2016

Leaders' roles in creating and sustaining collective genius

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LEADERS' ROLES IN CREATING AND SUSTAINING COLLECTIVE GENIUS

A Research Project

Presented to the Faculty of

The George L. Graziadio

School of Business and Management

Pepperdine University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

in

Organization Development

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by

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August 2016

This research project, completed by

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under the guidance of the Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the faculty of The George L. Graziadio School of Business and Management in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE
IN ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

Date: August 2016

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Abstract

This study examined leaders' roles in fostering collective genius innovation within one private elementary school, including managing the paradoxes of innovation. Based on content analysis of eleven participants, this study found that teamwork, clear student learning outcomes emphasizing individualized learning, design thinking, and a growth mindset, all impacted willingness to innovate. To develop conditions for collective genius, leaders again focus on teamwork as well as being relational. In terms of their management of the six innovative paradoxes, the school leaders tend to balance their affirmation of the individual and the group, support staff and parents, focus on experimentation and learning, improvisation, patience, and bottom-up initiatives.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

> A leader . . . is like a shepherd. He stays behind the flock, letting the most nimble go on ahead, whereupon others follow, not realizing that all along they are being directed from behind.
>
> –Nelson Mandela

From the Industrial Age through the 20th century, organizations have historically relied on striving for standardization, optimization, and achievement of maximal efficiencies (Hemp, 2008). People who could manage effectively and lead the charge were selected and promoted to management. Hill argued that this approach to leadership resulted in organizations that were over-managed, under-led, and ill-equipped for the rapidly accelerating technical and business changes witnessed throughout the 20th century.

Today, organizations of all sizes, industries, and types—from nongovernmental organizations and nonprofits to small businesses and large corporations—are facing ever-shifting challenges requiring new approaches and ways of thinking (Cummings & Worley, 2014). Whereas organizations of the past often relied on internal and external best practices and tried-and-true solutions, today, "things are changing so fast that often it isn't clear exactly where an organization needs to go" (Hemp, 2008, p. 127). Bradford and Cohen (1998) state that, "a system in which titular leaders take full responsibility for action and outcomes is fine if by some chance those leaders are perfectly knowledgeable, always know what to do, see everything, and can easily determine when to take charge and when to delegate" (p. 22). This type of management that Bradford and Cohen call

heroic leadership was useful when employees were less educated, when routine tasks were performed and when conditions were stable. However, the challenge in this case is that the leader's skill and initiative are highly depended upon, and not enough is asked of others such as subordinates. In this way leaders carry both the privilege and burden of having to know everything, control everything, and in making the hard decisions. Accordingly, the type of leadership that organizations need also has changed. Gone is the concept of leader as expert, visionary, or figure at the front of the charge. Instead, what today's organizations need are leaders who lead from behind and unleash their employees' passion, energy, and expertise (i.e., their collective genius).

An example of this type of leadership is found at Pixar, an animation industry leader known for its unparalleled creativity and innovation. Catmull (2008), Pixar's president, credits the company philosophy for its success. Catmull describes the philosophy as "getting great creative people, giving them enormous leeway and support, and providing them with an environment in which they can get honest feedback from everyone within the organization" (p. 68). As a result, leaders strive to identify, select, and retain talent and then create conditions that make it safe for risk taking, truth telling, and even failure. Catmull added that Pixar's cultural practices also were proven to be transferable, as they were used to help resuscitate the struggling Disney Animation Studios following the 2006 Pixar-Walt Disney Company merger.

Pixar's record of success for cultivating collective genius within its own ranks and its success in transferring this culture to Walt Disney—with impressive organizational results—suggests that other organizations may also benefit from the principles and approaches of leading from behind and cultivating collective genius. Although some books and articles exist on the subject of collective genius, there is limited research on

the impact this type of leader has within various organizational environments. Even less research is available on how leaders unleash collective genius by leading from behind in social impact-driven organizations, such as schools. Investigating how employees' innate creativity may be unleashed for the benefit of organizational performance and competitive advantage is the focus of this study.

Study Purpose

This study examined leaders' roles in creating and sustaining collective genius and subsequent innovation within one private elementary school. Three research questions were examined:

1. To what extent is a willingness to innovate fostered within the organization?
2. To what extent is the ability to innovate built within the organization?
3. In what ways does the leader foster conditions for collective genius?

Study Setting

The setting for this research was a nonprofit private elementary school located in Santa Cruz, California with an annual budget of $1.3 million. The school enrolls a maximum of 118 students from grades pre-Kindergarten to 6th grade. Target enrollment size for each grade (one class per grade) is 16. The school is staffed by one executive director and 14 staff and faculty members. The four leadership positions in the school are: executive director, dean of students, instructional coach, and early childhood director. Three of these leaders also are full-time teachers. The organization chart for the school is presented in Figure 1.

