a leader. Fullan's change theory and the premises that support that theory require this type of leader.

### Overall PLC Satisfaction

Themes that emerged from teachers who rated their overall PLC satisfaction high were time to collaborate and sharing of ideas, which are characteristics of the Human Resource Frame Orientation, which would provide qualitative support for Research Question 2 where leaders

possessing skills associated with Bolman and Deal's (2013) Human Resource Frame Orientation will be more likely to have a positive impact on successful implementation of PLCs. However, creating the time for collaboration would be supported by the Structural Frame Orientation. So this would again support the notion that all leadership frames are important and in many ways the leadership frames work with and support each other.

Themes that emerged from teachers who rated their overall PLC satisfaction low were apathy/PLC members don't care (Symbolic Frame Orientation and Human Resource Frame Orientation) and lack of support or guidance (Human Resource Frame Orientation), which was noted previously. These themes are clearly supported by characteristics of the Symbolic Frame Orientation where bringing people together and providing inspiration and a strong vision are important. These themes are also clearly supported by characteristics of the Human Resource Frame Orientation where relationships and the needs of people are important in creating an environment where collaboration and the sharing of ideas can take place and also where people feel their needs are being met and they are supported and taken care of in concert with the Human Resource Frame Orientation. Comments from this survey item again present themes that support leaders who are more closely oriented with the Symbolic Frame Orientation and Human Resource Frames Orientation. Some positive comments included: "It's almost always a good thing when teachers are in the same room talking about goals and ideas to make life better for students." "The opportunity to collaborate with teachers is beneficial." Some negative comments included: "There is little guidance." "The PLC program is forced and not given any direction."

In looking at the comments from this additional survey item, it is evident that while these additional survey items are different, there are also some overlaps and similarities as there are with the responses. It is clear from the responses that teachers want and need guidance, but they

also want the freedom to collaborate with their peers to problem solve without a leader micro-managing the PLC process.

Recall that DuFour et al., (2010) define PLCs as an “ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve” (p.13) Also recall that Burns’s definition of leadership: “...inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivation - the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations – of both leaders and followers” (Burns, 1978, p.19). These definitions of PLCs and leadership align neatly to a leader who possesses characteristics of both the Symbolic Frame Orientation and Human Resource Frames Orientation.

The purpose of my study was to examine associations among leadership styles and PLC implementation. All four leadership frame orientations correlate significantly with PLC implementation. Leaders who possess attributes of the Symbolic Frame Orientation, those who can inspire their teachers and can assist them in finding meaning in the work of PLCs, are more likely to successfully impact the implementation of PLCs. Leaders who possess attributes of both the Symbolic Frame Orientation and the Human Resource Frame Orientation; those who can empower their staff, foster relationships and a collaborative environment, are even more likely to successfully impact the implementation of PLCs.

### Study Limitations

My study was limited its research to middle and high schools in one large urban school district in northern Illinois. Because of this fact, it is unknown whether or not the data gleaned



from this study could be generalized to other districts or school settings. Expanding the research to other districts throughout the state of Illinois and across the United States would add value to the research questions investigated in this study. There is a lot of research on educational leadership but there is very limited research on how leadership impacts the successful implementation of PLCs. I believe that this will lead to more in-depth studies about the relationship between leadership and PLCs.

Another study limitation is the sample size. Although the sample was adequate for conducting statistical analysis, some of the data from respondents could not be used because some survey items were incomplete. If a survey contained incomplete items, then those surveys were eliminated in order to use a complete data set. Originally there were 254 respondents. After eliminating the incomplete surveys, I was left with a complete data set of 178.

Although my study had a few qualitative follow-up questions, it was largely a quantitative study which utilized self-report surveys. Participants were limited to the survey choices provided, and because of the nature of the study design, in-depth probing of responses was not possible.

