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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

APPLYING ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING THEORIES TO CONTINUOUS
IMPROVEMENT PRACTICES THROUGH SELF-STUDY METHODOLOGY
TO BETTER REFLECT UPON AND UNDERSTAND FACTORS THAT
INFLUENCE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

PROGRAM IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION AND SUPERVISION

BY

MORGAN GALLAGHER

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

MAY 2023

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without doubt, every doctoral candidate endures their own unique trials, tribulations, and possible traumas on their path to completing their program of study. My own experience has been no exception. I began my doctoral journey as an assistant principal in the 2013-2014 academic year. I have enduring gratitude to Drs. Israel, Fine, and Sostek for their early guidance in the program. Likewise, the tutelage provided by my principal coaches Richard Smith, Cynthia Fields, and dearly departed Sandra Trabeck exposed me to firsthand leadership experiences that were well attuned to my practitioner mindset. Dick guided me to be my authentic self. Cindy held my feet to the fire, ensuring that I finished up my clinical hours on time. Sandra showed me how to balance my leadership responsibilities with my newfound responsibilities as a father to twin boys, Keegan and Quinn. Sandra played the role of doting grandmother more so than principal coach and I am blessed that my family forged such a strong bond with her in the short time we shared together.

I began my dissertation research in earnest in the 2016-2017 school year. This same year I moved to the Rockford region to assume the role of fledging principal. I would like to acknowledge the grace and empathy of Dr. Travis Woulfe. In a pinch, when my initial superintendent internship mentor suddenly became indisposed, Dr. Woulfe stepped up and devoted himself to teaching me the character and resolve needed to enact meaningful school reform.

Moving to Rockford to take on my first tenure as building principal, I found myself consumed with the weight of the role while also untethered to the academic supports I had in Chicago. Along with the arrival of the unexpected gift of a third son, Kellan, I pushed my dissertation to the proverbial backburner. In the following couple of years, my progress on my dissertation was slow and unsteady. If not for the patience and motivation exhibited by my dissertation chair, Dr. Jorge Peña, my doctoral pursuit could have fully fallen to the wayside. However, in March of 2020 I successfully defended my dissertation proposal. Unfortunately, the very day after my proposal defense all schools in Illinois went into lockdown due to the COVID pandemic. Balancing work, family, and school became untenable, and my dissertation was again relegated to the back burner. The inertia that arose from the pandemic became further compounded in the 2021-2022 school year when I was promoted to Chief of Schools for Rockford Public Schools, newly tasked with the supervision of 120 school administrators. Though we returned to full in person instruction that year, we were met by students with needs beyond what our comprehension could foretell. Throughout all of it, Dr. Peña remained steadfast in his support. As I finally complete my doctoral studies, I am humbled by his selflessness. Of course, Drs. Ferrell and Edejer were also instrumental as dissertation committee members. Their inquiry and attention to detail greatly enhanced my ability to construct and design this study and communicate its findings.

Of course, I must take this opportunity to publish and copyright with all rights reserved my love for my wife and soulmate Danielle. She unwaveringly supported me through this journey. She empathized with the obstacles but never let me turn them into excuses. While I love my boys, I cannot truthfully thank them for helping me get across the finish line. Completing this dissertation while being a dad to our three young kids was straight up bonkers. I do however love

my boys for the frequent breaks and levity they provided along the way. Finally, I would like to express gratitude to my folks for their unconditional love and support and for being such great role models for myself and family.

While I often perceived this study as a dark cloud perpetually looming overhead, the satisfaction of persisting to completion is resounding. Never give up!

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this self-study is to better understand and address the factors that influence continuous improvement efforts led by the researcher/practitioner. To this end, this study applies Bolman and Deal's 4-frame model of organizational learning lenses to school improvement indicators on the Illinois 5Essentials Survey. Through taking Bolman and Deal's Online 4-frame Self-assessment, I am able to identify the organizational learning lens least integrated into my own leadership worldview. The organizational learning lenses that comprise Bolman and Deal's 4-frame model are the structural, symbolic, human resource, and political lenses. I then apply core tenets of my least integrated lens to low-performing school improvement efforts through reflective journaling on prompts derived from a summation of core attributes of the identified lens to low-performing school improvement indicators of the 5Essentials Survey. After collecting the journaling data, it is coded to determine the prevalence of the different organizational learning theories that underpin the least integrated lens in my leadership approach to school improvement. From there, the following broader research questions are considered:

1. How do the most prevalent organizational learning theories from my least integrated 4-frame-lens inform continuous improvement efforts in regard to this 5Essentials survey topic?

2. Based upon identified theories and concepts from my lowest percentile Bolman and Deal lens, what factors am I considering or not considering when engaging in continuous improvement concerning this 5Essential survey topic?

By deliberately applying under-considered principles to self-study reflection on continuous improvement efforts, I can more holistically articulate and understand factors that influence these efforts.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Overview

This self-study seeks to create a comprehensive and balanced framework for understanding how the reforms and practices surrounding student postsecondary outcomes at Opus Magnum High School can be sustained and improved by allowing the leader-practitioner to expand his conception of how his leadership worldview impacts school improvement efforts. Opus Magnum is a very complex educational organization that has made great strides across many metrics in the last four years. Moreover, Opus Magnum has recently begun to move in a direction that extends well beyond the traditional responsibilities of a high school concerning its students. According to Lyons and LaBoskey (2002, as cited in Lassonde et al., 2009), a primary characteristic of self-studies is that they “are lodged in socially and contextually embedded situations; hence, readers come to know the pertinent background, the subtle nuances of how the self-study unfurled, and the inner thinking of main characters.” As such, it is vital to closely examine the full scope of Opus Magnum’s programming and school improvement efforts to establish a critical context for this research.

Opus Magnum High School is an urban high school that operates under a nontraditional, competency-based education program model. It is one of five high schools in its district. The district has forty-two total schools. Under Opus Magnum’s competency-based model, students

earn high school credits as quickly as they can demonstrate proficiency in the content and skills of a course. Students are not tied to a minimum number of instructional hours or a semester schedule. Thus, on the one hand, hardworking students can earn credits at an accelerated rate.

On the other hand, students who struggle with math, for example, would not have their transcript stamped with a failing grade when the traditional semester is over. Rather, such a student could receive several weeks of more intensive remediation in math in order to attain proficiency and earning credit. Since students are not required to attend a particular number of hours, many elect to enroll at Opus Magnum on a flexible or part-time schedule.

The adaptive and individualized nature of Opus Magnum's competency-based program model is ideally suited for students that experience an array of at-risk factors and have not historically experienced success in their educational career. Many students attend Opus Magnum because they are not on track to graduate in four years. More often than not, these students failed several classes in their freshman year at their school of origin. Many of these students report to their counselors that they lacked self-regulation skills as freshmen. Others admit that in their transition from middle school, they never learned or understood how high school credits work. Other students come to Opus Magnum for flexible scheduling. Many students have adult responsibilities concerning work or family. Still, other students come to Opus Magnum because they have social, emotional, or medical needs and benefit from the more adaptive and personalized learning context. Opus Magnum also offers free daycare and parenting classes to teen parents so that they do not experience a disruption to their education due to becoming mothers and fathers.

Besides its competency-based high school program, Opus Magnum High School offers a general education development (GED) model for students seventeen and older. Approximately 800 high school students and 150 GED students enroll at Opus Magnum each year. Beginning in the school year 2019-2020, Opus Magnum also houses an early childhood program serving up to eighty children aged three to five. The demographic breakdown for Magnum's high school population is as follows: 77% free and reduced lunch, 14% diverse learner, 7% English language learner, 29% Hispanic, and 40% black. These demographics roughly approximate the GED and early childhood populations.

School Improvement Context

Over the last five years, Opus Magnum has experienced record success across several metrics. However, a ransomware attack on the district in the fall of 2019 and the COVID-19 pandemic that began in the spring of 2020 skews the validity of any longitudinal inspection of those metrics. For example, discipline drastically decreased in the school year 2019-2020 since teachers could not record behavior incidents in the fall as the data management system was down for several months due to a ransomware attack. When all students went remote in the spring, discipline rates further plummeted. Conversely, literacy gains dramatically fell in the school year 2019-2020 since most students could not take the post-test that was only available in person at the time. Given the circumstances, for the purpose of this study, Opus Magnum-'s annual longitudinal performance on some metrics is only evaluated from the earliest available data through the school year 2019-2020.

In the school year 2019-2020, Opus Magnum experienced a seven-year high in its average daily attendance rate (89.77%) (see Figure 1).

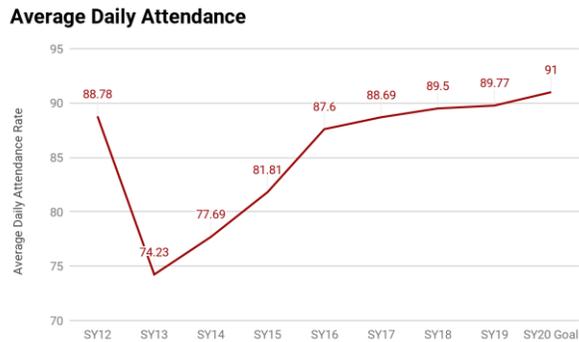


Figure 1. Opus Magnum Average Daily Attendance by Year

Discipline infractions dropped year over year at Opus Magnum High School from the school year 2016-2017 through the school year 2018-2019. For example, in the month of February, the average daily number of referrals decreased from seventeen in the school year 2017-2018 to eight in 2018-2019 and just two in 2019-2020, as shown in Figure 2.

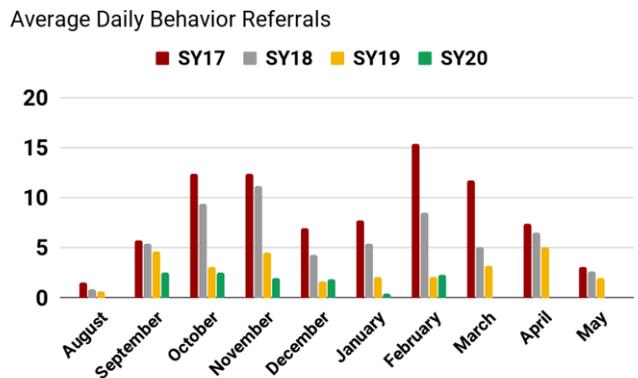


Figure 2. Opus Magnum Average Daily Behavior Referrals by Year and Month

In Opus Magnum’s district, students need to earn 48 credits to graduate. Each semester course is worth one credit. The number of credits generated by any given high school indicates the organization’s output and productivity. In recent years the total number of course credits

earned by students in the high school program at Opus Magnum is nearly double the average number of credits earned in school years 2013-2016, as shown in Figure 3.

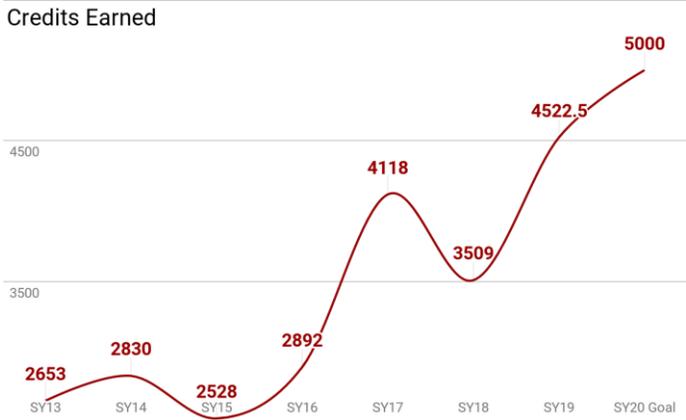


Figure 3. Opus Magnum Credits Earned by Year

In turn, Figure 4 shows that the high school graduation rate has skyrocketed by 130% when the average of school years 2013-2016 is compared to the average of years 2017-2019.

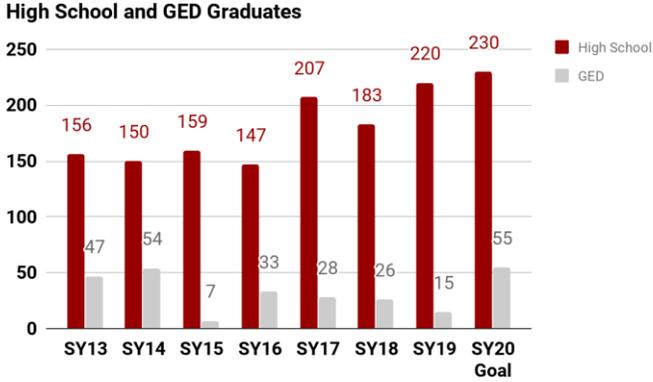


Figure 4. Opus Magnum High School and GED Graduates by Year

Though the percentage of students demonstrating a literacy grade level gain on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) dropped in 2019 as a result of the transition to a longer and more rigorous format, Opus Magnum is still the top performing program of its kind in Illinois (out of 79 total programs) in regard to TABE performance (DAISI, 2019). 58% of Opus

Magnum students grew more than one grade level in literacy in 2019 (see Figure 5). Hence, Opus Magnum made strides to close the achievement gap for Opus Magnum students.

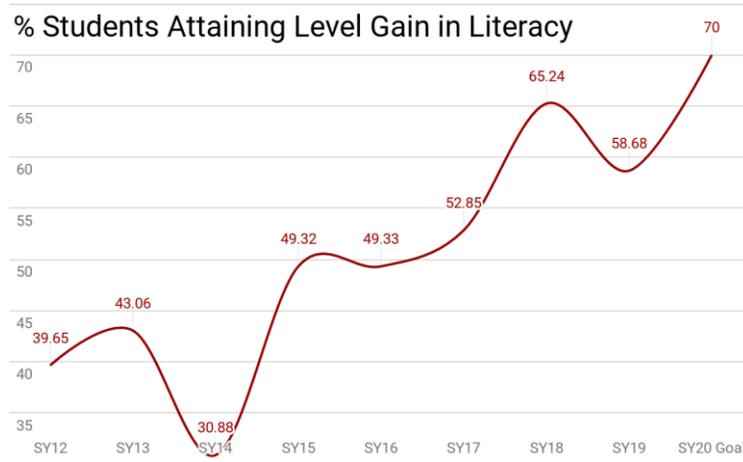


Figure 5. Opus Magnum Percentage of Students Attaining Level Gain in Literacy on TABE Test

Of the 42 schools surveyed on the district Employee Engagement and Satisfaction Survey, Opus Magnum had the highest overall employee engagement score (see Figure 6).

Overall Engagement

Responses to the nine engagement items were averaged to calculate an engagement score for each participant. To calculate the engagement score, each response option was assigned a numerical value:

- Strongly Disagree = 1
- Disagree = 2
- Neither Disagree or Agree = 3
- Agree = 4
- Strongly Agree = 5

Average scores were classified into three levels: Less Engaged (<3.5), Engaged (3.5 to 4.5), and Highly Engaged (>4.5).

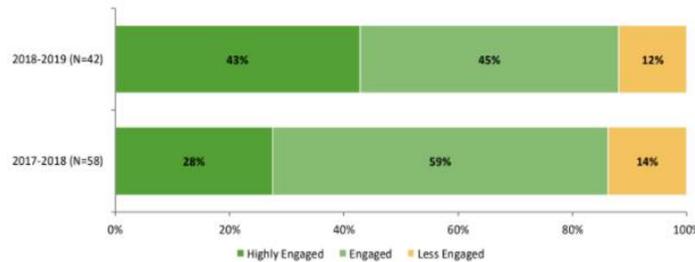


Figure 6. Opus Magnum Overall Engagement on the 2019 Employee Engagement and Satisfaction Survey

Finally, Opus Magnum is rated as ‘well organized’ on the 2019 Illinois 5 Essentials Report, the highest distinction attainable (see Figure 7). The 5Essentials is a mandated annual survey for all schools in Illinois. Students, teachers, and parents are administered the survey to rate schools in five distinct categories that research has shown to correlate to positive student academic performance.



Figure 7. Opus Magnum 2019 5Essentials Overview Score

The response rates for participants on the 2019 Opus Magnum 5Essentials Survey can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Response Rates on the 2019 5Essentials Survey at Opus Magnum

| Respondent | Response Rate | (Illinois) |
|------------|---------------|------------|
| Students | 75.5% | (85.7%) |
| Teachers | 83.3% | (80.0%) |
| Parents | 0.3% | (20.1%) |

A closer inspection of the indicators that comprise the five different essentials demonstrates specific successes at Opus Magnum.

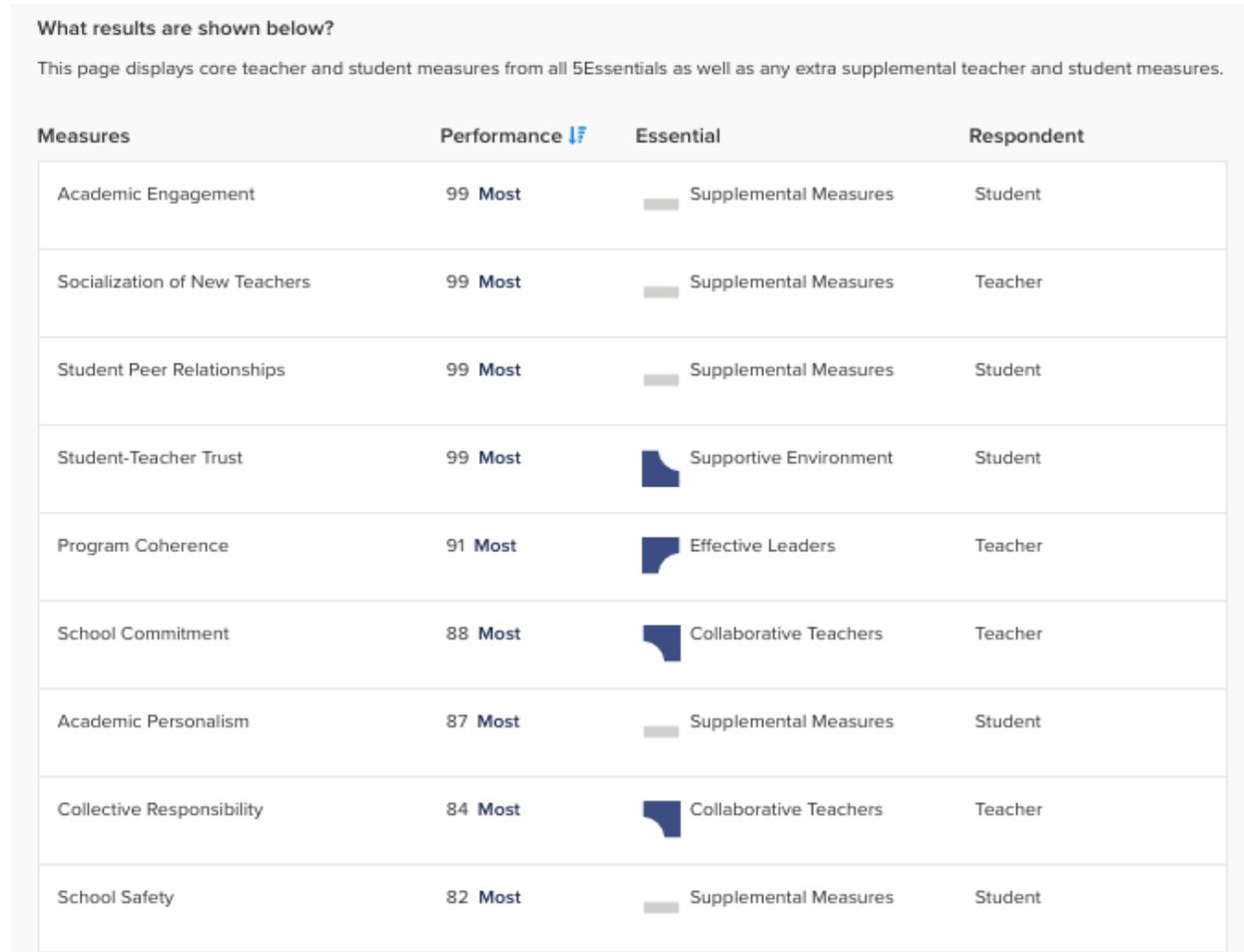


Figure 8. Highest Performing Indicators for Opus Magnum on the 2019 5Essentials Report

The 2019 5Essentials Report for Opus Magnum also indicates where there are opportunities for growth and continuous improvement (see Figure 9). This study will explore the lowest-scored indicators within each of the five Essentials. First, though, this study must establish a solid foundation of context and understanding regarding the Opus Magnum program.

What results are shown below?
 This page displays core teacher and student measures from all 5Essentials as well as any extra supplemental teacher and student measures.

| Measures | Performance  | Essential | Respondent |
|--|---|--|------------|
| Parent Supportiveness | 23 <i>Less</i> |  Supplemental Measures | Student |
| Grit | 27 <i>Less</i> |  Supplemental Measures | Student |
| Expectations for Postsecondary Education | 34 <i>Less</i> |  Supportive Environment | Teacher |
| Human & Social Resources in the Community | 36 <i>Less</i> |  Supplemental Measures | Student |
| Importance of High School for the Future | 37 <i>Less</i> |  Supplemental Measures | Student |
| Teacher-Parent Trust | 37 <i>Less</i> |  Involved Families | Teacher |
| Classroom Rigor | 38 <i>Less</i> |  Supplemental Measures | Student |
| Parent Involvement in School | 39 <i>Less</i> |  Involved Families | Teacher |
| Academic Press | 41 <i>Average</i> |  Ambitious Instruction | Student |
| Safety | 42 <i>Average</i> |  Supportive Environment | Student |
| Parent Influence on Decision Making in Schools | 43 <i>Average</i> |  Involved Families | Teacher |
| Teacher Influence | 43 <i>Average</i> |  Effective Leaders | Teacher |

Figure 9. Lowest Performing Indicators for Opus Magnum on the 2019 5Essentials Report

Organizational Structure of the School

The Opus Magnum instructional program for fiscal year 2020 and beyond is centered upon the goal that “Every Opus Magnum graduate will discover and pursue his or her full

postsecondary potential.” The researcher presented this goal as an example to the leadership team, and the team readily accepted it as aligning with their values and beliefs. The Opus Magnum Leadership team, comprised of the principal, assistant principal, content area department chairs, smaller learning community/academy leads, counselors, academy coach, and GED coordinator, monitors progress toward the school goal. In pursuit of this goal, Opus Magnum staff was not interested in creating aligned vision and mission statements. Staff reported that the consensus-building inherent to making such statements typically led to convoluted results.

