Influences of School Superintendents’ Servant Leadership Practices to Length of Tenure

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore servant leadership behaviors in superintendents as perceived by various stakeholders, specifically principals and school board members. The study sought out what characteristics this elite group of superintendents, the gold standard, exhibit on a consistent basis that resulted in increased length of tenure. This article reflects on what leadership traits public school superintendents need to consistently demonstrate to achieve an increase in length of tenure. Three constructs, servant leadership, internal and external relationships, and organizational culture and performance, framed the study, ultimately seeking out the answer to the research question, How does a superintendent develop organizational culture and performance expectations resulting in improved stakeholder relationships and increased length of tenure? The study of length of tenure and superintendents is one of interest to school boards and communities.

Understanding the complexity of the roles and responsibilities of the public school superintendent is a daunting task given the depth of the expectations of the role. Houston (2001) discusses the challenges and rewards of being a superintendent, “Superintendents know they can change the trajectory of children’s lives, alter the behavior of organizations, and expand the possibilities of whole communities”. As Houston suggests, a superintendent typically pursues this position with the hopes of being able to make a positive impact on the school and community, yet much of what can be accomplished is constrained by school law and state policy. A superintendent must maintain a high level of awareness of stakeholder perceptions and reconcile them with reality.

Fullan (2003) refers to this state of school law and state policy as, “What standards were to the 1990’s, leadership is to the future”. While standards and accountability are highly valued, it is our belief that organizational success rests on the shoulders of the leader to accomplish sustainable change within an organization. How a superintendent chooses to confront the roles and responsibilities can make all the difference in the success and length of tenure a superintendent experiences. Houston (2001) maintains that, “Leadership in the future will be about the creation and maintenance of relationships: the relationships of children to learning, children to children, children to adults, adults to adults, and school to community”. This study explored the perceptions of stakeholders regarding the culture established by the superintendent. It is an assumption that the success or failure of these stakeholder relationships will impact the success a superintendent experiences.
Current findings indicate that relationships begin with the superintendent and have a trickle-down effect. Internal relationships with school principals are crucial to the superintendent’s success. Waters and Marzano (2006) stated

When the superintendent establishes a relationship with the administrators in all schools, leadership autonomy is often encouraged among principals. As the superintendent encourages the administrators to assume a more proactive leadership responsibility, he is also encouraging the principal to embrace the established goals of the board and superintendent in the process; effective learning environments are improved for students.

Siccone (2011) discusses the expectancy of superintendents to excel in the leadership skill set with additional stakeholders as, “necessary for him to work successfully with staff, in order to assist in developing the effective learning environment needed for students to be successful.” Chynoweth (2008) refers to this a need for the superintendent to “win people over when they want to do what needs to be done.” It is all about consistency and developing relationships with stakeholders.

Value of Public School Superintendent as a Leader and Reflective Practitioner

Superintendents of the 21st century will need to create a network with stakeholders so that everyone participates in the shared vision. As paraphrased by Houston (2001) a belief is that learning does not stop and start at the school house door and it is the responsibility of the superintendent to create networks within all stakeholder groups resulting in a system of lifelong learning. The superintendent becomes the glue that holds the system together. With the emphasis on rigor, relevancy and relationships, the job of the superintendent at times seems impossible. A superintendent’s success is measured in the form of accountability. Goens (2009) describes success of a superintendent as based on the “soft qualities” and that these soft qualities are at the “core and heart of a person’s ability to bring a group of people together around a common objective”. For this reason, we attempt to measure stakeholder perception of trust, vision, and integrity. In the words of Goens, this is summed up as “The foundation of leadership rests on character and interactions”. It is these fundamental relationships, although, hard to measure, that seem to be at the core of producing tangible and measurable results that impact a superintendent’s success. The value of a superintendent continues to be based on relationships.

Tenure

The No Child Left Behind Act (2002) has more than likely impacted length of tenure for some superintendents by increasing accountability for school districts, based on test scores. However, prior to increased accountability, the position of the school superintendent was one of interest due to the short tenure many school districts were experiencing with their superintendents. While the research shows the ranges of average length of tenure of a superintendent in the same school district is between 2.5 years (Natkin, Cooper, Alborano, Padillo, & Ghosh, 2002) and 6.43 years (Cooper, Fusarelli, Carella, 2000), there are many superintendents who remain on the job for more than 12 years. Although 21% of the superintendent’s maintained the position
between 14 and 15 years (Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000), the greater percentage, 79% averaged only two to six years. However, Glass, et al. discuss the fact that it must be noted the approximate average length of tenure in any given school district is five years, which is not enough to measure the effects of reform efforts. Although the research on length of tenure is contradictory and limited, the average length of tenure has not changed significantly since the 1970’s (Natkin, Cooper, Alborano, Padillo, & Ghosh, 2002). It appears to the authors that an increase in turnover of superintendents’ results in school systems operating in a state of flux or status quo and increased costs associated with high turnover. For this reason, the study of length of tenure and superintendent’s is one of interest to school boards and communities.