#### Strengths

While one of the limitations of this study was the fact I had 76 incomplete data sets that had to be eliminated to ensure the accuracy of the data, it left me with 178 complete data samples from which to glean information. The remaining 178 data samples were complete and many of that set offered qualitative data through responses to additional questions/survey items such as Principal Effectiveness to Facilitate the PLC Process. This additional data provided valuable insight into how teachers perceived their principal which in turn helped to provide a more complete picture of teacher perceptions.

Another study strength, though also a limitation, was the fact that that data collected came from one school district rather than multiple school districts throughout the area, state or even country. As I mentioned previously, because the data collected came from one school district, it would be difficult to generalize the results to other districts. However, a strength of having all of the data from one location is the consistency across all of the schools within that district. The information obtained from this study could be very beneficial for this particular school district.

### Future Directions for Researchers

While there is a lot of research on educational leadership, research on the impact of leadership on the success of PLCs is very limited. PLCs are still relatively new, which is one reason for the lack of research in this area. My study begins to shed some light on what is of critical importance to teachers and educational leaders; if we can uncover the leader qualities that help to facilitate PLC success, we can create professional development opportunities for leaders to learn the skills associated with different leadership orientations. If we can do that, we can improve PLCs and improve student learning.

It would be beneficial for future research to be conducted measuring the impact of leadership orientations on successful implementation of PLCs across several districts and perhaps nationwide, rather than just focusing on one particular district. Expanding the scope of this study to several districts could help to inform leadership training in the state and also nationwide.

Conducting a similar study with a more qualitative approach could provide more comprehensive insight. The themes that were derived from the additional qualitative questions in my study could be analyzed more deeply, for example, asking follow-up questions to those

themes that bubbled up to the surface: “What are some specific things or actions your principal takes to demonstrate he or she is being supportive?” “What are some specific things your principal could do to help facilitate the PLC process better?” Other follow-up questions could focus in on the PLCs themselves, for example, asking questions like, “What are some specific things or reasons your PLC is successful?” “Why do you feel that your PLC is a valuable use or waste of your time?” Conducting a qualitative study could provide a deeper level of understanding and insight into the relationship between leadership and PLCs that is harder to achieve through a quantitative study.

My study measured the correlation between leadership and PLCs using Bolman and Deal’s Leadership Frames Orientation Survey (1990) that analyzed four different leadership orientations and how each impacted the implementation of PLCs. There are numerous leadership theories in existence and it might be worthwhile to look at different leadership theories or use a different leadership lens to see the impact it might have on PLC implementation. Another idea could be to look at leadership theories more deeply that may align individually or collectively to Bolman and Deal’s four leadership orientations. If you recall, for example, Sergiovanni’s leadership forces (1984) aligns favorably with Bolman and Deal. It might be worth it to survey teachers using an inventory of these Leadership Forces because it could support (or deny) the results of my study using Bolman and Deal. Bass’ Full Range of Leadership model (1998) would be another way to look at the impact of leadership on PLCs. The transformational components of Bass’ model align very closely to Bolman and Deal’s Symbolic Frame Orientation and Human Resource Frame Orientation.

Another thing to consider for future research is to create a more comprehensive way to measure the success of PLCs. At this time there is not an existing PLC survey rooted in solid

research that is reliable or valid. It might be worth it to explore this and come up with a more reliable way to measure whether or not a PLC is successful or not. I think the research from my study could be a start in that direction. As I mentioned earlier, a more qualitative approach to studying the relationship between leadership and PLCs would be something to strongly consider. Information gleaned from such a study could help to create a more comprehensive PLC survey.