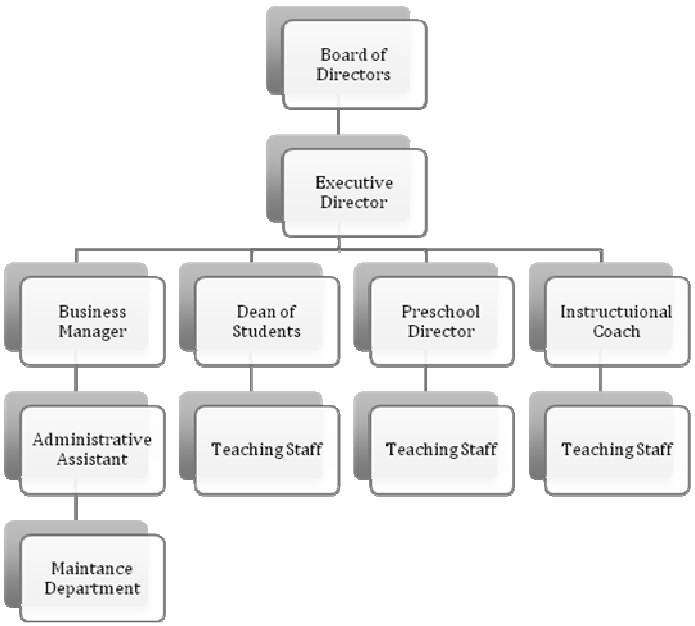

Figure 1

Study Setting Organizational Chart

The school was founded in the mid-1970s and historically served only gifted children and students with high aptitudes. The school's mission was altered in 1997 by a new school leader, who broadened the diversity of the student body. Today, the school acknowledges that "gifts, talents, aptitudes, and learning styles come in many forms, not just those measurable by an IQ test; and all of our students benefit from learning in the company of this diversity of strengths" (confidential school website).

The school aims to produce students who are tenacious learners, compassionate humanitarians, and who walk with humble confidence. These three qualities constitute the school's learning outcomes. The school uses the California Common Core standards as a baseline for minimum mastery of academic standards in math and literacy. Students regularly outperform students across the state on standardized tests.

Faculty and staff have been trained in the process of Design Thinking and have been designated a Design Thinking School by the Stanford d.school. The d.school aim is

to partner with teachers, school leaders, and educational product and service providers to support children in becoming creative innovators (d.school & IDEO, 2013). The school examined in this study reports that it has integrated design thinking into the curriculum across all subjects and grades. Additionally, the school experience is designed with the child's needs and interests as the school's first priority. The implications of this focus are that the school offers flexible programs, structures, and designs rather than a rigid curriculum through which each child must progress.

The school uses David Hanna's Organizational Systems Model for High Performance as a framework for analyzing strengths and challenges of the organization. Based on the analysis, leaders design strategies and capabilities to support the school's structure, people, rewards, and processes. The alignment between structure, people, rewards, and processes creates a powerful organizational culture, resulting in flexibility of the teaching team/organization to support individually designed education for all kids. Just as innovation is central to the school's educational outcomes, innovation is central to the way the school itself operates.

Significance of the Study

While extensive research has been conducted on leadership in general, there has been little research about what leaders can do to create and sustain collective genius that results in recurring innovation. Even less is known about these dynamics within social organizations. This study has generated understanding of what innovation leadership looks like in the education sector, especially as it relates to a leader's efforts to foster willingness and ability to innovate and to create conditions for collective genius.

These insights are valuable, as the traditional approach within education and within social organizations in general does not address concerns for innovation and

collective problem solving. In such environments, administrators primarily provide top-down strategies informed by state and federal mandates. The insights from this study may support leaders and their teams in identifying ways to shift their mindsets, structures, processes, practices and procedures to promote leading from behind and increasing innovation within their organizations.

Moreover, education is not the only environment wherein traditional styles of leading from the front and direction setting are the norm. In fact, this is a common approach in every sector. Therefore, the findings from this study may have some transferability to other organizations—particularly nonprofit social organizations.

Researcher Background

I have spent 8 years studying and working on behalf of social justice in the education and the nonprofit sector within Los Angeles County, an immensely vast and diverse community. The primary focus of my work and studies has been leveraging the innate talent of individuals to maximize learning, creativity, and community growth. Much of this work has called for student-centered and community-centered approaches to learning, engagement, and development, where the leader is a facilitator and aggregator of information. Importantly, in this capacity, leadership is continuously shared. My goal is to better understand how collective genius initiatives unfold within organizations and what impacts are noted as a result of this type of leadership. I am also interested in the applications of this style of leadership in other types of organizations.