It has been estimated that in order for a school district to experience successful reform, a minimum of five years of consistency is necessary (Fullan, 1992; Wallace 1996). Although the research varies in the tenure status, none appears to be enough time for a superintendent to make a systemic change within an organization and to develop a trusting relationship with stakeholders while creating a successful culture, one that results in increased student achievement. The underlying implication is that superintendents with short tenures cannot bring about sustainable and successful change to school districts.

Yee and Cuban (1996) discuss the importance of tenure and school improvement as, “superintendents need sufficient time to design the district changes, mobilize support for a reformist agenda, make adaptations as implementation unfolds, and work to institutionalize those innovations that have improved the quality of school.”

For the purposes of the study, a “gold standard” superintendent is defined as one who maintains tenure in the same school district for a minimum of twelve years (Williams, 2010). Twelve years is identified as a gold standard because it will allow the superintendent to initiate reform and allow it to cycle through the change process twice. Twelve years is also time to follow the same group of students as they matriculate through the educational system from 1st through 12th grade to measure student achievement against reform efforts.

Although there is a lack of research on gold standard superintendents, there are superintendents who fall in this category. The research by Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000) indicate 9% of the superintendents remain with the same district for their entire career. While this number is relatively low, it brings to the forefront the possibility of a relationship between leadership and length of tenure. Although it must be noted that another possibility these superintendents stay in the job is that status quo is acceptable and school districts are content with the leadership regardless of relationships established by the superintendent. It should also be noted there is constant turnover of school board members and the superintendent is continually faced with establishing positive working relationships with new members every few years.

The lack of research in this area establishes the need for further inquiry. Glass, Bjork and Brunner (2000) explain the lack of research on longevity of the superintendent is due to most superintendents moving into the field late in their career at age 52.5. Age, coupled with early retirement incentives and some superintendent’s reluctance to disclose why they leave the job, results in a very small percentage of superintendents from which to gather data on tenure. The intent of this study is to seek out what characteristics this elite group of gold standard superintendent’s exhibit on a consistent basis that results in increased length of tenure.
Hargreaves and Fink (2000), discuss the meaning of sustainability as, “Sustainability does not simply mean whether something can last. It addresses how particular initiatives can be developed without compromising the development of others in the surrounding environment, now and in the future”. This is accomplished through effective teamwork and shared vision among all stakeholders. In light of the relatively short tenure of a superintendent, it seems to achieve sustainability within an organization would be very difficult to attain. There are many factors that contribute to achieving a sustainable organization. First of all it is important for the superintendent to sustain himself/herself by maintaining the focus increasing personal mastery skills. Once accomplished, a superintendent can lead the learning organization toward the school district vision, resulting in high success and goal achievement for all stakeholders.

**Servant Leadership**

Greenleaf (1977) developed the concept of servant leadership by chance after reading the book, *Journey to the East*, by Hermann Hesse. The book was about a group of men who traveled a mythical journey on a spiritual quest. One man, a servant, did menial chores for the group, sang to them, and maintained high spirits within the group through his attitude, mannerisms, and guidance. Along the journey, the servant disappeared and the group fell apart and eventually abandoned the journey. Several years later, the servant was found in a major leadership position in the religious Order who sponsored the original journey. Greenleaf draws the conclusion that the man who was once a servant was in reality a great leader as well as a servant, and for this reason Greenleaf began to study Hesse’s works more closely. This story was the premise and basis from which Greenleaf developed servant leadership. Greenleaf references the moral of the story stating, “This story clearly says that the great leader is seen as servant first, and that simple fact is the key to his greatness”. Greenleaf decided there was a need to write about servant leadership in 1977 because, “…we in this country were in a leadership crisis and that I should do what I could about it.”

Greenleaf (1977) used the servant’s position and mannerisms to define the role of a leader. The author did not substantiate the term servant leadership with empirical research but maintained a servant leader is servant first. Not until recently did the servant leader style of leadership gain popularity and validity with empirical research studies (Spears, 1998). In the words of Spears, “Slowly but surely, Greenleaf’s servant-leadership writings have made a deep, lasting impression on leaders, educators, and many others who are concerned with issues of leadership, management, service, and personal growth.”

By thorough reading and interpretation of Greenleaf’s (1970) original essay titled, *The Servant as Leader*, Spears (2004) outlined characteristics that frame servant leadership practices. Spears (2004) list these characteristics as: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. The authors believed these traits are related to trust, relationships and organizational culture and performance.