### Closing Remarks

A review of the findings from this study determined that teachers respond most favorably to leaders who possess leadership orientations associated with the Symbolic Frame Orientation and Human Resource Frame Orientation, but they do respond to leaders possessing orientations associated with all four of Bolman and Deal's (2013) leadership frames. When working in concert, each leadership frame supports the other. As noted previously, there was a significant correlation ( $<.001$ ) between all four leadership frames and successful PLC implementation. More teachers rated their principal higher (4 or 5) than lower (1 or 2) for every qualitative survey item, which is encouraging for leaders in this particular northern Illinois district. While there were many comments from teachers who rated their principal lower (4 or 5), those negative or less favorable comments conversely relate to the positive or favorable comments made by teachers who rated their principal higher (4 or 5). In other words, if a teacher rated her principal high because she felt the principal was visible and supportive, there is another teacher who rated his principal lower because he felt his principal was never visible and did not provide support. Overall the responses to the qualitative questions, both negative and positive, provide valuable

insight as to the types of leader qualities that teachers value in a leader and, more importantly for this study, what leadership orientations help to facilitate successful PLCs.

One insight I would like to add is that I believe it's not enough to be a Symbolic leader, Human Resource leader, etc. The leader must believe in the initiative or change itself. In the case of my study, the leader must believe that PLCs are important and necessary. If the leader does not believe in the change initiative itself, then his or her leadership will be ineffective. For example, a leader who attempts to facilitate PLCs through any of the frame orientations without truly believing in PLCs will come across as a fraud or as one leading through "smoke and mirrors," as opposed to someone who is trustworthy, genuine and inspirational. You simply cannot inspire others, or as Burns said, "induce followers to act," if you don't believe in the initiative yourself.

This study attempted to analyze the relationship between leadership orientations and PLCs. When I set out to conduct my research for this study, it became apparent that there was not much existing research on this direct relationship. I think the evidence gleaned from this study will encourage other researchers to continue looking into this relationship and will expand the scope to include multiple districts nationwide.

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APPENDIX A  
STUDY SURVEY

## Bill Ady Dissertation

### Informed Consent Form

#### Introduction

Please consider taking fifteen minutes of your time to participate in a research study about school principal leadership and PLC implementation. This research is being conducted by Bill Ady, a current educational administrator, as part of a doctoral dissertation in the field of Educational Leadership at Northern Illinois University. You will be asked to give your opinions about PLC implementation and your building principal's leadership style. All personal information and answers gathered through this survey are anonymous and will not be shared except for research purposes. If you have questions or concerns, you may contact Bill Ady at wady@district100.org or you may contact the doctoral dissertation director, Dr. Kelly Summers, at ksummers@niu.edu.

#### Anonymity

All data are anonymous and will only be reported in an aggregate format (by reporting only combined results and never reporting individual ones). There is no foreseeable way the researcher would know your individual responses to survey questions.

#### Participation

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to participate entirely. Thank you for your valuable time.

I agree to participate in this research study.

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Condition: No Is Selected. Skip To: End of Survey.

I have participated in the PLC process in my school for at least one school year.

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Condition: No Is Selected. Skip To: End of Survey.

Think about and assess the extent to which each of the major factors associated with professional learning community—critical elements, human resources, and structural conditions is currently present at your school. Please choose the best answer.

Q5 Faculty/staff members talk with each other about their situations and the specific challenges they face.

- Not at All (1)
- Somewhat (2)
- 50% (3)
- To a large Degree (4)
- To a Great Extent (5)

Q6 Teachers share, observe, & discuss each other's teaching methods & philosophies.

- Not at All (1)
- Somewhat (2)
- 50% (3)
- To a large Degree (4)
- To a Great Extent (5)

Q7 Teachers assume that all students can learn at reasonably high levels & that teachers can help them.

- Not at All (1)
- Somewhat (2)
- 50% (3)
- To a large Degree (4)
- To a Great Extent (5)

Q8 Teachers not only work together to develop shared understandings of students, curriculum & instructional policy, but also produce materials & activities that improve instruction, curriculum, & assessment.

- Not at All (1)
- Somewhat (2)
- 50% (3)
- To a large Degree (4)
- To a Great Extent (5)

Q9 Through words & actions teachers affirm their common values concerning critical educational issues and in support of their collective focus on student learning.