Organization of the Study

This chapter provided an introduction to the study, including the problem background, study purpose, study setting, and study significance. The researcher background also was provided. Chapter 2 examines literature relevant to the study,

including theory and research about collective genius, leadership, and leading for collective genius. Chapter 3 outlines the methods that were used in the study, including the research design and procedures related to sampling, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter 4 reports the study results. Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the findings, draws conclusions, cites implications for practice, provides recommendations for organization development, cites limitations, and makes recommendations.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This study examined leaders' roles in creating and sustaining collective genius and subsequent innovation within one elementary school. Three research questions were examined:

1. To what extent is a willingness to innovate fostered within the organization?
2. To what extent is the ability to innovate built within the organization?
3. In what ways does the leader foster conditions for collective genius?

This chapter examines literature relevant to the study, including theory and research about collective genius, leadership, and innovation.

Collective Genius

Collective genius refers to leading in a way that spurs innovation both within individual employees and throughout the organization as a whole (Hill, Brandeau, Truelove, & Lineback, 2014). Hill et al. emphasized that innovation is needed now more than ever in organizations because, increasingly, the solutions to the problems organizations face are no longer known and straightforward. Instead, current organizational problems typically call for a truly original response—in other words, innovation. Moreover, although innovation is often associated with having fun and being creative, Hill et al. emphasize that "innovation is hard work and can be a very taxing, uncomfortable process, both emotionally and intellectually" (p. 96). The need for innovation combined with the difficulty of actually enacting and tolerating it calls for deeper understanding about what conditions are conducive for collective genius and how it may be fostered. Leading for collective genius is critical due to the importance of

innovation for meeting and surpassing the competitive challenges of today's ever-changing business and social landscapes.

Fostering collective genius. Parker (2013) pointed out that effectively operating from a place of innovation requires a substantial shift from analytical thinking to innovative thinking. Such shifts involve embracing rather than eliminating uncertainty, understanding there is no one best solution to a problem, focusing on asking the right questions rather than finding the right answers, questioning rather than blindly accepting assumptions, and embracing the new reality of change, among others.

Hill et al. (2014) characterized this shift as moving from *either/or* to *both/and* thinking, adding that doing so is rare. They elaborated that, more often, a single, less-inventive solution is reached through domination or compromise, whereas innovation requires eliciting individuals' ideas and then integrating these ideas to reach a new and better option. Furthermore, they stressed that integrative decision-making requires a sense of urgency and clear parameters.

Hill et al. (2014) further pointed out that innovation involves managing certain paradoxes, the most fundamental being the ability to unleash individual genius in a way that cultivates genius at the collective or group level. Through their research, Hill et al. identified six leadership actions needed to spur innovation. They called these six *innovation paradoxes* because these actions may be thought of as opposite aims:

- affirming the individual *and* the group
- demonstrating support *and* confrontation
- facilitating experimentation and learning *while* spurring performance
- encouraging improvisation *and* structure
- expressing patience *and* urgency

- promoting initiative emanating from the bottom-up *while* instituting top-down interventions as needed

Philips stressed the importance of navigating the full range of these spectrums, adding that determining where to operate on the spectrum relies on moment-by-moment circumstance. He explained that over-reliance on control, intervention, and the group will result in limited individual innovation, while over-reliance on the individual will result in a plethora of ideas, but at the cost of chaos, conflict, and lack of useful solutions.

Conditions for collective genius. A range of conditions were identified as helpful for collective genius to emerge. Fundamental to collective genius is creating a community within the organization that is both willing and able to innovate (Hill et al., 2014). Hill et al. alleged that a willing community is characterized by three components: a sense of purpose (why we exist), shared values (what we agree is important), and rules of engagement (guidelines for interacting with one another and for approaching problems). Importantly, these components should be designed in ways that "encourage collaboration, discovery-driven learning, and integrative decision making" (p. 95).

The authors further elaborated that an able community requires three ingredients that correspond to the earlier stated components: collaboration is enabled through *creative abrasion,* the ability to generate ideas through discourse and debate (Hill et al., 2014). Discovery-driven learning is enabled through *creative agility,* testing and experimenting ideas through quick pursuit, reflection, and adjustment. Finally, integrative decision-making is made possible through *creative resolution,* the ability to make decisions that combine disparate and sometimes even opposing ideas.

Once the community is established, it is critical to allow and encourage the members' natural diversity to flourish. Kelley and Kelley (2013) point out that teams of

people from diverse backgrounds can be rife with conflict and miscommunication, although "the dynamic tension between different viewpoints is what makes diverse teams a fertile ground for creativity" (p. 190). They add, "Teams that truly value diversity are willing to have the risky conversations rather than shy away from them" (p. 191). Hill et al. (2014) explained that innovation is almost always a collective process of discussion and debate. Through this process, the creative talents of a diverse group are harnessed as a wide range of ideas are generated, refined, and evolved into new ideas. It is in this way that the climate must both support and confront each individual's contributions and trigger new thinking.