Spears (2004) states, “These ten characteristics of servant leadership are by no means exhaustive, but they serve to communicate the power and promise that this concept offers to those who are open to its invitation and challenge”. Although limited research has been done on servant
leaders, the ten characteristics have been highly referenced in many of the studies that have been completed (Farling, Stone and Winston, 1999; Russell and Stone, 2002; Sendjaya and Sarros, 2002; Reinke, 2004; Humphries, 2005; Barbuto and Wheeler, 2006), establishing the value researchers place on the importance of the ten characteristics relative to servant leadership. Graham (1991) links together the importance of servant leadership to stakeholders, learning communities, moral and ethical behavior. These connections have encouraged many leaders to take a look at what servant leadership has to offer to an organization. It is the “we are in this together” mentality that seems to have piqued the interest of leaders and researchers.

Since the late 1970’s, the concept of servant leadership has evolved. Those who practice servant leadership consistently have documented high organizational performance. Levering and Moskowitz (2000) reviewed traits that top companies in a Fortune survey consistently exhibited. Levering and Moskowitz identified commonalities among these leading companies as the following six criteria: openness and fairness, camaraderie/friendliness, opportunities, pride in work and company, pay/benefits, and security. Levering and Moskowitz discuss that those who practice servant leadership are some of the best companies to work for in America. Levering and Moskowitz found through Fortune 500 surveys that three of the five best places in Fortune’s January 2000 ‘Top 100 Best Companies to Work For in America’ were awarded to companies that lived by these criteria.

Joseph and Winston’s (2005) study found servant leaders can improve organizational performance, “…through the practice of servant leadership behaviors that increase trust in the manager and in the organization”. Once again, trust and relationships are established as a core factor in successful organizational performance. Spears (1998), maintains that servant leadership builds trust not only between the leader and the follower, but also between followers. This dissertation believes this development of trust will result in leaders and followers working together to set higher goals and to achieve more.

Chappel (2000) sums up servant leadership through the words of Jimmy Blanchard, Chairman and CEO of Synovus Financial Corporation in the following way

The heart of the servant-leader brings order, brings meaning to employees. When employees feel order and meaning and that they are a part of a team that stands for something good, that there is a higher calling than just working to get a paycheck, that they are improving mankind, there is an energy level that explodes and great things happen.

The research and work completed on servant leadership points to the fact the servant leader is one of moral and ethical character, who does not look at the job of leader as a status symbol, but as a way to serve others while moving the organization forward. A servant leader works to help others in the organization work to their full potential so that they, too, become servants. Relationships with stakeholders are very important to the success of a leader, especially the public school superintendent. All other aspects of leadership can be found embedded within the relationships a leader maintains with the stakeholders.
Theoretical Framework

The possible association between specific traits of a public school superintendent’s servant-leadership style and length of tenure on the job, the strength of this association and if there were factors that explained the differences framed of the study. The methods used focused on the study of three main constructs: servant leadership, internal and external stakeholder relationships, and organizational culture and performance. The over-arching focus was on the patterns of behaviors and trends school superintendents established that may resulted in an increased length of tenure commonly referred to as a gold standard superintendent. Indicators of success could be improved student achievement, retention of employees, attendance patterns of employees, teacher and student buy in and participation in district wide events, and a decrease in student discipline and increase in student attendance. The success of a school superintendent is vested in the form of sustainable, trusting relationships with stakeholders who are guided to a unified shared organizational vision. A servant leader is one who will pursue building positive internal and external stakeholder relationships, and create a shared vision resulting in improved organizational culture and performance.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Five research questions framed the study and are combined into the formal hypotheses listed. The research questions for this study were:

1. Why do some superintendents have a very short tenure in office while others keep their positions much longer?
2. Does a superintendent who practices servant leadership experience increased length of tenure on the job in the same school district as a result of improved trust, shared vision and stewardship?
3. What does a superintendent do consistently that affects length of tenure in the position?
4. What connections or aspects of professional relationships are there between a superintendent and the internal and external stakeholders in the organization that result in increased length of tenure for the superintendent?
5. How does a superintendent develop organizational culture and performance expectations resulting in improved stakeholder relationships and increased length of tenure?

The hypotheses for this study were:

H₁: Organizational culture will be positively related to the superintendent’s ability to develop internal relationships and a climate of trust, as measured by integrity, empowering and developing others and modeling.
H₂: Organizational performance will be positively related to organizational culture (as measured by team building and creating a shared vision) and the superintendent’s ability to build external relationships as measured by leading others.
H₃: A superintendent who is tenured more than twelve years is more likely to exhibit servant leadership traits than a superintendent who is tenured less than twelve years.
Research Design

The study consisted of administering a servant leadership instrument based on Page and Wong’s (2000) *Self-Assessment of Servant Leadership Profile* to specific stakeholder groups. The adapted survey, entitled *Superintendent Servant Leadership Traits* was administered as a web-based instrument. Superintendents in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania granted permission to participate in the study. While this may be perceived as self-selection bias, the authors felt that it was important to have support of the superintendents. The superintendents did not choose who within their organization had the opportunity to participate in the survey. All school board members and principals received a request to participate.