Instead, the leadership team distilled our most essential practices with this goal into a theory of action (see Appendix A). Each leader on the leadership team has team-level goals that align with our school goal (see Appendix B).

At Opus Magnum, all department chairs lead their professional learning communities (PLCs) in meeting two specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely (SMART) content area goals that measure student attainment and growth on standards-based benchmarks for which all students take a pre- and a post-test (see Appendix C). PLCs meet weekly and engage in iterative, continuous improvement cycles using SMART goal data at the course, department, and teacher levels to plan, execute, reflect upon, and adjust individual standards-based instruction and curriculum (see Appendix D). The model of continuous improvement cycles utilized by PLCs at Opus Magnum is articulated through the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching (2007). This research-based, comprehensive framework ensures that teachers and support staff engage in best practices recognized by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). Moreover,

since this framework is the primary evaluation tool utilized for teachers and support staff at Opus Magnum, there is greater fidelity and familiarity to these identified best practices.

All high school courses align to standards-based curriculum maps that detail the content and skills that must be met to demonstrate proficiency in respective classes. These curriculum maps are designed at the district level through departmentalized curriculum leadership teams (CLTs). District-level content area specialists lead each team. The remaining membership comprises the PLC department leads at the five district high schools; thus, Opus Magnum is represented in each content area CLT. CLTs have also created pre- and post-tests aligned to each curriculum map to measure student proficiency. Traditional high schools in the district and many high schools nationwide have a final summative exam that is factored into a student's final semester grade. However, due to the more flexible and dynamic nature of Opus Magnum's model of instruction, the pre-test is used for formative adaptation of the curriculum for each student. Depending upon pre-test performance, students do not need to complete activities on content or skills in which they have demonstrated mastery. Instead, teachers create a personalized learning guide based on those areas in which each student exhibits a deficit or need. In this manner, Opus Magnum can differentiate the curriculum for each student and dramatically accelerate students' progress through the program.

Similarly, the GED program aligns with the Illinois Content Standards (ICS) for adult education. These standards are primarily delivered through Illinois' iPathways online platform. When students first enter the Opus Magnum GED program, they take a pre-test in each content area. The teachers adjust their instructional delivery according to identified deficits or areas of need.

To ensure that all students are provided with differentiation, Opus Magnum adheres to research-based Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) as the primary framework for all academic, attendance, and social and emotional supports and interventions delivered (see Appendix E). With input from all staff, the Opus Magnum leadership team created this framework. Through MTSS, students requiring progressively more intense supports are identified using student-level data aligned with Opus Magnum's SMART goals. In this manner, supports are efficiently organized and equitably provided to all students so that no student's needs are overlooked. PLCs ensure that differentiation is proactively delivered in the classroom by adapting content, learning activities, student work products, and the classroom environment according to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. To this end, PLC lead teachers have created a strategic action plan (SAP) that integrates differentiation practices into all classrooms. The SAP integrates student-centered and project-based learning experiences into the curriculum, the use of weekly individualized student goal setting coupled with weekly teacher-student feedback sessions, and research-based literacy strategies such as Evidence-Based Reading Instruction (EBRI), color-coding, and active annotation.

There are 50 certified staff at Opus Magnum, serving an average of 575 students. Certified staff and students are organized into smaller learning communities (SLCs) based on the academies of Opus Magnum. For school year 2020, each student at Opus Magnum is aligned to an SLC through students' selected Academies. Students in the Business and Production Academies comprise one SLC, students in the Health and Service Academies comprise another SLC, and students with freshman or sophomore-level credits comprise a third SLC. Students' placement within the Business, Production, Health, and Service academies is based upon the

career pathway students are interested in pursuing, as identified through the students' orientation to Opus Magnum. Both high school and GED students receive a tailored education based upon the selection of the following career pathways: business, graphic design and digital media production, studio arts, manufacturing, transportation technology, education and child development, law and public safety, personal and athletic training, premedical and biomedical sciences, and information technology. An engineering pathway has been introduced in school year 2020-2021. Core content delivered to high school and GED students integrates project-based learning experiences based on students' identified career pathways. Core Academy/SLC students primarily focus on attaining credits in their core content areas. Opus Magnum has twelve 'pathway days' built into the school calendar to further bridge students to their chosen career pathways. GED and high school students can complete their College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) on pathway days. Opus Magnum's CCRS benchmarks consist of the following: setting a postsecondary goal and creating a graduation plan and budget; conducting a postsecondary education research project; participating in a business site visit; writing a college essay or personal statement; submitting a college or trade school application; completing the Free Application for Free Student Aid (FAFSA) if applicable; submitting a scholarship application; writing a resume; participating in a mock interview; completing a job application; attending a university, college, or trade school visit; and completing a values and interests survey. Per Opus Magnum's goal, all GED and high school students complete these benchmarks before completing their respective programs of study. Besides serving as a vehicle for meeting these benchmarks, Opus Magnum Pathway Days are also how all students can gain certifications related to their career pathways. For example, all Science and Service Academies

students gain CPR and first aid certifications. Beyond the aforementioned career pathway, high school students follow a progressively more immersive, credit-bearing elective course sequence that bridges their high school education to real-world experiences with local businesses and professionals. Beginning in 2019-2020, high school and GED students can take articulated and dual credit classes at Opus Magnum in conjunction with the local community college in the Graphic Arts, Education and Child Development, Law and Public Safety, Manufacturing, and Business pathways. Also, all students have access to dual credit electives in Career Planning and Workplace Ethics and credit in transitional reading and math if needed. Students with adequate Accuplacer scores would also be able to take English 101 in their senior year for dual credit. Just under one hundred students completed community college coursework by the end of school year 2019-2020.

Besides career bridging and monitoring College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS), SLCs identify students needing more intensive academic, attendance, and social and emotional support. SLCs then monitor and evaluate the successful delivery of these supports through Opus Magnum's MTSS framework. Like PLCs, SLCs follow an iterative, continuous improvement cycle of intervention and support for students that has been evolving over the last four years. When GED and high school students are identified as needing increased academic support, they are provided additional remediation and instruction above and beyond the typical GED and high school instruction schedule. Teachers who are highly qualified in either English or mathematics provide remediation in a small group or one-on-one setting, depending on individual students' needs.

The MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Support) team, along with the work of all teachers and staff through Opus Magnum's three SLCs, contribute to the SMART Goal that “At the end of the year, 80% of students will attain on average three or more credits per quarter (proportional to time enrolled) leading to a total accumulation of 5,000 credits.” In essence, the MTSS team and SLCs would strive toward this ‘on-track’ goal through professional development on effective supports across all MTSS Tiers (see Appendix B). SLCs monitor the success of utilizing tiered supports to keep students on track in their biweekly student support meetings. They follow a protocol to review and disaggregate data at each tier to determine which supports are most effective and which need further development. On the alternate weeks that SLCs are not following the student intervention protocol, they are focused on building out Opus Magnum's career pathways with assistance from the College and Career team. In this regard, each career pathway team has a personalized professional development plan created with administration at professional development at the end of each year. Each plan is differentiated according to how each teacher fits it into and contributes to their identified career pathway.

Teachers that teach in a career pathway-specific course have professional development plans related to mapping their curricula. Non-pathway-specific teachers, such as core content teachers, with guidance from pathway teachers and pathway-specific community partners, incorporate the creation of pathway-specific project-based learning units into their core curriculum. Likewise, counselors and the academy coach have professional development plans for providing students opportunities to meet college and career readiness benchmarks tailored to students’ interests and chosen pathways. The success of these plans is monitored through the staff evaluation process.

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) is the primary organizational framework through which all services are delivered to ensure that students complete their program and graduate with a postsecondary plan tailored to their interests and chosen career pathway (see Appendix E). Opus Magnum's academic, attendance, social and emotional, and postsecondary goals are drilled down to the student level to determine the amount of support needed by each student in those respective domains.

Tier 1 academic supports primarily center around differentiated instruction. With input from all staff, Opus Magnum's leadership team has a strategic action plan (SAP) through which we can ensure differentiated instruction is provided uniformly across all classrooms. First, teachers use pre-test results to tailor individualized learning guides for students focused solely on content and skills in which the students have yet to demonstrate proficiency. Based on these learning guides, teachers then engage students in creating weekly goals aligned to their own learning plans. Each week, teachers follow up with students to evaluate whether students' performance aligns to their goals and provide students with specific feedback. All Opus Magnum teachers operate within a blended learning environment in which students can choose to engage in learning activities offered through an online platform or the more traditional use of textbooks and activity handouts. Finally, teachers have begun the process of embedding multiple real-world problems into each unit of study so that students have the opportunity to choose learning activities that are relevant to their interests and career pathways. A variety of additional supports exist at Tier 1 for attendance, social and emotional learning, and postsecondary plans. However, the overarching support method is providing teachers and staff with continued professional development for establishing positive mentor relationships with students. This emphasis on

relationships is embedded into the ethos of Opus Magnum, as exhibited by the fact that all staff, including the principal, is on a first-name basis with students. As the 2019 Illinois 5Essentials Report exemplifies, teacher-student trust, as reported by both teachers and students, scored 99 out of 99 possible points.

As with Tier 1, various supports are provided with progressive intensity at Tiers II and III. Approximately 30% of students fall below Opus Magnum's Tier 1 SMART Goal targets and receive Tier II support services. This additional support is primarily provided through embedding extra instructional time into the school schedule. High school students that need to meet growth goals or are behind pace on credits attend remedial instruction from certified teachers in either English language arts or math during lunch periods. GED students who are not meeting their goals receive the same remedial services either after their morning session or prior to their afternoon session, depending upon which session they are enrolled. Similarly, high school students that do not meet the average daily attendance goal of 90% are provided lunchtime tutoring with certified teachers in order to recoup lost instructional time. Tier III supports parallel those in Tier II but consist of increased instructional time and one-on-one support instead of small group support.

Through MTSS, 100% of students receive guidance services through an assigned counselor. Guidance counselors work with each student to provide career counseling and transition services. Likewise, 100% of Opus Magnum students receive social work services. At orientation each student takes a clinical social and emotional self-screener called the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. Student responses are organized and scored in the domains of misconduct, emotional needs, peer problems, hyperactivity, and prosocial behaviors. Students

exhibiting at-risk scores in these domains are provided targeted support through at least one of the following models: one-on-one and small group social and emotional support sessions, social-community support (i.e., connection to community social services), or other life support (such as rides to clinics, GED test sites, and welfare offices).

Additionally, Opus Magnum students receive transportation services through public school buses, while GED students receive city bus passes to attend Opus Magnum. Finally, Opus Magnum operates an infant lab for the children of its high school and GED students. The children in the daycare are aged six weeks to three years old. The parents that utilize the daycare also receive family literacy support and attend parenting classes hosted at Opus Magnum by outside agencies.

To ensure that Opus Magnum students have a seamless bridge to a meaningful career, Opus Magnum works closely with several key community partners through Opus Magnum's Academy Support Team (AST). Each AST member connects staff and students with community resources in their respective career field. Members of Opus Magnum's AST provide career-pathway-specific curriculum guidance to teachers through delivering skills, tools, and knowledge needed to succeed in their respective careers so teachers can incorporate these needs into their instruction. Through our AST, in and out-of-school opportunities are garnered for both teachers and students to learn and experience the purpose of their work and the various capital/human resource needs required for their respective operations. ASTs work with teachers to evaluate their teaching resources (equipment, materials, facilities, guest speakers, etc.) and ensure all students and teachers have consistent district and community support. Additionally, AST members participate in the preparation and facilitation of mock interviews for students, mentor

students, and assist students with class presentations and various projects. Opus Magnum's AST meets every month. The attendees of these meetings include community partners working within our career pathway domains, staff, students, and other cultural and postsecondary community members vital to bridging postsecondary success for Opus Magnum students. The teams are guided through an agenda, provide recommendations, make decisions, identify team members to continue progress on projects, and ultimately strive to ensure that Opus Magnum has meaningful community connections to meet our goal of bridging 100% of students to a meaningful college and career trajectory.

Next Steps for School Improvement

The evolution of the Opus Magnum goal of having all graduates discover and pursue their full postsecondary potential is best understood through an anecdote of a hot dog eating competition. In the book *Think Like a Freak*, authors Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner (2015) spend a chapter exploring why problem definition is so critical to attaining success. This is primarily done through the anecdote of Takeru Kobayashi and his success in the annual Nathan's Famous Fourth of July International Hot Dog Eating Contest. Prior to Kobayashi's entry in the contest, the record for the most hot dogs eaten in the allotted 12 minutes was 25 and one-eighths hot dogs. In his first go at it, Kobayashi effectively doubled the record with 50 dogs eaten (Dubner, & Levitt, 2015). When interviewed and asked how he could do so well, Kobayashi explained that he never paid attention to the previous record. He knew it was illegitimate because everyone else incorrectly defined the problem to be solved. Essentially, they were asking, "How can I eat the most hotdogs in 12 minutes?" Kobayashi tweaked the problem to ask, "How can I eat just one hot dog faster?" From this perspective, Kobayashi began to break

down the process of eating one hot dog faster. Through rigorous and scientific experimentation, he realized he could, for example, separate the bun from the dog, smash the bun, and dip the bun in water to speed up the process (Dubner, & Levitt, 2015).

The first illuminating takeaway from Kobayashi's success for the authors was that only by redefining problems can one discover a new set of solutions. The second tangential lesson was that how one defines a problem necessarily limits the success that can be achieved. These two lessons are paramount to the continuous improvement efforts at Opus Magnum High School. Their import cannot be undervalued with regard to the context they provide for the problem statement within this study. Opus Magnum has recently redefined the problem it seeks to solve for students so that a more ambitious set of solutions can be realized. The comprehensive reform required to attain these new solutions requires a deeper understanding of the factors that underlie high school continuous improvement efforts.

Viewed according to accountability measures, the primary focus of the Illinois public school system is to produce high school graduates. Stated otherwise, increasing the number of graduates is the primary problem to be solved in public education. This focus is driven home by the fact that 50% of a high school's score on the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) school report card is based solely on a school's graduation rate (see Appendix F). Whether or not students are proficient in content is only 20% of a school's score. If high schools align their time and effort according to the weights of these metrics, then much less emphasis is devoted to ensuring students' postsecondary success. Producing more high school graduates and ensuring college and career-ready graduates are two different problems. At Opus Magnum, the belief is that ensuring that high school graduates are college and career ready is the problem that will

produce a greater return on investment. This belief is the bedrock of all continuous improvement efforts at Opus Magnum. Opus Magnum has shifted its focus away from simply increasing its graduates and is instead redefining its problem to be solved. Opus Magnum is now ensuring that each Opus Magnum graduate is equipped to pursue their full postsecondary college and career potential.

Opus Magnum has garnered a great deal of attention in the last couple of years for its dramatic increase in its graduates. It has been visited by many local, state, and national level politicians so that they could learn how Opus Magnum achieved its successes. Opus Magnum now has many community partners that have invested significant time and money into its program.

Whereas the community once had the knee-jerk perception that Opus Magnum was the out-of-control school where the bad kids went, akin to Eastside High School in the movie *Lean on Me*, the community is now asking if its success can be replicated. Unfortunately, this revised perception of Opus Magnum hinges upon the traditionally defined problem of high school graduation rates. However, statistically speaking, if all Magnum Opus does is to ensure more students walk across the stage in May to receive their diplomas, then all that is accomplished is that Magnum Opus students would be less poor than if they had not attained their high school diplomas. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the graduates of Opus Magnum would make, on average, \$730 weekly compared to \$553 were they not to complete high school (see Appendix G). That \$730 is still substantially below the median household income of \$932 and is not a livable wage. These statistics are exacerbated for the population of students served at Opus Magnum. Many students who come to Magnum have not experienced success in the

traditional public school system. These students come to Magnum and experience success for the very first time. Once they get a taste of this success, they have blinders on and only care about getting their diploma. For many, simply walking across the stage at commencement represents a monumental milestone and the ability to triumph over significant adversity and hardship. In the estimation of these students, they have made it. But the sad reality is that they would most likely continue to struggle and face despair if they do nothing else in their educational career. In this context, it becomes clear that the problem addressed by public education, as defined by simply increasing the number of high school graduates, does not meet the needs of the students served. If you are less poor, you are still poor, and being poor is self-evidently not a good place to be.

In my first two years as the principal at Opus Magnum, I was working under the perception that we were great, especially considering that we increased our graduates by 30% in just two years. However, in my third year, I began recognizing how this belief was patently wrong. In my third year, I began to run into Magnum graduates in the community. Many more would come back to Magnum to visit other staff or me. In these interactions, it was rare to encounter a student that had meaningful postsecondary outcomes. Most were toiling away at minimum-wage jobs with no growth potential. Worse yet, I would, from time to time, learn from staff or local media that Magnum graduates had been arrested and charged with various crimes. In this third year, I spent a great deal of time contemplating how we at Magnum could improve postsecondary outcomes for our graduates. Though I could not articulate it, I began to recognize that we were limiting our students' chances at success by defining high school graduation as the critical problem facing our students. I slowly began to formulate a plan to make sure our graduates either gained meaningful employment or attained an associate's degree. I spoke with

district leaders and learned that a committee had been recently formed, comprised of representatives from the district and representatives of our local community college, to plan a response to recent dual credit legislation. I then selfishly inserted myself on the committee to pilot as many community college courses and certificates as possible. Now Opus Magnum is offering a total of 21 community college courses on our campus, taught by Opus Magnum staff, and at no cost to students.

The Opus Magnum school goal has grown far beyond increasing our number of graduates. Now, the goal is, "Every Opus Magnum student will discover and pursue his or her full postsecondary potential." This new goal is cherry-picked (with a minor tweak) from a school where I was formerly an administrator.

At Opus Magnum, the aspiration is that students are not just high school graduates but also already sophomores in college. Several community sponsors work closely with staff to create an Opus Magnum endowment called Opus Magnum Promise. The Opus Magnum goal is to provide a full one-year scholarship to every student that graduates the high school program having attained enough college credits to be a sophomore in college. The school effectively want to ensure that a significant portion of students is guaranteed an associate's degree. Each year we hope to grow this population of students.

At the same time, we are working on expanding our daycare and early childhood programming to offer subsidized daycare for district employees. We hope to hire students from our education pathway, many of them teen parents who have earned their early childhood educator certificate through our on-campus dual credit certification program. In this manner,

these students have meaningful employment with free daycare, if needed, to continue toward higher-level certifications and degrees in the field of education.

The problem is no longer about producing graduates. Now the problem is ensuring that Opus Magnum graduates have meaningful postsecondary opportunities that afford them a vastly improved quality of life. Of course, now that we have redefined our problem, the scope of the solution is much broader and much more ambitious. We are trying to expand our locus of control far beyond a high school diploma.

It would be easy for staff to regress to the norm of focusing on high school diplomas, especially since we are so good at aiding students in attaining them. High school graduation is an easily defined metric, whereas improving postsecondary outcomes is, at the same time, more abstract and more student specific. Staff could easily defer responsibility for postsecondary outcomes for students to students themselves, their parents, the community, or otherwise.

Reviewing the lowest performing subscores on each of the 5Essentials five indicators makes the possibility of regression palpable. Under the indicator of Effective Leadership, the lowest subset score is Teacher Influence. It has been stagnant at ‘average’ for several years despite being one of the school’s primary action items in each of the last four years. Under Ambitious Instruction, the subscore for Academic Press is ‘average’ and has gone down each of the previous two years. Students generally report that they do not feel teachers push them to do their best. Unsurprisingly, Parent Involvement is the lowest of the five indicators overall. Students and counselors frequently report that a lack of parent involvement in students’ education is a primary contributing factor to students seeking an alternative route to earning their high school diploma at Opus Magnum. Here, two of the three subset scores received the lowest

possible rating: parent involvement and teacher-parent trust. The last indicator, Supportive Environment, is the most significant cause for concern if Magnum's goal is to ensure every graduate discovers and pursues their full postsecondary potential. The subset indicator Expectations for Postsecondary Education received the lowest score of any of the twenty indicators that feed into the score for Supportive Environment. In order to sustain continuous improvement efforts related to students' postsecondary outcomes, it is necessary to reflect upon and understand the factors that influence these low scores.

Problem Statement

Though school principals often have a great deal of data at their disposal, there is little structure or guidance for interpreting this data in a comprehensive and balanced fashion that leads to sustained continuous improvement. The process of creating change from data is often unstructured. This study seeks to solve this problem by leveraging Bolman and Deal's 4-frame model of organizational learning theories to better understand the scores across the five indicators of success on the 5Essentials Survey. By exploring school continuous improvement efforts through multiple lenses of interpretation, each of which emphasizes different organizational attributes, it may be possible to deepen one's understanding of the factors that influence continuous improvement efforts so that students' postsecondary outcomes are thereby improved.