In order to leverage diversity and maximize creativity within a team, Kelley and Kelley (2013) advised crafting team experiences in advance and identifying and leveraging each member's strengths. Additionally, they advised that team members strive to be supportive, open and honest, empathic, comfortable with each other, and strive to have fun together—both inside and outside work. Focusing on these behaviors, according to the authors, will help build members' relationships and encourage the sharing of creative ideas. What is notable about the behaviors the authors describe is their focus on the personal aspects of teaming. They explain:

> Leaving your personal life out of your professional life takes a toll on creative thought. Bring your whole self to work. Kick off team meetings by going around one by one with a "How are you doing, really" check-in or a simple "Share something personal about yourself." (p. 191)

Wheatley (2006) echoed the sentiment that effective teaming requires learning how to be together amidst members' uniqueness and diversity, emotions, humanness. In short, effective teaming requires effective relationships.

Another condition that supports the emergence of collective genius is reconfiguring the organization's capabilities, infrastructure, and resources in order to permeate rigid unit boundaries, flatten silos, and eliminate political fiefdoms that hamper the effective use of organizational skills and assets. Hamel (2009) advised that organizations may become more adaptable by reorganizing themselves into smaller units and create fluid, project-based structures. Leveraging these new organizational structures and achieving the benefits of diversity requires mutual respect and trust (Hemp, 2008), tolerance for the tension and stress endemic to group process and idea generation (Hill et al., 2014), and a climate of psychological safety (Catmull, 2008).

Pixar is one organization that strives to create psychological safety for its employees. This process begins with recognizing, selecting, and valuing talent. Once these talented employees are in house, Catmull explains that they are encouraged to challenge the organization's assumptions; search for culture-destroying flaws; tell the truth; communicate with others up, down, and across the organization; freely offer their ideas without fear of retribution; and be aware of ongoing innovations emerging from academia. Hargadon and Sutton (2000) added that Pixar is not the only such company. They explain:

> Modern invention factories are springing up everywhere today. Since its founding in 1978, IDEO has developed thousands of products. IDEO's work with companies in dissimilar fields—such as medical instruments, furniture, toys, and computers—gives the company a broad view of the latest technologies. Lessons from IDEO's diverse client base inspire many original designs. (p. 9)

As might be predicted based on the literature reviewed up to this point, organizations that seek to create and sustain collective genius require a certain type of leader who plays roles that are often distinct from that of other types of leaders. Namely, people in such organizations need to be supported and equipped to react collectively

during crisis. Without leaders who are skilled in fostering collective genius, acting in this way can feel both unnatural and dangerous (Hill et al., 2014). The next section reviews leadership literature, beginning with traditional conceptions of leadership and then reviewing leadership for innovation and leadership specifically designed to cultivate collective genius.

Leadership

The hierarchical pyramid or bureaucratic model has been a long-standing "ideal" organizational structure, also called the *in-charge organization*. At the top of this pyramid resides a director, chief executive officer, president, or a small leadership group such as a board or top management team. This level of leadership *leads from the front by* establishing the organizational direction, determining the guiding policies, and issuing directives to a group of middle managers. The middle managers then translate policies and orders into more specific orders, which are then passed down to a large, lower-level group of workers. The assumption here is that the organization has a need or problem and utilizes expert-based planning and decision making to resolve it in a highly rational way. Hemp (2008) asserts that most organizations are led from the front. Here, the leader remains an expert providing needed coordination and control (Bradford & Cohen, 1998). However, much of the responsibility for the whole rests upon the shoulders of managers, or heroic leaders, whereas subordinates remain responsible only for their own areas. Bradford and Cohen state that, "the pervasive assumption that the manager is responsible for the whole while others are responsible for their subareas reflects a traditional contract of leadership derived from culture and past conditions" (p. 23). While this is infrequently made explicit, it becomes a contract that is both understood and deeply embedded. Until this is replaced, the authors assert that the goal of extraordinary performance will remain

elusive. Wheatley (2006) similarly observed that historically management has meant getting work done through employees who needed to be managed into conformity and predictability.

Leading from the front in this way can work well when the solution to a problem is known and straightforward, during times of crisis, or when the organization needs to react quickly and is unprepared to do so. However, leading from the front can be greatly limiting when the organization needs truly novel solutions and responses. In such cases, it is unlikely that a priori visions and responses—such as those produced by leading from the front—are effective (Hill et al., 2014).

Several researchers argue that today's independent and interconnected world requires an alternate organizational structure (Crosby & Bryson, 2005; Hill et al., 2014). Crosby and Bryson (2005) explain that one alternative is the networked organization, where units, departments, and individuals form a web of expertise and authority and the organization itself is part of a diverse sampling of external networks that are chaotic and fluid. Crosby and Bryson assert that anyone who wants to have influence within an organization needs to understand and design these internal or external networks.