In the survey, the principals and school board members were asked to respond to questions that reflected their perception of their public school superintendent’s servant leadership traits and relationships relative to organizational culture and performance.

The survey yielded a total of 178 responses, representing 51 Pennsylvania school districts. Of the 178, 85 were school board members and 93 were principals. Overall the participants averaged 7.72 years of experience in their current position as principal or school board member. The participants indicated they worked with their current superintendent for an average of 3.35 years. The average tenure of all participating superintendent’s was 7.3 years total. A total of 11 superintendents of the 51 participating school districts from the online survey portion of the study had twelve or more years of experience as a superintendent. Nine of the superintendents of the 32 who volunteered to participate in the second phase of the study had 12 or more years of experience as a superintendent. However, only 6 was a superintendent for 12 or more years in the same district, thus establishing themselves as a gold standard superintendent. The second phase of the study consisted of conducting an interview based on the survey entitled *Superintendent Servant Leadership Traits* to the public school superintendent used in phase one. The survey is based on the *Self-Assessment of Servant Leadership Profile* (Page and Wong, 2000). This provided the researcher the opportunity to compare and contrast the superintendent’s self-perception to those serving as school board members and principals in the school district. In addition, the follow up interview allowed the author to gather specific examples of when and how a superintendent demonstrated servant leadership. These research findings will be expanded upon in another article.

Although there is a lack of research on gold standard superintendents, there are superintendents who fall in this category. Prior research indicates 9% of the superintendents remain with the same district for their entire career (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). According to Yee and Cuban (1996), “By 1950 the very long-tenured superintendents (25 or more years) had disappeared; by 1970, even those with tenures greater than 15 years had departed. As the same time, only for years 1970-1990 were there substantial numbers of terms of 5 or fewer years”. This study reflected an 11.76% tenure with twelve or more years of the fifty one participating schools, thus exceeding the national average of 9%.

The three hypotheses mentioned above were tested using a non-parametric inferential statistical technique, specifically, Spearman’s Rho. This technique was chosen because the survey results were ordinal in nature. Since the relationship between variables stated in hypotheses one and
two was being tested, Spearman’s Rho correlation analysis was the best fit. In addition to testing the relationship between variables, Spearman’s Rho also tested the strength of the relationship, and its direction.

In hypothesis three, the original data set was divided into two parts, those superintendents with less than twelve years’ experience and those with more than twelve years’ experience. The number of responses for the less tenured superintendents was 146 and for the more tenured superintendent was 32, totaling 178 sample size. Due to the fact one data set was small a t-test was completed on each variable representing a question in the survey.

In order to identify if there was equal variance between the variables, it was necessary to run an F-test to determine which t-test should be run. The F-test results on the eight variables resulted in a P-value at the alpha-level of less than .05 and, therefore the t-Test for unequal variances was applied to each variable. This is referenced in Table 6.

The methodology applied allowed the researcher to identify relationships and strengths of the relationships within the model. The data categories were collapsed in order to simplify the analysis. Collapsing scaled data is a common technique to apply in order to simplify the data analysis without losing the original intent of the answer. For example, question one of the survey contained five statements in relation to empowering others so an algorithm was built to reduce the five answers to one value.

Table 1 is an example how the algorithm works. The seven Likert-scale categories were reduced to three categories by combining responses. A response of one or two representing “strongly disagree” and “somewhat disagree” were combined to a value of one or “does not exhibit traits”; similarly, responses of three, four, or five representing neutral answers were combined to a value of two or, “moderately exhibits traits”; and six or seven were combined to a value of three or “strongly exhibits traits”. Table 1, represents the servant leadership constructs and items used in both the survey and interview questions.

Each row in Table 1 shows a frequency distribution of the 178 responses across the seven point Likert-scale. To illustrate the algorithm, consider row one in Table 1. Since eight people indicated, “strongly disagree” and six indicated, “somewhat disagree”, these responses were added together, and placed in row one and column of Table 2. There were a total of 21 responses for “mildly disagree”, “undecided”, and “mildly agree” so this was recorded in column two of row one. Finally, there are 77 responses for “somewhat agree” and 66 for “strongly agree”. These are added together and recorded as 143 in column three of row one. This was done for the remaining four rows in Table 1 to yield the five rows in Table 2.