- Not at All (1)
- Somewhat (2)
- 50% (3)
- To a large Degree (4)
- To a Great Extent (5)

Think about and assess the extent to which each of the major factors associated with professional learning community—critical elements, human resources, and structural conditions is currently present at your school. Please choose the best answer.

Q16 Teachers take risks in trying new techniques and ideas and make efforts to learn more about their profession.

- Not at All (1)
- Somewhat (2)
- 50% (3)
- To a large Degree (4)
- To a Great Extent (5)

Q17 Teachers feel honored for their expertise within the school as well as within the district, the parent community and other significant groups.

- Not at All (1)
- Somewhat (2)
- 50% (3)
- To a large Degree (4)
- To a Great Extent (5)

Q18 Within the school there are formal methods for sharing expertise among faculty members so that marginal and ineffective teachers can improve.

- Not at All (1)
- Somewhat (2)
- 50% (3)
- To a large Degree (4)
- To a Great Extent (5)

Q19 The school leadership keeps the school focused on shared purpose, continuous improvement, and collaboration.

- Not at All (1)
- Somewhat (2)
- 50% (3)
- To a large Degree (4)
- To a Great Extent (5)

Q20 The staff imparts a sense that new teachers are an important and productive part of a meaningful school community.

- Not at All (1)
- Somewhat (2)
- 50% (3)
- To a large Degree (4)
- To a Great Extent (5)

Think about and assess the extent to which each of the major factors associated with professional learning community—critical elements, human resources, and structural conditions is currently present at your school. Please choose the best answer.

Q21 There is a formal process that provides substantial & regularly scheduled blocks of time for educators to conduct on-going self-examination & self-renewal.

- Not at All (1)
- Somewhat (2)
- 50% (3)
- To a large Degree (4)
- To a Great Extent (5)

Q22 Teachers have common spaces, rooms, or areas for discussion of educational practices.

- Not at All (1)
- Somewhat (2)
- 50% (3)
- To a large Degree (4)
- To a Great Extent (5)

Q23 There are recurring formal situations in which teachers work together (team teaching, integrated lessons etc.)

- Not at All (1)
- Somewhat (2)
- 50% (3)
- To a large Degree (4)
- To a Great Extent (5)





Q50 Be discriminating! The results will be more helpful if you think about each item and distinguish the things your principal really does all the time from the things that s/he does seldom or never.

	Never (1)	Occasionally (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
Strongly emphasizes careful planning and clear time lines. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Builds trust through open and collaborative relationships. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is a very skillful and shrewd negotiator. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is highly charismatic. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q51 Be discriminating! The results will be more helpful if you think about each item and distinguish the things your principal really does all the time from the things that s/he does seldom or never.

	Never (1)	Occasionally (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
Approaches problems through logical analysis and careful thinking. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Shows high sensitivity and concern for others' needs and feelings. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is unusually persuasive and influential. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is an inspiration to others. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q52 Be discriminating! The results will be more helpful if you think about each item and distinguish the things your principal really does all the time from the things that s/he does seldom or never.

	Never (1)	Occasionally (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
Develops and implements clear, logical policies and procedures. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fosters high levels of participation and involvement in decisions. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Anticipates and deals adroitly with organizational conflict. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is highly imaginative and creative. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q53 Be discriminating! The results will be more helpful if you think about each item and distinguish the things your principal really does all the time from the things that s/he does seldom or never.

	Never (1)	Occasionally (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
Approaches problems with facts and logic. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is consistently helpful and responsive to others. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is very effective in getting support from people with influence and power. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communicates a strong and challenging vision and sense of mission. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q58 Be discriminating! The results will be more helpful if you think about each item and distinguish the things your principal really does all the time from the things that s/he does seldom or never.

	Never (1)	Occasionally (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
Sets specific, measurable goals and holds people accountable for results. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Listens well and is unusually receptive to other people's ideas and input. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is politically very sensitive and skillful. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sees beyond current realities to create exciting new opportunities. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q54 Be discriminating! The results will be more helpful if you think about each item and distinguish the things your principal really does all the time from the things that s/he does seldom or never.

