

**Exploring the Relationship Between Transformational Leadership and Appreciative**

**Intelligence®**

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### **Abstract**

Leading change in public schools has long been the focus of numerous researchers. That research has led to providing detailed stages of leading change, the identification of specific steps leaders need to take to manage change, and identifying some styles of leadership that may support sustainable change within an organization, (Cameron, 2013; Knoster, 1991; Lewin, 1989; Scharmer, 2009). However, little research has been conducted on the reaction of followers during a complex change and whether or not leadership's Appreciative Intelligence® can change the often negative reaction of followers to one of support and positivity (Whitaker, Thatchenkery, & Godwin, 2020). The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between transformational leadership and Appreciative Intelligence®. This explanatory sequential case selection variant research (Creswell & Clark, 2018) study used purposive sampling based on survey results to identify six educational leaders in a Southern New Hampshire School Administrative Unit who scored in the low and high ranges on the Appreciative Intelligence® survey. Information gathered focused on the approach used by these participants to lead change, their perspective about change leadership, and participants' self-reflection on challenges and successes when leading transformational change. These data collected from interviews and field notes were analyzed and findings revealed the higher the Appreciative Intelligence® score the more transformational leadership traits the administrator discussed as their own in the interviews. The results of this study provide insight into the relationship between change management and Appreciative Intelligence®. This research has future implications for coaching, hiring practices, and teacher evaluation within the organization in which the study was conducted.

*Keywords:* Appreciative Intelligence® Scale, Appreciative Intelligence®, transformational leadership, K-12 educational leadership

## **Section 1: Introduction to the Dissertation**

### **Researcher Background**

Being raised on a Morgan horse farm in Eliot Maine has shaped me into the leader I am today. I was born into the routine of daily barn chores, long days, and how to see opportunities in any unexpected challenge. My mother was fiercely independent and had high expectations for those around her. She modeled perseverance and optimism every day while facing both personal and professional challenges that come with being a single parent of 4 on a farm of 50 horses. I take the skills I learned so very early and have applied them throughout my career as an educator. My father, a local physician who delivered over 3000 babies during his long career, helped me understand the value of relationships, and how to listen to understand not just to respond. He was a man of few words but his omnipotent presence was felt by all when he entered the room, which would quickly dissipate when he smiled and flashed his baby blues.

I have four sisters and three brothers, of which I am the youngest. All of my siblings share either the same mother or father with me, but in other ways, I am an only child because no other sibling shares both the same mother and father with me. I grew up with two of my sisters and one brother who graciously accepted me into their fold with attention, laughter, and protection. I adored my siblings and was always sad when they left for the summer to visit with their father. It was here I truly began to understand how important relationships are and how they impacted my family system. I learned the value of kindness and empathy when my sister recognized my loneliness and asked her father if I could come visit her each summer for two weeks on her Dad's cow farm. I have often reflected on what a courageous ask that was; given the complicated family dynamics of divorce, stepmothers, and hurt feelings.

Being raised on a farm surrounded by parents and siblings who loved me, supported me, and encouraged me created a passion in me to do the same for others. My life has had some major challenges; my mother was killed five years ago on the farm in a horse accident, my father passed away from Alzheimers, and my husband, Paul after being a principal for almost 25 years, faced each day disabled having suffered a stroke over ten years ago which robbed him of all mobility on his right side and all of his expressive speech. Most recently in December 2022, Paul passed away from an unexpected and sudden stage 4 cancer diagnosis. I faced all of these tragedies by depending on the core values instilled in me from my early years; the skills of leaning into the fear of the unknown as an opportunity for growth; the importance of strong relationships, optimism, and perseverance. Those core values not only guided me in my personal life but have also influenced the educational leader I am today. I have a better understanding of how change can impact a person and how important support is during change. These experiences have impacted me as a leader and made me passionate about transformational leadership. I am curious about the connection between transformational leadership and Appreciative Intelligence®. I am hopeful that my research will identify a relationship between transformational leadership and Appreciative Intelligence® in order to provide educational leaders with a framework and practices to lean in and view the future with hope.

### **Statement of Inquiry**

Throughout the 25 years that this researcher has been an educational leader, nothing has proven to be more difficult than leading transformational change. Building capacity to enable building level administrators to lead transformational change has been one of the most

challenging experiences as a professional educator, yet the importance of leading this type of change is necessary and of utmost importance for educational systems. As Warrick (2011) notes:

There is an urgent need in organizations of all types and sizes for transformational leaders who have the courage and skills to reinvent and build organizations capable of succeeding in today's times of dynamic change and scarce resources. And yet, while the idea of transformational leadership has a rich and well researched history, few leaders are familiar with the term, few organizations are developing transformational leaders, and very few leaders have any idea how to be a transformational leader. (Warrick, 2011, p. 11)

Transformational leadership is a style of leadership that brings about substantial change within an organization by creating a shared vision with followers while instilling a passion and a purpose for the change (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1993; Leithwood, 1994; Roberts, 1985). The COVID pandemic has forced schools to think differently about how to structure schools and leaders are being called upon to be creative, flexible, and courageous. This on-going health crisis impacts school leaders and calls for innovative ideas in education. These times demand leaders to rise up and become problem solvers to create school systems that are unified by a vision along with providing a light at the end of the tunnel. Roberts (1985) states that transformational leadership “ facilitates the redefinition of a people's mission and vision, a renewal of their commitment, and the restructuring of their systems for goals accomplishment” (p. 1024). She goes on to say, “it creates hope in the future and a belief that the world is knowable, understandable, and manageable (Roberts, 1985, p.1024). These are the type of leaders our school systems need now as well as in the future in order to meet the learning needs



of students. The need for transformational leadership is directly linked to the identified problem of practice; the lack of transformational leadership to facilitate the educational reform that is required to transition from a traditional deficit based system to a competency based system that focuses on growth and generativity at the research site.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this mixed methods study is to explore the relationship between school administrators' ability to lead transformational change and their Appreciative Intelligence® . Appreciative Intelligence® “as first conceptualized and defined by Thatchenkery and Metzker (2006) has three main components: reframing, appreciating the positive, and seeing how the future unfolds from the present. “Many people have the ability to reframe and the capacity to appreciate the positive. Yet, if they don't see the concrete ways that the possibilities of the present moment could be channeled, they have not developed their Appreciative Intelligence®” (Thatchenkery & Metzker, 2006, p.7). Recently Whitaker, Thatchenkery, and Godwin (2020) developed and validated a scale to measure Appreciative Intelligence® . This scale serves as a way to measure six dimensions within a person and explore the connection to innovative organizational leadership. The dimensions are; positive affect, creativity, tolerance for the uncertain, self-efficacy, situational awareness, and resilience. This scale brings a new approach to studying the traits of leaders and the ability to lead transformational change to educational systems. “We see the potential for new research on Appreciative Intelligence® using the Appreciative Intelligence® Scale” (Whitaker et al., 2020, p. 207).

The Appreciative Intelligence® Scale” (Whitaker et al., 2020) provides a way to survey possible participants for the research study and identify a purposeful sample of low and high

scoring participants for comparison. By using this quantitative measurement, the researcher can isolate participants to conduct qualitative interviews gathering data to answer the question: What is the relationship between Appreciative Intelligence® and leading transformational change?

Answering this question is important work and could be a missing piece to an unfinished puzzle on how to lead complex change in educational organizations that will meet our student learning needs. By using a mixed methods approach with the use of the Appreciative Intelligence® Scale (Whitaker et al., 2020) along with interviews, this researcher will explore the relationship between transformational leadership and Appreciative Intelligence®. For purposes of this study, transformational leadership will be referred to as a style of leadership practice that brings about substantial change within an organization by creating a shared vision with followers while instilling a passion and a purpose for the change (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1993; Leithwood, 1994; Raelin, 2011; Roberts, 1985).

### **Research Question**

This mixed methods research project will focus on exploring the relationship between leading transformational change and Appreciative Intelligence®. The following question will guide the collection and analysis of data for this study: What is the relationship between transformational leadership and Appreciative Intelligence®? This is the only question being considered as this is a relatively new area of research and the hope is that this study will lead to future research within the field of leadership and education.

### **Design of Research Study**

An explanatory sequential case selection variant design works well for this study as it is a design “in which the use of quantitative and qualitative methods is predetermined and planned at

the start of the research process and the procedures are implemented as planned (Creswell & Clark, 2018, p. 52). This explanatory sequential case selection variant design (Creswell & Clark, 2018), examines the relationship between school administrators' ability to lead transformational change and his/her Appreciative Intelligence®. The explanatory sequential case selection variant "arises when the researcher places priority on the second, qualitative phase instead of the initial quantitative phase" (Creswell & Clark, 2018, p. 82). This study was quan → QUAL (Creswell & Clark, 2018), with the first phase being the use of the Appreciative Intelligence® Scale (Whitaker et al., 2020), which is a 26-item survey organized into six factors as developed and validated by Whitaker, Thatchenkery, and Godwin(2020). The results of those surveyed were analyzed and a smaller purposeful sample of 6 participants were included in the qualitative phase of the study. Specifically, participants were identified from the quantitative phase who scored low and high on the measure to create a purposeful sample of differing levels of Appreciative Intelligence® for comparison in the qualitative phase.

This study is a blend of multiple worldviews due to the use of both quantitative and qualitative data. The qualitative portion of the study is a social constructivist worldview by gaining an understanding of a relationship by gathering data through personal interviews with leaders and their perceptions of leading innovative change. "Constructionists study the multiple realities constructed by different groups of people and the implications of those constructions for their lives and interactions with others" (Patton, 2015, p.121). The quantitative portion of the study is related to a positivist worldview due to the use of the Appreciative Intelligence® Scale. "This scientific research design strives to investigate, confirm, and predict law-like patterns of behaviour, and is commonly used in graduate research to test theories or hypotheses"

(Taylor & Medina, 2013, p. 2). The mixed methods design incorporates both worldviews of positivist and social construction to provide the data to begin to answer the research question: What is the relationship between transformational leadership and Appreciative Intelligence®?

The setting of this study is a New Hampshire School Administrative Unit (SAU) located in the southeast region of the State. The SAU encompasses 6 rural towns in which each have at least one school located within their boundaries and range from slightly over 100 to around 1700 students in each school. This research is being conducted by a central office administrator who works directly with each building level administrator. Each school has a separate governing school board yet all are within the same SAU. The administrators all belong to the same New Hampshire School Administrative Unit located in the southeast region of the State.

This explanatory sequential case selection variant design used a purposeful sample that is unique. “A unique sample is based on unique, atypical, perhaps rare attributes or occurrences of the phenomenon of interest” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.97) to conduct the research. The sample was determined before identified participants were interviewed. Building level administrators, who consented, completed the Appreciative Intelligence® Scale (Whitaker et al., 2020) survey. The results provided data to identify low and high scoring administrators of whom 6 became members within the mixed methods study. After the sample was identified this researcher conducted the qualitative portion of the study by gathering data from 6 building level administrators through interviews, field notes, and observation.

This researcher began by inviting all 28 building level administrators within the SAU to complete the Appreciative Intelligence® Scale (AIS®) (Whitaker et al., 2020). Access to invite participants was relatively simple as due to the nature of practitioner based research all

administrators, including the researcher, meet together a minimum of once a month, and email addresses are available at any time. After determining the results of the 26 item survey for all participants who chose to take the survey, a purposeful sample was identified ending the quantitative portion of the mixed methods design of this study. The purposeful sample was determined by examining the survey scores of each participant and choosing to interview the three highest scoring and three lowest scoring administrators. The sample size is relatively small with just 6 participants, although this will be adequate as the results are not being generalized to a larger population, “a qualitative inquiry sample only seems small in comparison with the sample size needed for representativeness when the purpose is generalizing from a sample to the population of which it is a part” (Patton, 2015, p. 311). This purposeful sample determines the participants for the qualitative portion of this research design. In qualitative research a variety of methods can be used to gather data. “The process of research involves emerging questions and procedure, data typically collected in the participant’s setting, (Creswell, 2018, p.4). This study includes semi-structured interviews facilitated by the researcher. The data collection guide included 10 open ended interview questions. Participants completed a semi-structured interview allowing for the possibility of a follow up interview based on the amount of data gathered in the first interview. The interview focused on participants sharing their story of being an administrator, and their change management style, or “experience, background, and knowledge questions” (Patton, 2015, p. 444). The interview then delved deeper into the qualities and traits they possess, how those traits influence leadership, and change management, or opinion and feeling questions, (Patton, 2015, p. 444). The focus shifted to questions regarding the leadership style of the interviewee, with a focus on gathering information on traits specific to

transformational leadership such as communicating a vision, empowering staff to make decisions, providing support, developing strengths of staff, leading by example, and motivating others (Podsakoff, P. M.; MacKenzie, S. B.; Moorman, R. H.: & Fetter, R., 1990).

These recorded interviews took place using a remote platform. The researcher constructed an interview guide with open-ended questions as this approach “increases the comprehensiveness of the data and makes data collection somewhat systematic for each respondent” (Patton, 2015, p. 438). The guide also provided a way “to make sure that the interviewer/evaluator has carefully decided how to best use the limited time available in an interview situation” (Patton, 2015, p. 439). The data analysis plan used qualitative deductive analysis which will be “determining the extent to which qualitative data in a particular study support existing general conceptualizations, explanations, results, and/or theories (Patton, 2015, p.541). The first step in the process was to review the interview questions and develop a codebook, “the intent of a codebook is to provide definitions for codes and to maximize coherence among codes” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 196). The codebook included the name of the code itself which reflected the traits of transformational leaders, and a short definition of each code listed. This supported the consistency in coding the interviews and avoided creating inconsistencies.