The average number of responses for the three rescaled categories in Table 2 was recorded in the bottom row. These numbers were a sum of the original 178 responses. A new data set was then created with 158 responses of “three”, 15 responses of “two”, and 5 responses of “one”. This algorithm is applied to all eight questions in the survey.
Table 1.
*Example of Simplified Data Analysis*

Stakeholder Survey: Superintendent Servant Leadership Traits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Relations - Empowering Others</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answer Options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The superintendent is willing to risk mistakes by empowering others to &quot;carry the ball&quot;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The superintendent consistently encourages others to take initiative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The superintendent grants all workers a fair amount of responsibility and latitude in carrying out their tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The superintendent's leadership effectiveness is improved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
through empowering others.
5. The superintendent appreciates, recognizes and encourages the work of others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>158.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The model in Figure 1 served as a conceptual model for guiding the survey and interview questions. There was another component to this research, answered in another article, in which superintendents were interviewed. In Figure 1, the model reflects the belief that integrity, modeling, a climate of trust, and organizational culture are directly related. When a superintendent practices servant leadership and blends integrity, modeling and trust with empowering and developing the internal stakeholders, a positive organizational culture would result. It was the belief of the researcher that superintendents who practice servant leadership may also typically empower and develop others, especially the internal stakeholders for the good of the organization rather than for the good of the leader.

The model in Figure 1 also reflects the belief that a superintendent who practices servant leadership through team building and a shared vision will positively impact the district in a direct manner. A superintendent, who leads the internal stakeholders and maintains a focus on developing external relationships, specifically with the school board, by leading via servant leadership, will directly impact organizational performance. It is the belief when a superintendent has a positive self-perception of practicing servant leadership and, creates a focus on building internal and external relationships for the good of creating a shared vision for the organization, positive organizational culture and trust where stakeholders are empowered and developed, organizational performance may increase. By practicing servant leadership a
superintendent can focus on building internal and external relationships for the good of creating a shared vision for the organization.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model Guiding the Survey and Interview

![Conceptual Model Guiding the Survey and Interview](image)
The conceptual model in Figure 1 suggests that strong positive relationships, especially those with the school board, contribute to high organizational performance. When a superintendent practices servant leadership and works with the school board on goal setting and creating a shared vision with the stakeholder’s organizational performance should increase, potentially resulting in increased length of tenure for the superintendent. The dependent, or criterion, variable in this study was length of tenure. The independent, or predictor, variables in this study were empowering others and developing others, goal setting and decision making, integrity and modeling, and team building and vision as proxy measures for climate of trust, internal and external relationships, organizational culture, organizational performance, superintendent self-perception, and tenure. Self-perception was part of the second phase of the research which will be addressed in future work.

Population of the Study

Responses from this study were representative of urban, sub-urban and rural school districts in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Five participating school districts were Class 2 school district class size schools; 44 participating school districts were Class 3 school district class size schools, and; 2 participating school districts were Class 4 as determined by the Public School Code of 1949.

The population breakdown for each class is as follows: a Class 2 school district has a population between 350,000 and 1,500,000; a Class 3 school district has a population between 5,000 and 30,000; and a Class 4 school district has a population less than 5,000.

Participants in this study were identified as members of major stakeholder groups, one internal (principal) and one external (school board). School board members and principals are most representative of the community at large, administrative team, teachers, auxiliary staff, students, school board, parents, sports and activities, and various other school affiliated events and organizations. It was a belief that the representative stakeholder groups selected typically funnel concerns and questions through the two major stakeholder groups, school board and principals.

Results of the Study and Statistical Analysis

In order to fully analyze H₁, it was necessary to review the following independent or predictor variable correlation relationships: integrity to team building, integrity to shared vision, modeling to team building, and modeling to shared vision to measure climate of trust. Additional independent or predictor variable correlation relationships were required to measure internal relations. The additional independent or predictor variables were empowering others to team building, empowering others to shared vision, developing others to team building and developing others to shared vision. These independent or predictor variables served as proxy measures for climate of trust and internal relations which was an indicator of organizational culture. All eight variables in H₁ resulted in a strong direct relationship based on the following rule of thumb: 0.8 ≤ 1 very strong, 0.5 ≤ 0.8 strong, 0.3 ≤ 0.5 moderate, 0.1 ≤ 0.3 weak, and 0 ≤ 0.1 no relationship. The principal researcher advocates this as a set of rules to determine strength of relationship. The rule is applied to both positive and negative correlation results. The correlation results appear in Table 3.
The strong relationship between the $H_1$ variables suggests that when a superintendent practices servant leadership and blends integrity, modeling, and trust with empowering and developing the internal stakeholders, a positive organizational culture may result. The independent or predictor variables in the first hypothesis ranged from .826 to .950. We used the concept of satisficing to choose the overall correlation of .826, as the lowest value.