As with all humankind, school administrators understand and interpret the world around them through their own individual worldviews. Each individual's unique knowledge and experience forms the basis for their worldview. As school administrators reflect upon their work and make efforts to affect continuous improvement, their array of potential solutions is

necessarily limited by their constructivist understanding of continuous improvement efforts. However, if one is aware of their predispositions in relation to different theories of organizational learning, one can then better understand the factors that influence continuous improvement. Notably, one can recognize which learning theories comport with their worldview and which learning theories may not be relied upon when interpreting the world around oneself. By identifying where, one has deficit learning theories in their worldview, the school administrator can then be more intentional in applying the attributes of those deficit learning theories when analyzing continuous improvement efforts. With this newfound knowledge, the school administrator can position themselves to expand their perception of continuous improvement efforts. Thereby, one can have a more robust and balanced understanding of how to define continuous improvement problems. In turn, the school administrator can illuminate a more well-rounded approach to continuous improvement that opens up a range of possible solutions that otherwise may not have been considered.

Purpose of the Study

As an education practitioner, this self-study aims to maximize and sustain solid postsecondary outcomes for students. The specific purpose of this self-study is to apply Bolman and Deal's 4-frame model of organizational learning theories to areas of concern in relation to the school's continuous improvement efforts to better understand the explicit and implicit forces that drive the low performance in these areas of concern. This study seeks to expand the researcher's perceptions and understanding of the factors influencing targeted reform efforts to identify a more informed, balanced, and comprehensive approach to continuous improvement for targeted areas.

As previously stated, the problem of getting students to discover and pursue their full postsecondary potential is simultaneously abstract and specific. It is difficult to broadly define or measure such success on the whole. At the same time, it is also readily discernible at the individual graduate's level. It is challenging to encapsulate all the effort exuded toward such a goal. But outcomes are more readily ascertained when it comes to determining whether a graduate's postsecondary trajectory aligns with their interest and potential. Moreover, such a goal extends far beyond the limits set in traditional public-school policy and practice. Opus Magnum is attempting to expand its locus of control far beyond what is historically expected of a public high school. Given the ambitious vision of extending the school's influence beyond high school graduation, school leadership must have a deep understanding of reform efforts to combat any regression to the mean. As the former principal of Opus Magnum and current Chief of Schools for the district, I do not want a return to the notion that the school is solely responsible for producing high school graduates. Instead, I want Opus Magnum to be now committed to cultivating students that are college and career ready upon graduation.

The best means to fight regression and ensure an ambitious approach toward Opus Magnum's goal is to embed continuous improvement into the ethos of the school. How we 'do' school at Opus Magnum must perfectly align with our goal. Thus, this study aims to frame and reflect upon practices at Opus Magnum by categorizing our efforts toward meaningful postsecondary outcomes under the Illinois 5Essentials Survey. Per the Survey's website,

The 5Essentials were developed by the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute in partnership with Chicago Public Schools. Past research has shown that schools strong

on at least three of the five essentials are 10 times more likely to improve student learning than schools weak on three or more of the five essentials (5Essentials, 2020).

The five essentials are Effective Leadership, Ambitious Instruction, Supportive Environment, Collaborative Teachers, and Parental Involvement.

The primary purpose of this study is to leverage self-study methodology to better understand the factors that influence Magnum's areas of concern as identified by the 5Essentials as they relate to Magnum's goal that every graduate discovers and pursue their full postsecondary potential. To have a balanced approach that limits biases while expanding the perspective on continuous improvement, this study applies Bolman and Deal's 4-frame model of organizational learning theories to each of the identified low-performing 5Essential indicators.

In their seminal work *Reframing Organizations*, Bolman and Deal (2017) identify and apply four different organizational learning lenses—Structural, Human Capital, Political, and Symbolic—to organizations to better understand obstacles and barriers to achieving goals. By applying these lenses to the 5Essentials of school improvement, I have a robust means to gather evidence regarding the quality and endurance of our school practices that lead toward our goal. Moreover, by recognizing my inclinations regarding the structural, human capital, political, and symbolic lenses, I hope to position myself to better identify and understand the factors that I would typically overlook in continuous improvement practices. Said otherwise, I hope to overcome the limits of my worldview by utilizing lenses that are not fully integrated or acknowledged by my worldview. For example, no clear policy or practice leads to teachers having dramatically low expectations for our students' postsecondary education. There is a myriad of factors that influence this low expectation. This study seeks to understand those

contributing factors and their relationship to the expectation through multiple lenses of organizational learning theory. Ultimately, I hope to gain a balanced understanding of existing deficits and potential solutions by reviewing the lowest-performing scores on the 5Essentials related to students' postsecondary outcomes.

The one Essential that I have the most significant impact on is Effective Leadership. It stands to reason that this would be the Essential that could be impacted the most by my departure from Opus Magnum as its principal. Over the course of researching and writing for this study, I moved into the role of Chief of Schools, overseeing the support and supervision for all forty-four schools in the district. Thus, my focus on developing effective school leadership has evolved beyond the scope of my own effectiveness to that of all principals in the district. By examining the lowest subscore area in Effective Leadership, teacher influence, and evaluating the strength and vitality of the work done to cultivate teacher influence from structural, political, human capital and symbolic lenses, I can better identify the full array of explicit and subtle factors that affect teacher influence. In turn, I have a deeper and more balanced understanding of how principals may influence the factors that shape teacher influence. I can thereby identify the next steps to continually improve teacher influence such that it is ingrained into the school's ethos. Moreover, by examining the body of work entailed by teacher influence through multiple lenses, I can seek to negate my cognitive or confirmation biases on the topic. This process is reiterated with the lowest subset scores within the other four Essentials. In turn, I can translate this self-study and the self-knowledge gained into potential professional learning opportunities for district school administrators.

Significance of the Study

This study adds to the body of literature surrounding continuous improvement practices by comprehensively framing school continuous improvement efforts through the 5Essentials and then evaluating the efficacy and sustainability of those efforts through a balance of organizational learning theories as outlined by Bolman and Deal's 4-frame model. As such, this study creates a concrete blueprint for school leaders seeking to understand how to improve and sustain high student outcomes. Having such a comprehensive blueprint could be critical to a principal's success, given the role's complex, fluid, and demanding nature.

Initiating and sustaining comprehensive school reform is a daunting task for school leaders. A primary obstacle is the sheer number of regulations and policies that impact public schools. The Race to the Top Fund is the origin of many of these current policies and regulations. Following in the footsteps of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESSA) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB), President Barack Obama's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 is one of the federal government's most recent attempts to raise the academic achievement of students across the United States of America. Race to the Top (RttT), a competitive grant program created to encourage state-level educational reform, represents the most significant educational legislation included in the ARRA. The reforms and policy decisions that have emanated from Race to the Top have been far-reaching, with an immediate and direct impact on students and educators in various ways.

The executive summary of RttT states that there are four core areas that the bill is designed to address:

- Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy.
- Building data systems that measure student growth and success and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction.
- Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and
- Turning around our lowest-achieving schools. (RttT Executive Summary, 2009)

All 50 states, including Illinois, have been awarded over \$4.1 billion through three phases of state applications. Though the reauthorization of ESSA in 2015 allowed states greater flexibility in meeting the RttT award requirements, the same core initiatives and accountability measures are in place.

Though the intent of all of this recent federal legislation was to invoke comprehensive and coherent educational reform, once the policies trickle down to the state, then the district, and finally the school level, they are often viewed in isolation from each other. Rather than complement each other, many of the reforms exist in a vacuum, seemingly operating in silos.

As such, many educators feel deluged with a disparate number of changes. As chronicled in the annual MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, teacher job satisfaction plummeted in the wake of RttT, from 62% of teachers reporting job satisfaction in 2008 to just 39% in 2012 (MetLife survey, 2012). Similarly, in the same study, three out of four principals reported that the job had become “too complex,” with approximately one-third of principals stating that they would leave the profession within the next five years (MetLife survey, 2012).

The responsibilities faced by school administrators are markedly more complex than those faced by administrators in other contexts (Goldring & Greenfield, 2002). As former U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan explained, “Principals run multi-million-dollar budgets, they hire, train, and manage scores of people, and the best of them are also instructional leaders who are trained in classroom observation” (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). As leadership at various levels changes positions, different reforms get emphasized or devalued. Consequently, the status quo has become the reinvention of the wheel every couple of years; change is a constant (Goldring & Greenfield, 2002). Furthermore, while the pendulum of reforms swings in one direction or the other, little is ever taken off the proverbial plate of school administrators. Hence, there is little desire from school leaders or teachers to either develop their capacity or invest in the future of their schools.

Packaging seemingly divergent school reform efforts in the 5Essentials aids principals and staff in recognizing the interconnectedness and complementary nature of these myriad improvement efforts. Once Opus Magnum and other schools have the many reforms organized into these buckets of work, Bolman and Deal’s four organizational learning lenses allows school leaders to better identify and understand the factors that influence these improvement efforts in order to evaluate the efficacy and sustainability of current efforts. By applying each lens, school leaders can identify the next steps and action items to sustain their continuous improvement efforts. These next steps have a higher degree of efficacy and sustainability because they are informed by the balance of each lens’ perspective. A framework for applying organizational learning theories to continuous improvement efforts would readily compliment any district’s strategic plan for administrator development regardless of the district’s school improvement foci.

Moreover, the aggregate of identified organizational learning gaps would serve as valuable information for customizing professional development plans on the whole and for individual leaders.

Methodology Overview

The methodology for this research is that of self-study action research. The primary purpose of action research is to leverage the study as a “practical tool for developing solutions to problems experienced by stakeholders in context” (Stringer, 2014, p. 10). Through this self-study action research, I gain greater insight into how much I rely upon or disregard various organizational learning theories as they apply to continuous improvement efforts. With a more comprehensive understanding of how the different organizational learning theories influence my worldview and subsequent decision-making, I am better positioned to take a more balanced approach to apply the lenses to continuous improvement efforts. By knowing which lenses may be deficit areas in how I approach reform, I can then more purposefully reflect upon and apply those lenses to continuous improvement efforts to better conceptualize all of the factors and actions that influence those reform efforts. Ultimately, this self-study methodology allows me to begin planning to embed these continuous improvement efforts into the organization's ethos so that they remain well after I depart from Opus Magnum. At the risk of hyperbole, this research helps me leave a legacy of sustained and continued growth in students’ postsecondary outcomes at Opus Magnum High School.

The 5Essentials Survey is the primary way I categorize my journal entries responding to guiding questions regarding Opus Magnum. I apply Bolman and Deal’s (2016) 4-frame model of learning theories for the lowest indicators within each Essential. Before applying the lenses to

the 5Essentials indicators, I take Bolman and Deal's online Leadership Orientation Self-Assessment. This online battery of questions provides me with percentile scores in each of the four lenses in relation to all other subjects that have taken the self-assessment. Thus, I know which lens or lenses most closely comport with my worldview and which lens or lenses I overlook or neglect relative to other organizational leaders. My journaling and subsequent coding is tailored to these results. This self-assessment method guides me to step out of my worldview to understand how I rely upon or disregard different learning theories in my leadership. This knowledge allows me to reflect more deeply upon the possible factors influencing the identified areas of growth on the 5Essentials. I cannot implement continuous improvement if I do not fully understand the problem. Finally, the insights gleaned from the application of the lenses permits me to identify possible next steps to improve the efficacy and sustainability of Magnum's continuous improvement endeavors.

Conceptual Frameworks

Two conceptual frameworks are being merged in this study. The first framework is that of continuous improvement. The concept of continuous improvement originated in the healthcare, manufacturing, and technology fields (Park et al., 2013). In its simplest form, continuous improvement can be considered a process or approach to solving problems that improves outcomes over time.

Its implementation can be measured by three organizational characteristics: (1) the frequency of quality improvement work; (2) the depth and extent of its integration at different levels of the organization; and (3) the extent of contextualization within a system of work processes. (Park et al., 2013)

The approaches toward continuous improvement are as varied as the contexts and problems being addressed. This is especially true in the field of education. Furthermore, while the concept has become ubiquitous across education, its implementation has produced uneven results. According to Mark Elgart, the president and CEO of AdvancED, a school accreditation group that studies school improvement, continuous improvement is built into many school improvement plans. However, few understand how to actually unpack it (Sparks, 2021). In my experience, this sentiment has led many colleagues to attach a negative connotation to the catchphrase. However, when implemented properly and with fidelity, continuous improvement can lead to dramatic and positive outcomes when implemented properly and with fidelity.

The continuous improvement framework that will be utilized in this study is the 5Essentials. The 5Essentials is the outgrowth of many years of research on school improvement efforts in Chicago Public Schools. It is a comprehensive continuous improvement tool that allows researchers and educators to readily identify areas for improvement directly tied to student learning outcomes.

The second conceptual framework utilized in this study is Lee G. Bolman and Terrance E. Deal's (2017) 4-model framework for making sense of organizations from their seminal work *Reframing Organizations*. Bolman and Deal provide four different organizational learning lenses that allow one to view a problem from multiple angles to develop "alternative diagnoses and strategies." These four frames are the Structural, the Human Resource, the Political, and the Symbolic. Supporting their 4-frame model, Bolman and Deal cite Kruger and Dunning's research on cognitive bias. Kruger and Dunning's research demonstrates that the inability of people to recognize their lack of competence on a topic inflates their perceived performance

concerning the topic. If one does not know what he or she does not know, then one is inclined to think he or she knows more about any given topic. This dilemma is often coupled with the idea that when we do not know what to do, we do more of what we know (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The four-frame model combats one's ignorance and bias by creating various lenses through which problems and facts can be organized. As put by Astley and Van de Ven (1983), "It is the interplay between different perspectives that helps one gain a more comprehensive understanding of organizational life, since any one school of thought invariably offers only a partial account of reality" (p. 1). Through reflecting upon continuous improvement efforts at Magnum Opus through the four lenses, particularly deficit lenses, the researcher aims to better conceptualize and understand factors that influence those efforts.

Limitations and Bias

The primary limitation of this study is its potential inability to be generalized by other practitioners or applied to other settings. There is an inherent bias in the self-study methodology. It lacks peer review and cannot easily be triangulated with outside research. Constructivist philosophers such as Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, or Jean Dewey would argue that a self-study researcher constructs knowledge for oneself which informs his or her individual worldview. Only the researcher holds this unique worldview that informs how he or she interprets the world. Consequently, the findings and conclusions of this self-study would be limited in their ability to be extrapolated to other practitioners or contexts. However, through applying Bolman and Deal's (2017) 4-frame model of organizational learning theories to this self-study, I am forced to view the body of work that has occurred at Opus Magnum under my leadership from multiple perspectives. In this manner, I must reflect beyond the bounds of my worldview to see a larger

perspective of the work. Hence, the 4-frame model charges me to investigate my biases and can provide other school leaders with a potential process to use in their contexts.

Key Terms

Key terms are the terms found throughout this study that are central to the context and research (Calabrese, 2012). The definitions for key terms used throughout this self-study follow.

4-Frame Model: The 4-frame model is a framework for viewing and understanding organizations and their outcomes from four distinct yet complementary organizational learning theories. The authors Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal (2017) present this model in their book *Reframing Organizations*. The 4-frame model is designed to be applied by organizational leaders that seek to think about their organizations from more than one angle to develop alternative diagnoses and strategies for improvement. The four frames are the structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. When applied to problems in unison, they aid leaders in painting a more comprehensive picture of the factors influencing outcomes.

5Essentials: 5Essentials is an evidence-based system designed to drive improvement in schools nationwide—it reliably measures changes in a school organization through the 5Essentials Survey and provides individualized, actionable reports for each school. The 5Essentials system is based on more than 20 years of research by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research on five components found to be critical for school success:

- **Effective Leaders:** The principal works with teachers to implement a clear and strategic vision for school success.
- **Collaborative Teachers:** Teachers collaborate to promote professional growth.

- **Involved Families:** The entire school staff builds strong relationships with families and communities to support learning.
- **Supportive Environment:** The school is safe and orderly. Teachers have high expectations for students and support students to realize their goals. Classmates also support one another.
- **Ambitious Instruction:** Classes are academically demanding and engage students by emphasizing the application of knowledge. (5-essential.org, as retrieved from <http://help.5-essentials.org/customer/en/portal/articles/780471-illinois-5essentials-faqs>)

Academy Pathways: High school program model in which students are organized into smaller learning communities called Academies. Within the Academies, students can choose from career pathways that allow them to explore career areas of interest further. Each pathway is a three-course sequence beginning in a student's sophomore year that provides real-world experiences with local businesses and professionals, linking schoolwork and the workplace. Students learn math, science, English, and social science but apply their academic learning to their chosen career pathway (rps205.com, as retrieved from <https://www3.rps205.com/academies/Pages/default.aspx>)

Competency-Based Education: Competency-based education is an education delivery model that provides flexibility in how credit can be earned or awarded and provides students with personalized learning opportunities. These strategies include online and blended learning, dual enrollment and early college credit opportunities, project-based and community-based

learning, and credit recovery (www.ed.gov, as retrieved from <https://www.ed.gov/oii-news/competency-based-learning-or-personalized-learning>).

Continuous Improvement: Continuous improvement, sometimes called continual improvement, is the ongoing improvement of products, services or processes through incremental and breakthrough improvements. These efforts can seek "incremental" improvement over time or "breakthrough" improvement all at once (American Society for Quality, as retrieved from <https://asq.org/quality-resources/continuous-improvement>).

Dual Credit: Dual credit refers to students completing a single course to earn academic credits that are recognized by two or more institutions, typically a high school and an institution of higher learning (edglossary.org, as retrieved from <https://www.edglossary.org/dual-enrollment/>).

Employee Engagement and Satisfaction Survey: The Employee Engagement and Satisfaction Survey is an annual survey administered in Opus Magnum's district to certified staff. The survey's design and reporting are managed by the company K12 Insight. Per the Project Overview of the Opus Magnum report, there are three goals of the survey: measure the level of engagement of employees; classify employees as highly engaged, engaged, or less engaged, and to identify areas where employee engagement can be improved (K12Insight 2019, retrieved from Employee Engagement Survey: Results School Year 2019-2020).

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS): MTSS is an instructional framework that includes the universal screening of all students, multiple tiers of instruction and support services, and an integrated data collection and assessment system to inform decisions at each tier of

instruction. The framework can be used for literacy, math, or positive behavior supports (www.keystoliteracy.com, as retrieved from <https://keystoliteracy.com/blog/what-is-mtss/>).

Professional Learning Community (PLC): A group of educators that meets regularly, shares expertise, and works collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students. The term is also applied to schools or teaching faculties that use small-group collaboration as a form of professional development (edglossary.org, as retrieved from <https://www.edglossary.org/professional-learning-community/>).

Project-Based Learning (PBL): In PBL, students work on a project over an extended period of time—from a week up to a semester—that engages them in solving a real-world problem or answering a complex question. They demonstrate their knowledge and skills by creating a public product or presentation for a real audience (www.pblworks.org, as retrieved from <https://www.pblworks.org/what-is-pbl>).

Smaller Learning Community (SLC): SLCs include structures such as freshman academies, multi-grade academies organized around career interests or other themes, "houses" in which small groups of students remain together throughout high school, and autonomous schools-within-a-school, as well as personalization strategies, such as student advisories, family advocate systems, and mentoring programs (www.ed.gov, as retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/slcp/index.html>).

SMART Goal: SMART is an acronym that helps individuals write meaningful and measurable goals. The letters of the acronym stand for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-focused, and Time-bound. Although SMART goals can be used in a variety of settings (business, personal use, etc.), they are often used in school settings for students

([www.study.com](https://www.study.com/academy/lesson/smart-goals-for-students-definition-and-examples.html), as retrieved from <https://www.study.com/academy/lesson/smart-goals-for-students-definition-and-examples.html>).

Theory of Action: A theory of action is a tool implemented by school leaders to first conceptualize the problem to be solved by a district or school. Once the problem is articulated, leaders identify the specific, research-based actions they intend to take to solve the problem and thereby improve teaching and learning (<http://info.k-12leadership.org/>, as retrieved from <http://info.k-12leadership.org/hubfs/documents/tools/creating-a-theory-of-action.pdf?hsCtaTracking=e0aced7d-1f5d-4b18-a4f5-f05b0811264e%7Cdde22d86-27c3-4b1b-8d62-3e6c9977c307>).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This self-study applies Bolman and Deal's 4-frame model of organizational learning theories to areas of concern in relation to Opus Magnum's continuous improvement efforts. Through this self-study I seek to better understand how my leadership influences and shapes continuous improvement endeavors through the application of learning theories that are not prominent fixtures of my leadership worldview. A review of the literature that supports this study begins with an overview of self-study methodology. Next, a broad context is laid for the concept of continuous improvement. The focus on continuous improvement is then narrowed to the Illinois 5Essentials Survey, a continuous improvement tool utilized by all public schools in Illinois. The literature review concludes with an examination of organizational learning theories, specifically the learning theories embedded in Bolman and Deal's (2017) 4-frame model. The categories of learning theories within the 4-frame model are the structural lens, the political lens, the symbolic lens, and the human resource lens. Finally, this study pays particular attention to human resource learning theory literature cited by Bolman and Deal since the application of this study's methodology reveals that this domain is less prevalent in my leadership worldview.