Within these networks, common objectives and norms of information sharing, informal coordination, formal coordination through shared activities or resources, shared power, and shared authority are prevalent. It follows that even those organization members with little formal or positional authority can be very powerful through collaboration. Similarly, those with formal or positional power are dependent upon numerous stakeholders. In this way, participants' power is enhanced, going beyond the sum of their individual capabilities in a shared-power arrangement. Crosby and Bryson (2005) refer to this as an expansive model of power that affects how decisions are made

and implemented as well as how shared meaning is created and communicated. It is noted that leaders of a change effort can utilize shared power arrangements to manage interconnectedness and complexity.

The next section discusses leading for collective genius. This discussion begins with the concept of the location of the leader compared to his or her followers—namely, that in contrast to traditional leadership that sets direction and leads from the front, leaders that cultivate collective genius and innovation need to lead from behind.

Leading for Collective Genius

Leading for collective genius begins with the practice of leading from behind. At its core, leading from behind is a process of creating an organizational culture that allows people to capitalize on their unique talents. It follows that leading from behind is associated with valued outcomes such as building organization members' problem solving abilities, unleashing organization members' collective genius and full innovative capacity, employee engagement, and job satisfaction. Group agility and collective leadership also increase when managers lead from behind because group members don't have to wait for and then respond to a command from the front (Hemp, 2008).

Leading from behind may also be associated with the surprises, discovery, and new learnings described by Wheatley (2006) in her book, *Leadership and the New Science*. She added that for leaders to be good scientists of their craft, leaders should seek out surprises and embrace the unpredictable. "The dance of this universe requires that we open ourselves to the unknown. Knowing the steps ahead of time is not important; being willing to engage with the music and move freely onto the dance floor is what's essential" (pp. 310-311).

Wheatley (2006) further elaborated that nature uses certain principles to create infinite diversity and well-organized systems, concluding that human life and organizations should be no different. In this way, nature could provide guidance for the dilemmas of our time. She asserts that science can help with developing new questions and processes that have weight at a universal level. Therefore, when thinking of participative management, there is a process of co-adaptation and co-evolution. Wheatley believes that the movement towards participation is grounded in our changing perceptions of life's organizing principles. She explains:

> Everywhere in the new sciences, in living systems theory, quantum physics, chaos and complexity theory, we observe life's dependence on participation. All life participates in the creation of itself, insisting on the freedom to self-determine. All life participates actively with its environment in the process of co-adaptation and co-evolution. No subatomic particle exists independent of its participation with other particles. And even reality is evoked through acts of participation between us and what we choose to notice. (p. 295)

Wheatley (2006) further puzzles why, with all the images of a participatory universe that scientists have found, human organizations continue to support authoritarian approaches and command-and-control leaders, resist participation of individuals throughout the organization, and in fact hope that participation goes away? Wheatley considers resistance to participative leadership and approaches as futile.

According to Wheatley (2006), because of the participatory nature of reality, scientists must focus their attention on relationships, which indeed is a growing theme in leadership research and practice today.

Bradford and Cohen (1998) echo Hemp (2008) and Wheatley (2006). They assert that the "heroic leader" or the leader from the front, is not dead. Instead, it is disguised using the language of consensus, teams and empowerment. Here, while the words may have changed, harsh orders replaced with softer talk, and though the degree of

participation may have increased, it is still assumed by everyone that the boss remains responsible for the success of the group. The authors share that, “thanks to people-centered management theories, changes in employee attitudes, greater spans of control, and growing evidence of the power of teamwork, the age of the managerial autocrat has largely vanished. But the underlying assumptions of that age linger on” (Bradford & Cohen, 1998, p. 23). It can be gathered that the traditional leader as hero approach is flawed and that much more can be done to truly empower workers at all levels of the organization. Leaders sharing in the responsibility of taking initiative and in decision-making, may support capacity building and through this, increased opportunities for excellence to be realized collectively.

The next section examines the leader characteristics that are associated with fostering collective genius.

Outcomes. Several indicators are evident in workplaces led by managers who lead from behind. Some of these indicators are that group members take risks and that leaders ask for help from and share power with those on their team (Hemp, 2008). In this new model, the leader’s job is to create an environment where every employee has the chance to collaborate, innovate, take risks, and excel (Hamel, 2009). These indicators reflect a high-trust, low-fear culture rooted in the leader’s belief in team members’ potential (Hamel, 2009; Hemp, 2008), as well as the leader’s focus on setting the context rather than setting the direction for members’ performance (Hemp, 2008).

This is a dramatic departure from command-and-control forms of management, which reflect a deep mistrust of employees’ commitment and competence (Hamel, 2009). In this type of leadership, emphasis is on sanctions and forced compliance, trust is low, and employees tend to feel anxious and hesitant about taking initiative or trusting their

own judgment. Hamel added that mistrust and fear are toxic to innovation and engagement. It follows that command-and-control leadership is antithetical to collective genius.