In the qualitative portion of the study, this researcher analyzed the content of the interviews for themes and patterns. “Content analysis sometimes refers to searching text for and counting recurring words or themes” (Patton, 2015, p. 541). This researcher manually coded the transcripts from the interviews, as Saldana (2016) recommends this approach for small-scale studies and states, “there is something about manipulating qualitative data on paper and writing

codes in pencil that gives you more control over and ownership of the work” (p.20). The researcher first read each transcript with the codes in mind, and then reviewed each interview for initial coding based on codes in the codebook. After the initial coding of the transcripts the researcher reviewed them several more times as codes may be combined, reclassified, and/or reorganized (Saldana, 2016) upon numerous reviews. The next step was to group the codes into categories or themes that can be combined representing a common idea. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Once the data was categorized the summary was represented in a visual format using a table as well as a narrative paragraph. Once the collected data has been coded, organized into thematic categories, and those themes represented, the analysis of the data was completed.

This type of analysis provides a process to examine the data to highlight specific common patterns and themes. Patton (2015) stated that “ a pattern refers to a descriptive finding while a theme takes a more categorical approach or topical form, interpreting the meaning of the pattern”( p. 541). Themes were identified to help the researcher explore the relationship between leading innovative change and Appreciative Intelligence® .

### **Limitations**

Limitations of this study is the relational position of power the researcher has over the participants. The setting of the research is specific and therefore the conclusions of the study are not generalizable. Lastly, the AIS® was developed and validated in 2020 so there is yet little data on the use of the scale in a research setting.

### **Assumptions**

This researcher assumes there is a relationship between Appreciative Intelligence® and leading transformational change which can be explored by using an explanatory sequential case

selection variant design. By first using a quantitative survey to identify specific participants and then by collecting qualitative data based on prior personal knowledge and experience. Interviews were reviewed and thematically coded in order to answer the question: What is the relationship between transformational leadership and Appreciative Intelligence®? The researcher's constructivist worldview impacts the thinking and interpretation of the data gathered from which new understandings arose, "learners construct new understandings using their current knowledge. In other words, the learners' prior knowledge influences their new knowledge" (Aminch & Asl, 2015, p.10).

### **Design Controls**

The design used for this research is an explanatory sequential case selection variant design. This design is a process "in which the use of quantitative and qualitative methods is predetermined and planned at the start of the research process and the procedures are implemented as planned" (Creswell & Clark, 2018, p. 52). The specific order of gathering quantitative data from the survey to identify the participants, followed by the qualitative data gathering phase of interviewing of 6 participants support a mixed methods approach to the study. The interview data was gathered from a purposive sample of building level educational administrators that all completed the Appreciative Intelligence® Scale (Whitaker et al., 2020). From the survey results, 6 participants were chosen based on their survey scale score in order to have 3 high scores and 3 low scores represented in the purposeful sample. The participants all shared a common expectation to lead transformational change and the shift from a traditional educational system to a competency based learning organization. As interviews were completed



and coded, this researcher discussed the relationship between Appreciative Intelligence® and leading transformational change based on the results of the study.

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

Appreciative Intelligence® Scale (AIS®) is a validated instrument used to measure the level of six factors that define Appreciative Intelligence®. The six dimensions are positive affect, creativity, tolerance for uncertainty, self-efficacy, situational awareness, and resilience. (Whitaker et al., 2020).

Appreciative Intelligence® is the capacity to reframe and see the potential in any situation and act on it with success (Whitaker et al., 2020, p.191).

Transformational leadership is a style of leadership that brings about substantial change within an organization by creating a shared vision with followers while instilling a passion and a purpose for the change (Burns, 1978; Bass 1985; Bass & Avolio 1993; Leithwood, 1994; Roberts, 1985).

K-12 leadership refers to leadership roles such as principals, assistant principals, curriculum coordinators, special education directors and assistant special education directors at all grades levels kindergarten through grade 12.

### **Significance of the Study**

There is an impact on both scholarship and practice if the relationship between Appreciative Intelligence® and transformational leadership is connected. In regard to scholarship, the research could contribute additional thinking in the areas of Appreciative Intelligence® and transformational leadership. While both areas have significant study, there is a lack of research studying the relationship between Appreciative Intelligence® and

transformational leadership using the Appreciative Intelligence® Scale Survey. In fact Whitaker, Thatchenkery, and Godwin (2020) state that the purpose of their work developing and validating the scale “is to advocate for the importance of Appreciative Intelligence® for management research, and to develop and validate a new measure of Appreciative Intelligence®, the Appreciative Intelligence® Scale (AIS®), in order to facilitate future research. Developing a grounded theory related to this work supports the stated purpose of AIS®, and offers possibilities for future research in this area.

In practice this study offered information that could impact the training and coaching of educational leaders who are consistently tasked with leading transformational change. The connection between high Appreciative Intelligence® and transformational leadership, could have implications for preparatory programs as well as local professional development to build Appreciative Intelligence® in educational leaders. This is important to this researcher because the data gathered is specific to the site in which this researcher has the ability to offer professional development such as coaching that aligns with increasing the Appreciative Intelligence® of building level leaders who are leading transformational change.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to answer the question: What is the relationship between transformational leadership and Appreciative Intelligence®? The results helped identify practices in people that enable them to lead systematic change using an asset based approach by helping the organization see the opportunities in challenging situations. There is a clear connection between this researcher’s social habitus and the role played as an educational leader for over 25 years. During that time this researcher has observed over and over the challenges in leading

transformational change at the building level. Given the context of education in current times of rapid change and increased demands it is time for revolutionary change in the way we educate our students and a major step in doing that is to have positive transformational leaders. “Positive leadership practices can help you begin the process of enabling your organization to achieve extraordinary successful performance” (Cameron, 2013, p. 156). If there is a connection between Appreciative Intelligence® and transformational leadership then there is a responsibility to leverage each person’s Appreciative Intelligence® practices to move our system forward because our students are depending on us to provide a system that meets the needs of all learners in “an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world (Kegan & Lahey, 2016, p.2).

## **Section 2: Practitioner Setting for the Study**

### **Introduction**

The research setting is within a large school administrative unit in southeastern New Hampshire. There is a rich history of the organization as turnover is low having only three superintendents over the last 25 years. This history provides a lens to analyze the organization using Bolman and Deal’s structural, human resource, symbolic and political frames (2017). A purposeful sample of building level leaders were the participants in the study which is the organization for the study. The leadership system was analyzed from the practitioners point of view using the review of return to school plan presentations and three transformational leadership competencies of planning, oral communication, and initiative (Stavros & Seiling, 2015). Both the organizational and leadership analysis is based on observations, survey results, and conversations with the researcher over the past twelve years, as the researcher is a district level leader who has had consistent contact with building level leaders in a variety of settings

including one on one monthly coaching sessions. By exploring the relationship between transformational leadership and Appreciative Intelligence® the study could have a direct impact on future coaching and training practices within the practitioner's setting.

### **History of the Organization**

The first existence of the southeastern school administrative unit was in 1848. This evolved into separate schools over the years expanding to include six towns with a total of twelve school buildings. Each building has at least one administrator with larger buildings having administrative teams ranging from two to eight leaders. Leadership roles have expanded from the traditional principal and assistant principals to include curriculum coordinators, student services directors, special education directors and assistants to be part of the leadership teams. Having only three superintendents over the past 25 years has provided stability to the leadership organization, however each superintendent's interest has driven the work of the leaders. One superintendent, 15 years ago, had a vision for innovation with special attention to technology. It was during this time infrastructure became a priority along with supporting the creation of a virtual learning academy and electronic student portfolios. Leaders were of a more autocratic style and each school building functioned as an island within one school administrative unit.

The next superintendent was relationship focused as previous board relations were hostile and unsupportive of leadership. Leadership was trained on the importance of relationship building and servant leadership was expected of all building level leaders. This superintendent was in that position for 9 years, during which board members were given individual attention and the trusting relationships were developed. Storytelling played a major role during administrative meetings and leaders were expected to face challenging situations with empathy. This tone

helped repair board relations and create a calm, caring environment throughout the SAU. It should be noted that little progress was made on curriculum, assessment, and instruction during this time as the superintendent did not view that as a priority. Unfortunately, after 9 years this superintendent passed away unexpectedly and in the following 6 months the associate superintendent passed away too, creating a void in the system and leaving the building level leaders without a compass.

The current superintendent filled the vacant position and has been in the position for the past 4 years. He has a team approach and is focused on building the leadership capacity of everyone within the system. He has brought new approaches to leadership with a passion for social justice and competency based education. Recent hires in building level leaders have aligned with those passions creating a leadership team of 38 that are expected to lead with passion and positivity in order to create generative systems within the school buildings. The recent challenges the pandemic brought to educational systems has slowed down some of the work due to a laser focus on health and safety concerns; however, this summer training has shifted back to competency based assessment and diversity, equity, inclusion and justice work.

Over the past 25 years the focus of leadership has moved from autocratic to servant to transformational. Each superintendent influenced the building level leadership and the focus of training. This study aligns to the current transformational leadership focus by exploring the relationship between transformational leadership and Appreciative Intelligence® . The impact of the study could influence coaching practices as well as leadership professional development as this style of leadership is needed in order to meet the ever changing needs of the students within this SAU.

### **Organizational Analysis**

In the school administrative unit (SAU) that is the site of this study, there are 38 administrators in SAU 16. Positions range from central office leaders to building level leaders comprising a variety of roles including principals, assistant principals, special education directors, and curriculum coordinators. The full team represents six towns which make up seven districts that include eleven schools. Each district has their own governing school board and all 33 board members create the SAU 16 Joint Board that governs the SAU budget and the superintendent. Each of the six towns have school boards that range in size from three members up to nine members depending on the student population of the school in each district. The total student population in the SAU is around 5000 and the total educator population is around 1200. Every school has a principal and some have teams of administrators that include assistant principals, curriculum coordinators, and directors of special education. The governance of all the schools is overseen by a central office staff of a superintendent, an associate superintendent, an assistant superintendent, a director of student services, an assistant director of student services, a chief financial officer, and an assistant business administrator. This team oversees all of the individual school sites and works with each of the eight school boards. This is a complex organization made up of many administrators who are universally tasked with facilitating transformational change.

The organization that is the focus of this study is made up of a group of school administrators who are challenged with the task of driving systematic change. Currently this organization has been faced with meeting student learning needs within the context of a national health crisis. The pandemic required leaders within the system to deal with numerous situations

that had never occurred before, which, in turn, forced change . Wheatley (2006) states “change is prompted only when an organism decides that change is the only way to maintain itself” (p.20). Based on the recent shifts and complexity of the organization, Bolman and Deal’s (2017) four-frame model provides a suitable framework for analyzing the system. “Learning to apply all four [frames] deepens your appreciation and understanding of organizations” (p. 19).

For purposes of analysis this researcher reviewed the results of an anonymous survey presented to building leaders in June of 2020 and in June of 2021. The data gathered was feedback on the top level leaders in the system and allowed for open ended feedback from lower level building leaders. The feedback cited that there is a division of labor, mistrust of central office leadership from some leaders at the building level, and the feeling that decisions are made “top down.” These comments indicate the presence of a structural frame with vertical coordination. (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The data demonstrates that there is an authoritative hierarchical structure within the system with central office administrators at the top of the organization. Rules and policies are, at times, driven from decisions made in the central office with little or no input from building level leaders. “Rules, policies, standards, and standard operating procedures are developed to ensure that individual behavior is predictable and consistent” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p.56). Other evidence of the influence of a structural frame are such items as policy books, employee handbooks, and a professional development master plan. This system of control is to have an organized, consistent approach to common issues that may occur within any school. Items such as manuals give leaders a document to work from and help avoid different actions to the same occurrence. In this system the rules are a controlling system which can be beneficial to an organization; however, survey information indicates that

some leaders feel they do not have a voice as part of the rulemaking process which can be harmful to an organization. This struggle is not unique nor is it easy to satisfy all members as “every organization must find a design that works for its circumstances, and inherent structural tradeoffs rarely yield easy answers or perfect solutions” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 61). It is because of the rigidity of the structural frame that it is important to include the other three frames to examine the system.

The human resource frame “highlights the relationship between people and organization” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 133). This perspective speaks to the way systems need people and how people need organizations. The way the two interact or fit is important and has an impact on the functioning of the system.

When the fit between people and organizations is poor, one or both suffer: individuals may feel neglected or oppressed, and organizations sputter because individuals withdraw their effort or even work against organizational purposes. Conversely, a good fit benefits both: individuals find meaningful and satisfying work, and organizations get the talent and energy they need to succeed. (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 133)

The current system of leadership reported on the June 2021 feedback survey about central office leadership that there was a feeling of respect from higher leaders and that many felt they did have a voice in decision making. There were 20 respondents out of 38 and out of the responses 13 answered with a 4 or 5 rating on a likert scale, 5 being strongly agree, that their leadership was respected by central office administrators (COA). The same number of 13 answered with a 4 or 5 that their voice matters in collaborative conversations with central office administrators. These comments reflect the attention to the human resource frame (Bolman &



Deal, 2017) within the system as they speak to the relationships between leaders within the organization.