	Never (1)	Occasionally (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
Has extraordinary attention to detail. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gives personal recognition for work well done. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Develops alliances to build a strong base of support. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Generates loyalty and enthusiasm. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q56 Be discriminating! The results will be more helpful if you think about each item and distinguish the things your principal really does all the time from the things that s/he does seldom or never.

	Never (1)	Occasionally (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
Strongly believes in clear structure and a chain of command. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is a highly participative manager. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Succeeds in the face of conflict and opposition. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Serves as an influential model of organizational aspirations and values. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q43 Please rate your school principal's overall effectiveness as a leader.

- Not at all effective (1)
- (2)
- (3)
- (4)
- Extremely Effective (5)

Q78 Please rate the overall effectiveness of how your school principal facilitates the PLC process.

- Not at all effective (1)
- (2)
- (3)
- (4)
- Extremely Effective (5)

Q88 Please explain your answer.

Q61 For each item below, please rank the characteristics that best describe your school principal. Use "1" for the term listed that BEST describes him/her and "4" for the term listed that least describes him/her.

Q62 The individual's strongest skills are:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Analytic skills (1)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Interpersonal skills (2)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Political skills (3)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Ability to excite and motivate (4)

Q63 The best way to describe this person is:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Technical expert (1)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Good listener (2)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Skilled negotiator (3)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Inspirational leader (4)

Q64 What this individual does best is:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Make good decisions (1)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Coach and develop people (2)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Build strong alliances and a power base (3)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Energize and inspire others (4)

Q65 What people are most likely to notice about this person is:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Attention to detail (1)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Concern for people (2)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Ability to succeed, in the face of conflict and opposition (3)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Charisma (4)

Q66 This individual's most important leadership trait is:

- Clear, logical thinking (1)
- Caring and support for others (2)
- Toughness and aggressiveness (3)
- Imagination and creativity (4)

Q67 This person is best described as:

- An analyst (1)
- A humanist (2)
- A politician (3)
- A visionary (4)

Q82 How many years have you been a teacher in your current building?

Q83 How many years has your building principal been the leader of your school?

Q84 How many years have you worked in your current school district?

Q85 How many years have you been part of a Professional Learning Community (PLC)?

Q86 Please rate your overall satisfaction of the PLC process.

- Extremely satisfied (1)
- Somewhat satisfied (2)
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (3)
- Somewhat dissatisfied (4)
- Extremely dissatisfied (5)

Q87 Please explain/give insight into your answer.

Q89 I feel that PLCs are an effective use of my time.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Somewhat agree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

Q91 Please explain/give insight into your answer.

APPENDIX B

EMAIL ACCOMPANYING SURVEY



Dear Administrator:

My name is Bill Ady and I am a doctoral student at Northern Illinois University in the Department of Leadership, Educational Psychology, and Foundations. I am completing my Ed.D. in Educational Leadership. The purpose of my dissertation is to examine relationships between leadership orientations and successful implementation of professional learning communities. I am seeking the insights of teachers in grades 6-12.

Would you please forward this survey to your teachers at the middle and high school level? This survey would take fifteen minutes of their time. The survey is anonymous and asks questions about their perceptions of their building principal and PLC implementation. No one will know how teachers answered each question and there is no way answers could be linked back to specific teachers.

My dissertation director is Dr. Kelly Summers, Assistant Professor in the Department of Leadership, Educational Psychology, and Foundations at Northern Illinois University. You are welcome to contact either her or me with any questions you may have. Dr. Summers can be reached at [ksummers@niu.edu](mailto:ksummers@niu.edu).

Teachers may take the survey by clicking the link below.

[https://niu.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_b4pNSpMT7dP3W3X](https://niu.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_b4pNSpMT7dP3W3X)

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Bill Ady  
Doctoral Candidate  
NIU  
Department of Leadership, Educational Psychology, and Foundations