In order to test $H_1$, satisficing was used to review the relationships between four pair-wise comparisons of the proxy measures. The Web Dictionary of Cybernetics and Systems defines satisficing as:

Satisficing is an alternative to optimization for cases where there are multiple and competitive objectives in which one gives up the idea of obtaining a “best” solution. In this approach one sets lower bounds for the various objectives that, if attained, will be "good enough" and then seeks a solution that will exceed these bounds. The satisficer's philosophy is that in real-world problems there are too many uncertainties and conflicts in values for there to be any hope of obtaining a true optimization and that it is far more sensible to set out to do "well enough" (but better than has been done previously).”

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spearman’s Rho Correlation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empower</td>
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<tr>
<td>Empower</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dev</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The weakest correlation was used to carry out the hypothesis and therefore obtain an answer according to satisficing. This established the fact that the researcher did not attempt to manipulate data to bias the results.
We suggested that organizational culture is positively related to the superintendent’s ability to develop internal relationships and a climate of trust, as measured by integrity, empowering and developing others and modeling since we fail to reject the null hypothesis. Table 4 provides a visual representation of the pair-wise analysis of hypothesis one. The analysis of H2 measured the strength of the relationship between the following independent or predictor variables: goal setting and team building, goal setting and shared vision, and goal setting and leading as listed in Table 5. These independent or predictor variables served as proxy measures for organizational culture which was an indicator of organizational performance.

Table 4
Analysis of Hypothesis One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>H1</th>
<th>Integrity→Team Building</th>
<th>Integrity→Shared Vision</th>
<th>Modeling→Team Building</th>
<th>Modeling→Shared Vision</th>
<th>Empowering Others→Team Building</th>
<th>Empowering Others→Shared Vision</th>
<th>Developing Others→Team Building</th>
<th>Developing Others→Shared Vision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.826</td>
<td>.865</td>
<td>.906</td>
<td>.950</td>
<td>.832</td>
<td>.872</td>
<td>.923</td>
<td>.875</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once again the Spearman’s Rho correlation resulted in a very strong relationship suggesting that when a superintendent practices servant leadership through team building and a shared vision the result will be a positive impact to the school district through organizational performance. The independent or predictor variables in hypothesis two ranged from .943 to .974. We suggest that organizational performance would be positively related to organizational culture as measured by team building and creating a shared vision and the superintendent’s ability to build external relationships as measured by leading others. The Spearman’s Rho analysis resulted in a strong relationship between all three variable pairs resulting in failure to reject the null hypothesis. Table 5 provides a visual representation of the analysis of hypothesis two.

Table 5
Analysis of Hypothesis Two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>H2</th>
<th>Goal Setting→Team Building</th>
<th>Goal Setting→Shared Vision</th>
<th>Goal Setting→Leading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.943</td>
<td>.960</td>
<td>.974</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The third hypothesis determined if there were different survey responses between the gold standard superintendents who had maintained the position for more than twelve years and those with less than twelve years of experience.

The original data set was divided into two parts, those superintendents with less than twelve years of experience and those with more than twelve years of experience. The number of responses for the less tenured superintendents was 146 and for the more tenured superintendent was 32, totaling 178 sample size. Due to the fact one data set was small a t-test was completed on each variable representing a question in the survey.

In order to identify if there was equal variance between the variables, it was necessary to run an F-test to determine which t-test should be run. The F-test results on the eight variables resulted in a P-value at the alpha-level of less than .05 and, therefore the t-Test for unequal variances was applied to each variable.

Table 6 is an overview of the t-Test results for the eight variables. The eight variables were significant at the .05 alpha-level. Superintendents with less than twelve years tenure maintained an average 2.910 for question one, empowering others, while those superintendents with more than twelve years’ experience maintained an average of 2.65. This is an indication the stakeholders who participated in the survey (principals and school board members) perceived the superintendents with less tenure to empower them more. Since the P-value was less than .05 at the alpha-level, the null was rejected for empowering others.

The results of this test indicate superintendents with less experience for a shorter period tended to exhibit more servant leadership traits than gold standard superintendents. The implications of this finding are indicative of the possibility the longer a superintendent is a superintendent, the principals and school board members, believe they have less influence with the superintendent based on the eight survey questions. The perception among the principals and school board members is that they may be less likely to have influence and make an impact on the decisions of the superintendent the longer the tenure.