The system recognizes the importance of the human resource frame on culture over the past two years as each building leader has appreciative inquiry based coaching around their growth goal. Along with this all leaders have opportunities to attend national conferences and enroll in college courses in areas that are aligned to their self chosen growth goal. Also there is an increase in collaborative decision making; all administrators have input into creating the administrative monthly meetings, principals are encouraged to ask questions and for support at any time, all administrators are encouraged to celebrate their learning by sharing their growth with others. All of these strategies support a human resource framework and highlight the comprehensive approach for high participation of all leaders. These efforts will increase the way the system continues to shift and will be ongoing as, “success typically requires a comprehensive strategy undergirded by a long-term human resource management philosophy. Ideas and practices from organizational development often play a significant role in supporting the evolution of more comprehensive and effective human resource practices” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 156).

When looking at this organization from a symbolic frame (Bolman & Deal, 2017) this researcher has experienced the use of storytelling, traditions around celebrations of success, and a creation of shared values around the implementation of competency based education within the system and during the pandemic. “The symbolic frame focuses on how myth and symbols help humans make sense of the chaotic, ambiguous world in which they live. Meaning, belief, and faith are its central concerns. Meaning is not given to us; we create it” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p.

236). This frame is a bright light in the development of a positive culture of our leadership system, and the organization continues to nurture that culture with storytelling, and by creating traditions.

Currently, each leadership meeting starts and ends with a question that lends itself to having members share a story. For example, one question asked at a meeting was about a favorite Halloween costume, the answers shared all came with a story as to why it was a favorite costume. Leaders laughed and some cried from recalling a special memory but this simple question provided a forum for leaders to “share their stories which can grant comfort, reassurance, direction and hope to people of all ages” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 247). Over the past three years leaders worked together to create their vision of a leader along with the knowledge, skills, and mindsets aligned with that vision. That process was all inclusive with leaders and that is now used to set growth goals which guide the monthly individual coaching sessions. This process supported the leaders in having a voice and impacted the culture of the group because, “vision turns an organization’s core ideology, or sense of purpose into an image of the future” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 244).

In this system, the use of organizational symbols such as storytelling and vision support the development of specific beliefs and values which create a positive culture. While this frame can have negative impacts when the symbols hold back the organization by creating barriers to growth it appears that this system is focused on transformational change and over the past three years worked to use symbols in a way to build a collaborative, supportive organization in which leaders are valued for their contributions and encourage to share their stories.

The last frame of the four that Bolman and Deal (2017) speak to is the political frame. “The political view frames a different world. Organizations are coalitions composed of individuals and groups with enduring differences who live in a world of scarce resources. That puts power and conflict at the center of organizational decision making” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 199). Power in this system shifts from leadership to the school board to the community depending on the topic as well as the interest level in the topic. Before the days of return to school plans in the context of the safety and health guideline due to the pandemic, the power of building operations was with the leadership. Over the past two years, this power has been challenged by boards due to pressure from community members. Board members took votes to override reopening timelines and safety measures recommended by leadership. This shift in power caused the leadership system to be flexible and work within the demands set by the school board. The uniqueness of leading schools during a pandemic gave a new lens on the impact the political frame can have on a system.

Authorities have political power, but they must vie with many other contenders for other forms of leverage. Different contenders bring distinct beliefs, values, and interests. They seek access to various forms of power and compete for their share of scarce resources in a finite organizational pie.(Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 199)

The system in this study experienced a shift in power due to the lack of full day, every day in person learning, recommended health and safety guidelines that did not align with board members beliefs, and financial demands due to the increased need for each student to have digital access during the emergency order put in place by the Governor. Many of those issues have subsided however mask mandates are at the core of back to school this fall and again

boards may vote to override leadership recommendations which may cause more anxiety and unrest within the system.

The political frame has a strong influence on the leadership system in the SAU. Leaders are spending more time talking with community members, board members, and teacher union representatives in an effort to support a balance of power between all major constituent groups. This is a challenging task during chaotic times and has caused the leadership organization to increase collaboration in order to ensure messaging is consistent throughout the schools within the SAU. One thing is clear, the political frame is strong and the skills of the leaders sharp as, they will encounter a predictable and inescapable ethical dilemma; when to adopt an open, collaborative strategy or when to choose a tougher, more adversarial approach. In making such choices, they have to consider the potential for collaboration, the importance of long-term relationships, and, most importantly, their own organization's values and ethical principles. (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 216)

The four frame (Bolman & Deal, 2017) analysis of the organization in the study gives rise to the impact each frame has on the system. It is important to examine the system from each frame in order to get a full understanding of the organization that was the focus of the research for this study. Each frame analysis gives this researcher insight into the system from varied perspectives as well as reminds the researcher of the importance of examining the relationship between transformational leadership and Appreciative Intelligence® through a variety of frameworks.

### **Leadership Analysis**

The site that is the focus of this study has a large central office leadership staff that include a superintendent, associate superintendent, and an assistant superintendent. Together these three positions oversee 28 building level administrators within 12 school buildings. There are some larger schools that have full administrative teams as well as small schools that only have a principal for administrative staff. At least one time per month this entire group comes together for a leadership meeting. Often during these meetings professional development activities are the focus, and the goal is to build leadership capacity within all schools.

These leaders vary in experience within the system, ranging from first year administrators to some with as much as 25 years. This diversity in experience creates an environment for discourse and sharing of varied opinions around leadership. Administrators are at different levels of expertise in building capacity within their schools. Some are eager to enter into dialogue with educators who have a passion for innovation and trying new ideas, while others take a more traditional approach and continue to see management of personnel as a priority.

As the organization moves more toward a competency based system, central office leaders are having to model this by differentiating professional development and coaching goals based on the individual leader's depth of knowledge. This approach has opened the conversation about the shift in their roles and how each leader is working to build their own capacity for leading change. This has been a slow and steady process, as these courageous conversations are often based in building trusting relationships (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009) and that takes time.

Most recently, the seven elementary principals have started a weekly professional learning community (PLC) meeting time. This PLC was organically created allowing elementary

principals their own time to build their capacity following their own agenda. Often the group discussion will focus on school data, curriculum, or professional development planning creating common themes and approaches among the 8 elementary schools. The collegial relationships are strong and supportive enhancing a culture of support and trust which enables these leaders in trying new ideas and modeling for their educators the willingness to learn and grow professionally.

The middle and high school leadership teams are both large and include up to as many as 10 educators. At each level these teams work well together, however the day to day work often focuses on management. Leaders are quick to respond to issues throughout the school day with little time focused on professional development and building capacity. This is done more individually with teachers than as a whole staff.

The middle school principal position has not been stable for the last 2 years with the anticipation of a new principal coming in next year. This inconsistency in leadership has slowed the capacity of that team, impacting the culture and climate of the school. This team works hard every day to ensure the school runs smoothly, but there is a reported feeling of stress and tiredness from the leaders in that building.

The high school leadership team has been working together to build capacity among educators. Currently, that team meets one time per week after school to discuss recent coaching meetings individuals have had with educators, plans for professional development, school data, and various upcoming events. The assistant principals also meet one time per week with the goal of creating and implementing a consistent approach when giving feedback to educators and to student discipline. All the building leaders see building capacity among their educators and each

other as a main function of their roles. This is a recent shift in thinking that has occurred over the past 3 years.

Overall the leaders within this SAU understand the need to change the organization in order to best meet student learning needs. They are practicing the art of building capacity for leadership within their schools by providing feedback, professional development and modeling for educators. This is a system wide approach that is beginning to become the norm throughout the organization. It is the goal of the central office leadership that this culture continues to grow creating an innovative, asset based system.

### **Implications for Research in the Practitioner Setting**

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between transformational leaders and Appreciative Intelligence®. If a relationship is found the results could have a substantial impact on leadership training and coaching within the setting of the study in order to support the development of a high functioning system.

Since organizations as a whole can adapt and survive, and individuals with Appreciative Intelligence® have a positive impact on their organizations, we refer to organizations whose leaders and employees have extended their Appreciative Intelligence® into the organizational culture as organizations with Appreciative Intelligence®. (Thatchenkery & Metzker, 2006, p.105)

The implications could impact the entire organization in becoming strong in ways that create a culture of positivity in which leaders learn to see possibilities in the unknown. “Appreciative Intelligence® is behind creating new possibilities and helping see the steps necessary to realize them” (Thatchenkery & Metzker, 2006, p. 12). The results of this study could help create a

generative educational system in which transformational leadership works with educators in their schools to truly meet the learning needs of each student because they are “reframing to see the positive, they often see talents or potential that others might miss” (Thatchenkery & Metzker, 2006, p.7).

By measuring leaders' Appreciative Intelligence® with the Appreciative Intelligence® Scale (AIS®) this researcher will have data on leaders' positive affect, creativity, tolerance for uncertainty, self-efficacy, situational awareness, and resilience, (Whitaker et al., 2020). This data could help drive the areas of focus for leadership training. As well as future use of the AIS® to set leadership goals that could become the focus of one on one coaching session. Both of these strategies impact the system in creating an appreciative organization (Thatchenkey & Metzker, 2006). This work is significant because,

those with high Appreciative Intelligence® are predisposed to see the larger picture and the connections between diverse things because they can shift their frames of reality to possibilities not boundaries. Due to their higher capacity to embrace ambiguity, or shades of grey in situations, they can live in uncertainty without knowing the answers. Because they can see how a positive future can inform the present, they live their lives with a sense of realistic optimism. (Thatchenkery & Metzker, 2006, p.12)

The significance of having a generative system whose leaders can reframe challenging situations into opportunities is exciting and could help the process of transforming the SAU in the study into a competency based system that is future focused and innovative.



### **Summary of Practitioner Setting**

The setting for this study has a long history that began in 1848 with a public high school. This system now involves 11 schools that are governed by 8 different school boards. The strong history has provided a framework for the organization that has shifted focus throughout the years dependent upon the leadership style and priorities of the superintendent and governing boards. Analysis of the organization highlights the importance of recognizing that the structural, human resource, symbolic and political frames of Bolman and Deal (2017) can have a positive or negative impact on the system. Leadership within this site is extensive and includes 28 building level leaders that have a significant impact on the educators and students they lead. If this study does produce a grounded theory on appreciative transformation then the implications could be system wide. The study has far reaching consequences on leadership coaching and training with the SAU. This, in turn, could lead to the development of an appreciative organization (Thatchenkery & Metzker, 2006) which would support the transformation of the educational system in order to meet the individual learning needs of each student in the SAU.

### **Section 3: Scholarly Review for the Study**

#### **Introduction**

The review of the literature as related to this research on the exploration of the relationship between transformational leadership and Appreciative Intelligence® is rooted in three main areas; leadership style, organizational change, and appreciative inquiry as they all are related to leading transformational change using a positive lens. Positive, distributive and transformational leadership styles each have characteristics that help organizations flourish when changing (Cameron, 2013; Spillane, 2005, Stavros & Seiling, 2015), and thus a review of these

styles is important to this research. This study includes the use of the Appreciative Intelligence® Scale, (Whitaker, Thatchenkery, & Godwin, 2020) which directly connects to Appreciative Intelligence® and appreciative inquiry (Thatchenkery & Metzker, 2006). The connection between the possible relationship between transformational leadership and Appreciative Intelligence® with leadership style, organizational change, and appreciative inquiry make a review of the literature in those three areas foundational to this study.

### **Conceptual Theoretical Framework**

Exploring the relationship between transformational leadership and Appreciative Intelligence® through the process of personal interviews closely aligns with a social constructivist worldview. “Constructionists study the multiple realities constructed by different groups of people and the implications of those constructions for their lives and interactions with others” (Patten, 2015, p.121). Using the process of interviewing leaders that have varied levels of Appreciative Intelligence® scores about how he/she leads changes provides this researcher valuable data to see if a better understanding of the relationship between the two factors emerge. It is important to understand the design of this study is applied research as the interviewees and researcher are currently practitioners in a specific K-12 school system located in southern New Hampshire. Appreciative Inquiry theory, transformational leadership theory, distributive leadership theory, and positive organizational scholarship all provide frameworks for the research, as they are foundational to leading systematic change, (Bushe, G. R., & Kassam, A. F., 2005; Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D., 2020; Cooperrider, D. L., & Whitney, D., 2001).

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) focusses on the strengths of a system by asking generative questions and that questioning can lead to sustainable innovative change. “We create new realities during the process of inquiry. The birth of AI extended this idea to the realm of organizational life by suggesting that the very act of asking a question had a profound impact” (Cooperrider & Godwin, 2012, p.740). The foundations of AI are that the inquiry begins with appreciation, is applicable, is provocative, and is collaborative (Cooperrider & Srivasta, 1987), and has been implemented by practitioners to lead transformational change (Bushe and Kassam, 2005). Bushe and Kassam (2005) found 20 cases that documented the relationship between AI and transformational change in organizations. Although this meta-case analysis is now 15 years old it documents the use of AI theory to support the study of leading innovative change and substantiates the use for further research that is seeking to expand upon positive leadership qualities and transformational change management.

Just as AI supports the wholeness principle, transformational leadership theory supports the idea that leading innovative organizational change requires engaging all involved within the system. “Transformational leadership focuses on developing the organization’s capacity to innovate” (Hallinger, 2003, p. 330). This theory of leadership when put into practice helps define the approach and qualities a transformational leader has in order to facilitate innovation within a school. “Some of these qualities include building trusting relationships with teachers, use of humor, encouraging and modeling innovation, open mind to others ideas, and encouraging trying new ideas without fear of negative consequences for failure “ (Hallinger, 2003, p. 330). This style of leadership looks to the future and “it creates a hope in the future and a belief that the world is knowable, understandable and manageable” (Robets, 1985, p. 1024). Offering a focus

on the future while engaging others in the change process through optimism of the present transformational leadership theory directly connects to this study

Transformational leadership speaks to the importance of including others while leading change. While transformational leadership is the focus of this research, it is important to discuss distributive leadership too, as both styles do share some similarities. Both distributive and transformational leadership have direct connections to shared leadership and building leadership capacity as an approach to facilitating change, however “the distribution may or may not be transformational” (Timperley, 2005, p. 397). Distributive leadership creates a culture and climate where stakeholders have a voice that allows more people to participate at all levels of an organization, (Haris & Gronn, 2008). This type of leadership is a practice that not only shares leadership but works to identify strengths in a person and then maximizes the use of those strengths to build leadership capacity. “Distributive leadership recognizes the varieties of expertise that diverse constituents bring to the table and utilizes the expertise to optimize organizational performance,” (Fusarelli, et al., 2011, p. 48). By empowering followers to have input into creating a vision and the goals to enact that vision the entire organization flourishes and the changes are viewed as needed by the followers instead of imposed without input from those doing the work. This leadership style motivates and engages people to become leaders and as Fullan (2001) points out, a strong leader is one who builds leadership capacity in others and thus in the context of schools, the principal facilitates this process.