Hill et al. (2014) offered the following nine questions to use as a checklist to evaluate the degree to which the organizational culture reflects a context for collective genius and the extent to which a leader is leading from behind:

1. Do members of my organization feel part of a community?
2. Does my organization have a shared purpose—one that binds us together and compels us all to do the hard work of innovation?
3. Does it live by rules of engagement supportive of a set of core values: bold ambition, responsibility to the community, collaboration, and learning?
4. Do we have the ability to generate ideas through candid discourse and debate?
5. Do we have the ability to test ideas through quick pursuit, reflection, and adaptation?
6. Do we have the ability to make integrative decisions, rather than compromising or letting some groups dominate?
7. Do I think my primary job as a leader is to create a context in which my team can innovate?
8. Am I comfortable serving as the "stage setter" as opposed to the visionary leading from the front?
9. Do I have the courage and patience required to amplify differences, even when discussion becomes heated and when ambiguity and complexity loom?

Hill et al. suggested that if the answer to any of these questions is "no," or even "I don't know," it is necessary to reconsider one's perceived leadership roles and actions as well as the effects these are having on the organization. Where leading from behind is found to be lacking, various leader development tactics, as discussed in the next section, may be useful to transform leaders' behaviors.

Leader development. Managers who wish to lead from behind first and foremost must develop their soft skills. For example, in order to figure out how to motivate those who are different from themselves, managers must develop their inquiry and empathy skills, as discussed in the body of work on emotional intelligence (Bar-On, 1997; Feldman, 1999; Goleman, 1995; Kobe, Reiter-Palmon, & Rickers, 2001). In recent decades, leadership researchers and theorists have expressed agreement that this competency is significant to managerial and organizational performance. As the research on emotional intelligence makes clear, managers must be prepared to learn about themselves (their identities, strengths, and limitations); be willing to make necessary changes; and be able to cope with the associated stress and emotions (Goleman, 1995). There is no magic or quick fix. Only with self-awareness, empathy, discipline, and practice can new managers master the human competencies necessary for cultivating collective genius (Hill, 2004).

Among other things, emotionally intelligent leaders adopt an explorer's stance in new situations, are open to and invite new ideas, and can incorporate diverse perspectives (Hill, 2004). They also have dialogue skills and are capable of seeking and using feedback from others (Goleman, 1995).

Most effective managers also have an appetite for lifelong learning (Hill, 2004). They tend to be entrepreneurial in taking charge of their development and seeking out experiences and relationships from which they can learn. People can only learn to manage and lead if they are willing to take risks and experiment with new ways of being and doing things. Learning, especially personal learning, involves making oneself vulnerable and admitting what one does not know. Other critical skills to develop within the manager who wishes to lead from behind and unleash collective genius include

learning how to partner with employees as self-directed learners, coach employees and develop their talent, build trust and psychological safety, and gain personal and leadership credibility (Hemp, 2008).

Hemp (2008) suggested that leaders may learn to lead from behind through volunteer experiences. She explained that in such settings, leaders need to learn how to accomplish work effectively and efficiently with a group of diverse peers who have no real accountability or incentive to participate (other than the desire to volunteer) and no designated manager to guide and evaluate their contribution. She emphasized, "Experiences where people work with others who are different from themselves, and in settings that are unfamiliar, can be truly powerful opportunities for learning" (p. 129).

Summary of the Literature

Traditional approaches to leadership are changing due to ever increasing complex challenges and problems that require innovative solutions. The ability to manage changes inherent in the innovation process requires a different style of leadership. What we now know about collective genius and leaders' role in unleashing it is that there must be a sense of community as well as willingness and ability among organization members for collective genius to flourish. Additionally, leaders must have the mindset of the "stage-setter" rather than the visionary leading from the front. The leader and his or her leadership team also must have the judgment necessary to continuously manage the paradoxes inherent in the innovation process. It is important to note that much of what we know about these topics stem from research and practices created within the for-profit sector, in companies such as Pixar and Google.

What remains unknown is how these concepts of leading from behind and fostering collective genius apply to social organizations. The present study begins to fill

this gap in the literature by examining leaders' roles in fostering collective genius within one elementary school. The next chapter describes the methods that were used in this study.

Chapter 3

Methods

This study examined leaders' roles in creating and sustaining collective genius and subsequent innovation within one elementary school. Three research questions were examined:

1. To what extent is a willingness to innovate fostered within the organization?
2. To what extent is the ability to innovate built within the organization?
3. In what ways does the leader foster conditions for collective genius?