Action Research and Self-Study Methodology

The methodology for this research is that of self-study action research. The primary purpose of action research is to leverage the study as a “practical tool for developing solutions to problems experienced by stakeholders in context” (Stringer, 2014, p. 10). Qualitative research methods such as case studies gained prominence in the late 1960s (Herr & Anderson, 2015). This methodology closely resembled practitioners' previous work and allowed them to implement more systemic approaches to studying their practices. The paradigm shift toward more qualitative methodologies gained further traction as research on school reform efforts reported that school-based reform efforts were more likely to be successful (Herr & Anderson, citing Lieberman & Miller, 1984, p. 24). Action research posits that generalized solutions or programs do not fit all contexts (Stringer, 2014). Rather, inquiry should be focused on finding “an appropriate solution for the particular dynamics at work in a local situation” (p. 6). Accordingly, action research “provides the means to systematically investigate and design more effective solutions to the complex array of issues at work in any social setting” (p. 6). As such, self-study methodology centers upon improvement at both the personal and professional levels (Lassonde et al., 2009)

A basic routine for action research related to a specified issue is two parts. First, the research must look into the problem through describing the situation and gathering relevant information (Stringer, 2014). Next, the researcher will think about the problem in light of the context. The researcher will explore and analyze what is happening. Moreover, the researcher will interpret and explain, theorizing how and why things are the way that they are.

Action research and self-study methodology diverge from traditional research as the role of the researcher is dramatically different. In other research methodologies, the researcher attempts to be as unobtrusive as possible to avoid influencing the outcomes of their investigation (Stringer, 2014). However, in action research, the researcher actively participates in the research process. In self-study methodology, the researcher is actually the focus of the research. The researcher focuses on processes and the way they influence how things get done.

Continuous Improvement

Over the last several years, educational leaders have adopted and utilized practices that parallel private sector efforts regarding organizational improvement (Evans et al., 2012). At the forefront of these practices is the concept of continuous improvement. In fact, continuous improvement has become the new buzzword in the field of education. There is now a significant body of research on the topic. Through continuous improvement can take many forms, and some core commonalities exist. First, the work done through continuous improvement is regular and constant (Park et al., 2013). Second, this work is incorporated into the day-to-day work of individuals within the organization. Additionally, the problems of practice addressed through continuous improvement are recognized as the products and outputs of the system's design.

At the outset of embedding a continuous improvement initiative into an organization's ethos, there are three primary questions that need to be asked: (1) What is the specific problem to be solved, (2) What change might be introduced, and (3) how will improvement be measured? (Bryk et al., 2015, p. 9). The overarching problem to be solved here is improving students' postsecondary outcomes. Through analyzing 5Essentials data, low-performing indicators related to this goal can be readily identified. Then, by applying Bolman and Deal's (2017) 4-frame

model of organizational learning theories, one can better identify and understand the factors that influence continuous improvement processes concerning the problem so that, ultimately, a systematic, daily continuous improvement plan can be implemented.

5Essentials

The specific continuous improvement framework that utilized in this study originates from the research of the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) (Byrk et al., 2010). The CCSR arose after the passage of the Chicago School Reform Act of 1988. This Act decentralized resources and authority away from Chicago Public Schools, thereby giving individual schools and principals greater influence over their programming. This decentralization allowed researchers with the CCSR to create a vast longitudinal database from which they could test different propositions and inputs to see which actions and investments were associated with positive outcomes for student learning. All of this data eventually spawned the creation of the 5Essentials. The 5Essentials represent the core elements of school improvement that “substantially influence the dynamics of teaching and learning in classrooms, and ultimately student achievement.” Strong implementation of the identified essentials for school improvement allows for quality student outcomes under the great variety of conditions that schools face (Bryk et al., 2015). Conversely, any weakness in one of the five identified essentials implies that meaningful school improvement is unlikely (Byrk et al., 2010). The 5Essentials represents multiple related processes that occur simultaneously. School improvement requires attention to performing these items over time and collecting data to measure change (Bryk et al., 2015). As stated by Bryk et al., “within any organized system of activity, the individual work process is the basic unit for improvement-focused inquiry. Since an organization’s capacity to engage in

improvement efforts is limited at any given point in time, choices inevitably must be made” (p. 47).

Hence, any focus on processes related to school improvement should be highly leverageable. Identified processes should consume substantial resources, their execution and outcomes should vary, and changes in them should yield significant improvements. The 5Essentials is the bedrock conceptual framework for continuous improvement for this self-study.

The 5Essentials framework survey instruments are utilized each year by all schools in Illinois, and many out of state, as a leading indicator of current school performance and is also predictive of future performance (5Essentials, 2019). Data from 650 schools demonstrates that the 5Essentials survey measures predict many types of students and school success. These success measures exist when controlling for school type, demographic composition, test scores, and socio-economic status. Through two separate surveys over 15 years, researchers at the University of Chicago found that schools that were strong on three to five of the Essentials were ten times more likely to substantially improve student learning outcomes relative to schools weak in three to five of the Essentials. The outcomes positively impacted by schools strong on the 5Essentials include standardized test gains, attendance rates, college enrollment, high school graduation, freshman grades, teacher mobility, and grades in college-preparatory classes.

The raw data for the 5Essentials is based on eighty student and 150 teacher questions that are compiled into 22 measures of school climate and staff practices that feed into the five Essentials (5Essentials, 2019). Each measure comprises multiple statements that teachers and students’ rate as ‘strongly disagree,’ ‘disagree,’ ‘agree,’ or ‘strongly agree.’ Based on responses, each measure is given a numeric score on a scale from 0 to 99. Score ranges are given an alpha

rating as well that describes a school's performance and organization relative to other schools that utilize the survey: 0-19 is 'least implementation,' 20-39 is 'less implementation,' 40-59 is 'average,' 60-79 is 'more implementation,' and 80-99 is 'most implementation.' Based upon a school's performance in the five Essentials, schools also receive an overall school rating that aligns with this same alpha rating though worded slightly differently: 'least organized,' 'partially organized,' 'organized,' 'more organized,' and 'well organized.' For example, schools with three to five Essentials rated at average or higher receive a score of 'well organized.' A minimum of eight teachers and ten students must take the survey for a school report to be generated. The parent survey portion of the 5Essentials generates a supplemental report. Parent responses have no bearing on the scores of the five Essentials. Also, the category of teachers includes such positions as counselors, social workers, instructional coaches, librarians, reading specialists, speech-language pathologists, teacher aides, and paraprofessionals (5Essentials Facts, 2019).

The first Essential on the 2019 5Essentials is that of Effective Leadership. According to the 5Essentials website,

In schools with Effective Leaders, principals and teachers work together to implement a shared vision. In such schools, people, programs, and resources are focused on a vision for sustained improvement. Leaders:

- practice shared leadership,
- set high goals for quality instruction,
- maintain mutually trusting and respectful relationships,
- support professional advancement for faculty and staff, and
- manage resources for sustained program improvement (not measured). (2019)

Four corresponding measures are utilized to rate Effective Leadership. They are Program Coherence, Teacher-Principal Trust, Instructional Leadership, and Teacher Influence. Teachers are the only respondents for this Essential. As an example of the number and type of statements associated with each measure, teachers rate the following statements under the measure of Program Coherence:

- Once we start a new program in this school, we follow up to make sure it is working.
- Many special programs come and go at this school.
- Curriculum, instruction, and learning materials are well coordinated across the different grade levels at this school.
- There is consistency in curriculum, instruction, and learning materials among teachers in the same grade levels in this school. (Opus Magnum 2019 5Essentials, 2019)

The next Essential on the 2019 5Essentials is that of Collaborative Teachers. The Report states,

In schools with strong Collaborative Teachers, all teachers collaborate to promote professional growth. In such schools, teachers are:

- active partners in school improvement,
- committed to the school, and
- focused on professional development. (5Essentials, 2019)

The five measures that comprise Collaborative Teachers are: School Commitment, Collective Responsibility, Teacher-Teacher Trust, Quality Professional Development, and Collaborative Practices. Teachers provide all responses in the area of Collaborative Teachers.

Involved Families is the next Essential on the 5Essentials Report. The report states,

In schools with Involved Families, the entire staff builds strong external relationships.

Such schools:

- see parents as partners in helping students learn,
- value parents' input and participation in advancing the school's mission, and
- support efforts to strengthen its students' community resources. (5Essentials, 2019)

There are three measures comprising this Essential: Parent Influence on Decision Making in Schools, Parent Involvement in School, and Teacher-Parent Trust. Teachers provide all responses for these measures.

Supportive Environment is the next Essential in the report. The report states,

In schools with a Supportive Environment, the school is safe, demanding, and supportive.

In such schools:

- students feel safe in and around the school,
- they find teachers trust-worthy and responsive to their academic needs,
- and they are well-supported in planning for college and other post-high school experiences. (5Essentials, 2019)

Four measures comprise Supportive Environment. Students are respondents to the measures of Student-Teacher Trust, School-Wide Future Orientation, and Safety. Teachers respond to statements in this Essential on the measure of Expectations for Postsecondary Education (2019).

The final Essential of the 5Essentials Report is Ambitious Instruction. The Report summarizes this Essential by noting,

In schools with strong Ambitious Instruction, classes are challenging and engaging. The instruction is clear, well-structured, and encourages students to build and apply

knowledge. When combined with a supportive environment, Ambitious Instruction has the most direct effect on student learning. It is:

- well-defined with clear expectations for student success,
- interactive and encourages students to build and apply knowledge,
- well-paced (not measured), and
- aligned across grades (not measured). (5Essentials, 2019)

For this Essential, teachers are respondents to the measure Quality of Student Discussion, and students respond to the measures English Instruction, Math Instruction, and Academic Press.

Organizational Learning

Continuous improvement literature widely recognizes that before continuous improvement can be effectively implemented, different viewpoints must be considered to ensure the change is effective (Bryk et al., 2015). To this end, this study seeks to apply Bolman and Deal's (2017) four distinct yet complementary organizational learning lenses to low-performing indicators on the Magnum Opus 5Essentials Report that negatively impact students' postsecondary outcomes. These four lenses, or the 4-frame model, are outlined in Bolman and Deal's *Reframing Organizations*. This text details the basic concepts and underlying assumptions of four organizational learning theories: the structural frame, the human capital frame, the political frame, and the symbolic frame. Once defined, the authors also provide key applications and extensions for the four frames.

Bolman and Deal (2017) point out, "Our preconceived theories, models, and images determine what we see, what we do, and how we judge what we accomplish" (p. 40). By training

oneself to shift amongst different lenses, one can more adeptly redefine situations to understand and manage them.

The first organizational learning frame of Bolman and Deal's 4-frame model that will be employed to understand the pertinent 5Essentials results is the structural lens. The structural theory originates from the scientific management approach and the bureaucratic model of understanding and managing organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The structural theory of organizational learning posits that organizations must have well-defined goals, roles, and relationships that are carefully coordinated to optimize performance. Tasks must be differentiated and integrated efficiently to achieve a strategic goal. Hence, specialization and the division of labor are key characteristics of this frame. According to this theory, personnel issues, confusion, and mismanagement are minimized when responsibilities are allocated effectively. Adherence to the structural frame ultimately allows rationality to prevail over extraneous influences.

Though structural reforms are a powerful means toward an organization's continual improvement, they are also high risk. Citing a study that reports that 50% of all structural reform efforts ultimately fail, Bolman and Deal (2017) note that structural reforms are difficult and hazardous. This issue stems from the fact that there are simultaneously several tensions at play regarding viewing an organization through the structural lens. Leaders must ensure that responsibilities are clearly defined to avoid performance gaps. Nevertheless, they must also ensure that there is no overlap of responsibilities to avoid redundancies. Leaders must also balance autonomy with interdependence. When systems are too loose, employees lose their way. However, when they are too tight, employees spend inordinate time trying to game the system.

The second organizational learning theory articulated by Bolman and Deal is the political lens. Power is the central tenet of the political organizational learning theory (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Under this lens, decisions are made in a context of scarcity and divergent interests (2017). In this context, conflict is inherent, and power is the means to overcome it. Networking, negotiating, and creating coalitions with stakeholders are key to meeting needs. Under this guise, the organization's goals are not designed at the top but are instead the evolutionary offspring of negotiations and bargaining.

Bolman and Deal (2017) outline various power sources that should be identified and leveraged to maximize power. First, there is always positional authority that determines communications and networks within organizations. Here, the control and dissemination of information are key. Just as important is how information or outcomes are framed. Leaders have substantial influence over how meaning is derived. Leaders control agendas and information by deciding who participates in different decision-making domains. Leaders also have reward systems at hand to increase support and loyalty. Conversely, leaders also have coercive power at their disposal, whereby they can “constrain, block, interfere, or punish” (p. 192). Reputation is also critical to establishing power, as opportunities are afforded to those with solid reputations based on prior performance.

Leaders can also gain power independent of external sources based on their own personality: their charisma, humor, energy, and intelligence (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Here, Bolman and Deal pay particular attention to how leaders wield personal power to influence and persuade others. One means of influencing is reciprocation. When one does something for another, the recipient will likely feel the need to do something in return for the provider. Leaders

can also leverage another's desire for consistency. Hence, if a leader can get another to side with them on an issue, they can then attain commitment from the other on the issue since they would not want to be viewed as inconsistent. There is, of course, peer pressure. If one can demonstrate to another that everyone is on board with a decision, they are more likely to conform. Bosses can also manipulate how they communicate pleasure or displeasure. For example, the more a leader tells someone that he or she approves of their work in a given area, the more likely they will continue to perform well in the area.

The third organizational lens to complement the mix is the symbolic lens. My current superintendent is fond of the adage, "Culture eats strategy for breakfast." This sentiment is the essence of the symbolic frame. According to Bolman and Deal (2017), symbols have a strong intellectual and emotional currency that speaks to the hearts and souls of employees and customers. The symbolic frame, with its emphasis on culture, can be understood by the phrase, "That's how we do things around here" (p. 236, quoting Whole Foods CEO John Mackey). Leaders that utilize the symbolic lens are careful in how they control the narrative of an organization. Stories, rituals, ceremonies, visions, and values are the mechanisms that get the most attention under the symbolic lens. Through these mechanisms, employees derive the meaning underlying their work. Clarity is thereby provided, and confusion and uncertainty are minimized.

The human resource lens of organizational learning is centered upon the relationships between employees and the organization. It focuses on changing people and their behavior through various means, such as promoting, remediating, training, coaching, rotating, and dismissing (Bolman & Deal, 2017). A core premise of this theory is that organizations exist to

serve human needs. The relationship between the organization and its employees is symbiotic. “Organizations need ideas, energy, and talent; people need careers, salaries, and opportunities” (p. 118). When the symbiosis is optimized, organizations meet their goals, and individuals experience meaningful work. Conversely, when the fit is not good, both suffer. As Jim Collins (2001) would add, “people are not your most important asset. The *right* people are” (p. 51, italics in original). One needs to get the right people in the right seats on the bus, and then one needs to keep them there.

One of the most influential models applied to human resource management is the hierarchy of needs identified by psychologist Abraham Maslow in the mid-twentieth century (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Under this hierarchy, a human’s basic needs, such as shelter and food, form the fundamental base. People cannot focus on relational or social needs or wants unless their well-being and safety are first established. Once this base is established, people can move up to social needs such as love and a sense of belonging. If met, this stage is then followed by ego needs like respect and recognition. At the top of the hierarchy is self-actualization. Here, one seeks to develop and attain the best version of their self. Proponents of the human resource lens for viewing organizations seek to create systems that facilitate employees reaching the self-actualization stage. Organizations gain a competitive advantage by investing time and resources into the development of employees. Henry Ford is often cited as a successful leader in regard to investing in employees. In 1914, Ford doubled his employees' pay while also cutting back the number of hours worked each day. Within two years, his company's profits doubled, and he was cited as saying that raising employee pay was the best cost-saving measure he ever made (ibid).

Several human resource management theories have evolved from Maslow's basic hierarchy of needs. Douglas McGregor built upon Maslow's foundation by asserting that managers' assumptions about employees ultimately become self-fulfilling prophecies (Bolman & Deal, 2017). According to McGregor, most managers hold "Theory X" assumptions about people. This theory posits that subordinates are "passive and lazy, have little ambition, prefer to be led, and resist change" (p. 123). As such, conventional management techniques rely upon "coercion, tight controls, threats, and punishment." This, in turn, results in superficial harmony where there is, in fact, indifference, apathy, and resentment. Ultimately, the belief that employees require tight controls leads to the behavior that managers are trying to subvert.

McGregor argues that managers should instead abide by "Theory Y." Through this theory, management is tasked with setting conditions that allow people to be self-directed in achieving their own goals. Greater productivity is realized when organizational needs are aligned with employees' self-interest (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

Similarly, through his research, Chris Argyis recognized a conflict between traditional management practices and basic human needs (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Argyis believed that most managers treat employees as children and not adults. This belief is baked into organizational practices in which jobs are defined as narrowly as possible through task specialization, assuming that this promotes greater efficiency. Unfortunately, this approach often backfires as employees attempt to thwart the system through six escape options. First, employees withdraw. This withdrawal is illustrated through chronic absenteeism and high turnover as employees regularly quit their jobs. Second, employees may stay in their jobs but withdraw psychologically. They become passive or apathetic. Alternatively, employees resist directives by lowering performance,

deception, or possibly outright sabotage. Employees may also try to escape the doldrum of their jobs through promotion. However, there are never enough higher-level positions to satiate all lower-rung employees. Another means of escape is to form alliances such as unions. Often union leadership operates much like the management they seek to redress since they know no other way. Furthermore, while alliances like unions may succeed in gaining better wages or benefits, they are typically powerless to protect their ranks from boredom and day-to-day frustrations. Finally, Argyis states that employees also combat management by imparting to their children that work is unrewarding and that chances for advancement are rare. Argyis cited research demonstrating that while the children of farmers believed that hard work paid off, children of urban blue-collar workers did not (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

Interpersonal and group dynamics are the core of human resource management theories that seek to improve productivity beyond the traditional 'assembly line' practices of the past. For both managers and their subordinates, the quality of their relationships correlates to their job satisfaction and effectiveness. However, everyone brings patterns of interpersonal behavior that have developed over a lifetime and are not aligned with organizational interests. Relationships are formed to fit each individual's preferences. Thus, it is imperative to better understand the sources of effective and ineffective relations in the workplace (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

A considerable body of research has been devoted to self-defeating personal interactions and the inability of employees and managers to recognize such actions (Bolman & Deal, 2017). These human resource theorists have developed models for understanding self-protective modes of behavior and how, in even highly volatile circumstances, such understanding can be harnessed to create constructive responses. Prominent within this field, Argyis and Schon developed Model

I Theory-in-Use to explore how people in the workplace are not doing what they think they are. In turn, their Model II offers guidelines for addressing this discord.

Under Argyris and Schon's Model I, an organization is considered a dangerous place where one must be focused on looking out for themselves (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Within this premise, employees follow predictable steps to influence others as they look out for their self-interests. First, employees assign work problems or conflicts to others. When the problem is owned by someone else, there is no incentive or need to adapt or change. Under this paradigm, it is the other that must change. When the other does not change according to the assumptions of the employee, it only confirms that the other is at fault. Furthermore, when the other resists external forces to change, the employee or manager may simply intensify pressure or outright reject the other rather than take a more introspective route to understand the root of the problem or conflict. In the end, when one's private, unilateral diagnosis and solution to a problem are not successful, blame can easily be assigned to the other. This protective interpersonal behavior leads to soured relationships, minimal learning, and suboptimal decision-making (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

Through Model II's systemic integration of advocacy and inquiry, managers more actively seek to understand their own thoughts and feelings and those of others (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Common goal setting and embracing mutual influence are the first steps to averting adversarial, zero-sum interactions. In most circumstances, problems can be rectified through an awareness that everyone needs help and can benefit from others when confronting problems that arise in organizations. Accordingly, organizations should structure communications to be open.

Assumptions and beliefs must be publicly tested. Employees should have avenues to advocate on their behalf while also having mechanisms to inquire as to what others think, know, want, or feel.

Bolman and Deal's (2017) exploration of the human resource organizational learning theory extends beyond one-on-one interpersonal dynamics through analysis of how group dynamics hinder or aid the fulfillment of organizations' goals. As Bolman and Deal acknowledge, traditional hierarchical coordination has given way to modern group-centric task and project completion, making such analysis more imperative. Whereas the structural lens highlights the importance of formal roles in groups and teams, roles are typically more informal and implicit. Each group within an organization has a finite supply of talent and motivation. The orientation of each group should be to capitalize the members' assets while limiting liabilities. Hence, a frontload investment in team building and norms that bring assets and liabilities to light pays dividends.

Per Bolman and Deal (2017), groups develop informal norms that determine how the group or team operates. Through early intervention and discussion of these norms, groups may perform with greater interdependence and efficiency. Establishing norms related to group participation, emotional attunement, and psychological safety should be at the core of this early intervention. Thus, groups should be given the opportunity to discuss group dynamic preferences, such as whether they will be more task-oriented or relaxed, punctual or loose with deadlines, or whether they will emphasize debate or courtesy.

Group dynamics are also influenced by informal networks, the patterns of who relates to whom (Bolman & Deal, 2017). These bonds can have a dramatic impact on group functioning. Basically, the more informal ties within and among a team, or the more complex the web, the

greater the yield of the team. Conversely, conflict and strife between personnel within a group can derail the group's effort despite the collective IQ or intentions.

Bolman and Deal cite Healey et al. (2015) to identify two levels of cognition that are sources of group conflict. The first level is conscious and is explicitly being verbalized in conversations about the group's purpose and how the purpose should be realized. The second level of cognition that is detrimental to group conflict is unconscious. It is found in the "emotionally charged attitudes, goals, and stereotypes that operate outside of awareness" (p. 173).

In sum, several basic strategies aligned to the human resource frame stemming from the research of Bolman, Deal, Maslow, McGregor, Argyis, and others. First, an organization must have a concrete philosophy for managing people with systems aligned with the philosophy (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Organizations must be selective in hiring the right people and retain them by rewarding them, protecting their jobs, promoting from within, and sharing the wealth. Organizations also allocate resources to employee learning. Finally, employees must be empowered. They must be given information and support. Autonomy and self-managed teams should be encouraged to the extent possible.