“A distributive perspective frames leadership practice in a particular way; leadership practice is viewed as a product of the interactions of school leaders, followers, and their situation” (Spillane, 2005, p.144). The focus on distributive leadership as a practice shifts the

idea of simply sharing leadership with others to the actual interactions between everyone in the organization. The interactions between positional leaders and followers is what creates the culture of shared leadership, “individuals play off of one another, creating a reciprocal interdependence between their actions” (Spillane, 2005, p.146). Thus creating a system of give and take, and an environment of appreciation and trust among members. This is where there is some connection to transformational leadership as this leaderful practice is one where “everyone is participating in the leadership of the entity both collectively and concurrently; in other words, not just sequentially, but all together and at the same time” (Raelin, 2011, p.203). This idea of reciprocity builds relationships between followers and leaders is not new. Noddings, (1984) speaks to the importance of both teacher and students giving and receiving from each other in order to build a caring relationship. Distributive leadership practice builds trusting relationships in which all members of the organization have a voice, and feel valued. Raywid (1992) found that when teachers and students had an increase in responsibilities and were treated as valued contributors to the school, it was the common values that shaped their efforts and compliance, not the rules of the school.

The practices aligned with distributive leadership have been identified as supportive of school improvement (Heck & Hallinger, 2009). “Distributive leadership, which has been described as a distribution of power within the context of universities, provides a valuable model for encouraging scholarship and innovation in learning and teaching” (Creanor, 2014, p.573). This style of leadership can be implemented during challenging times by bringing members together to collaborate and collectively solve issues of concern. Fullan, (2001) believes that this approach when used in schools can help the organization face difficult times because it is not the

sole leaders working to make improvements but the voice of many which enhances the problem solving process. Raelin, (2011) states, “we look for leaderful individuals who can affect the status quo, not by becoming a champion in from the cold, but who can work with all contributors to identify the needs and wishes for their own community” (p. 204). The factors of creating a shared vision and playing to people’s strengths to drive change highlights the overlap between transformational and distributive leadership thus warrants the discussion of both styles in order to have a more inclusive review of leading change. However since this research is seeking to understand the relationship between leading transformational change and Appreciative Intelligence® the focus will be on transformational leadership practices within the context of Appreciative Intelligence®. The appreciative approach focuses on opportunities and offers a different lens for creating change in an organization through positive scholarship.

Positive Organizational Scholarship, (POS), provides a structure for understanding and exploring generative transformation within systems. POS is aligned with positive social change as it “focuses on the generative dynamics in an organization that promote human strength, resiliency, healing and restoration” (Spreitzer,2006, p. 2). POS is a way to see things differently, “challenges and obstacles are reinterpreted as opportunities and strength-building experiences rather than tragedies or problems” (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012, p. 2). POS is critical to the change process, “rather than point out weaknesses and deficiencies, positive leaders highlight others’ strengths, capabilities, and contributions and enable others in the organization to do the same” (Cameron, 2013, p. 58). POS is important to consider when leading change as it provides a positive lens for followers to use throughout the change process.

When leading change, followers can be positively impacted when the leader incorporates optimism into the process. Small acts consisting of being compassionate, fostering agency, and continuity in change can “help strengthen relational systems, relieve people’s suffering, and generate alternative change patterns that enrich rather than deplete the human experience in change” (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012, p. 771). Giving voice to followers or engagement in the process is another important facet of POS. “Establishing an environment where employees are actively engaged, (Harter, et. al., 2002), is important because increases in productivity emerge as a result and innovations are more likely to develop” (Chan, 2018, p.18). In other words when people are engaged in change they tend to feel empowered to try new ideas and invite feedback in order to achieve system wide goals for increased productivity. POS looks to build on the positive aspects of an organization. When complex change is being implemented with positive social justice as an area of development it is important for leaders to recognize what the current strengths are of the system. “Continuity in change represents a positive clustering of small acts because, in bringing together the past, present, and future, it seeks to draw on the best of the past while people build the future in the present” (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012, p. 769). Recognizing the strengths of the system, engaging all educators in the change process, and building authentic relationships are all elements of positive social change and POS.

## **Review of Literature**

### ***Leadership Style***

Leadership style and leading change has been the subject of numerous studies exploring the relationship between leadership style and successful change management, (Burns, 1978; Bass 1985; Bass & Avolio 1993; Leithwood, 1994; Roberts, 1985, Battilana et. al., 2010, Canterino et.

al., 2020). Styles that focus on a collaborative approach to building relationships and trust empower the leader to motivate followers in making changes to an organization, (Bass & Stogdill, 1990; Chemers, 2001; Van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003; Yukl, 2006). When leaders build trust, display empathy, and nurture positive interpersonal relationships with followers, organizations flourish, (Burns, 1978; Bass 1985; Bass & Avolio 1993; Leithwood, 1994; Roberts, 1985; Cameron & McNaughtan, 2014). The importance of motivating followers by creating a culture that supports shared vision development within an appreciative context is a critical component when leaders facilitate a complex change process (Bushe & Kassam, 2005). Creating a collaborative culture is thought by some to be best described as a practice in increasing agency among all participants within the organization. Leadership styles that are aligned with POS and AI do not subscribe to the belief that one person leads alone and in isolation but that leadership is “dialogical. It is characterized by nonjudgemental inquiry and by an advocacy that submits to the views of others” (Raelin, 2014, p. 137). Raelin’s thoughts on leadership being a practice that creates a system that is leaderful not leaderless. “In this sense, leadership-as-practice is less about what one person thinks or does and more about what people may accomplish together (Raelin, 2011, p.196). Distributive and transformational are leadership styles that include practices that support giving voice to everyone in the organization. Distributive and transformational are styles that use collaborative qualities that put relationship building at the center of leading successful change (Bass, 1990; Leithwood, 1994; Battilana et al., 2010; Canterino et al., 2020) making both styles important to explore for purposes of this research.



***Positive Leadership***

Positive leadership allows “individuals and organizations to achieve their highest potential, flourish at work, experience elevating energy, and achieve levels of effectiveness difficult to attain otherwise” (Cameron, 2013, p. ix). When a leader is positive and sees the glass half full instead of half empty, then shares that optimism it creates an energy with the system that others will gravitate towards. “Positive leadership practices engender positive energy and unlocks resources in people because, like all biological systems, human beings possess inherent inclinations toward the positive” (Cameron, 2013, p. 5).

Cameron (2013) speaks to applying positive leadership in organizations using the competing values framework which is made up of four quadrants that identify leadership practices for each area. The clan, adhocracy, hierarchy, and market make up the four quadrants which take into account the complexity of positive leadership. “The quadrants of the Competing Values Framework have been found to be very robust, accurately describing a wide variety of individual phenomena” (Cameron 2013, p. 129). This framework consisting of four quadrants provides guidance for leaders to use positive practices for all processes within an organization.

The first of the four is the Clan quadrant which focuses on collaboration and that is when the positive leader works to empower employees. “Effective leaders must engender teamwork, cohesion, and cooperative interpersonal relationships” (Cameron 2013, p. 130). The Market quadrant is diagonal to the Clan quadrant with an opposing position from collaboration to competition. Even though competition can have a negative connotation to it, in this model it provides a positive focus for competition and immediate results. The quadrant focused on creativity is called the Adhocracy quadrant. A positive practice in this quadrant is “generalized

reciprocity” (Cameron, 2013, p.140), or “when a person contributes something that is not directly connected to the receipt of something personally beneficial” (Cameron, 2013, p. 140). The last quadrant is the Hierarchy Quadrant which is rooted in control and efficiency. This is in balance to the Adhocracy Quadrant and reminds the positive leader on the “need for measurement, accountability, and efficiency” (Cameron, 2013. P. 144).

Applying Cameron’s (2013) Competing Values Framework to this research sheds light on the importance of using a variety of positive leadership processes when exploring leadership and change. “Positive leaders must take into account the specific organizational context in which they find themselves, because practices and tools are not universally applicable to every situation” (Cameron 2013, p. 147), highlighting the importance of reviewing other leadership styles, too.

### ***Distributive Leadership***

Distributive leadership creates a culture and climate where stakeholders have a voice in making decisions for the organization in which they work (Fusarelli et al., 2011). While giving voice to all may not be inclusive to everyone for every decision made it is clear that this style does allow more people to participate at all levels of an organization (Haris & Gronn, 2008). This process is based on the strengths that people have, not the title they hold. “Distributive leadership recognizes the varieties of expertise that diverse constituents bring to the table and utilizes the expertise to optimize organizational performance” (Fusarelli et al., 2011, p.48). By empowering followers to have input into creating a vision and the goals to enact that vision the entire organization flourishes and the changes are viewed as needed by the followers instead of imposed without input from those doing the work. This leadership style motivates and engages

people to become leaders and as Fullan (2001) points out, a strong leader is one who builds leadership capacity in others and thus in the context of schools, the principal facilitates the leaders. The Decurion Corporation embraced distributive leadership and it proved to be a positive approach to organizational change.

The Decurion Corporation is parent to several operating subsidiaries, including Robertson Properties Group, Pacific Theatres, and ArcLight Cinemas and an example of distributive leadership. “They reflect a choice to see wholeness and possibility rather than separateness and trade-offs. Our axioms join work, people, and development as one unified possibility rather than as separate pieces” (Kegan & Lahey, 2016, p. 185). On the Decurion webpage the vision posted states, “we are building a company that will thrive for generations. Consciously challenging existing norms, we require and cultivate connectedness, curiosity, authenticity, and autonomy. We seek to recognize and realize the potential in people, places, and society” (<https://www.decurion.com>, 2021, vision section). This company focuses on bringing all levels of workers together to enable the organization to flourish. Decurion entered into the senior living business, “to learn how to translate its corporate strengths and values into a new type of business” (Kegan & Lahey, 2016, p. 193). Using past models of shared leadership the company decided to have the employees on the floors develop the work schedules as a team instead of a manager in isolation building the weekly work schedule. This shift to shared development of the schedule helps build relationships and trust with workers and provides them an opportunity to build new skills allowing them to advance within the system. “The employees involved in the process, the business knowledge they are gaining and using is going to progress their careers” (Kegan & Lahey, 2016, p. 194). This willingness to approach leadership collaboratively with

positive intent supports relationship building and in turn creates a system that is successful, “ If you care deeply about people development (for the good of the company, or the good of the planet, or both), this might be the most powerful way to organize your culture-and it is possible to do so, and still run a very successful business” (Kegan & Lahey, 2016, p. 197). By using this style of leadership Decurion was able to build leadership capacity while having a positive impact on the culture of the organization which in turn increased the success of the company. This example highlights the importance of a shared leadership approach in organizations including schools.

It is important to understand that distributive leadership is not merely a sharing of leadership and decision making within an organization, but a practice. “A distributive perspective frames leadership practice in a particular way; leadership practice is viewed as a product of the interactions of school leaders, followers, and their situation” (Spillane, 2005, p.144). The focus on distributive leadership as a practice shifts the idea of simply sharing leadership with others to the actual interactions between everyone in the organization. The interactions between positional leaders and followers is what creates the culture of shared leadership. “Individuals play off of one another, creating a reciprocal interdependence between their actions” (Spillane, 2005, p.146), thus creating a system of give and take, and an environment of appreciation and trust among members. The idea of reciprocity building relationships between followers and leaders is not new. Noddings, (1984) speaks to the importance of both teacher and students giving and receiving from each other in order to build a caring relationship. Distributive leadership practice builds trusting relationships in which all members of the organization have a voice, and feel valued. Raywid (1992) found that when

teachers and students had an increase in responsibilities and were treated as valued contributors to the school, it was the common values that shaped their efforts and compliance, not the rules of the school.

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### ***Transformational Leadership***

Transformational leadership is a style of leadership that brings about substantial change within an organization by creating a shared vision with followers while instilling a passion and a purpose for the change (Burns, 1978; Bass 1985; Bass & Avolio 1993; Leithwood, 1994;

Roberts, 1985). The COVID pandemic has forced schools to think differently about how to structure schools and leaders are being called upon to be creative, flexible, and courageous. This on-going health crisis impacts school leaders and calls for innovative ideas in education. These times demand leaders to rise up and become problem solvers to create school systems that are unified by a vision along with providing a light at the end of the tunnel. Roberts (1985) states transformational leadership “is a leadership that facilitates the redefinition of a people’s mission and vision, a renewal of their commitment, and the restructuring of their systems for goals accomplishment” (p. 1024). She goes on to say that “ it creates hope in the future and a belief that the world is knowable, understandable, and manageable (Roberts, 1985 p.1024). These are the type of leaders our school systems need now as well as in the future in order to meet the learning needs of students.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a worldwide study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) which ranks 79 countries on how sophomore students are performing in mathematics, science, and reading. In 2018 the United States ranked 38th in mathematics, 19th in science, and 14th in reading. These rankings stay fairly consistent for the United States since the beginning of this ranking system in 2000, ([www.oecd.org/pisa/](http://www.oecd.org/pisa/)). Based on this information it is clear schools have not transformed enough to move up in the rankings over the past twenty years. There is a need for reform and transformational leadership plays an important role in this problem solving process. “We consider the central purpose of transformational leadership to be the enhancement of the individual and collective problem-solving capacities of organizational members; such capacities

are exercised in the identification of goals to be achieved and practices to be used in their achievement” (Leithwood, Begley, and Cousins, 1994, p.7) .