This chapter describes the methods that were used in the study, including the research design and procedures related to sampling, data collection, and data analysis.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was selected for this study for two primary reasons. First, little research existed at the time of this study regarding leaders' roles in creating collective genius and subsequent innovation in the social sector. Qualitative studies are often conducted in such situations where research is needed and literature is lacking, because qualitative methods are emergent, supporting continued exploration of topics (Creswell, 2014). Second, the topics being examined in this study are subjective; therefore, the inquiry needed to be open-ended, allowing the development of emerging definitions and understanding of constructs.

Participants

The study sample consisted of 11 individuals: the executive leader, five managers (one of whom was a board member), and five staff members within the study organization. This sample was drawn to enable data collection across multiple levels of the organization and to gauge the leaders' impacts at these various levels.

Participant recruitment began with a discussion of the study topic with the school's executive director. The executive director expressed interest and offered her school as a sample. After confirmation that the school was an innovative social organization, and thus, was a suitable study setting, a formal request was made to conduct the research at the school. The executive director granted permission and the specific participants were selected.

Data Collection

An interview script (see Appendix) was created based on a review of relevant literature, and consisted of 14 questions organized into three sections:

1. Fostering a willingness to innovate. Hill et al. (2014) explained that creating a community within the organization that is willing to innovate is fundamental to building collective genius. Willingness is characterized by three components: a sense of purpose (why we exist), shared values (what we agree is important), and rules of engagement (guidelines for interacting with one another and for approaching problems). Therefore, the first five questions examined participants' sense of community, purpose, values, and rules of engagement within the organization. For example, Question 5 asked, "How does ambition, responsibility to community, collaboration, and learning interplay with your organization's values?"

2. Building the ability to innovate. Hill et al. (2014) asserted that another fundamental ingredient to collective genius is an able community, characterized by creative abrasion*,* the ability to generate ideas through discourse and debate; creative agility, testing and experimenting ideas through quick pursuit, reflection, and adjustment; and creative resolution*,* the ability to make decisions that combine disparate and sometimes even opposing ideas. The next three questions inquired about these aspects of the organization. For example, Question 7 asked, "How do team members test ideas? Tell me about a time when this happened."

3. Developing leaders who can create collective genius. Hill et al. (2014) explained that leaders' primary tasks are to set the stage rather than lead from the front, create a context in which teams can innovate, and possess courage and patience to amplify differences for the benefit of innovation. They added that leaders need to manage the paradoxes of innovation. These traits and abilities of the leader were assessed through the next five questions in the interview. For example, Question 9 asked, "What do you think your primary job is as a leader?" Question 13 asked participants to plot themselves on the

spectrum of each paradox. Teachers were asked to evaluate their managers in these respects.

The final question was open-ended and designed to gather any additional thoughts the participant wanted to share.

In-person one-on-one interviews were conducted in a private space within the school during January 2016. Each interview began with an introduction that outlined the voluntary and confidential nature of participation and their rights as participants. Each interview lasted 45 minutes to 1 hour and was audio-taped to facilitate data collection and to allow the researcher to give the participant her full attention (Creswell, 2014). After the interview, a note of appreciation was sent to the participants and a follow-up meeting with the executive director was scheduled to review the research findings.

Data Analysis

The interview data were examined using content analysis, according to the following steps:

1. The researcher reviewed each interview transcript three times to familiarize herself with the data.
2. The data in each transcript was coded for each question to reflect the central idea present in each response.
3. Codes were reviewed across populations (leader, managers, teachers) to identify common themes.
4. Following completion of the coding, saturation levels were noted. Codes with more saturation were assumed to have greater significance than codes with less saturation.
5. The analysis was reviewed by a second rater and inter-rater reliability test was evaluated. Discrepancies were identified and resolved until 75% reliability was achieved.

Summary

This qualitative study examined leaders' roles in creating and sustaining collective genius and subsequent innovation within one elementary school. Eleven leaders and staff members were interviewed related to the extent to which willingness and ability to innovate are fostered within the organization and in what ways the leader fosters conditions for collective genius. The data were examined using content analysis. The next chapter reports the results.

Chapter 4

Results

This study examined leaders' roles in creating and sustaining collective genius and subsequent innovation within one elementary school. Three research questions were examined:

1. To what extent is a willingness to innovate fostered within the organization?
2. To what extent is the ability to innovate built within the organization?
3. In what ways does the leader foster conditions for collective genius?

This chapter reports the results, organized by research question. Themes and findings related to fostering the willingness to innovate are reported first, following by findings related to building ability to innovate and creating conditions for collective genius. The chapter closes with a summary.

Fostering the Willingness to Innovate

The first set of questions examined the extent to which the leader fostered the willingness to innovate. These questions concerned participants' sense of community, mission and values, and rules of engagement.

Sense of community. First, participants were asked whether they felt part of a community in the organization. All but one of the participants (91%) reported "yes," "definitely," "absolutely," or "very much so." The remaining participant reported feeling part of a community "most days." Participants' reasons for this feeling are presented in Table 1.