In addition to empowering others, the null was rejected for developing others, leading, goal setting, integrity, modeling, team-building, and visioning because all of the P-values were less than .05 at the alpha level.
All of the averages for the eight variables were also higher for the less tenured superintendents than those with more tenure. The averages are the perception of the stakeholders, in particular, the principals and school board members, that the superintendents with less tenure do a better job at empowering others, developing others, leading, goal setting, integrity, modeling, team-building, and visioning.

Hypothesis three was rejected. A superintendent with less than 12 years tenure is more likely to exhibit servant leadership traits as perceived by others.

**Variable, Reliability, and Validity**

The dependent, or criterion, variable in this study is length of tenure. The independent, or predictor, variables in this study are empowering others and developing others, goal setting and decision making, integrity and modeling, and team building and vision as proxy measures.

The reliability of a measuring instrument refers to the degree of consistency with which it measures whatever it is measuring (Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh, 1990; Gay and Airasian, 2000). A high reliability coefficient indicates consistency and high reliability of the instrument. A reliability coefficient of 1.00 would indicate a perfect reliability. Gay and Airasian (2000) note that due to the fact scores are often affected by errors of measurement resulting from a variety of causes, no test or measure is perfectly reliable.

The validity of an instrument is the degree to which it measures what it is intended to measure. If an instrument measures reliably, which is consistently, and also measures the intended variable, then it is highly reliable and valid. For this reason, validity is a critical feature of any
measurement instrument because it is the most important characteristic of a measurement instrument. Gay and Airasion (2000) discuss the importance of this as, “Validity is best thought of in terms of degree: highly valid, moderately valid, and generally invalid”. In order to recognize the validity of an instrument, the researcher must understand that interpretations of the instrument are very important.

Page and Wong’s (2000) Self-Assessment of Servant Leadership Profile was created after the authors did an extensive study of the literature on servant leadership. Page and Wong administered the self-assessment instrument to 6 male leaders in a Christian education setting, and 18 students (10 males, and 8 females) enrolled in a leadership course. Reliability and validity was established as indicated by the following results discussed by Page and Wong:

We also calculated the alpha values for each sub-scale as well as the total assessment score. The alpha coefficients were as follows: Total (0.937), Integrity (0.796), Humility (0.656), Servanthood (0.761), Caring for Others (0.714), Empowering Others (0.765), Developing Others(0.916), Visioning (0.569), Goal-setting (0.768), Leading (0.837), Modeling (0.763), Team-Building (0.815), and Shared Decision-Making (0.802). An alpha coefficient of 0.70 or higher indicates acceptable levels of internal reliability, which means that all the items in the same category measure the same attribute.

Regarding validity of the instrument, content validity was established to fit each question. Authors Dennis and Winston (2003) produced a correlation matrix and confirmed Page and Wong’s presumption that the items were correlated. Page and Wong’s Servant Leadership Profile was assessed and reliability and validity has been established. The lower validity numbers for the survey instrument for visioning may result in a possible limitation to the study. It should be noted Page and Wong’s (2000) humility coefficient also has a lower validity rating, but is not used in this research study.

Discussion

This article focused on the quantitative portion of a mixed design study with the primary purpose focusing on how superintendents relate to servant leadership based on what they do on a consistent basis that ultimately would result in increased length of tenure. The length of tenure was measured by gold standard superintendents, those who have maintained their superintendency for at least twelve years in the same school district.

It was the belief of the researcher that a climate of trust was directly related to organizational culture. Trust was measured by the traits of integrity and modeling. In other words, when a superintendent practices servant leadership and blends integrity, modeling and trust with empowering and developing the internal stakeholders, a positive organizational culture would result.
It was also the belief of the researcher that superintendents who practiced servant leadership through building relationships as measured by empowering and developing others for internal stakeholders would be related to organizational culture.

Previous studies indicate trust as a concept related to leadership and organizational culture. In summary, Greenleaf (1977) states trust is at the core of servant leadership. Ferres (2001) suggests that openness of communication, perceived organizational support, and justice are determining factors of trust. Bass (1985) indicates leadership styles are an important factor in determining trust levels with stakeholders throughout the organization.

The first hypothesis suggested organizational culture would be positively related to the superintendent’s ability to develop internal relationships and a climate of trust, as measured by integrity, empowering and developing others and modeling. The Spearman’s Rho analysis resulted in a strong relationship between the independent or predictor variables and the dependent or criterion variable in this study which is length of tenure.

The findings of this study support the previous body of work and shows again how important trust and relationships are to the organizational culture. Orr (2006) found that some of the cited issues superintendents had in regards to the position were, “those that could be classified as organizational socialization – learning the community and district and its values, priorities, history and resources, and problems – which would enable them to set priorities, do their work, and be effective”. Orr found that for some superintendents it was the school culture, reducing fear and building trust, learning how to take charge and developing positive relationships between the district, board, and community. Orr reported one superintendent as stating, “I’m not going to change the landscape, but I can change my behaviors and how I approach the landscape.”