Fullan states “we need leaders who can create a fundamental transformation in the learning cultures of schools and of the teaching profession itself” (Fullan, 2002, p.17). This relates to developing a culture that is positive and where there is trust among all members. “In a highly innovative and satisfying organizational culture we are likely to see transformational leaders who build on assumptions such as: people are trustworthy and purposeful; everyone has a unique contribution to make; and complex problems are handled at the lowest level possible” (Bass, B. M., & Avolio, B. J., 1993, p. 113). In fact Bass (1985), expressed that transformational leaders had four dimensions: intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, charisma, and inspirational motivation. Intellectual stimulation is when leaders seek out creative new ideas from followers. Individualized consideration is a leader who is able to see and develop the potential in others and supports a growth mindset. Charismatic leaders communicate a clear vision and are risk takers with a supportive following. Inspirational motivation awakens the passion in members and creates an energy and passion for change (Bass, 1998).

Others go on to support Bass, Leithwood et al. (1999) conclude that “transformational leadership practices were helpful in fostering organizational learning; in particular, vision building, individual support, intellectual stimulation, modeling, culture building and holding high performance expectations” (p. 37). Leithwood et al. built on the work of Bass and went on to identify seven dimension of transformational leadership “building school vision and establishing school goals; providing intellectual stimulation; offering individualized support; modeling best practices and important organizational values; demonstrating high performance expectations;

creating a productive school culture; and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions” (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood et al., cited in Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000 p. 114).

Leithwood et al. worked together to identify specific traits that support transformational leadership based on the review of past research, as well as their own research on successful transformational leaders. These traits are what this researcher used to develop interview questions and a codebook that aligned with the 7 research based traits. The first trait regarding vision was characterized in this study as the ability of the leader to describe the process he or she would use to create, communicate, and enact a school vision. The next trait of intellectual stimulation this researcher related to the approach to and delivery of professional development planning for educators. Individual support and expectations for educators were explored by having participants share what he or she would do when educators were not meeting expectations and/or struggling in their role as a teacher. Modeling was explored in this study through conversations with interviewees on leadership beliefs and actions used when leading a change process. Shared leadership, relationship building and the process used to motivate educators to transform practices were also discussed with participants during the interviews to explore beliefs around school culture and collaboration.

### **Organizational Change**

Innovative organizational change can be difficult. It affects the ability to feel valued and effective, it is disruptive to the status quo which can be unsettling, it creates conflict between members who want the change and others who do not, and members of the organization can feel a loss of meaning for the current system (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Leading followers through a complex change has been examined and many models have been created to support the process.



Kurt Lewin (1947) was a pioneer of change management. He introduced his 3-step process of change which included, unfreezing, change, and freeze. “Management textbooks begin their discussions on how the field of managing change developed with Lewin’s ‘classic model’ and use it as an organizing schema” (Cummings, S., Bridgman, T., & Brown, K. G. 2016 p.34). Many have used that initial model and built upon the idea to create more complex systems to manage change. Appreciative Inquiry uses the 4-D model (Cooperrider & Whitney 2001) to work with organizations. The idea is to move the members through the 4 stages of inquiry enabling members to see the potential and possibilities of the organization. The Knoster Model (1991) outlines 5 major elements every change should consider in order for the change to be successful. The five elements are: vision, skills, incentives, resources and an action plan. First, there must be a clear vision so all members know what the goal is for the change. Second, in order for change to occur the members must have the skills to implement the change. Third, members often want to know what are the personal benefits of the change. Fourth, any resources required to implement the change must be available. Fifth, all members must understand the steps required to make the change.

More recent is Otto Scharmer’s Theory U model (2009). Scharmer’s model has four levels of how people respond to change; level one is reaction, level two is redesigning, level three is reframing and level four is presencing. “Presencing denotes the ability of the individuals and collective entities to link directly with their highest future potential” (Scharmer, 2009, p, 50). The leader must move followers to a place where they are thinking and learning about the future as they work in the present. To do this Schramer (2009) outlines major steps for the leader to take in order to lead the organizational change. He refers to these as “shifts” ( p. 61). The initial

shift is to have members move from being focused on the product to being aware of the process. Next is the shift from process focus to the source of the change. These shifts are guided by each identified department within the organization shifting roles and focus and the leader supports the shifts by bringing all the departments together and it “requires them to operate from a blank canvas-that is, to deeply sense and actualize the opportunities as they arise” (Schramer, 2009, p. 67).

All of these models call for leaders to be thoughtful and to move people through a process that can be full of resistance. “One of the most difficult issues for any organization, no matter how large or small, public or private, profit or non-profit, is implementing and adapting to change. People are inherently resistant to change; those in higher education are no different” (Wentworth, D. K., Behson, S. J., & Kelley, C. L. 2020, p. 511). That being said, the models highlighted here all have the leader building relationships with followers by providing a feedback loop that is asset-based, however these stage based models “lowlight people’s actual experiences during change” (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012, p. 764). Considering how people react during change, and if a leader’s actions can impact the followers experience appears to be an important piece of the puzzle when leading innovative change. Positive Organizational Scholarship, POS, speaks to this very idea as it “focuses on the generative dynamics in an organization that promote human strength, resiliency, healing and restoration” (Spreitzer, 2006, p. 2). POS is a way to see things differently, “challenges and obstacles are reinterpreted as opportunities and strength-building experiences rather than tragedies or problems” (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012, p. 2). POS is critical to the change process, “rather than point out weaknesses and deficiencies, positive leaders highlight others’ strengths, capabilities, and contributions and

enable others in the organization to do the same” (Cameron, 2013, p.58). POS is important to consider when leading change as it provides a positive lens for followers to use throughout the change process.

When leading change, followers can be impacted when the leader incorporates positivity into the process. Small acts consisting of being compassionate, fostering agency, and continuity in change can “help strengthen relational systems, relieve people’s suffering, and generate alternative change patterns that enrich rather than deplete the human experience in change” (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012, p. 771). Organizational change “brings emotion to the foreground as uncertainty, loss, and anxiety prevail” (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012, p. 765). These feelings can create a system of people that are fragile and need to be cared for by the leader. Research does indicate that the change process is less stressful for followers when leaders show compassion. (Huy, 2002). When leaders show compassion by acknowledging the suffering, showing empathy and then acting to reduce the suffering the change process was experienced as one with continuity instead of chaos (Huy, 2002). Giving voice to followers or engagement in the process is another important facet of POS. “Establishing an environment where employees are actively engaged, (Harter, et. al., 2002), is important because increases in productivity emerge as a result and innovations are more likely to develop” (Chan, 2018, p.18). In other words, when people are engaged in change they tend to feel empowered to try new ideas and invite feedback in order to achieve system wide goals for increased productivity. POS looks to build on the positive aspects of an organization. When complex change is being implemented it is important for leaders to recognize what the current strengths are of the system. “Continuity in change represents a positive clustering of small acts because, in bringing together the past, present, and

future, it seeks to draw on the best of the past while people build the future in the present” (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012, p. 769).

Jim Mallozzi, CEO of Prudential Real Estate and Relocation Company implemented the tenets of POS when he was faced with merging two vastly different organizations. He was brought in as CEO when Prudential had just acquired a division of Cigna Corporation. Mr. Mallozzi reports, “in the beginning it was like trying to merge the Red Sox and the Yankees” (Cameron & Plews, 2012, p.99). Over the course of two years he implemented many of the POS tools such as celebrating employee strengths, fostering positive leadership, and building caring and compassionate relationships with employees. “As a consequence of these initiatives, he achieved the successful merger of two culturally different organizations, dramatic improvements in financial performance, improved customer satisfaction scores, and markedly enhanced employee engagement” (Cameron & Plews, 2012, p. 99). POS can have a direct impact on the entire culture of an organization, one study found when financial services organizations implement the positive practices, “including compassion, integrity, forgiveness, kindness, and optimism they produced significantly higher performance than firms pursuing a normal approach to success” (Cameron & Quinn, 2017, p. 60). These examples support the value of using POS as a compass for leaders when facing the task of leading innovative, complex change.

### **Appreciative Inquiry**

Leaders that are able to bring the best out in people are often able to put it all together and empower followers to enact the vision using appreciative inquiry. These leaders have “an ability or capacity to reframe reality to bring out the best from others and the environment” (Thatchenkery & Metzker, 2006, p. xvi). Appreciative Inquiry is a process of asking questions

which allow followers to think creatively, have innovative thoughts, and be generative. By asking questions that are rooted in the present while helping people see possibilities in the future. “AI deliberately, in everything it does, seeks to work from accounts of this positive change core—and it assumes that every living system has many untapped and rich and inspiring accounts of the positive” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001, p. 613). This approach energizes followers to do the hard work of transformational change within a system.

Appreciative Inquiry typically uses the 4-D model (Cooperrider & Whitney 2001) as a common process for leading change work with organizations. The idea is to move the members through the 4 stages of inquiry enabling members to see the potential and possibilities of the organization. The first stage is Discovery, or asking what is best about the organization. That is followed by the Dream stage; what can be, then the Design stage or what is the ideal for the organization. The last stage is Destiny which is discussing what members need to do to be able to consistently adjust and improvise (Cooperrider & Whitney 2001). Moving organizations through the 4D stages keeps the focus on the possibilities of what can be and uses the positive foundations of AI to support the change process.

Appreciative Inquiry creates an environment where questions that are asked activate the brain to be creative. This generative way of thinking can create a culture of positivism and optimism helping an organization to transform, Thatchenkery and Metzker refer to this ability as Appreciative Intelligence® which is “the ability to perceive the positive inherent generative potential within the present” (Thatchenkery & Metzker, 2006, p. 5). The idea that successful leaders of change correlate with specific intelligences and/or traits is not new to the world of organizational change. Digman (1990) brought a new interest into research about leadership

traits. The five- factor model, consistently reported for four of the five traits – extraversion, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness related to one’s ability to lead change with success. Collins (2007) speaks to the level five leader who is a modest person with a strong sense of loyalty to the organization and a willingness to do whatever it takes to get the work done. In the area of emotional intelligence, a study conducted by Bharwaney, G., Bar-On, R., & MacKinlay, A. (2011) concluded “that the application of emotional intelligence in the workplace increases occupational performance, leadership and organisational productivity” (p.23).

Appreciative Intelligence® has three main components; reframing, appreciating the positive, and seeing how the future unfolds from the present. “Many people have the ability to reframe and the capacity to appreciate the positive. Yet, if they don’t see the concrete ways that the possibilities of the present moment could be channeled, they have not developed their Appreciative Intelligence® ” (Thatchenkery & Metzker, 2006, p.7). Recently Whitaker, Thatchenkery, and Godwin (2020) developed and validated a scale to measure Appreciative Intelligence®. This scale serves as a way to measure six dimensions within a person and explore the connection to innovative organizational leadership. The dimensions are positive affect, creativity, tolerance for the uncertain, self-efficacy, situational awareness, and resilience. This scale brings a new approach to studying the traits of leaders and the ability to lead transformational change to educational systems. “We see the potential for new research on Appreciative Intelligence® using the Appreciative Intelligence® Scale” (Whitaker et al., 2020, p. 207). Identifying the relationship between leading change and having a high Appreciative Intelligence® score is important work and could be a missing piece to an unfinished puzzle on

how to lead complex change in educational organizations that will meet our student learning needs.

Meeting the learning needs of all students is what drove the work of Richard Dufour in transforming Adlai Stevenson High School when he was principal. Richard Dufour is an example of a transformational leader that incorporated strategies from all areas of this literature review and provides a strong example of how to lead transformational change. He combined strategies and ideas from positive, distributive, and transformational leadership styles to create a system of inquiry to be used to ensure all students in his school were learning.

Dufour used a collaborative approach while creating a system of accountability as part of his change management. This relates directly to Cameron's (2011) quadrant framework specifically clan and hierarchy. The clan quadrant highlights the importance of collaboration and teamwork among followers and the hierarchy quadrant is related to a system of accountability. Dufour used this idea when creating a system of "professional learning communities in which educators "focus on teaching rather than learning, working collaboratively, and hold themselves accountable for results" (Dufour, 2004, p. 6).

In relation to distributive and transformational leadership styles Dufour employed strategies from both. In his development of professional learning communities (PLC) all teachers were involved and building capacity among members was a focus. These are strategies that are specifically linked to a style of distributive leadership (Fullan, 2001; Fusarelli et al., 2011; Cameron, 2013; Railin, 2011). Dufour transformed his high school as under his leadership Adlai Stevenson underwent a substantial change which included creating a shared vision to focus on student learning instead of teaching. In fact Adlai Stevenson became one of the "most celebrated

high schools in America” (Dufour et al., 2004, p.ix). Dufour led his high school from a system of individuals teaching in classrooms to a system of educators collaborating to ensure learning was occurring for every student.