From a group or team perspective, organizations can develop an individual's ability to understand and contribute productively. Organizations should emphasize skills such as listening, communicating, managing conflict, and consensus building. Teams should also agree on norms, procedures, and goals at the outset of a project or assignment. Team members must also be given the means to express conflict productively. Conflict should be expressed directly, but oppositional intensity should be minimized to achieve the best outcomes. Groups should always

seek commonality to better assuage differences that arise. Bolman and Deal (2017) stress that experimentation is a powerful means of combating harmful conflict. Experimentation allows the parties to move beyond a stalemate without anyone losing face.

CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The methodology utilized in this study is that of self-study. The inherent existentialism of self-study research serves a dual-pronged purpose (Loughran, 2008). First, through disciplined and systematic inquiry, a better developed and articulated knowledge of practice through disciplined and systematic inquiry (Loughran, 2008). This study utilizes the annual 5Essentials report to organize this knowledge within a research-based construct for identifying and understanding continuous improvement practices. As Loughran (2007) explains, studying our practices in education necessarily involves the “purposes, participants, and contexts” of our work. The self of a self-study can only be fully understood through the self’s relationship and position within the larger context within which it exists. By utilizing the four unique lenses of organizational learning espoused in Bolman and Deal’s (2017) *Reframing Organizations*, I am able to have a more thoughtful, more balanced, and ultimately more reflective understanding of my impact on the continuous improvement at Opus Magnum as well as the factors impacting the identified areas of concern.

The second purpose of self-study is cyclical data collection and analysis, leading to continuously improved iterations (Lassonde et al., 2009). The self-study methodology’s emphasis on continuous improvement aligns with this study's purpose: to better identify and understand the factors that influence continuous improvement processes around Opus Magnum’s

goal of having every Magnum graduate discover and pursue his or her full postsecondary potential.

Research Design and Justification

I chose to embark upon a self-study action research methodology so that this research could make an immediate and positive impact on my leadership and student outcomes at Opus Magnum High School. When I first began to formulate the design for this study, I knew I did not want to have a narrow focus on just one practice or initiative at the school. Instead, I wanted to design a study that could aid me in understanding how I could facilitate comprehensive, sustained reform. Magnum has made giant leaps in many areas in the last few years. I do not want to see that growth decline due to staff turnover or any other internal or external factors. At the same time, I recognize that there is no feasible way to adequately address every policy and practice at Magnum through the mechanism of dissertation research. But, by viewing the lowest performing subset scores of the 5Essentials through a balance of multiple organizational learning lenses, I can begin to more comprehensively identify and understand factors influencing these scores. This is particularly true with regard to organizational lenses that are less enmeshed in my leadership worldview. Using the 5Essentials as my umbrella framework is a seamless match to the work already done by principals. I have been using the 5Essentials for nearly a decade in pursuit of school improvement. However, I have used the trend data from the 5Essentials to typically identify two to three low-performing indicators year to year and come up with a plan for just those indicators. I had never used the 5Essentials to conceptualize how different policies and practices shaped 5Essentials results on a larger scale. Conversely, I have never attempted to see how seemingly disparate low scores were interrelated with regard to the impact on the

overall school goal. Finally, I have never genuinely engaged in deeply analyzing the factors underlying the low scores. Through viewing the results through multiple theories of organizational learning, I hope to have a much more comprehensive understanding of the root causes for these scores so that the continuous improvement practices implemented to address these scores become embedded into how ‘work’ gets done at Opus Magnum.

Of course, how I approach each problem is unconsciously influenced by my own worldview. Like anyone, I interpret the world around me according to my own constructivist perspective. Relative to other school leaders, I rely more heavily on one or two lenses of the 4-frame model while I may not adequately integrate other lenses. On the other hand, I may not take some of the perspectives into consideration when trying to understand complex issues such as those being addressed in this study: teacher influence, parent involvement in school, academic press, and expectations for postsecondary education. To this end, Bolman and Deal offer an online leadership self-assessment that scores one’s integration of the four lenses into his or her leadership style. The results allow one to see his or her percentile score for each frame with respect to how others have scored on the assessment. My *a priori* step to conducting research is to take this self-assessment to more objectively capture which frames I integrate into my worldview and which ones I do not. With these results, I can ensure that when I probe the factors underlying each area of concern I am paying particular attention to those frames that are not as integrated into my worldview. This helps me to identify and better analyze factors influencing these areas of concern that I otherwise would overlook. In essence, this study aides me in making what has been implicit or hidden to me more explicit and readily discernible.

The text *Reframing Organizations* is supplemented by an online Leadership Orientation Self-Assessment (Bolman & Deal, 2017). By completing the questions on this self-assessment, one can then learn his or her percentile score on each of the four learning theories in relation to all other people who have taken the self-assessment. By completing Bolman and Deal's Leadership Orientation Self-Assessment, I know the extent to which I integrate the four organizational learning theories into my own worldview. Then, with each Essential, I apply Bolman and Deal's 4-frame model of learning theories, paying particular attention to those theories that are less integrated into my worldview. The application of the lenses guides me to step out of my individual worldview to understand how I rely upon or disregard different learning theories in my leadership. This 4-frame model also allows me to reflect more deeply upon the strengths and weaknesses in the targeted indicators on the 5Essentials. Finally, the insights gleaned from the application of the lenses allows me to identify possible next steps to improve the efficacy and sustainability of Magnum's continuous improvement endeavors.

Applying each 4-frame organizational learning lens to each of the five essentials provides a comprehensive framework to identify, understand, and evaluate all the work done in pursuit of Opus Magnum's continuous improvement efforts. And through the self-study application of multiple organizational theories of learning, I have a balanced perspective on the quality and endurance of the work. However, if I did this, this study would be upwards of a thousand pages long. Thus, for this study, I will narrow my focus to the subset indicators within each of the Essentials that are the lowest performing. This approach still allows a comprehensive means toward reform while focusing attention on high-demand concerns with each of the essential indicators of school success. Specifically, these concerns are teacher influence, parent

involvement, academic press, and expectations for postsecondary education. While these four spheres may not seem readily interrelated in their impact upon student postsecondary outcomes, the field of continuous improvement in education recognizes that the orchestration of various reforms to improve student outcomes is complex, involving multiple strands of activity in a highly integrated manner (Bryk et al., 2010).

With the 5Essentials areas of concern for continuous improvement identified, I can then apply the attributes of my lowest-percentile scored lens to the areas of concern to better identify and understand factors that influence these scores. Table 2 shows the lowest scoring indicator for each of the five Essentials to which my least integrated lens is applied.

Table 2. The Scores for Each Essential and the Lowest Subscore of Each Essential to which the Lowest Scoring 4-Frame Lens is Applied

| Scores for Each of the Five Essentials | Effective Leadership (66, More) | Collaborative Teachers (79, More) | Ambitious Instruction (51, Average) | Supportive Environment (61, More) | Involved Families (40, Average) |
|---|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| Lowest Indicator Score for each Essential | Teacher Influence (43, Average) | Collaborative Practices* (71, More) | Academic Press (41, Average) | Expectations for Postsecondary Education (34**, Less) | Parent Involvement in School (39, Less) |

* this subscore is not be addressed for the purposes of this study

**lowest overall subscore on the 2019 Opus Magnum 5Essentials

Measures

Since the methodology employed in this study is self-study, the sole subject of the study is the researcher. The 5Essentials Survey is the primary means through which I identify the deficit areas that require the greatest attention at Opus Magnum with regard to continuous improvement. Using the 5Essentials to frame Opus Magnum's continuous improvement makes

sense for various reasons. The 5Essentials is a comprehensive, organized look at all of the inputs surrounding the outputs of a school. The information is triangulated by surveying all relevant stakeholders, including students, teachers, and parents. The Illinois State Board of Education mandates the 5Essentials. It is data that theoretically should be utilized by all schools in Illinois. Because it is mandated, the 5Essentials is also provided for free through the Illinois State Board of Education. Thus, there is no additional burden in cost or time in utilizing the 5Essentials to frame the content of this study. Importantly, there is a wealth of research regarding the inception of the 5Essentials survey and its corresponding benefits. Moreover, there is 5Essentials longitudinal data that extends back to before I was the school's principal. By simply consolidating Magnum's work regarding students' postsecondary outcomes under the 5Essentials umbrella and articulating the work through the 5Essentials lens, I can ensure the work continues to grow and improve.

The 5Essentials is a continuous improvement tool for identifying areas of growth that can directly impact student learning. However, the 5Essentials do not explicate the underlying causes for scores in any of the indicators for improvement. Thus, data from the 5Essentials commences the study by allowing me to narrow the focus to core indicators impacting continuous improvement efforts.

The second measure utilized in this study is Bolman and Deal's (2016) Leadership Orientation Self-Assessment. With the low-scoring indicators on the 5Essentials identified, I must delve deeply into the indicators of concern to fully grasp the underlying causes. In sum, just as with Kobayashi and his hot dog eating championship, only by accurately defining the problem can I overcome limits. Thus, I apply Bolman and Deal's (2017) 4-frame model to the areas of

concern. How I do this relies heavily upon my Bolman and Deal's Leadership Orientation Self-Assessment. Bolman and Deal's Leadership Orientation Self-Assessment provides one with percentile scores for the extent to which one has integrated each of the lenses into their own leadership worldview relative to everyone else that takes the assessment. Hence, I can see which lenses I heavily rely upon and which ones I disregard or neglect relative to the population of subjects that have taken the assessment.

Procedure and Analysis Plan

As mentioned, the results of Bolman and Deal's (2016) Leadership Orientation Self-Assessment serve as the cornerstone of this self-study. Thus, a thorough understanding of the assessment design is warranted.

The instructions on the first page of the Leadership Orientations Self-Assessment state the following:

For each item on the following screens, select which of the two options describes you better. In some instances, both options --or neither-- may seem to describe you well. In these cases, decide which option is *more* like you in relation to the other option.

(Leadership Orientations Self-Assessment, 2020)

There are a total of 37 items in the self-assessment battery. As an example, the first item on the assessment is as follows:

My stronger skills are:

analytical skills

interpersonal skills.

Another example item further into the assessment is as follows:

What helped me more to be successful was my ability to:

coach and develop people

Build strong alliances and a power base. (2020)

After providing responses to the battery of items, there is a page on the assessment that asks the method by which one linked to the online assessment: link in Jossey-Bass email, typing url from print book, hotlink in ebook, received url from instructor, social media, or other (Leadership Orientations Self-Assessment, 2020). There is also a question as to whether the assessee would like updates on new assessments, resources, and publications from the publisher Jossey-Bass/Wiley. The last page requests the input of optional demographic data for age, gender, current employment positional level, and global geographic location. Upon submission, the assessee is navigated to a results page. Here, there is a brief synopsis of structural leaders, human resource leaders, political leaders, and symbolic leaders. This is followed by a report of the raw scores from the self-assessment in each of the four domains. Below the raw scores is a table showing percentile scores for each of the four domains based on raw score results (see Table 3).

Table 3. Leadership Orientations Self-Assessment Table Correlating Raw Scores for Each of Bolman and Deal's Four Frames to Percentile Scores

| Percentile | Structural Score | HR Score | Political Score | Symbolic Score |
|----------------------|------------------|----------|-----------------|----------------|
| 90-100 th | 22-24 | 24 | 16-24 | 21-24 |
| 80-89 th | 20, 21 | 22, 23 | 14, 15 | 18-20 |
| 70-79 th | 18, 19 | 21 | 13 | 17 |
| 60-69 th | 17 | 20 | 12 | 16 |
| 50-59 th | 15,16 | 19 | 11 | 14, 15 |
| 40-49 th | 14 | 18 | 10 | 13 |
| 30-39 th | 13 | 17 | 9 | 12 |
| 20-29 th | 11,12 | 15, 16 | 8 | 11 |
| 10-19 th | 9, 10 | 13, 14 | 7 | 9, 10 |
| 1-9 th | 6-8 | 6-12 | 6 | 6-8 |

Accompanying the percentile table is a brief description of aggregate results. It states that most leaders rate themselves markedly higher on the human resource and structural lenses (Leadership Orientations Self-Assessment, 2020). However, it further states that research conducted by Bolman and Deal paradoxically finds that higher ratings on the political and symbolic lenses are more closely correlated with effective leadership.

At the end of the results page of the Leadership Orientations Self-Assessment is a section titled What Your Score Means. This section explains how to interpret one's results. It states that

scores above the 75th percentile are the assessee's primary leadership orientation. These scores represent how one instinctively thinks about and approaches leadership (Leadership Orientations Self-Assessment, 2020). However, if scores in each domain are approximately the 50th percentile, it represents that one has a more balanced orientation toward leadership. Finally, the assessment states that assesseees should strive to emphasize lenses with lower percentile scores to move beyond impulses in decision-making.

Through leveraging my results on the Leadership Orientation Self-Assessment, I can identify how my lack of integration of the lowest performing frame into my worldview impacts my ability to understand and analyze these low scores on the 2019 5Essentials Report for Opus Magnum High School. I can thereby better understand the factors affecting continuous improvement efforts concerning those low scores. Of course, other researchers seeking to replicate this study could adapt their analysis according to their own self-assessment scores and lowest-performing indicators on the 5Essentials.

In pursuit of a better understanding of the factors that influence continuous improvement, I have structured a reflective journal that is organized according to the prompts and responses within each low-performing subscore that are aggregated into the subscore. By dissecting the subscores of teacher influence, academic press, expectations for postsecondary success, and parent involvement according to the prompts comprising the subscores, I can ensure that my reflection is more coherent and targeted toward the most pertinent factors that underlie the scores. An overarching purpose of the design of this study is to triangulate the 5Essentials results with Bolman and Deal's 4-frame model to ensure that my reflection is balanced and comprehensive to expand my understanding beyond the worldview I have constructed for

myself. By further disaggregating the parameters of my self-study reflection to the prompts comprising the subscore results, the self-study will be triangulated and highly focused on gaining deeper insight.

Table 4. 5Essentials Survey Topics for the Lowest Performing Indicators Identified for this Study

| |
|--|
| Academic Press: Students report the following about one specific class: |
| The teacher expects me to do my best all the time |
| The teacher expects everyone to work hard |
| This class really makes me think |
| This class challenges me |
| The teacher asks difficult questions on tests |
| The teacher asks difficult questions in class |
| This class requires me to work hard to do well |
| I really learn a lot in this class |
| The teacher wants us to become better thinkers, not just memorize things |
| Teacher Influence: Teachers report having influence on: |
| Planning how discretionary school funds should be used |
| Determining which books and other instructional materials are used in classrooms |
| Establishing the curriculum and instructional program |
| Determining the content of in-service programs |
| Setting standards for student behavior |
| Expectations for Postsecondary Education: Teachers report that: |
| Teachers expect most students in this school to go to college |
| Teachers at this school help students plan for college |
| Most of the students in this school are planning to go to college |
| Teachers in this school feel that it is part of their job to prepare students to succeed in college |
| Parent Involvement in School: Teachers report that students' parents: |
| Attend parent-teacher conferences when you request them |
| Volunteered time to support the school (e.g., volunteer in classrooms, help with school-wide events, etc.) |
| Contacted you about their child's performance |
| Responded to your suggestions for helping their child |

For each cell of Table 4, I reflect upon two to three journal prompts that distill the primary tenets of my least integrated 4-frame lens. These prompts serve as a broader summary of

the principles of my least integrated 4-frame lens in order to cast a wide net for continuous improvement data from the perspective of the identified lens.

The primary mode of journaling for these prompts is through using a voice recording and transcription app on my phone. However, at times, depending upon the content and circumstances of a particular journal, I also type reflections into a Google document. Once journaling is complete, all transcribed and typed journal entries are compiled into one document that is organized according to the four sub-indicators of the 5Essentials being analyzed. Once this matrix of journaling is compiled, the data is coded according to the most prominent organizational learning theories and concepts that comprise the lens least integrated into my worldview.

Through this two-step self-study methodology, I first broadly apply the lowest-percentile lens from my self-assessment results to the 5Essentials lowest-performing results through journaling. In this manner, I ensure that the journaling data collected aligns with the broad context of the selected 4-frame lens. In the second step, I code this data according to more specific organizational learning theories and concepts that serve as the theoretical foundation for the lens. This two-step approach, moving from broad to more specific application of the lowest percentile lens, allows for a deeper investigation of factors that influence my leadership of continuous improvement efforts that would otherwise not be considered due to the lack of intentional integration of the identified lens in my leadership worldview. These overlooked factors are explored through a second round of journaling for each of the 22 prompts. For each journal entry, there are two research questions for further consideration:

1. How do the most prevalent organizational learning theories from my least integrated 4-frame-lens inform continuous improvement efforts in regard to this 5Essentials survey topic?
2. Based upon identified theories and concepts from my lowest percentile Bolman and Deal lens, what factors am I considering or not considering when engaging in continuous improvement concerning this 5Essential survey topic?

Limitations and Biases

Though the methodology of self-study action research has gained ever-increasing traction and legitimation over the last several years, critics of the methodology frequently state that self-study inherently lacks ‘trustworthiness’ (Lassonde et al., 2009). The general argument is that the self-study researcher has a constructivist worldview; any conclusions drawn by the self-study researcher do not represent an objective reality. Advocates of self-study do not dispute this position but instead embrace it. Self-study proponents argue that self-study represents a paradigm shift in which the researcher is not attempting to ascertain truths. Instead, it is understood that the self-study researcher is interpreting facts (Lassonde et al., 2009, p. 23). The action research community combats the sense that self-study is not scientific by explaining that more quantitative methodologies that rely on the scientific method do not capture truth but instead tell likely stories (Stringer, 2014; Lassonde et al., 2009). In *Action Research* by author Ernest T. Stringer (2014), it is posited that the legitimacy of action research depends upon the accepted definition of science. Stringer cites Levin and Greenwood (2001) to explain that with action research, “[The] nucleus of scientific activity is deliberative, democratic sensemaking among professional researchers and local stakeholders.” This paradigm of scientific endeavors is

more suitable for studies of human behavior and the social world. The fundamental nature of the difference between studying the physical world and the social world requires a different approach to studying the social world. Action research and its subset self-study methodology help address these diverging needs (Stringer, 2014).

One limitation of this study is the bias inherent in a self-study. Moreover, bias can emanate from my positionality as a school leader. As a self-defense mechanism, I could cast blame downward toward other staff for whatever issues without making the full effort to truly reflect on my own beliefs, assumptions, or actions. Nevertheless, as stated earlier, one of the primary reasons I am using Bolman and Deal's 4-frame model is to step out of my own worldview to consider the concerns from multiple perspectives. Of course, there is no way to fully remove a researcher's bias from a self-study, but I believe that by having the 4-frame model as my central theoretical concept that I am removing my own bias to the extent possible. In this manner, the researcher's trustworthiness may be expanded. Self-study examination through multiple organizational lenses positions the researcher to inquire beyond the confines and inherent biases of my own worldview constructed through my unique lived experience.

Summary

The 5Essentials is a comprehensive report based on many years of empirical research that triangulates survey responses from a school's students, teachers, and parents. The purpose of the survey is to allow schools to engage in continuous improvement efforts. Research shows that schools that perform well on three of the 5Essentials are ten times more likely to improve student outcomes (5Essentials, 2022). Over the last eight years of my administrative experience, I have attempted to utilize 5Essentials information to engage in continuous improvement with outcomes

that have overall had a net positive outcome. Through this study, I want to optimize my approach to using the 5Essentials to improve student outcomes. I want all Opus Magnum graduates to discover and pursue their full postsecondary potential. Four indicators in four different Essentials on the 2019 5Essentials are a detriment to achieving this goal: teacher influence, parent involvement, academic press, and expectations for postsecondary education. Through this study, I seek to understand why Opus Magnum is underperforming in these areas.

Self-study action research is the best methodology I can employ to reflect on my influence and leadership in relation to the low performance on the aforementioned indicators. Before I take continuous improvement action, I must reflect deeply upon the complex forces influencing the indicator outcomes. To this end, I must also know the extent to which I incorporate the four different lenses into my own worldview. To have a truly balanced understanding, I seek to overlay Bolman and Deal's (2017) 4-frame model over the 5Essentials results. The 4-frame model forces me to challenge my assumptions and limited worldview to capture causes that I would otherwise miss. Through this more balanced and comprehensive understanding, I believe that the continuous improvement reform instituted to address the findings can be more holistic and more sustainable than previous continuous improvement efforts utilized to address 5Essentials findings.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The inquiry at the crux of this self-study is to better understand how a principal can expand his or her perception of the factors that influence continuous improvement in a comprehensive manner that extends the principal's understanding and subsequent response to continuous improvement needs. To this end, I have applied Bolman and Deal's (2017) 4-frame model of organizational learning theories to low-scoring indicators on Opus Magnum's 2019 5Essentials Report utilizing a self-study methodology. To maximize my introspection and understanding, I took Bolman and Deal's online Leadership Orientations online self-assessment. The results of this self-assessment detail how I integrate the four different lenses into my worldview. In my analysis of the factors that shape continuous improvement outcomes in the low-scoring indicators on the 5 Essentials, I can then emphasize the lens or lenses less incorporated into my worldview in order to have a more balanced and comprehensive understanding of those factors.

Self-Assessment Results

I took the Leadership Orientations Self-Assessment on March 13, 2020. The raw scores I received from the self-assessment are found in Figure 10. I received scores of 16 in the Structural Frame, 12 in the Human Resources Frame, twelve in the Political Frame, and 20 in the Symbolic Frame. These raw scores correspond to the percentiles found in Table 5.