Joseph and Winston’s (2005) study found servant leaders can improve organizational performance, “…through the practice of servant leadership behaviors that increase trust in the manager and in the organization”. Once again, trust and relationships were established as a core factor in successful organizational performance. Additionally, Spears (1998) maintained that servant leadership builds trust not only between the leader and the follower, but also between followers.

Another belief was that organizational culture directly relates to organizational performance as measured by team building and a shared vision. A superintendent, who leads the internal stakeholders and maintains a focus on developing external relationships, specifically with the school board, by leading via servant leadership, will directly impact organizational performance. External relations are factored in using leading as a proxy measure.

Hypothesis two suggests that organizational performance would be positively related to organizational culture as measured by team building and creating a shared vision and the superintendent’s ability to build external relationships as measured by leading others. In reference to hypothesis two, the Spearman’s Rho correlation resulted in a very strong relationship, suggesting that when a superintendent practices servant leadership through team building and a shared vision the result will be a positive impact to the school district through
organizational performance. It is the belief when a superintendent has a positive self-perception of servant leadership traits, creates a positive organizational culture and trust where stakeholders are empowered and developed that organizational performance may increase. By practicing servant leadership a superintendent can focus on building internal and external relationships for the good of creating a shared vision for the organization.

The findings of this study support the previous research and shows how important it is for a superintendent to build teams by creating a shared vision. Team building and shared vision impact the culture and ultimately organization performance. Creation of a learning community stresses the importance of the team approach to leadership. Learning communities also reference the importance of creative thinking as part of the journey. Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross & Smith (1994) refer to this creative journey as:

First, the community must develop committed leadership…
At first, a small group of believers tends to emerge – people who can reinforce and coach each other. The leadership of this cadre becomes sustained not through their personalities or influence, but through their concepts; they refine and shape the goals of their learning community, so that their vision becomes more than just a “do-good” idea. Through their concerted effort, including the use of well-crafted presentations and open, inquire-filled meetings, the word spreads to others in the area, and more people begin to see the value.

Senge contends that a leader must be clear and confident with his own leadership abilities in order to develop trusting relations with stakeholders in order to meet the goals of the organization, resulting in success.

When a superintendent practices servant leadership and works with the school board on goal setting and creating a shared vision with the stakeholder’s organizational performance should increase, ultimately resulting in increased length of tenure for the superintendent. Houston (2001) suggests that leadership is about relationships with stakeholders and maintains that, “Leadership in the future will be about the creation and maintenance of relationships: the relationships of children to learning, children to children, children to adults, adults to adults, and school to community.”

The dependent, or criterion, variable in this study is length of tenure. The independent, or predictor, variables in this study are empowering others and developing others, goal setting and decision making, integrity and modeling, and team building and vision as proxy measures. Due to the limited research in the area of tenure and goal setting, the findings of this research are partially validated by prior research. Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) estimated that in order for a school district to experience successful reform, a superintendent needed to stay on the job for a minimum of five years. Although the research varied in the tenure status, none appeared to be enough time for a superintendent to make a systemic change within an organization and to develop a trusting relationship with stakeholders while creating a successful culture, one that results in increased student achievement, a shared vision and team building.
The underlying implication is that short tenures cannot bring about sustainable and successful change to school districts. The findings in hypothesis three are such that as tenure increases, goal setting decreases. It is the belief of this author of this study this occurs for a variety of reasons. One is that a superintendent may become comfortable in the job and has developed a reputation of success, indicating a high amount of trust that does not dictate the need for team building and shared vision.

Another reason to potentially explain why empowerment is more valued than listening is based on leadership styles. Of the 500 possible superintendent interviews in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, thirty two superintendents volunteered to participate in the study. This is an indication that only those who were confident enough in their servant leadership skills volunteered to participate. It is a belief of this researcher that superintendents who practice a more traditional style of leadership, such as authoritarian, would not listen as much to their stakeholders.

**Future Research**

More research in the area of servant leadership and school districts is needed. Obtaining feedback from a variety of school districts without prior superintendent permission would be optimal. However, the author of this study felt it was very important and ethical to gain the approval of the superintendent. A possible area of research would be to study why superintendents chose or declined participation in the study.

It would be interesting to conduct a longitudinal study of those superintendents with less than twelve years until they reach gold standard status. It would be a prediction that due to the fact they participated in the study they will achieve gold standard status because of their confidence and willingness to allow others to assess their leadership in the school district. In other words, what is it that these superintendents do that gave them the confidence to participate in the study? These traits could be predictors of gold standard status.

**References**


Pennsylvania Public School Code of 1949, Section 202 (24 PS 2-202 Classification.