Inquiry is the foundation of the work that occurs in a PLC. Dufour created three critical questions that all educators asked in every PLC on a regular schedule. The questions are: What do we want each student to learn? How will we know each student learned it? What are we going to do for the students that did not learn it? This system of using questions to think about the future based on the present is directly linked to appreciative inquiry (Thatchenkery & Metzker, 2006). The work in the PLC’s creates an optimistic environment in which the questions discussed force participants to be generative and positive.

Richard Dufour was a transformational leader, he created a passion and purpose for change among his teachers which led to substantial change at Adlai Stevenson High School. Dufour used an inquiry based approach grounded in positive leadership while accessing strategies that are aligned with distributive and transformational leadership styles. Dufour is an example of how a transformational leader can lead sustainable successful change within a school system.

### **Gaps in Literature**

Positive organizations, distributive leadership, transformational leadership, and AI share common ideas related to leading change. All of these topics speak to the importance of collaboration among all members of the organization, as well as building capacity within a system by utilizing the strengths of followers. They speak of creating energy for organizational improvement using various strategies and tools however there is little research that explores the



relationship between leading transformational change and Appreciative Intelligence®. In other words, there is a gap in the literature in connecting the skills a leader needs to facilitate and sustain transformational change.

Styles of leadership and leading change have been heavily researched, (Burns, 1978; Bass 1985; Bass & Avolio 1993; Leithwood, 1994; Roberts, 1985, Battilana et. al., 2010, Canterino et. al., 2020) however this research focuses on various strategies a leader can use to lead change. Building trusting relationships, motivating followers, and using a collaborative approach are all research based approaches that help facilitate leading change (Bass & Stogdill, 1990; Chemers, 2001; Van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003; Yukl, 2006) yet there is little study on why some leaders are successful in using those strategies and others are not. There is research that identifies specific traits transformational leaders have (Bass, 1985; Leithwood et al., 1999) yet again there is little to explain why the leader has those identified traits. This gap is what this study begins to research by exploring the link between leading transformation change and Appreciative Intelligence®.

### **Summary of Scholarly Review**

In order to answer the question, what is the relationship between leading transformational leadership and Appreciative Intelligence® a scholarly review of topics that lay the foundation for this study were explored. Positive, distributive, and transformational leadership styles all share commonalities that align with transformational change. All three styles speak to the importance of shared leadership, building trusting relationships, and collaboration as skills imperative to facilitated complex change (Roberts, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1993; Leithwood, 1994; Fullan, 2001; Fusarelli et al., 2011; Cameron, 2013). While there are differences among the

styles the overarching themes are important to leading transformational change. A review of the various organizational change models combined with an understanding of appreciative inquiry was important to better understand Appreciative Intelligence®. Reading the literature on models of change developed by Lewin (1947), Scharmer (2009), Knoster (1991, and Cooperrider & Whitney (2001) helped this researcher in gaining insight into the nuances of leading change. This insight supported the development of the study and helped guide the work.

#### **Section 4: Contribution to Research**

##### **Introduction**

While there is significant study on both areas of transformational leadership and Appreciative Intelligence® there is a void when it comes to examining the relationship between the two. This research looks to answer the question: What is the relationship between transformational leadership and Appreciative Intelligence®? The Appreciative Intelligence® Scale (Whitaker, et al., 2020) was developed and validated in 2020 with the hope that it would be used for future research. This study continues to validate the Appreciative Intelligence® Scale as a measure and begins to build research that suggests there is a relationship between Appreciative Intelligence® and leading transformational change.

##### **Findings**

An explanatory sequential case selection variant design (Creswell & Clark, 2018) was used in this study. In the quantitative phase, 21 building level leaders completed the AI<sup>®</sup> scale and based on the scores the three highest and lowest scorers were chosen to move onto the qualitative portion of the study. The leaders in this part of the study have a variety of roles and experience. Roles included; principals, assistant principals, special education directors, special

education assistant directors, and directors of curriculum. Experience in these roles ranged from 23 years to 2 years in building level leadership positions. Each of the participants completed the online survey on their own time within a timeframe of a 2 week window. This researcher received no additional questions regarding the survey and all participants completed the survey within the two-week window provided. The scale scores were determined by a data scientist, Brian Whitaker, Ph.D. one of the researchers who developed the AIS® (Whitaker, et al., 2020). The scores provided enabled this researcher to identify the participants to be interviewed.

To gather the data displayed in Table 2, the 6 participants were interviewed using a semi-structured format to build consistency among interviews and “increase comprehensiveness of the data and make data collection somewhat systematic for each respondent” (Patton, 2015, p. 438). The questions displayed in figure 1 are the questions that were used in all 6 interviews. In each interview there were follow up questions in order to help the interviewer clarify the understanding of information gathered.

### **Figure 1**

#### *Interview Questions*

1. What was your professional path that led you to your current position as a building level administrator?
2. Who or what has the greatest influence on you as a leader? Why?
3. How would you describe your leadership style?
4. How do you think your faculty describe your leadership style?
5. When a staff member is having a challenging time in their professional role what do you do?
6. As a leader what is your vision for your school? How do you communicate that vision?

7. When leading a change proces how do you get others to follow?
8. What might a conversation sound like with an educator that is resistant to the change you are trying to make?
9. Take me through a change process that you facilitated in your school-describe the process from beginning to end.
10. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about being a leader of change?

These interviews were then coded using the codebook this researcher created. The codebook gave working examples to each transformational leadership trait as defined by Leithwood et al. 2005. The codebook summarized in Table 1 shows the transformational traits, definitions and an example of quotes used to guide the researcher while analyzing the interviews for themed language within each trait. This codebook was developed using an a priori coding framework based on the seven dimension of transformational leadership: 1)building school vision and establishing school goals; 2) providing intellectual stimulation; 3) offering individualized support; 4) modeling best practices and important organizational values; 5) demonstrating high performance expectations; 6) creating a productive school culture; and 7) developing structures to foster participation in school decisions (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood et al., cited in Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000 p. 114).

**Table 1**

*Research Codebook for Transformational Traits*

Trait	Definition	Participant Example Statements
Communicates a Vision	Leader creates and shares a vision using an inclusive process with staff	Participant #1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “When I am working on creating a vision the</li> </ul>

		<p>first step is to ask faculty members to engage in the process of creating a vision”</p> <p>Participant #3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “It’s a balance of what I have for a vision with what others believe so it is about a year a half of asking questions about beliefs and then coming together on a single vision.”</li> </ul> <p>Participant #2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “First you have to bring everyone together and make time for the conversations about what is valued and that is where the vision work begins.”</li> </ul>
<p>Develops Staff</p>	<p>Leader uses an asset based approach with staff and uses the strengths in others to build capacity with school setting</p>	<p>Participant #2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “One day I was meeting with a teacher and he was pretty discouraged about his teaching so I sat with him and we began to brainstorm a list of his recent successes with different students. This visual representation of his successes helped him see that he did have many strengths.”</li> </ul> <p>Participant #1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “It is important to let people know they are valued. I do value your input-I really pump up the positives so they are excited about the</li> </ul>

		<p>work.”</p> <p>Participant #3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “Having a leadership team of educators has been a good addition this year. It has helped build capacity among the staff as leaders.”</li> </ul>
<p>Provides Support</p>	<p>Leader engages with staff to offer appropriate resources to staff when needed. This support could include time to listen to staff, providing materials/supplies, training/professional development</p>	<p>Participant #3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “A staff member came to me when she was really struggling with a student. I listened to her concerns and then we began to break down what her concerns were and then we identified specific resources of support to help her work with this student. One thing we did was set a weekly meeting time up with the case manager of the student with the teacher to help the teacher get a better understanding of the specific needs of the student and how the case manager could support the teacher with meeting the student's learning needs.”</li> </ul> <p>Participant #4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “It’s important to take the time to build a common understanding and that takes time so I take the time to listen and then offer support.”</li> </ul> <p>Participant #3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “It is part of my</li> </ul>

		<p>professional practice to be an instructional coach with teachers. It is part of what I do.”</p>
<p>Empowers Staff</p>	<p>Leader is consistently working to include others in decision making and is able to recognize and build on individual strengths to enhance system</p>	<p>Participant #5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “When a teacher is great at a specific skill I ask them to present at a staff meeting so they can share their expertise.”</li> </ul> <p>Participant #2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “When teachers lead their own professional learning communities that is when I know I have done the work as a leader because they don’t need me anymore.”</li> </ul> <p>Participant #1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “It’s about listening and learning what the strengths are first, then you can use those strengths to work together toward a common goal.”</li> </ul>
<p>Leads by Example</p>	<p>Leader models and actively lives vision day to day in their school</p>	<p>Participant #2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “Each day I go out and greet the students as they enter the school because I have asked staff to do this and I want them to see me doing it too -I think it helps folks understand that this is important if</li> </ul>

		<p>they see me doing it.”</p> <p>Participant #3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “As professionals we are always growing. I learn everyday from others-there is a culture of learning for everyone.”</li> </ul> <p>Participant #1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “When opportunities come my way-even if I am not sure, I thought yeah I’ll step into that.”</li> </ul>
<p>Motivates Others</p>	<p>Leader excites others to the point that others want to enact vision</p>	<p>Participant #1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “I love it when I am talking about an idea with a teacher and they say YES! I am on board...I want to do this!!”</li> </ul> <p>Participant #3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “When people understand the implications of the work and of being a leader I think it inspires people to think about leadership and how to move forward.”</li> </ul> <p>Participant #1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “I look for opportunities to keep people excited about what they are doing by making sure we value the hard work we are all doing and by celebrating the successes.”</li> </ul>



These results are displayed in Table 2 which displays the AIS<sup>®</sup> scores of the 6 participants along with the amount of transformational skills shared during the interview. The frequency of the theme for each trait was counted and entered into the summary of findings table below for each participant. The Appreciative Intelligence<sup>®</sup> Scale score ranges from the highest of 5 to the lowest of 1. Based on responses from the employed MBA students the mean for the Appreciative Intelligence<sup>®</sup> Scale is 3.57 (Whitaker, et al., 2020). The top three scorers ranged from 4.65 to 4.50 and the bottom three scores ranged from 3.85 to 3.50. Table 1 highlights each of the 6 participants' qualitative data from interviews. The table displays how many different skills the participant displayed during the interview and the number of times each transformational leadership trait was expressed by the participant within the interview.

Overall the findings of the research indicate that there is a positive relationship between transformational leadership and Appreciative Intelligence<sup>®</sup>. The three highest Appreciative Intelligence<sup>®</sup> scoring participants also have the most transformational leadership traits. The three participants with the highest Appreciative Intelligence<sup>®</sup> scores have a higher frequency of traits discussed during the interviews. The three lowest Appreciative Intelligence<sup>®</sup> scoring participants had less transformational leadership traits as well as the same participants had a lower frequency of transformational leadership traits discussed during the interviews. The data gathered from the six participants suggests that there is a relationship between transformational leadership and Appreciative Intelligence<sup>®</sup>. The higher the Appreciative Intelligence<sup>®</sup> score in the participant than the more transformational leadership traits the participant had along with each trait occurred with higher frequency than the participants with lower Appreciative Intelligence<sup>®</sup> scores.

**Table 2**

*Frequency at Which Participants Expressed Transformational Leadership Traits in Relation to Appreciative Intelligence® Survey Score*

Participant #	AI® Scale Score	Vision	Develops Staff	Provides Support	Empowers Staff	Leads by Example	Motivates Others
1	4.65	11	14	16	12	14	12
2	4.54	19	10	35	21	11	8
3	4.50	13	4	11	11	6	11
4	3.85	3	4	11	6	3	7
5	3.77	5	4	14	7	0	0
6	3.50	3	1	11	10	1	0

Upon examining Table 1, it is apparent that participants numbers 1, 2, and 3 have a higher frequency of coded transformational traits. It is interesting to note that participant number 2 with an AIS® score of 4.54 had a higher amount of coded transformational traits in three areas of vision, providing support, and empowering staff. While participant number one with an AIS® score of 4.65 had higher frequency in the areas of developing staff, leading by example, and motivating others. However, there is a notable difference in all traits between the two scores and the bottom two scores. In fact the bottom two scorers both had zeros or ones in the two traits of leading by example and motivating others. The findings do indicate that there is a positive relationship between Appreciative Intelligence® and transformational leadership; the higher the Appreciative Intelligence® Scale score the more transformational leadership traits are apparent as presented by the participants in their interviews. It is important to note that this is a small

sample size and the results are not generalizable to larger populations, however the results do indicate a relationship between Appreciative Intelligence® Scale scores and the number of transformational leadership traits in both depth and frequency.

### **Target Journal and Rationale**

One of the first steps in making a broad scholarly contribution is to explore and choose the appropriate journal to submit an article. The submission needs to be to a journal that is the right fit for the work. After exploring many different educationally based journals, this researcher is choosing to submit a journal article to Educational Leadership. “Educational Leadership® (EL®) is the award-winning flagship magazine of ASCD with a distinctive niche in the world of education publishing. Our readers are educators from all levels, preK–12, and from many different disciplines and job positions” (Association for Curriculum and Development, 2022, <https://www.ascd.org/guidelines-for-el>). Also this journal often prints in themes, and in March of 2023 leading through change is the focus for that edition. The journal submission is due by October 2022 and must be 1500 to 2400 hundred words in length. The guidelines for submission request a research based article written in a conversational style.

This journal appears to be a good fit for this researcher as it is geared towards an audience of professionals within the world of education PreK-12. This matches the grade levels of building leadership within the study as well as aligns with the journal theme of leading change. This researcher believes this journal is a way to share the results of the study highlighting specific ideas grounded in scholarly research that practitioners could implement in their schools. The fact that this journal is for a specific target audience related to my research and

has an upcoming themes edition related to leading change makes Educational Leadership an appropriate place to submit an article.