Your Scores

Your **raw scores** for each of the four frames, on a scale from 6 to 24, are:

Structural: 16

Human Resources: 12

Political: 12

Symbolic: 20

Figure 10. Researcher's Raw Scores on Bolman and Deal's Four Frames from Taking the Leadership Orientations Self-Assessment

Table 5. Researcher's Percentile Scores on Bolman and Deal's Four Frames from Taking the Leadership Orientations Self-Assessment

| Frame | Percentile |
|----------------|------------|
| Structural | 50-59th |
| Human Resource | 1-9th |
| Political | 60-69th |
| Symbolic | 80-89th |

My self-assessment results reveal that the percentile scores for the structural, political, and symbolic lenses were in the mid to high range. However, my integration of the human resource lens into my leadership worldview is in the lowest percentile band of 0-9%. Hence, through self-study journaling, the human resources lens is applied to the lowest indicators on the 5Essentials 2019 report to better interpret and understand the factors that influence the relatively low performance. In this manner, I hope to illuminate how I can better address this low

performance utilizing a perspective I have neglected to leverage.

Findings from Coding

Within the domain of human resources, Bolman and Deal cite numerous studies and anecdotes to demonstrate that investment in employees and employee needs results in long-term success and competitive advantage (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Of course, such investment in people requires time and persistence to develop relationships and cultivate desired behaviors. The primary tenets of the human resource lens, as explained by Bolman and Deal, serve as the guiding prompts for each of the 22 5Essential sub-indicator journal entries for this study:

1. What is the relationship between employees and myself in this regard?
2. How do I try to change employees and employees' behavior in this regard?
3. How do I serve employees' needs in this regard?

After journaling data that applies these core considerations of the human resource lens is compiled, the data is reviewed and coded according to the primary human resource organizational learning theories referenced by Bolman and Deal.

To facilitate the coding of the data, a quick reference of the core theories and concepts underlying Bolman and Deal's human resource lens is used. This reference is articulated in Table 7.

Table 6. Matrix for Classifying and Coding Data within Each Essential According to the Primary Theories and Concepts Underlying Bolman and Deal's Human Resource Lens

| | Teacher Influence Data | Academic Press Data | Postsecondary Expectations Data | Parent Involvement Data |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Maslow Needs | | | | |
| Basic | (B-TI) | (B-AP) | (B-PE) | (B-PI) |
| Love and Belonging | (LB-TI) | (LB-AP) | (LB-PE) | (LB-PI) |
| Ego (respect and recognition) | (RR-TI) | (RR-AP) | (RR-PE) | (RR-PI) |
| Self-Actualization | (SA-TI) | (SA-AP) | (SA-PE) | (SA-PI) |
| McGregor Theories | | | | |
| Theory X | (TX-TI) | (TX-AP) | (TX-PE) | (TX-PI) |
| Theory Y | (TY-TI) | (TY-AP) | (TY-PE) | (TY-PI) |
| Interpersonal Dynamics | | | | |
| Argyris (Employees as Children) | (EC-TI) | (EC-AP) | (EC-PE) | (EC-PI) |
| Model I | (I-TI) | (I-AP) | (I-PE) | (I-PI) |
| Model II | (II-TI) | (II-AP) | (II-PE) | (II-PI) |
| Group Dynamics | | | | |
| Norms | (NO-TI) | (NO-AP) | (NO-PE) | (NO-PI) |
| Networks | (NE-TI) | (NE-AP) | (NE-PE) | (NE-PI) |

Table 7. Quick Reference of the Core Theories and Concepts Underlying Bolman and Deal's Human Resource Lens

| Quick Reference of Human Resource Lens Core Theories and Key Concepts | |
|--|---|
| Maslow Needs | |
| Basic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fundamental base: well-being, safety |
| Love and Belonging | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Relational needs |
| Ego | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Respect and recognition |
| Self-Actualization | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Best version of self |
| McGregor Theories | |
| Theory X | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Expect laziness, passivity, lack of ambition ● Manage through coercion, tight controls ● Leads to indifference, apathy, resentment ● Use of tight controls creates behavior trying to be subverted |
| Theory Y | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Employees self-directed in reaching goals ● Organizational needs align to employee interest |
| Interpersonal Dynamics | |
| Argyis (Employees as Children) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Employees treated as children; jobs narrowly defined ● Leads to 1) withdrawal/absenteeism, 2) apathy, 3) resist through low performance, deception, sabotage, 4) promotion, 5) alliances like unions, 6) impart on children that work is unrewarding |
| Model I | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work is dangerous, look out for self ● No ownership or introspection ● Assign problem/conflict to other, no change, other at fault, then intensify pressure or reject other |
| Model II | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Advocacy and inquiry integration ● Common goal setting and mutual influence ● Everyone benefits from others, open communication |

Group Dynamics

| | |
|----------|--|
| Norms | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify informal group norms for early intervention ● Establish norms for group participation, emotional attunement, and psychological safety ● Discuss preferred group dynamic norms |
| Networks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● More informal ties, more complex the web, more yielded by group ● Conflict between personnel derails group despite collective IQ or intention |

After collecting evidence for each 5Essential subindicator journal entry, I coded each entry according to the most prevalent human resource organizational learning theories and concepts. Below is a table that shows the most prevalent theories and concepts from Bolman and Deal's human resource lens as they relate to the 22 survey topics for the lowest-performing indicators for this study.

Table 8. Most Prevalent Theories and Concepts from Bolman and Deal's Human Resource Lens as they Relate to the Survey Topics for the Lowest Performing Indicators for this Study

| 5 Essentials Indicators | Journal Entry Number | Prevalent Code |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Academic Press: Students report the following about one specific class: | | |
| The teacher expects me to do my best all the time | 1 | II-AP |
| The teacher expects everyone to work hard | 2 | TX-AP |
| This class really makes me think | 3 | NE-AP |
| This class challenges me | 4 | NO-AP |
| The teacher asks difficult questions on tests | 5 | TY-AP |
| The teacher asks difficult questions in class | 6 | TY-AP |
| This class requires me to work hard to do well | 7 | TX-AP |
| I really learn a lot in this class | 8 | TY-AP; RR-AP |
| The teacher wants us to become better thinkers, not just memorize things | 9 | TY-AP |
| Teacher Influence: Teachers report having influence on: | | |
| Planning how discretionary school funds should be used | 10 | TY-TI; II-TI |
| Determining which books and other instructional materials are used in classrooms | 11 | NO-TI |
| Establishing the curriculum and instructional program | 12 | NO-TI |
| Determining the content of in-service programs | 13 | TY-TI; II-TI |
| Setting standards for student behavior | 14 | SA-TI |

Expectations for Postsecondary Education: Teachers report that:

| | | |
|---|----|--------------|
| Teachers expect most students in this school to go to college | 15 | RR-PE; SA-PE |
| Teachers at this school help students plan for college | 16 | I-PE |
| Most of the students in this school are planning to go to college | 17 | X-PE; Y-PE |
| Teachers in this school feel that it is part of their job to prepare students to succeed in college | 18 | II-PE |

Parent Involvement in School: Teachers report that students' parents:

| | | |
|---|----|-------|
| Attend parent-teacher conferences when you request them | 19 | NO-PI |
| Volunteered time to support the school (e.g. volunteer in classrooms, help with school-wide events, etc.) | 20 | TY-PI |
| Contacted you about their child's performance | 21 | II-PI |
| Responded to your suggestions for helping their child | 22 | II-PI |

The overall distribution of the prevalent codes cited by Bolman and Deal for their cited human resource learning theories is found in Table 9.

Table 9. The Overall Distribution of the Prevalent Codes Cited by Bolman and Deal for their Referenced Human Resource Learning Theories

| | Teacher Influence Distribution | Academic Press Distribution | Postsecondary Expectations Distribution | Parent Involvement Distribution | Overall Distribution |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Maslow Needs | | | | | |
| Basic | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Love and Belonging | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Ego (respect and recognition) | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Self-Actualization | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| McGregor Theories | | | | | |
| Theory X | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| Theory Y | 2 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 8 |
| Interpersonal Dynamics | | | | | |
| Argyris (Employees as Children) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Model I | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Model II | 2 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| Group Dynamics | | | | | |
| Norms | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| Networks | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

Since each 5Essential indicator has a different number of survey topics and corresponding prevalent codes, Table 10 reports the percentage distribution of the prevalent codes cited by Bolman and Deal for each 5Essential indicator as well as the overall percentage distribution of prevalent codes.

Table 10. The Percentage Distribution of the Prevalent Codes Cited by Bolman and Deal for Each 5Essential Indicator as Well as the Overall Percentage Distribution of Prevalent Codes

| | Teacher Influence Distribution Percentage | Academic Press Distribution Percentage | Postsecondary Expectations Distribution Percentage | Parent Involvement Distribution Percentage | Overall Distribution Percentage |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|---|---|---------------------------------------|
| Maslow Needs | | | | | |
| Basic | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Love and Belonging | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Ego (respect and recognition) | 0 | 10 | 17 | 0 | 7 |
| Self-Actualization | 14 | 0 | 17 | 0 | 7 |
| McGregor Theories | | | | | |
| Theory X | 0 | 20 | 17 | 0 | 11 |
| Theory Y | 29 | 40 | 17 | 25 | 30 |
| Interpersonal Dynamics | | | | | |
| Argyris (Employees as Children) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Model I | 0 | 10 | 17 | 0 | 7 |
| Model II | 29 | 0 | 17 | 50 | 19 |

| Group Dynamics | | | | | |
|----------------|----|----|---|----|----|
| Norms | 29 | 10 | 0 | 25 | 15 |
| Networks | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 4 |

In reviewing the distribution of each 5Essential indicator, no one learning theory dominates the individual indicators. With just four survey topics, Parent Involvement had three applicable human resource learning theories. Postsecondary Expectations had four survey topics and six learning theories. Academic Press had nine survey topics and six learning theories. Teacher Influence had five survey topics and four learning theories. It should be noted that there were five survey topics in which two prevalent codes were identified. This coding occurred in each 5Essential indicator except for Parent Involvement.

In reviewing the overall percentage distribution of the human resource learning theories, the distribution of the application of the codes becomes starker. Three learning theories are not applied, Maslow's foundational hierarchy levels Basic and Love and Belonging and Argyis' model of employees as children. Sixty-seven percent of all applied codes were from the juxtapositional Theory X and Theory Y or Model I and Model II. As Bolman and Deal explain, Theory X and Model I represent a lower-order or less desirable form of leadership theories (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Conversely, applying Theory Y or Model II results in optimal employee engagement and organizational productivity. When categorized as lower or higher-order human resource learning theories, 18% of all cited learning theories were Theory X or Model I, while 49% of applied theories were Theory Y or Model II.

Findings from Research Questions

After collecting and coding the first round of self-study data, I then analyze the information through a second and third round of journaling to explore two more specific research questions:

1. How does the most prevalent human resource organizational learning theory inform continuous improvement efforts in regard to this 5Essentials survey topic?
2. Based upon identified theories and concepts from the human resource lens, what factors am I considering or not considering when engaging in continuous improvement concerning this 5Essential survey topic?

These research questions were applied to the survey topic data for each of the four lowest scoring indicators from the 5Essentials Survey. Appendix H includes a list of journal entry topics followed by journaling prompts for rounds one through three for a comprehensive view of the iterative application of the self-study methodology of this study. A detailed finding for each sub-indicator survey topic of each 5Essential indicator is outlined in the following sections.

Academic Press

To measure Academic Press, the 5Essentials surveys students according to the topics in Table 11. For ease of reference, Tables 11 through 14 include the journal entry numbers for each survey topic as outlined in Table 8.

Table 11. Topics Surveyed to Measure Academic Press Indicator within the Essential of Ambitious Instruction

Academic Press: Students report the following about one specific class:

Journal Entry 1: The teacher expects me to do my best all the time

Journal Entry 2: The teacher expects everyone to work hard

Journal Entry 3: This class really makes me think

Journal Entry 4: This class challenges me

Journal Entry 5: The teacher asks difficult questions on tests

Journal Entry 6: The teacher asks difficult questions in class

Journal Entry 7: This class requires me to work hard to do well

Journal Entry 8: I really learn a lot in this class

Journal Entry 9: The teacher wants us to become better thinkers, not just memorize things

For the survey topic, *The teacher expects me to do my best all the time*, I journaled on the topic of teachers engaging students in weekly goal setting. In my leadership of teachers in this regard, I worked to have teachers shift away from task-oriented goal setting to learning-oriented goal setting. By focusing on the ‘why’ behind this shift, I was attempting to serve employees’ needs. I wanted employees to see how they were valuable in how they led students to meaningful postsecondary outcomes. Through various meeting structures and the evaluation process, I reflected that I “helped stretch the vision of what their [teachers’] purpose should be.”

The prevalent code for this entry was Model II. Journal evidence reflects my aim was to work with staff to set common goals. I wanted to foster mutual influence onto our collective vision of students as lifelong learners. In identifying Model II as the prevalent theory at work, I

realized that I was taking a binary approach to shift the staff's mindset. Transitioning the collective vision of staff requires nuance and scaffolding. It requires explicit direction and strategy. In effect, I was trying to execute a Model II approach on day one, but I did not comprehensively establish staff capacity for a Model II approach.

For the survey topic, *The teacher expects everyone to work hard*, my journaling focus was on setting goals for teachers. I wanted to normalize expectations for how we measured student success teacher by teacher, apples to apples. I reflected that I had inherited many teachers who adhered to the status quo. I had considerable inertia that I needed to break through. My assumptions regarding this inertia largely stemmed from conversations with staff. I interpreted the inertia to originate from the collective belief of staff that they were positively contributing to student outcomes simply on the merit that they were teaching disadvantaged students at an alternative school. Whom they were serving and where they were serving them was sufficient evidence that they were doing meaningful work. In this circumstance, I had to be very deliberate in breaking through the inertia. I was "letting the data speak for itself" as I had to "micromanage performance through one-on-one evaluation." In essence, I was applying Theory X. I managed teachers through tight controls defined by quantitative outcomes. I did this because I was expecting inertia, or as Theory X would espouse passivity and a lack of ambition. Through this approach over several years, I never constructed a mechanism to move from Theory X to Theory Y. This was the primary overlooked factor from the perspective of the human resource lens. My clinical approach to goal setting did not provide opportunities for teacher interest and investment in how we measured student success.

Journal entry 3 for the survey topic *This class really makes me think* centered upon my relationship with the teachers' union representation. I often had an adversarial relationship with our union representation because I could not productively engage them in problem-solving. This combative stance most frequently arose when increased rigor was a meeting topic. I wanted students to be more challenged and think through problems applying a greater depth of knowledge. I journaled that "they would really try and assign problems to others," particularly to the district central office. I would regularly stress that their toxic relationship with the central office resulted in missed opportunities for our students. And, I would explicitly identify the individuals supporting us and advocating for our program.

The prevalent human resource theories that apply to journal entry 3 are Norms and Networks. I articulated the informal norms for how our union leadership interacted with the central office and began to intervene. I demonstrated how our relationship with the central office was a complex web; the bureaucracy was not a monolith but made up of many informal relationships with individuals who support and advocate for our program. Further, I highlighted how our adversarial relationship and the conflict that arose from it derailed our aspirations for our students despite our collective intention. While I reflected that this approach was successful, I overlooked factors under the Norms learning theory. I never took the informal norms through formalizing established norms for collaboration between our union leadership and myself and the central office. As such, I did not optimize our group dynamic or provide for emotional attunement and psychological safety.

For the journal entry 4 *This class challenges me*, I focused my reflection upon the school's structure and how it tacitly "allowed for a lack of accountability for staff with no real

clear expectations.” This lack of accountability directly influenced norms within the building. The staff prided itself on having a positive culture defined by positive student relationships. While this was true, there was not a culture of positive academic outcomes for students. Moreover, in the absence of an academically oriented culture, there was a great deal of strife between staff with low and high expectations for student academic performance.

Here, the human resource learning theory regarding Norms aids in understanding how I led the work of creating an academically oriented culture. I did quickly identify the informal group norms. However, I addressed the undesirable norms on an individual level. I did not formally establish norms or engage the whole staff in a discussion of preferred group dynamic norms. In reflection, I could have better addressed the group dynamic with a holistic group approach, as opposed to changing behavior one by one.

On the survey topic, *The teacher asks difficult questions on tests* for journal entry 5, I journaled that I “probably put too much trust and autonomy on teachers for how they designed their tests.” Teachers were self-directed in adjusting curriculum and instruction to meet their goals for student credit attainment. Hence, this leadership practice closely aligns with Theory Y. In hindsight, I should have started with a Theory X approach with tighter oversight. While this approach can lead toward apathy or resentment, this was the level of control initially needed. From there, I need to incrementally grow staff capacity to be self-directed.

In journaling for entry 6, I folded the similar indicator of *The teacher asks difficult questions in class* into the above journal. My reflection centered here on project-based learning, our primary instructional driver. With project-based learning, the goal is to have students elicit difficult questions they seek to understand and solve. My practice for changing staff behavior

while simultaneously serving their needs was again individualized. I would schedule formal observations when students were engaged in project-based learning so that staff would be scaffolded for success under the Charlotte Danielson (2007) evaluation framework. Also, when conducting tours of the school, I would showcase classrooms where high-quality project-based learning was occurring. As with the survey topic *This class challenges me*, the overlooked factor was how I engaged the collective with project-based learning. Leveraging my individualized approach to changing behaviors while being cognizant of group dynamics could have optimized staff participation and engagement around project-based learning.

As I journaled on the topic of *This class requires me to work hard to do well*, I applied the human resource lens to my conversations with low-performing teachers. Over my tenure as principal, I steered away from reliance on the formal observation process to coach and supervise teachers. Instead, I began to more frequently round with teachers and have data-centered conversations to discuss if this is “the right fit for you.” I believe I had presuppositions that led me to employ Theory X to change behaviors. First, I believed that the time-consuming evaluation process would not result in coaching that effectively improved performance. Moreover, I did not fully believe that the behavior of some employees could be changed. Due to my biases, I overlooked how a Theory Y approach could have aligned the interest of poor-performing employees with the needs of our school.

Growing the leadership capacity of high-performing teachers was the theme of my journaling for entry 8, *I really learn a lot in this class*. Here, I articulated an individualized approach to growing leadership capacity. In sum, I would find intra-district leadership opportunities extending beyond our school. Additionally, I would send teacher leaders to high-

quality professional learning experiences in and out of the state that was tailored to their roles and content. I reflected that this approach helped to “create a sense of validation...that they were leaders.” Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs this addressed these teachers’ Egos. I was providing them with respect and recognition. Likewise, I led these high-capacity teachers through McGregor’s Theory Y human resource lens. Our organizational need for district alignment and distributed leadership aligned with our leaders’ interests related to their roles and content areas.

This individualized approach did apply to growing the leadership capacity of teachers that were not natural leaders or intrinsically motivated to continue their professional development. In effect, I was swinging from one end of the pendulum to the other, either applying Theory X or Theory Y depending on the individual. I did not have a systemic means to incrementally develop teachers from Theory X to Theory Y.

For the last survey topic under the indicator of Academic Press, *The teacher wants us to become better thinkers, not just memorize things*, the focus of journal entry 9 was on teacher opportunities for innovative project-based and work-based learning experiences within their respective career pathways. I reflected on the high amount of autonomy and resources given to teachers to be innovative. I was implementing McGregor’s Theory Y approach to managing human resources since there was such a high level of self-direction. I would step in and model effective practices when teachers struggled with innovation or resisted it. Ultimately, this just led to me filling in for our lowest-performing pathway year after year. I overlooked that my modeling enabled these teachers to maintain the status quo. I did not have a plan to gradually release the teachers from my modeling to their own execution of project and work-based learning experiences.

Teacher Influence

The Teacher Influence indicator within the Essential of Effective Leadership is perhaps the indicator that most closely aligns with the human resource organizational learning theory. Bolman and Deal (2017) proffer a milieu of examples in which empowering employees fosters a positive culture and maximizes an organization's productivity. Progressive organizations focused on employee influence and empowerment invest in employee development, encourage autonomy and participation, foster teamwork and egalitarianism, and infuse work with meaning (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

Whereas the 5Essentials utilizes the term 'Teacher Influence' as a leverageable factor for improving a school's performance, Bolman and Deal refer to 'employee empowerment' as a means to increasing an organization's performance. For this research, these terms are interchangeable. To measure Teacher Influence, the 5Essentials surveys teachers according to the topics in Table 12.

Table 12. Topics Surveyed to Measure Teacher Influence Indicator within the Essential of Effective Leadership

| Teacher Influence: Teachers report having influence on: |
|--|
| Journal Entry 10: Planning how discretionary school funds should be used |
| Journal Entry 11: Determining which books and other instructional materials are used in classrooms |
| Journal Entry 12: Establishing the curriculum and instructional program |
| Journal Entry 13: Determining the content of in-service programs |
| Journal Entry 14: Setting standards for student behavior |

An *a priori* condition to employee empowerment is providing information to employees. Providing information signals that management trusts employees and creates a powerful incentive for employees to contribute (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Armed with information, employees recognize how they fit into the bottom line and are therefore more motivated to participate. Employee participation in decision-making is correlated to both increased morale and productivity. This productivity is realized by increasing the effectiveness of workers and enhancing organizational learning. Greater freedom, authority, feedback, and challenges must be considered to achieve higher participation, satisfaction, and productivity.

Before this study, I struggled to identify the unconsidered factors that influence poor performance in this indicator. Teacher Influence has been the lowest-scoring indicator within the Essential of Effective Leadership throughout my tenure at Magnum Opus. Hence, it has been at the forefront of Magnum Opus's continuous improvement initiatives. This particular Essential goes to the crux of this study.

Regarding the Teacher Influence survey topic *Planning how discretionary school funds should be used* for journal entry 10, I reflected that PLCs have full autonomy in ordering instructional materials. I referenced that the school's discretionary budget has dramatically grown in relation to its increased performance since its grant awards are tied to performance. Purchase requests are rarely denied. For example, in light of the current pandemic and the proliferation of remote learning, teachers and staff were allowed to order from a menu of items that would facilitate remote learning, including standing desks, ergonomic chairs, secondary computer monitors, wireless mice, and headsets. Per journaling for entry 10,

I think this had a giant impact on how I served the employees' needs because they were able to see that they had at their disposal anything that they needed. And, I always made it clear to tie that to the fact that that was because they had worked so hard with regards to their academic press to really improve student outcomes.

Here, I was applying McGregor's Theory Y and Argyris and Schon's Model II. I aligned our budget so that our organizational needs matched employees' interests. Teachers were empowered to work within their professional learning communities to engage in inquiry and advocate for resources that would improve student outcomes. Similarly, under Maslow's hierarchy of needs, I was fulfilling the staff's needs for well-being, safety, belonging, and ego. However, my approach did not extend to Maslow's highest level of self-actualization. Identifying this overlooked factor is one finding of this study. Per Bolman and Deal (2017), organizations gain a competitive advantage by investing time and resources into the development of employees. I was investing in employees, but not in a deliberate fashion that invested in their development or self-actualization.

For journal entry 11, *Determining which books and other instructional materials are used in classrooms*, I noted in my journal that these decisions are largely determined by the district. Teachers are encouraged to integrate project-based learning opportunities to the greatest extent possible. Per journaling,

I really tried to change behavior by hiring an instructional coach that was focused on project-based learning and pushing that instructional coach who had a great deal of influence with her peers to enter into their PLCs to provide professional development on

ways within their specific content areas that they could integrate project-based learning opportunities.

I served employee needs in this regard by “always showcasing teachers that had phenomenal project-based learning taking place.” Moreover,

I always made a point of having an open-door policy with the building and trying to bring as many external stakeholders in for tours of the building. And as I would provide these tours, I would always make sure that we were visiting the classrooms that had the highest engagement in student collaboration in project-based learning, so that teachers were receiving validation for their work, not just from myself, but seeing that external community members and stakeholders, were also valuing the work that they were doing.

However, as I note in my journaling, “This approach did have a drawback, in that several teachers became upset that their classrooms were consistently neglected or overlooked during tours.”

Here, theories falling under group dynamics shed light on unconsidered factors. By regularly and exclusively showcasing teachers engaged in project-based learning, I established an informal group norm that caused strife among staff. While I always promoted project-based learning, I never formally addressed that it would be the focus of building tours. If, instead of always highlighting the same teachers on tours, I had worked with all staff to establish norms for participation in tours and connected them with our instructional coach to have an opportunity to engage students in project-based learning, I could have been more emotionally attuned to their needs. I could have better served their psychological safety and, in turn, had an even more robust PBL program. Per Bolman and Deal (2017, citing Healey et al., 2015), I was engaging in the

unconscious level of cognition that can cause group conflict. I was unaware of how my leadership contributed to emotionally charged attitudes.

Findings for journal entry 12, *Establishing the curriculum and Instructional Program*, overlap with the prior indicator. From the human resource lens, I overlooked the fact that I could have more formally identified that PBL would be the focus of school tours. The emphasis on PBL was explicit in many regards, but it was at times only implicitly acknowledged, through tour focus or otherwise.

A secondary finding in this domain relates to how I would create agency for teachers by empowering them to have more influence at the district level. By instilling in teachers that we needed to exert greater influence because we were “the wave of the future,” I was effectively adhering to the Model II human resource management theory. I was embracing our collective influence on growing our program.

Theory Y and Model II were the prevalent codes for journal entry 13 on *Determining the content of in-service programs*. Theory Y is present as staff became more self-directed in setting school-wide goals and in-service programming. The staff’s goals became aligned with the school’s vision. Model II was also present as the approach to more distributed leadership hinged upon open communication and goal setting. As I journaled,

I had to bite my tongue and make sure that I was not dominating meetings and that rather I would just be there to provide clarification or to answer questions that were directed towards the administration as they came up.

Since teachers were leading teachers, there was a much greater integration of advocacy than the sit-and-get format of the meeting structure I previously led.

This journal entry did not illuminate overlooked factors with regard to the topic at hand, in-service programming. Rather, I gleaned that I could successfully attain the higher-order human resource lenses of Theory Y and Model II because I had a coherent framework for developing the collective capacity of the leadership team. Instead, I did not rely upon my default approach of building capacity or buying in through leveraging individual relationships, an approach more attuned to the political lens as opposed to the human resource lens.

The final Teacher Influence journal entry 14 was about *Setting standards for student behavior*. I journaled a two-prong approach in my relationship with employees to change their behavior while meeting their needs. First, I noted that “we needed to have a proactive approach to establishing relationships with the students and I would model this through my interactions with students.” As an example, I noted how I was on a first-name basis with students. Second, I made it mandatory for teachers to make regular phone calls home in which any constructive criticism regarding behavior or performance was couched in predominately positive feedback on the child.

The prevalent code for this entry is Maslow’s self-actualization. Teachers’ ratings on our district’s annual Employee Engagement and Satisfaction Survey were the highest of all schools across multiple categories year over year. Teachers rated a score of 99/99 for having trusting relationships with their students. My analysis is that strong relationships coupled with a focus on instruction instead of classroom management met the teacher needs that steered them into the profession in the first place.

What is overlooked in applying the human resource theories espoused by Bolman and Deal (2017), is the limitation of a binary interpretation of leadership from the human resource

perspective. I applied the lower-order Theory X or Model I leadership lenses because I set clear non-negotiable expectations. Tight controls were in place that set ownership of the issue on employees. Even though I was applying lower-order lenses, the results achieved matched what would be expected from the application of the higher-order lenses of Theory Y and Model II. If scaffolded and modeled appropriately, lower-order human resource lenses can be successfully applied to achieve high-order results.

Expectations for Postsecondary Education

To measure Expectations for Postsecondary Education, the 5Essentials surveys teachers according to the following topics.

Table 13. Topics Surveyed to Measure Expectations for Postsecondary Education Indicator within the Essential of Supportive Environment

| Expectations for Postsecondary Education: Teachers report that: |
|---|
| Journal Entry 15: Teachers expect most students in this school to go to college |
| Journal Entry 16: Teachers at this school help students plan for college |
| Journal Entry 17: Most of the students in this school are planning to go to college |
| Journal Entry 18: Teachers in this school feel that it is part of their job to prepare students to succeed in college |

The expansion of dual credit programming is at the heart of my reflection in entry 15, *Teachers expect most students in this school to go to college*. In four years, our school went from no dual credit offering to twenty-one total offerings. This expansion occurred primarily through growing my individual relationships with the teachers we had and incentivizing each teacher to take on this more rigorous coursework. The most straightforward way that I incentivized teachers was to have them teach these courses in addition to their contractual five course load, resulting in

a 20% pay increase. I found ways for teachers to attend graduate or certification programs at no cost. I also regularly celebrated these teachers and I believe that their sense of self-worth grew as they saw their students continue to college. However, as I note in my journal, teacher expectations for students going to college “was never something that I was able to drive home for the entire staff.”

Maslow’s Ego and Self-actualization were at the forefront of my leadership in this domain. For those individuals that took up the dual credit mantle, I feel that I helped them become the best version of their teaching selves and validated them through various channels of respect and recognition.

Though approximately half of the staff became focused on students’ postsecondary success, the other half remained steadfast in the status quo. I overlooked a universal or formal approach to embedding a postsecondary ethos into all staff. This more formalized approach could have been accomplished through conferences in the evaluation process. Alternatively, I could have emphasized postsecondary student success by embedding the topic as a recurring agenda item in SLC and PLC meeting structures. In effect, I did not have a mechanism for aligning all employees’ interests to our organizational need for student postsecondary success as would have been possible with a Theory Y direction. While accomplished in pockets, as with our English PLC, our emphasis on postsecondary opportunities was not as systemic as it could be.

As aforementioned in the last paragraph, I closely monitored and developed our English department so that postsecondary outcomes were embedded in the English curriculum. I went deeper into how I managed from the human resource lens with the English department in entry 16 for *Teachers at this school help students plan for college*. Whereas I gave significant

deference to other departments, I regularly attended English PLC meetings and set their agenda related to postsecondary outcomes. This level of micromanagement employed Argyis' Model I approach to lead from the human resource perspective. I never gradually released the English department from this high level of oversight, so it is unclear if any true ownership or introspection was fostered. I had external mechanisms for changing the behavior of English teachers. However, if I had more deliberately aligned these mechanisms to be seen as mutually beneficial to teachers, I could have evolved into a Model II leadership approach.

The journal entry 17 for *Most of the students in this school are planning to go to college* presents a paradox. In carving out one day each month for work-based learning experiences, I provided a great deal of latitude for teachers to design experiences as they saw fit. I did not adequately engage pathway teachers in planning and preparation for career pathway experiences. I created dedicated space and time for planning experiences but did not have a feedback loop or means of providing sufficient feedback to pathway teams on their planning. There was time but no structure or guardrails for the final product. I put too much trust in staff to want to engage in work-based learning experiences. In hindsight, I do not believe staff was not at a level of interest or skill to be given so much autonomy. Herein lies the paradox; I needed to start at Theory X to get to Theory Y.

For journal entry 18 on the survey topic *Teachers in this school feel that it is part of their job to prepare students to succeed in college*, I placed emphasis on the manner in which our postsecondary vision for students was baked into our employee interview protocol. I created the interview questions to reflect our postsecondary vision. As we would interview for various vacancies, virtually all staff would have an opportunity to rotate into interview panels. Staff

would take turns asking the interview questions, and we would debrief each candidate on the quality of their response. While I set the interview questions, the format gave advocacy to all staff that participated in the interviews, allowing them mutual influence. Participation in this manner changed the interviewers' behavior. The authority vested in them to choose colleagues, based on their fit with the postsecondary vision, naturally led them to feel ownership of the vision.

This journal entry represents an occasion where I led staff through a Model II human resource learning theory approach with minimal scaffolding or incremental professional development. The tenets of Model II were baked into the interview protocol so that staff with the Model I attribute of lacking introspection or ownership moved into Model II territory by the end of an interview round. Not only did they feel ownership through their hiring input authority, but through discussion of candidates' fit, many average or even lower-performing staff began to absorb and understand the why behind the school's vision.

So how was this circumstance different in that it did not require scaffolding up to a Model II relationship with staff? In reflection, the staff with Model I attributes were influenced by the Group Dynamic Norms. By balancing interview panels with a range of performance levels, the lower-performing staff yielded to the majority norms for group participation, emotional attunement, and psychological safety.

Parent Involvement in School

To measure Parent Involvement, the 5Essentials surveys teachers according to the following topics.

Table 14. Topics Surveyed to Measure Parent Involvement Indicator within the Essential of Involved Families

| Parent Involvement in School: Teachers report that students' parents: |
|---|
| Journal Entry 19: Attend parent-teacher conferences when you request them |
| Journal Entry 20: Volunteered time to support the school (e.g. volunteer in classrooms, help with school-wide events, etc.) |
| Journal Entry 21: Contacted you about their child's performance |
| Journal Entry 22: Responded to your suggestions for helping their child |

For the Parent Involvement in School survey topic *Attend parent-teacher conferences when you request them*, the evidence from journal entry 19 centered upon how I restructured parent-teacher conferences. The initial informal group norm was to maintain the status quo. Given the low turnout of parents or guardians to traditional parent-teacher conferences, there was minimal work on the part of teachers. When I restructured the format to be more engaging for families, it required more work from teachers. This shift was uncomfortable at first and was therefore met with resistance. However, the new norm of engaging families through more meaningful activities became normalized because teachers could choose activities, they were interested in. Thus, while staff expectations were heightened, I was emotionally attuned to staff while providing them with psychological safety.

This example illustrates how integrating the human resource lens in my leadership led to most staff quickly growing their capacity to engage students and their families. There was minimal professional development or scaffolding required. This was because there was immediate ownership on the part of the staff. The activities were aligned with their own self-interest while also serving the organization's needs.

For the survey topic *Volunteered time to support the school*, McGregor's Theory Y was the prevalent code. Here, journal 20 evinces that I delegated too much autonomy to the teacher leading our parent engagement committee because she was so high capacity in other regards. However, from a situational perspective, just because she was high capacity as a teacher did not translate to her being high capacity in this new endeavor. I falsely assumed that because she was self-motivated and enjoyed challenging work that she would be successful. As I journaled, she "froze in the role because there wasn't enough direction set." While I may have been disposed to apply a Theory Y human resource lens to the circumstance, I importantly needed to also create an infrastructure for the parent engagement committee that would allow for autonomy but provide parameters or guardrails for the work so that clear goals were established with actionable outcomes to attain the goals.

For the survey topic *Contacted you about their child's performance* that teachers reported on, evidence from journal entry 21 was related to the information and orientation meetings that were held every month. Argyis's Model II was the prevalent code. I cited my lack of delegation as an area of growth from the perspective of the human resource lens. Since I unilaterally conducted most of these meetings, there was a lack of open communication or opportunities for mutual influence on the part of employees. The error in this unilateral approach was that I neglected to recognize that counselors and clerical staff had much more interaction with families than myself. According to the tenets of Model II, had they been given more opportunity in these introductory meetings to establish relationships with families, staff would have been more invested in common goal setting with families around the organization's vision.

The last survey topic under the Essential of Parent Involvement in School required teachers to respond to questions about families responding to suggestions for helping their child. The evidence collected from journal 22 focused on required parent and student conferences with administration after exclusionary discipline consequences were applied to student misbehavior. In this journal entry, I recorded my disregard for employees' needs. I recorded, "I had not done anything intentional to repair the harm that may have been done in the relationship between the student and teacher." As such, Model II was the prevalent code. I failed to include staff in reinstatement conferences and staff was therefore unable to exert influence on reinstatement expectations or the opportunity to repair any harm done in their relationship with students. As a result of this unilateral approach to these conferences, there was no framework or systems approach to engaging all stakeholders.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Introduction

This study aims to apply multiple organizational learning theories to continuous improvement efforts through a self-study methodology to allow me as a leader-practitioner to expand my conception of how my leadership worldview impacts school improvement efforts. By holistically applying complementary leadership theories to research-based school improvement identified to have the most significant impact on student achievement, one can create a comprehensive framework for understanding how one's leadership worldview impacts outcomes. Applying the learning theories to continuous improvement efforts aids the school leader in understanding and improving their leadership in meaningful ways. This approach to understanding school improvement thus creates a guide that can be used by other educational leaders seeking to learn how to expand their influence by integrating underutilized organizational learning theories into their worldview.

Implications for my Leadership

Through applying the different human resource lenses to my leadership of continuous improvement efforts, I collected journal evidence that reveal several opportunities to enhance organizational productivity through the intentional implementation of collective frameworks, norms, or policies to drive employee interactions. When I first took the Leadership Self-Assessment, I was surprised to score at the lowest decile on the human resource lens. I

considered myself to have relatively strong interpersonal skills regarding my leadership. I considered my interactions with staff to be positive and productive. While I still believe this holds, journaling for this study illuminated what was often missing: my unconscious application of the human resource lens relies upon one-to-one relationships. There are only a limited number of entries in which I document that my application of the human resource lens goes beyond personal relationships to instead institute a human resource framework or policy that shaped the collective interpersonal dynamic. Across the journal entries, it is rarely documented that I had established an explicit plan to develop organizational norms related to goal setting, communication, advocacy, or self-efficacy. In sum, there is limited evidence of formalized processes that I created or fostered to empower employees.

Across multiple journal entries, I acknowledged the absence of formalized mechanisms for normalizing my relationship with staff and amongst staff. I also articulated circumstances where there was no articulated process through which I would either change staff behavior or serve staff needs. Across all journal entries, there was evidence of either an overreliance on individual relationships or an under-reliance on formalized structures for interpersonal dynamics in ten entries.

One example journal in which I did identify the implementation of a human resource-oriented process for guiding employee relationships was in the entry for the survey topic *Teachers in this school feel that it is part of their job to prepare students to succeed in college.* In this entry, I identified how I engaged staff in the interview process. Through creating a framework for participation and dialogue in interviews, I journaled that I created a stronger sense of community, advocacy, and ultimately greater buy-in to the school vision.

Journal evidence for the survey topic *Determining the content of in-service programming* provides another one of the isolated instances in which I attained a high level of staff engagement through the deliberate implementation of a human resource-centered process. In this journal entry, I reflected upon how I shifted toward a more distributed leadership model for our school leadership team. In sum, I established a norm that I would only participate in a consultative role, only answering logistical or administrator-oriented questions as they arose. Teachers led teachers in identifying relevant topics, creating action items, and determining the next steps.

Beyond the need for me to more formally integrate human resource leadership practices into norms, processes, procedures, and structures, a second implication for my leadership that is derived from the evidence relates to how I scaffold the organization toward higher level human resource learning theories, such as McGregor's Theory Y and Argyis' Model II. Though one may fully invest in one of these higher-order learning theories, in my journaling, I found limited instances where these two learning theories become seamlessly embedded into the ethos of the school in a rapid fashion. Rather, in most scenarios, a gradual release from tighter controls to increased autonomy is required as staff capacity develops.

The evidence from the journal entry *Volunteered time to support the school* serves as an illustration of this trend. Here, I document the formation of a new parent engagement committee at the school. This upstart was spearheaded by a high-capacity teacher that is highly motivated. As such, I provided this teacher and the committee with full autonomy to set a vision and execute it. Unfortunately, this committee floundered and disbanded within a couple of years. In hindsight, I learned that while the committee leader was high capacity as a teacher, she had

marginal experience starting or leading a team on a new initiative. In my journal reflection, I noted the need to provide more intensive support and development at the onset. I could have then gradually released her to have autonomy and a greater likelihood of success.

There are a total of eight journal entries that reference a need to incrementally grow the capacity of staff toward higher-level human resource learning theories. Evidence from the survey topic *I really learn a lot in this class* elicits this trend when I reflect that

I was swinging from one end of the pendulum to the other, either applying Theory X or Theory Y depending on the individual. I did not have a systemic means to incrementally develop teachers from Theory X to Theory Y.

There was one of the eight aforementioned journal entries in which there was the successful integration of a higher-order human resource learning theory. In this instance, I orchestrated significant institutional change with relatively quick staff assimilation. In journaling, I cited my attention to aligning this shift to the staff's interest and emotional attunement. Hence, staff desired ownership of the shift. The takeaway conclusion from my reflection upon the juxtaposition of lower and higher-order human resource learning theories is that the practical application of lower and higher-order learning theories rests on a fluid continuum of employee coaching. One cannot shift from a lower-order theory to a higher-order theory in a binary fashion. Based upon evidence from my journaling, going from lower to higher-order learning theories is not akin to flipping a switch. Rather, a deliberate and incremental approach must be executed to scaffold toward higher-order capacity. Situational context and staff capacity should determine the starting point for the integration of human resource learning theories into the workplace. For example, inexperienced staff may not be

equipped to engage in high-order learning theory integration. Such staff need more intensive support and supervision. They need tighter controls. As the inexperienced staff becomes versed in a task, they are prepared to exert influence, ask questions, and advocate. Nevertheless, at the outset, their lack of experience means their needs are not yet align with the organization's interest. Before any change or reform can be started, careful consideration should first be afforded to aligning staff needs and interests to the change or reform to optimize staff ownership.

Limitations

In applying human resource learning theories to my leadership of continuous improvement efforts, my journaling reflection often did not comport with the diametrical nature of McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y or Argyis' Model I and Model II. Across journal entries, I observed that the best approach to integrating the human resource lens into my leadership depends on the situational nature of the task to be performed. Often, circumstances dictated a need for tighter controls or the micromanagement of staff. McGregor and Argyis would label such approaches as a lower form of human resource integration.

While tight controls and micromanagement are not desired or ideal methods for shaping employee behavior, leaders must meet staff at their current capacity and build from there. However, neither McGregor nor Argyis accounts for a need for incremental tactics. Evidence from the journal survey topic *Most of the students in this school are planning to go to college* captures this conflict; "Herein lies the paradox; I needed to start at Theory X to get to Theory Y." Journaling from *Setting standards for student behavior* further reveals how the diametrical nature of these theories does not fully conceptualize the nuance or subtlety required when leading people with diverse outlooks. I noted that there is an inherent:

limitation of a binary interpretation of leadership from the human resource perspective. In essence, I applied the lower-order Theory X or Model I leadership lenses because I was setting clear non-negotiable expectations. Tight controls were in place that set ownership of the issue on employees. Even though I was applying lower-order lenses, the results achieved matched what would be expected from application of the higher-order lenses of Theory Y and Model II. Lower-order human resource lenses can be successfully applied to achieve high-order results if scaffolded and modeled appropriately.

In sum, the binary conditions posited by McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y and Argyis' Model I and Model II human resource learning theories do not adequately account for a fluid continuum or multifaceted integration of both lower and higher-order approaches to managing employees' behavior.

Recommendation for Future Studies

I chose to conduct this study using a self-study methodology because I wanted to engage in research that would aid me in understanding how I could improve my performance as a practitioner and school leader regarding critical continuous improvement endeavors for the school I served. Through utilizing Bolman and Deal's (2017) self-assessment tool, I readily learned that I lacked integration of human resource organizational learning theories in my leadership worldview. Equipped with this knowledge, I am able to dig deeper into the array of specific human resource theories cited by Bolman and Deal to better understand how a fuller integration of said theories could benefit my leadership approach. As a practitioner, I would hope that fellow colleagues would be able to replicate this study in order to derive the same benefits I have experienced through the research. Of course, the viability and utility of replicating this

study are contingent upon the unique contexts in which the study could be applied.