### **Journal Submission-Ready Article**

Building an educational system that is forward thinking and open to change is critical to ensuring our students are innovative, creative learners. “In the last two decades, every prediction that came true that was valuable or industry changing was first called:ridiculous” (McNulty, 2022, Leading in a VUCA world, AASA Conference). These include airbnb, Uber, and Amazon. This forward thinking approach requires leaders to have the skills to lead transformational change in organizations, a task that continues to be a challenge in educational settings. Traditionally, leaders go about change in education by starting with identifying what is wrong and then developing a plan to fix it. I wondered what would happen if we started leading change from the opposite or asset based direction; what if we looked at our strengths and began to build capacity from within our schools to lead change? In other words, we shifted our lens and viewed problems as opportunities.

An asset based approach is directly related to appreciative inquiry which focuses on the strengths of a system by asking generative questions, and that questioning can lead to sustainable innovative change (Cooperrider & Godwin, 2012). Asking questions that encourage innovative thinking can be learned, but are there people who can approach things from an appreciative stance more easily than others? Appreciative Intelligence® “ is the capacity to reframe and see the potential in any situation and act on it with success” (Whitaker et al., 2020, p. 191). In 2020 Whitaker, Thatchenkery, and Godwin developed and validated a scale to measure Appreciative Intelligence®. This scale serves as a way to measure six dimensions within a person and explore

the connection to innovative organizational leadership. The dimensions are; positive affect, creativity, tolerance for the uncertain, self-efficacy, situational awareness, and resilience. This scale brings a new approach to studying the traits of leaders and the ability to lead transformational change to educational systems.

In my recent research for my dissertation, I explored the relationship between Appreciative Intelligence® and transformational leadership. My results indicated that there was a positive relationship between Appreciative Intelligence® scores and transformational leadership skills; the higher the Appreciative Intelligence® score the more the transformational leadership traits in the leader (Asbell, 2022). These findings were based on a very small sample size in one school administrative unit but the study got me thinking about how to use this information to develop a system that supports our leaders in facilitating transformational change in educational systems.

The three areas I decided to focus on within my districts were hiring, coaching, and evaluation. I chose these specific practices because they are common to all of our building level leaders and in my role as a central office administrator I have the opportunity to discuss my ideas with colleagues. As a group, our team discussed ways to help building leaders lead complex change as our system is moving from a traditional educational approach to a competency based learning system. As a team, we explored and learned about asset based systems and decided to move forward with moving to an asset based approach in the areas of hiring, coaching, and evaluation.

Hiring is one of the most important opportunities a leader has in building a team that supports the vision of the organization. The challenge to find the right fit based on two or three

rounds of interviews, the application packet, and reference checks make the questions asked an important part of the hiring process. In our school administrative unit, (SAU) we are focused on bringing in leaders who have transformational leadership skills so included in our interview process are questions that directly align with the transformational traits of developing, empowering, and motivating staff (Podsakoff et.al., 1990). The first question is; can you please share how you would develop staff using an asset based approach?. Followed by; when leading change how would you excite others to follow? The last additional question is; in our district we believe building capacity within the organization at all levels is critical to transforming from a traditional system to a competency based system of learning. How would you build capacity to support this change? Each of these questions are related to transformational leadership traits (Podsakoff et.al., 1990) and how the candidate answers these questions gives the interviewing team insight into the beliefs and skill set each candidate possesses related to transformational leadership.

Another step in the hiring process that we are looking to add is to have each candidate complete the Appreciative Intelligence® Scale. This survey serves as a way to measure six dimensions within a person and explore the connection to innovative organizational leadership. The dimensions are; positive affect, creativity, tolerance for the uncertain, self-efficacy, situational awareness, and resilience (Whitaker, et al., 2020). By having both the Appreciative Intelligence® Scale score and specific interview questions related to transformational leadership traits, hiring teams should have more data to inform the goal of hiring educators that are better equipped to lead complex change in our schools.

An additional approach to supporting our leaders is through coaching as this is an important process that develops the capacity of leaders, (Devine et al., 2013). In our districts, the change we made is to focus on appreciative inquiry as this supports leaders in thinking in generative and innovative ways. When a leader is struggling we use appreciative inquiry to help them shift from seeing something as a problem to fix to an opportunity to build capacity. An example of this occurred recently in a coaching session. A building administrator was sharing concerns in how to give feedback to an educator on weak instructional math practices as the leader knew that this feedback would be very upsetting and unsettling for the teacher. As a coach using appreciative inquiry I began to ask questions. I began with, can you talk to me about the strengths this educator has in the classroom? At this point, the leader was able to reframe her thoughts and began to share areas of strengths related to instruction for this educator. After reframing her view on the educator I went on to ask the leader, how do you think you can open the conversation with the teacher to allow her to stay in a place where she can stay engaged in a generative way with you? In other words, using an appreciative lens what questions can you think of to begin your conversation? After some thought, the administrator shared she could start by asking the teacher what she felt went well during the lesson followed up with what did the teacher want the students to learn and did she feel that this was accomplished? From there, depending on the responses from the teacher the conversation can evolve and the administrator can continue to engage the educator in a conversation focused on opportunities for growth based on enhancing her areas of strengths to build her math instructional practices.

Just being to shift the administrator from being focused on giving feedback in a way that is deficit based to an asset based approach helps the leader practice leading with an appreciative

stance. This supports the overall goal of transformation of the organization because “several studies have shown that strengths-based employee development in the workplace can lead to desired behavioral change” (Asplund & Blacksmith, 2012, pg. 353). I have shifted my coaching approach in my monthly meetings with building level leaders and the feedback from administrators is that coaching is helpful in their personal growth and that it is a valuable use of their time.

The last area I want to speak to is evaluation. This is a more involved process, and often, as in our SAU, is tied into contract language. As a result I needed to form a large committee and begin the process of revising our evaluation system with a group of about 35 educators from all grade levels PreK-12. This group of administrators, teachers, and union leadership came together ready to dive into the work however I started with the learning. As a committee we learned about asset based systems and appreciative inquiry. We took time to have honest conversations about past evaluation experiences and how the system did not promote professional growth but instead was rooted in fear and distrust.

The next step was to examine the rubric for evaluation which was aligned with the work of Danielson (2007). At this point the group realized that the rubric did not really align with competency based practices and that our educator expectations were not well defined. That is when we worked closely with the consulting firm 2Revolutions to develop our portrait of an educator which was the foundation in helping the group develop the professional growth tool. This new rubric identifies the knowledge, skills, and mindset that are necessary to be an educator in our SAU. The portrait of an educator and growth rubric went through a vetting process in all



of our schools using the representatives from the committee. After vetting both items, the group focused on developing the process for evaluation.

The process is strength based and educators can choose an area of passion to set their annual goals. The feedback form is educator driven so the administrator knows exactly what feedback the teacher is looking for as related to his/her annual goal. Also feedback can come from a variety of sources such as students, peer-to-peer observations, presentations to staff, etc. This new process was piloted during the 2021-22 school year on a volunteer basis, 98% of educators chose to pilot the new system. Feedback to date is positive and educators report this system is truly about growing as an educator not about checking boxes on a form. Administrators report the conversation with teachers is rich and feedback is viewed as a tool to grow instead of a conversation focused on what is wrong. We are moving to full implementation of this asset based system in the 2022-23 school year. This educator growth will support transforming our system to an organization that is full of teachers that have the knowledge skills and mindset to support student learning using competency based instructional strategies.

To transform our system using an appreciative lens we are beginning with a focus on hiring, coaching, and evaluation. These three areas play major roles in creating a system that can view chaos and problems as opportunities. Leaders are being hired with high Appreciative Intelligence® and a skill set that supports facilitating transformational change. Coaching is focused on building capacity using appreciative inquiry for administrators. Evaluation and supervision is growth based and aligned to the knowledge skills and mindset needed to enact our vision of a competency based system of learning. Our SAU is transforming and most importantly we are forward focused with students at the center of the work.

## **Section 5: Contribution to Practice**

### **Introduction**

This researcher completed this study with the intention the data would support ideas to influence practice among leaders in education. The need for transformation of our education system is urgent as “few organizations are developing transformational leaders, and very few leaders have any idea how to be a transformational leader (Warrick, 2011, p.11). The data did support the positive relationship between Appreciative Intelligence® and transformational leadership and gives validity to shifting practices in hiring coaching and evaluation in order to build capacity in leaders to be transformational. A way to share this information, and have a larger conversation with leaders around the world is to present this information at state and national level conferences.

### **Plan for Dissemination and Practitioner Contribution**

There are numerous state and national level conferences that educational leaders attend on an annual basis. In particular, the most attended conferences for educational leaders in the State of New Hampshire are the New Hampshire School Administrators Association annual conference in June of each year and the annual national conference for the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) <https://nce.aasa.org/>. There is also an annual Appreciative Inquiry conference, the AI Jam <https://ccoacademics.champlain.edu/jam/>, each year that is hosted by Champlain College. These three conferences are the main targets for dissemination of the research as these venues provide an opportunity not only for a presentation but for networking face to face with current practitioners.

Each conference requires a proposal submission that must be filled out and submitted by a specific date. For example, for the AASA conference all proposals must be completed and submitted to the organization in June of the preceding year of the conference. If a proposal is accepted notification is received in August, with final materials due to AASA by January for the February conference. This timeline is similar to other National level conferences. The State level conferences timeline is shorter and requires submission of ideas in January with a final notification in March for a June presentation. The research findings will be submitted for presentation with ideas for implementation to support leading change to AASA, NHSAA, and AI Jam according to specific timelines for 2022-23 annual conferences as outlined in each website.

Documentation for each proposal will include a powerpoint presentation. The presentation will briefly overview the research and findings with a deliberate focus on transformational leadership and Appreciative Intelligence®. This type of presentation format works well in a conference setting as it quickly highlights the focus and allows participants to engage in the presentations with a reference document. The findings that will be highlighted in the powerpoint are how each of the six final interviews coding results aligns with the six transformational leader traits in the researcher codebook. The powerpoint includes table 1 of the codebook, and table 2 the Appreciative Intelligence® score and each participant's frequency of each transformational leadership trait.

The presentation will highlight the possibilities for implementation with a school system as that is often the goal of attending a conference. The presentation will offer ideas for hiring, coaching and a system wide asset based evaluation system. Each idea presented will be facilitated with interactive activities to help create an environment of collaboration and

appreciation. The heart of the presentation for practitioners focuses on the application of the research for hiring, coaching and evaluation.

Hiring practices have a significant impact on the organization. “Individuals know that the route to institutional success is to have access to resources and hire the best possible personnel who have the background, experience, contacts, and reputation to advance the growth and development of the institution” (Breslin, 2000, pg.228). From a practitioner perspective, hiring is a critical component in order to transform a system (Kegan & Lahey, 2016) and this research could impact the hiring process for building level leaders. In most cases the first step of becoming a candidate for consideration includes the completion of an application packet. Often this includes a cover letter, resume, and letters of recommendation. Based on the findings from this research, this practitioner would require applicants to complete the Appreciative Intelligence® survey. This gives the initial screening committee another source of information about the candidates to be considered when creating a candidacy pool. This addition to the initial packet supports the process of hiring leaders who have a high Appreciative Intelligence® in order to support the goal of transforming the system.

Once the initial candidate pool list is final the next step is first round interviews. Often questions are asked about background, philosophy of leadership, and personal successes. What this practitioner will add are a few very specific questions that directly align with the transformational traits of developing, empowering, and motivating staff (Podsakoff et.al., 1990). The first questions will be; can you please share how you would develop staff using an asset based approach? Followed by; when leading change how would you excite others to follow? The last additional question will be; in our district we believe building capacity within the

organization at all levels is critical to transforming from a traditional system to a competency based system of learning. How would you build capacity to support this change? Each of these questions are related to transformational leadership traits (Podsakoff et.al., 1990) and how the candidate answers these questions gives the interviewing team insight into the beliefs and skill set each candidate possesses related to transformational leadership.

By adding the completion of the Appreciative Intelligence® Scale along with asking interview questions that are grounded in transformational leadership the top candidates will have a strong foundation in leading transformational change. These changes to the hiring process provide pointed additional information coordinating the organizations efforts in hiring building level leaders that can lead transformational change using an appreciative lens.

Coaching is another area that can have a significant impact on leading change in an organization. “Coaching for school leaders is vital, not only to develop individual leadership capacity, but equally as systems leaders. Effective educational leaders create environments which foster capacity development and reinforce and sustain ongoing learning” (Devine, et al., 2013, pg. 1386). Coaching rooted in appreciative inquiry can support leading transformational change and continue to support the development of Appreciative Intelligence® . “AI is defined as an approach to organizational analysis and learning that is intended for discovering, understanding, and fostering innovation” (Orem et al., 2007, pg.25).

By using an AI approach coaches can use the 4-D model (Cooperrider & Whitney 2001) to work with leaders to be generative and creative. The idea is to move leaders through the 4 stages of inquiry enabling them to see the potential and possibilities in themselves and then in the organization. The first stage is Discovery, which helps leaders “focus on an appreciative view of

themselves and the topic or situation they bring to the coaching relationship” (Orem et al., 2007, pg.206). That is followed by the Dream stage, this is when the coach can help leaders “in articulating a meaningful picture of the future” (Orem et al., 2007, pg.206). The Design stage encourages leaders to develop an action plan in order to design the future “ by bringing the dream into focus”(Orem et al., 2007, pg.207). The last stage is Destiny in which the coach works with leaders to bring the plan to fruition and realize their dreams in the present. (Orem et al., 2007). Coaching using the 4D (Cooperrider & Whitney 2001) stages keeps the focus on the possibilities of what can be and uses the positive foundations of AI to support the change process. By using this process in coaching, leaders experience the 4-D (Cooperrider & Whitney 2001) process personally and gather an understanding of how appreciative inquiry can be useful to use when leading change as “appreciative inquiry, by design an affirmative process, dismantles organizational habits of distrust, animosity, and blame and replaces them with a willingness to learn, mutual respect, and cooperation” (Whitney & Schau, 1998, pg. 11).

In order to implement an AI based coaching system for all building leaders preliminary training of coaches would be necessary. In the case of this researcher, trained coaches are already using AI to coach building level leaders throughout the school year. These coaches are central office based and meet with each building level leader at least once a month. Feedback from administrators has been positive and there is desire for continued coaching as well as an increase to two times per month. As a result of the individual coaching, all of the elementary principals by their own choice, now meet one time per month for AI based peer coaching. AI focused coaching is supporting the effort to develop leadership capacity for facilitating transformational change.

Teacher supervision and evaluation is another area this research can be used as all building level administrators have this responsibility. Oftentimes when a leader works with a teacher to develop professional goals for supervision, the conversation is deficit based. The evaluator encourages the teacher to set a goal around improving in an area of weakness. This deficit based process does not encourage the teacher to be creative or generative which in turn creates an evaluation system that is centered on problems instead of a system that is focused on strengths. This is an important distinction, as when leaders focus on the strengths of others the organization can flourish. “Businesses studied that have adopted a strength-based approach to individual development have seen greater gains in employee engagement and hence productivity” (Clifton & Harter, 2003, pg.8).

From a practitioner perspective, our school administrative unit begins by having educators go through a process of self reflection on their knowledge, skills, and mindsets on their role as a teacher. It is important to note that the educators using the tool developed and vetted the growth rubric used for self reflection. As teachers complete the self assessment they identify areas of strengths and high interest. The educator then meets with an administrator to review the self-reflection and during that meeting both parties work together to develop a growth goal based on strengths. This goal then becomes the area in which the educator will gather feedback throughout the year from an administrator and other sources that the educator identifies. The feedback process occurs at least three times per year and includes the completion of a growth feedback form which documents feedback and reflection on the strength-based goal during the school year.

By switching from a deficit based to a strength- based approach for supervision and evaluation the organization is more likely to change. “Developing employees using strengths-based science can ensure that organizations are fully maximizing their employees’ potential. Several studies have shown that strengths-based employee development in the workplace can lead to desired behavioral change” (Asplund & Blacksmith, 2012, pg. 353). This systematic change supports the overarching purpose to transform the current learning practices from traditional to competency based.

Overall, as a practitioner this research has immediate implications for creating a system of leaders who can lead transformational change. Hiring practices can be focused on acquiring leaders who have a high Appreciative Intelligence® along with the specific skills of a transformational leadership. Coaching relationships can use appreciative inquiry and the 4-D process (Cooperrider & Whitney 2001) to increase innovation and Appreciative Intelligence® within leaders to support them in leading successful transformational change. Furthermore, by moving from a deficit-based evaluation system to one that is strengths-based the school will be full of educators who are engaged and open to growth creating a culture in which transformational change can occur. All of these practices can be combined to support building an appreciative organization of transformational leaders.

## **Section 6: Practitioner Reflection**

### **Summary of Inquiry**

As I reflect upon my educational journey these past three years, I have a better understanding of how important it is to become a scholarly practitioner. I was quick to settle on an area of interest in leadership but it wasn’t until I had a professor that spoke of appreciative



inquiry and Appreciative Intelligence® that I was able to create my research question. I had an almost instant wondering about the relationship between transformational leadership and Appreciative Intelligence®. My question: What is the relationship between transformational leadership and Appreciative Intelligence® led me to an explanatory sequential selective variant research design which allowed me to explore both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. The quantitative data was gathered by administering the Appreciative Intelligence® survey to over 20 building level leaders. The qualitative data was interviewing the top three and bottom three scorers on the scale with questions that were specifically designed to elicit answers aligned with transformational leadership traits. After coding the interviews for themes from my codebook my findings revealed the higher the Appreciative Intelligence® score the more the transformational traits in the participant. These findings are limited to a very small sample size specific to my workplace, however I am excited to continue my work as a scholarly practitioner and put my findings into practice as well as think about future research possibilities.

### **Personal Transformations**

Personally, this research has had a profound impact on how I approach my life at home and work. In the beginning, of this dissertation I spoke about being a caregiver to my husband for the past 11 years after a debilitating stroke and how having resilience, optimism, and a deep love all played a role in the two of us transforming to a new normal full of tears, laughs, and joy. Most recently on December 14, 2022 my husband died after three weeks of receiving a completely unexpected diagnosis of stage 4 esophageal cancer. I can honestly say it took all I had to reframe my view and see his passing with an appreciative lens, and I truly believe I could not have faced December 15, 2021 without having the knowledge that I have gained during my

learning over the past three years. I mention this because my personal and professional life has always blended and in the past three years this remains true. The pandemic seemed to bring out the worst in some and in my role as a central office leader I received death threats, was told that I was responsible for the increase in depression in our students, and people yelled to the school board that I was an idiot. These remarkable times forced me into making decisions about wearing masks, social distancing, and facility changes that I was not trained nor equipt to make using often conflicting health care recommendations. In both instances, my husband's passing and managing an SAU of over 5000 students during a pandemic required a transformation of my systems. Fortunately, I had the knowledge to lead myself through these past experiences with an appreciative lens. I focused and used my Appreciative Intelligence to look for the opportunities in the chaos of change I could not control.

This loss of control in both my personal and professional life provided me with a choice to make: view moving forward focused on the deficits or from an appreciative stance. I chose to see the opportunities and one of those was time. Time to reflect on the joyful memories, time to talk to colleagues, time to meet with parents and listen to their experiences. I had time to use the appreciative inquiry tools such as the 4-D model (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001) to reorganize my life and to refocus myself on the reasons I am a central office public educator. I am fortunate that I have gained a deep understanding of how to build an appreciative world for myself as I transform.

### **Educational Leader Transformations**

As a leader, my research has had a profound impact on the work of transforming our traditional teaching system into a competency based learning organization. I have been using

appreciative coaching with all of our building level leaders, and they now are using it with their staff. By modeling appreciative inquiry in every coaching relationship our leaders have grown to see the value of this approach when leading in their buildings. Administrators have used the 4-D (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001) tool in staff meetings for vision work, others have used it with their administrative teams to talk through a challenging situation, and some are using it to begin the shift from a punitive student discipline approach to one of growth and learning.

Perhaps the most substantial body of work related to my research in my role as an educational leader is in the area of teacher evaluation and supervision. As I began to learn about and understand the value of asset based approaches I got the idea that we needed to shift our evaluation system from deficit to asset based. This was a major undertaking as our evaluation system is tied to the teacher contract and often that can be a barrier to transformation. I believed however, that this shift had the potential to make a huge difference in the professional growth of over 600 certified staff in our SAU, which in turn could impact over 5000 students.

I began by approaching union leadership and together we learned about appreciative inquiry, and asset based systems. I used my research to back up the ideas and when there were questions I modeled Appreciative Inquiry. After many conversations the group felt like it was worth bringing the idea of transforming the entire evaluation process to a larger audience. I requested at least one administrator and teacher from each of the 11 schools in our SAU. Some schools are larger so those schools had a larger representation bringing the group to 38 participants. Again we learned together about asset based systems and appreciative inquiry in turn building a deeper knowledge in each person.

As a group, we acknowledged that we needed support to cull the research on other educational systems that had already identified the knowledge, skills, and mindset needed to be an educator teaching in a competency based system. This is when I brought in the consulting firm, 2Revolutions, to support that work. As a result the group was given numerous research based growth tools to review, and from those the group created our own growth tool. These group members then took the tool to each one of their schools for vetting and feedback. Adjustments were made based on feedback and vetted a second time in each school with all faculty. As a result we were able to pilot this new tool and new approach to setting professional goals based on individual strengths during the 2021-22 school year with a 98% volunteer participation rate.

As an educational leader, this research has impacted the entire organization. I changed my approach in coaching administrators to appreciative and worked with a large group to transform the teacher evaluation system. Both shifts have transformed how our building level leaders view themselves and their growth and in turn they are using their new skills in their buildings. Based on feedback on the pilot, teachers are excited about their professional growth and have shared that the new system allows them voice and choice when setting goals. Also, the feedback educators receive is purposeful and helpful to their self reflection in growing as a professional. While I am enthused about the direct impact my learning has had on our system, I also understand the importance of a continued scholarly approach as our system continues to evolve.

### **Scholarly Leader Transformations**

As a scholar, I now understand the importance of using research to support an idea or opinion when leading change. Before I began the work for my dissertation, I would try to lead change based more on assumptions and personal bias rather than research. This would cause a high level of frustration and anxiety for those that did not share my beliefs, and result in an increase in resistance. Knoster's (1991) change management chart explains this as when the skills to manage the change are missing, anxiety increases in those being impacted by the change which leads to a resistance to the change. I have learned the skills can be knowledge, and when followers have the knowledge of why there is need for change this can have a positive impact on the process.

As a scholarly leader, I now use past research to support the transformation of our system. In coaching the building level administrators I shared numerous research based articles about appreciative inquiry, and then we would dialogue about the journal articles. In fact some of the leaders asked for more information such as books which in turn led to administrators deciding to use some of the tools, such as the 4-D model (Cooperrider & Whitney 2001) for visioning work in their schools. This personal shift to use research when sharing a new idea or concept, gives credibility to the concept and to me as an informed leader.

I have also learned to evaluate the information I receive with a critical eye. When I read data or an article I look at the citations to see if there are reliable resources included to support the work shared. When it is data I look at the design of the study, how the data was gathered, and who gathered the data. I now comprehend the value in doing this, for example, if a study was conducted by a reading company about how a specific reading program increases the fluency

ability in young children I would want to dig deeper as the reading company may be biased in gathering and presenting the data as the organization wants to sell their program. The same could hold true for a person writing a journal article with a personal bias for a specific instructional strategy. The writer may have used this approach in their classroom and it worked well, but unless the data shared is grounded in strong research design and a substantial literature review I would be hesitant to share this approach as one that has great impact on student learning.

As a scholar, my work has had a substantial impact on the way I understand information and lead. I have gained confidence in leading because now I facilitate using the skills and ideas that are based in research. I read, listen, and converse with a scholarly lens so those who are engaged with me in the work know it is researched based. I have gained knowledge that has shifted my mindset about leading and it excites me to think about the future implications my study could have on future research as I continue my work as a scholarly practitioner.

### **Implications for the Future**

Based on the work that has begun in my SAU my study lays a foundation for continued research with other styles of leadership such as distributive. Depending on the needs and/or philosophy of the organization this research opens the door for others to explore the relationship between Appreciative Intelligence® and leadership styles such as distributive. Also, as I continue to use appreciative coaching with building level administrators I wonder if this builds their Appreciative Intelligence®. There is research that states emotional intelligence (Hen, M., & Sharabi-Nov, A. 2014) can be taught so begs the question can Appreciative Intelligence® also be taught? One way to look at this could be through the coaching process. If a group of leaders all took the AI survey and then participated in appreciative coaching as a recipient would the

Appreciative Intelligence® Scale score be higher after an identified amount of time, in other words does an AI coaching approach increase Appreciative Intelligence®? This study could have a direct impact on how educational leaders are coached and trained to strengthen their abilities in leading transformational change.

Building the skills of leaders to lead complex change is another area my study could have future implications for further research. In my study, I looked at the Appreciative Intelligence® Scale scores first and then interviewed leaders based on their Appreciative Intelligence® score. Another approach to increase the validity of my research could be to switch the quantitative and qualitative data gathered. In other words, I could have used the transformational leadership survey (Edwards, J. R.; Knight, D. K.; Broome, K. M.; & Flynn, P. M., 2010) as my quantitative data to identify specific participants to interview. Then once participants were identified as high and low scorers on the transformational skills survey (Edwards, J. R.; Knight, D. K.; Broome, K. M.; & Flynn, P. M., 2010) move onto the qualitative portion of the study by asking those participants interview questions that are aligned with the 6 dimensions of Appreciative Intelligence®. In theory, based on my findings, the results may support the idea that the higher the transformational leadership survey scores, the more dimensions of Appreciative Intelligence® the participant would share during an interview.

The final area I wonder about for future research is the impact on student learning. To me, this is most important and critical to my work as an educational leader. I am hopeful that if building leaders are creating an appreciative lens while facilitating complex change, our educators in the classroom are growing and learning as professionals which in turn impacts the students every day. By changing our evaluation and supervision system from deficit to asset

based our classroom educators are writing goals to strengthen their professional skills and receiving feedback that promotes growth and learning. Future research needs to be done to explore the relationship between asset based evaluation systems and instructional practices. I think about the possibilities of exploring this, and the impact this research could have for our educators and students.

Overall, I am hopeful research will continue in the areas of transformational leadership and Appreciative Intelligence® . The impact of this type of research is far reaching as it could lead to creating appreciative classrooms in which students feel empowered to view challenges as opportunities to be creative and generative. Also, if we can teach Appreciative Intelligence® it would be critical for those teachings to be part of the social and emotional curriculum in our schools. Students could learn how to see chaos and problems as opportunities for growth and be able to build their futures in the present. These abilities would truly be a gift not only for each student, but for our society as students are the future.



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