School administrators seeking an introspective approach to doctoral research that could directly impact their leadership over school improvement efforts could benefit from conducting a similar study. The study could readily be adapted to substitute a different framework of organizational learning theories or a single organizational learning theory depending upon the researcher's focus. Likewise, a future researcher may apply organizational learning theories to different school improvement results. While the 5Essentials serves as the continuous improvement source of data for this survey, parent surveys, employee surveys, or other more localized data sets could be leveraged.

There are practical limitations to engaging in this continuous improvement self-study methodology for school administrators with the greatest constraint being time. The benefit gained from replicating this study would be far outweighed by the burden of time it takes to complete this study mirroring all the same stipulations. That said, there are a couple of different ways this study could be adapted to benefit school administrators without having to sacrifice focus on the variety of responsibilities facing administrators. For example, the crux of this study could be distilled into a graduate course for administrators. Since many school administrator leadership courses already use Bolman and Deal's (2017) *Reframing Organizations* as the primary source of content, such courses could have students complete the self-assessment and then layer their own school improvement results onto their deficit learning theory or theories. By applying their own school's outcomes to the results, administrators may better internalize the concepts outlined by Bolman and Deal. The time required to complete coursework could be pared down from that required of a doctoral study by having students only focus on one metric

for school improvement, as opposed to the twenty-two survey topics stemming from the four Essential indicators of this study. A professor of a course that incorporates the essence of this study could also have students engage in group presentations where students were grouped according to their lowest percentile score on the 4-frame model. In this fashion, students would derive targeted insight into more fully integrating their deficit learning theory into their continuous improvement efforts while still learning about the central tenets underpinning the other learning theories, albeit at a more topical level.

Just as the substance of this study can be abridged to a graduate course, it has the potential to be further truncated to be offered as a professional learning opportunity for school administrators. A regional office of education could tailor the study to meet the requirements of the Illinois State Board of Education's annual Administrator Academy, a one-day workshop required of each school administrator in Illinois to keep their Professional Educator License (PEL) active. Alternatively, a school district could offer all district administrators training based on the tenets of this study.

The prospect of offering a district-led professional learning opportunity that would apply Bolman and Deal's (2017) 4-frame model to continuous improvement data is especially appealing to this researcher. At the outset of this study, I formulated a research proposal that would impact my leadership at the school level. Since then, I have moved into a district-level position. As Chief of Schools for the district, I now direct the professional development of 41 principals and eighty assistant principals. From this new vantage, the implications of this study take on new meaning.

The aggregation of data that would be available from all principals applying the 4-frame

model to the 5Essentials could have profound consequences for identifying and designing ongoing professional learning. Professional learning could be targeted toward a learning theory in which a disproportionate number of administrators scored in lower percentiles. Likewise, professional learning could be customized according to the 5Essential indicators that principals choose to focus on. On the contrary, district leaders could opt not to focus on a learning theory or 5Essential indicator. Instead, the matrix created by layering the 4-frame model over the 5Essentials provides a ready-made formula for differentiating professional learning to the individual level.

Beyond utilizing a version of this study to identify professional learning opportunities for school administrators, the results of conducting a study with all administrators across a large district could illuminate opportunities for growth and change at the district level.

APPENDIX A
OPUS MAGNUM THEORY OF ACTION

MAGNUM OPUS THEORY OF ACTION



Magnum Opus staff is committed to disrupting the inequities and adversities faced by our students through:

- building strong relationships with students,
- individualizing instruction through the use of formative data, learning guides, and goal setting,
- maximizing project-based learning opportunities,
- providing appropriate tiered supports and interventions to all students, and
- connecting students to college and career opportunities that promote the development of academic and employment competencies.

Through this commitment we will accelerate students' learning, close the achievement gap, and provide a pathway for Magnum Opus students to discover and pursue their full potential.

Inclusive, Adaptive, Individualized

APPENDIX B

OPUS MAGNUM BUILDING AND TEAM LEVEL GOALS

MAGNUM OPUS SMART FLOW SY20

Building Goal: Transition to Success

Wildly Ambitious Goal:

Every Magnum Opus graduate will discover and pursue his or her full postsecondary potential.

PLCs: See Departmental SMART Goals

Team Level Goals

MTSS: 70% of students will read at grade level or higher, grow 1 level, and/or attain a 12.9 GLE on the TABE.

SLCs: 80% of students will attain on average 3 or more credits per 60 days enrolled (proportional to time enrolled) leading to a total accumulation of 5,000 credits.

C&C: 100% of graduates that have attended Magnum Opus for 1+ year will complete all college and career benchmarks, attain a pathway certification, and obtain dual credit.

BHT: 80% of high risk students identified through the SDQ will receive targeted social work and counseling resulting in improved post-SDQ scores.

Attendance: Magnum Opus will attain a 91% average daily attendance rate.



Inclusive, Adaptive, Individualized

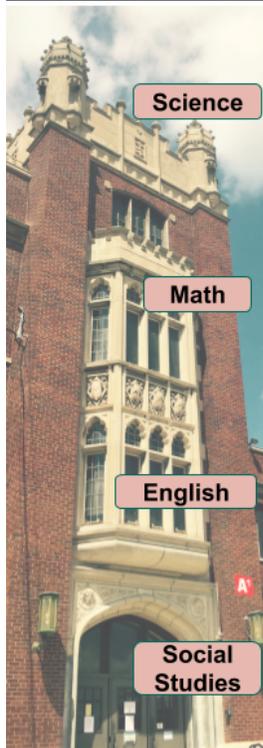
APPENDIX C

OPUS MAGNUM CORE CONTENT AREA GOALS

MAGNUM OPUS SMART FLOW SY20

Type II District Focus Skills

Type III Course Specific Content



Science

80% of science students earning credit will demonstrate growth from the science pre-assessment to post-assessment in the focus skill of asking questions in the following bands:

| Pre-Assessment Score | Growth |
|----------------------|---------------|
| 0-35%: | >20% |
| 36-60%: | >10% |
| 61%+ (proficiency): | maintain or > |

Math

80% of math students earning credit will demonstrate growth from the linear equations pre-assessment to the post-assessment according to the following bands:

| Pre-Assessment Score | Growth |
|----------------------|---------------|
| 0-24%: | >25% |
| 25-74%: | >10% |
| 75%+ (proficiency): | maintain or > |

English

80% of all English students earning credit will attain proficiency (in the 'yes' column) in gathering and understanding evidence AND communicating conclusions based on performance as measured on the RPS ELA and Social Studies Focus Skills Rubrics, unless they are already scoring at a proficient level in both categories.

Social Studies

80% of social studies students earning credit will attain proficiency (in the 'yes' column) in asking questions based on performance as measured on the RPS ELA and Social Studies Focus Skills Rubrics, unless they are already scoring at a proficient level in both categories.

80% of science students earning credit will demonstrate growth from the science pre-assessment to post-assessment according to content specific areas in the following bands:

| Pre-Assessment Score | Growth |
|----------------------|---------------|
| 0-35%: | >20% |
| 36-60%: | >10% |
| 61%+ (proficiency): | maintain or > |

80% of math students earning credit will demonstrate growth from the math pre-assessment to post-assessment according to the following bands:

| Pre-Assessment Score | Growth |
|----------------------|---------------|
| 0-19%: | >40% |
| 20-39%: | >30% |
| 40-54%: | >20% |
| 55-74%: | >10% |
| 75%+ (proficiency): | maintain or > |

80% of students will read at grade level or higher, grow 1 level, and/or attain a 12.9 GLE on the TABE.

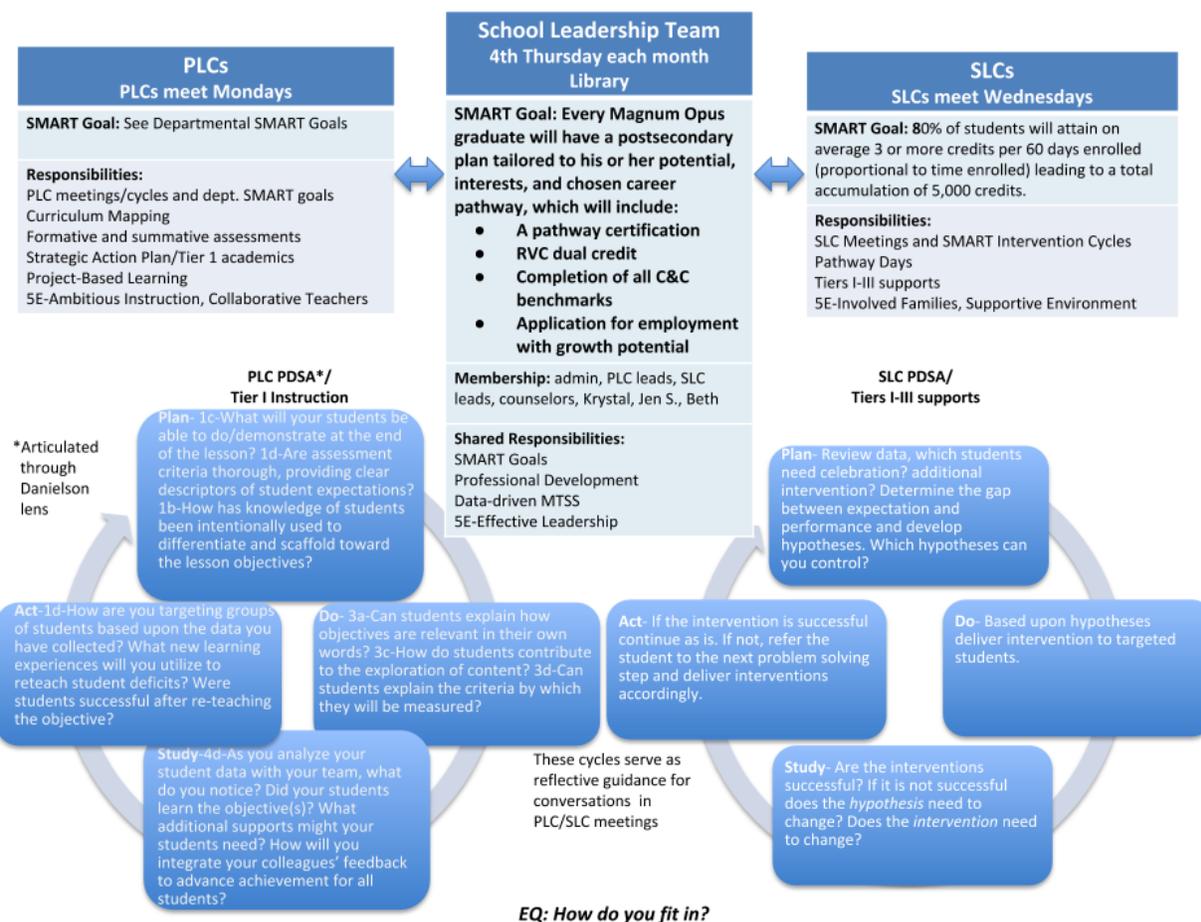
80% of social studies students earning credit will demonstrate growth from the social studies pre-assessment to post-assessment according to the following bands:

| Pre-Assessment Score | Growth |
|----------------------|---------------|
| 0-39%: | >30% |
| 40-69%: | >15% |
| 70%+ (proficiency): | maintain or > |

Inclusive, Adaptive, Individualized

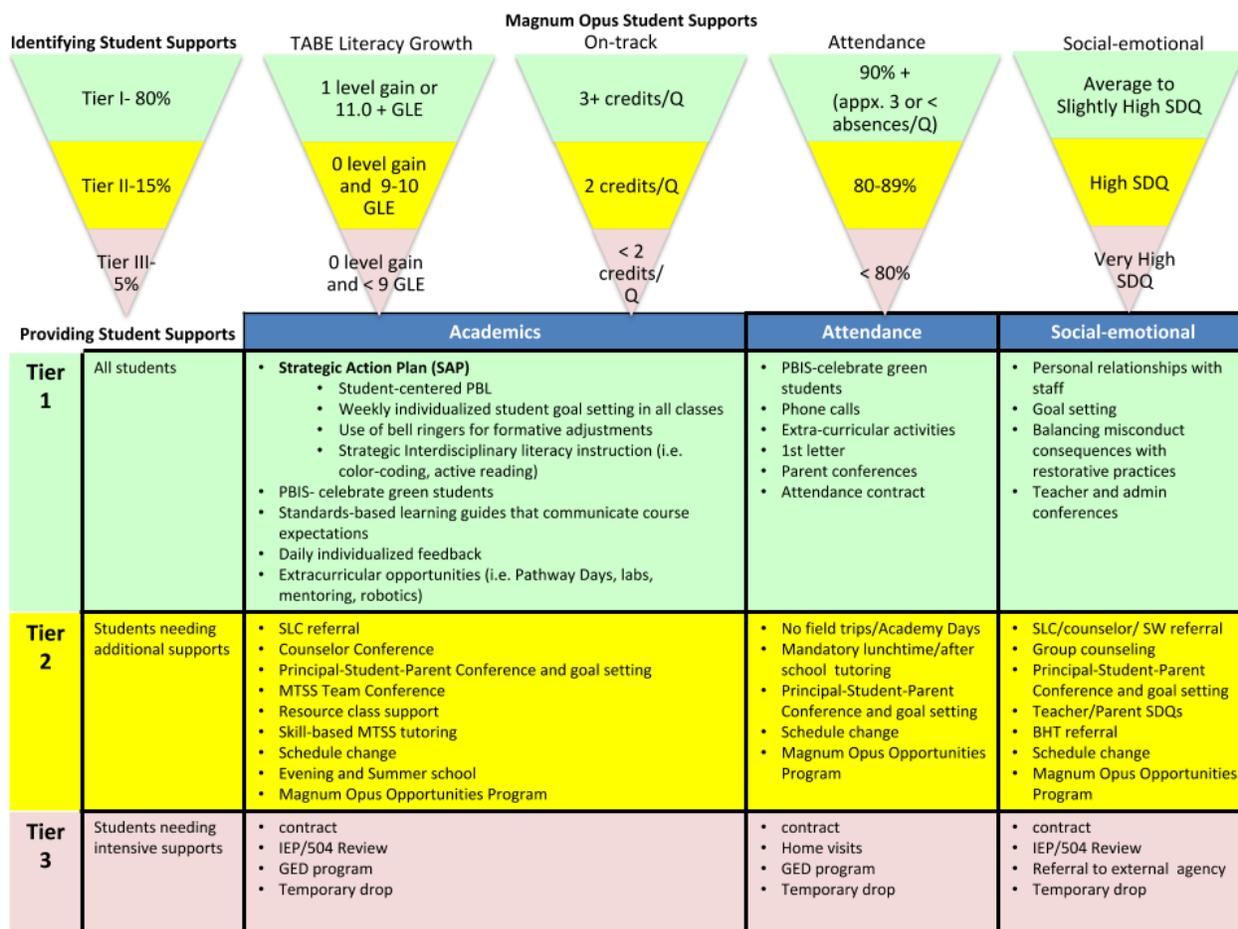
APPENDIX D

OPUS MAGNUM CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT CYCLES FOR PROFESSIONAL
LEARNING COMMUNITIES AND SMALLER LEARNING COMMUNITIES



APPENDIX E

OPUS MAGNUM MULTI-TIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT (MTSS)



APPENDIX F
ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION METRICS FOR
HIGH SCHOOL REPORT CARDS

High School



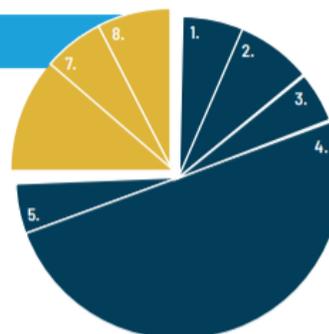
Academic Indicators

- 1. English Language Arts Proficiency: 7.5%
- 2. Math Proficiency: 7.5%
- 3. Science Proficiency: 5%
- 4. Graduation: 50%
- 5. English Learner Progress to Proficiency: 5%



School Quality/Student Success Indicators

- 6. Chronic Absenteeism: 10%
- 7. Climate Survey: 6.67%
- 8. Ninth-Graders on Track to Graduate: 8.33%
- 9. College and Career Readiness*
- 10. Fine Arts*



*Not ready for implementation.
See definitions of all indicators on next page.

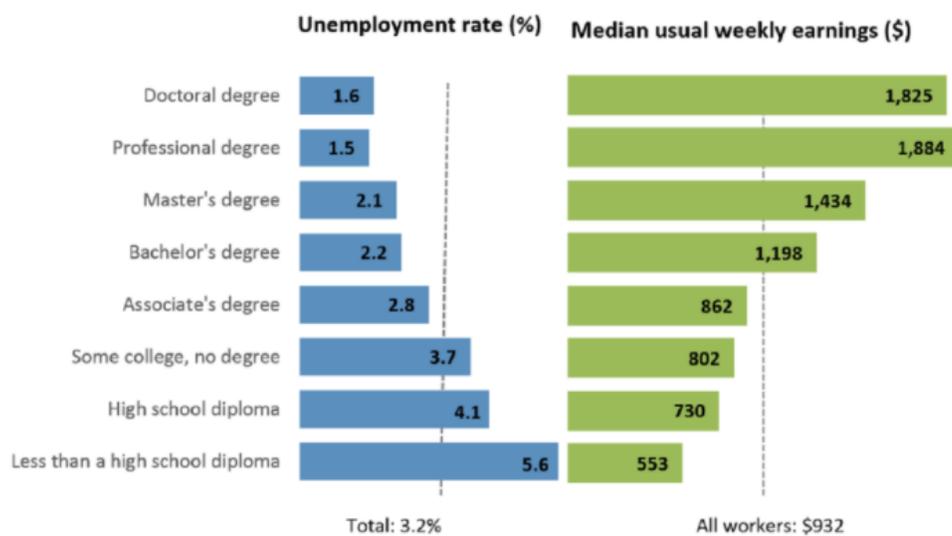


Illinois
State Board of Education

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APPENDIX G
UNEMPLOYMENT RATES AND MEDIAN WEEKLY EARNINGS
BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT, 2018

Unemployment rates and earnings by educational attainment, 2018



Note: Data are for persons age 25 and over. Earnings are for full-time wage and salary workers.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

APPENDIX H

5ESSENTIALS SURVEY JOURNAL TOPICS FOR THE LOWEST PERFORMING
INDICATORS IDENTIFIED FOR THIS STUDY FOLLOWED BY ROUNDS ONE
THROUGH THREE JOURNAL PROMPTS

Academic Press: Students report the following about one specific class:

The teacher expects me to do my best all the time

The teacher expects everyone to work hard

This class really makes me think

This class challenges me

The teacher asks difficult questions on tests

The teacher asks difficult questions in class

This class requires me to work hard to do well

I really learn a lot in this class

The teacher wants us to become better thinkers, not just memorize things

Teacher Influence: Teachers report having influence on:

Planning how discretionary school funds should be used

Determining which books and other instructional materials are used in classrooms

Establishing the curriculum and instructional program

Determining the content of in-service programs

Setting standards for student behavior

Expectations for Postsecondary Education: Teachers report that:

Teachers expect most students in this school to go to college

Teachers at this school help students plan for college

Most of the students in this school are planning to go to college

Teachers in this school feel that it is part of their job to prepare students to succeed in college

Parent Involvement in School: Teachers report that students' parents:

Attend parent-teacher conferences when you request them

Volunteered time to support the school (e.g. volunteer in classrooms, help with school-wide events, etc.)

Contacted you about their child's performance

Responded to your suggestions for helping their child

Round One Journal Prompts

1. What is the relationship between employees and myself in this regard?
2. How do I try to change employees and employees' behavior in this regard?
3. How do I serve employees' needs in this regard?

Round Two Journal Prompt

How do the most prevalent organizational learning theories from my least integrated 4-frame-lens inform continuous improvement efforts in regard to this 5Essentials survey topic?

Round Three Journal Prompt

Based upon identified theories and concepts from my lowest percentile Bolman and Deal lens, what factors am I considering or not considering when engaging in continuous improvement concerning this 5Essential survey topic?

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VITA

Morgan Daniel Gallagher was born in Salisbury, Maryland, on November 19, 1979. Dr. Gallagher attended Tulane University for his Bachelor of Arts degree, double majoring in international relations and Spanish. He graduated in May of 2002. He then received a master's in education in bilingual special education from the University of Illinois - Chicago in 2006. In 2011, Dr. Gallagher graduated from Loyola University Chicago Law School with a juris doctor degree with a certificate in advocacy. Thereafter, Dr. Gallagher attended DePaul University, attaining a Master of Education in educational leadership in 2013. In May of 2023, Dr. Gallagher graduated from Loyola University Chicago with a Doctor of Education in educational leadership and supervision.

Dr. Gallagher began his career in education as a substitute teacher for Chicago Public Schools. He taught bilingual special education at McCormick Elementary for five years. He later taught special education, Spanish, and the United States legal system at Manley Career Academy for four years followed by two years as an assistant principal there. Dr. Gallagher served another two years as assistant principal at Roosevelt High School. In 2016, Dr. Gallagher moved to the Rockford, Illinois region where he served as principal of Roosevelt Community Education Center for five years with Rockford Public Schools. Upon completion of his doctoral program, Dr. Gallagher served as the Chief of Schools for Rockford Public Schools.

Dr. Gallagher is married to Danielle Gallagher and together they have three sons, Keegan, Quinn, and Kellan.

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