Two reasons were most commonly offered for this feeling: personal relationships (64%) and teamwork (64%). Participants elaborated that team members have personal relationships and a sense of connection characterized by a sense of knowing everyone, a

closeness, and people being welcoming and friendly. One management level participant explained:

> The relationships that have been built, the ability to support each other when there are things that need to be done. The joy that gets felt, and also the tears that get poured when there's something sad. So yes definitely a community.

Table 1

Reasons for Feeling Part of a Community

Reason	Description	n
Personal relationships	Involves connection amongst team members, a sense of knowing everyone, a closeness, people are welcoming and friendly	7 (64%)
Teamwork	Involves collaboration, communication and dialogue, inclusivity, information and resource sharing, cohesion, learning how others work best, and leveraging each other's strengths	7 (64%)
Close-knit culture	There is a general feeling of togetherness; a small number of people and the design of the campus lends itself for shared spaces and interaction	6 (55%)
Support from leaders	Leadership listens, helps faculty come up with solutions, supports faculty goals, there is good follow through, they guide instead of dictate, they are 'there' for the faculty, they let them fail, help if they need it, give them reign to make decisions, there are celebrations including birthdays, training is provided, there is community building and bonding	4 (36%)

N = 11

Teamwork, also cited by 64% of participants, is characterized as collaboration, communication and dialogue, inclusivity, information and resource sharing, cohesion, learning how others work best, and leveraging each other's strengths. One management level participant expressed:

> The word community to me means teamwork. It means closeness and this team is very close and very tight and works together in every aspect of the field and in everything that we do. I think that this team of people, I don't know I think we do exude community in everything that we do.

A third reason was the close-knit culture (55%), evidenced by a general feeling of togetherness. One teacher shared that she loves that the teachers know not only all of

their own students, but they also know every other student from every grade level. She also indicated how supportive the community is: “That to me is a sign of community and the fact that teachers not only know the parents in their classroom but the parents in other classrooms. Just everyone knows each other and looks out for each other.”

Mission and values. The second question asked participants to state the school’s mission. As shown in Table 2, participants expressed the mission as individualized learning (64%) and expected student learning outcomes (36%). One teacher stated,

> It is to make an individualized learning environment for each kid so they can accelerate at their own pace. The way to be able to do that is to have some autonomy to create that because everybody learns at a different level, and everybody learns at a different rate, but you want them to also feel a part of that whole classroom experience as well.

Table 2

School Mission and Values

Theme	Description	n
Mission		
Individualized Learning	There is dedication to continuously meeting the needs of each child through differentiated, personalized learning and a holistic approach to their education: academic, social, behavioral; this results in engagement.	7 (64%)
Expected student learning outcomes	Intended goals are for students to become tenacious learners, compassionate humanitarians, and individuals with humble confidence.	4 (36%)
Values		
Individualized Learning	There is dedication to continuously meeting the needs of each child through differentiated, personalized learning and a holistic approach to their education: academic, social, behavioral; this results in engagement.	7 (64%)
Expected student learning outcomes	Intended goals are for students to become tenacious learners, compassionate humanitarians, and individuals with humble confidence.	5 (45%)
Trust and safety	Ability to express one’s whole self and take risks	4 (36%)

N = 11

Another teacher expressed, “I do love our [expected student learning outcomes]. . . . Those three bullet points, I think, have always been embedded in what we strived for in each of our classes or even what I strive for in my class.”

Participants offered similar answers regarding the school’s values, with 64% of participants citing individualized learning and 45% citing expected student learning outcomes. An additional 36% cited trust and safety, meaning the ability to express one’s whole self and take risks. One manager described the expected student learning outcomes as values in this way:

> We want all of our children to leave being humble human beings and confident as well. We want them to love learning and we want them to be tenacious at it. No, fright in failing. The sky is the limit and we love that. We also want our children to be compassionate. I think those three very simply would be our shared values.
>
> So I think there’s the social piece, there’s the academic piece, there is this, and then the safety. I think the safety of the space. I think we really try and keep that safe comfortable space, so then they’ll be successful in their growth academically, behaviorally.

A teacher described the value of trust and safety: “…you want to have an environment where there is safe learning, you want to have an environment that is I think our value is to reach, have that diversity, that acceptance.”

Participants were then asked whether the organization has a shared purpose around innovation. All 11 participants answered affirmatively. The most commonly shared purpose (91%) was design thinking, consisting of empathizing, designing, ideating, prototyping, and testing (see Table 3). Participants explained that design thinking is used to solve problems at every level of the organization and is integrated into the curriculum. A manager who also teaches shared:

> Yeah, I think that this is sort of a remarkable group of teachers who are really willing and hungry for trying new things and implementing new curriculum and working together as a team.

> It's a really creative staff and so when we were, as we brainstorm together or in our small groups of how to put together our STEAM ideas, with our social skills ideas, with our day-to-day curriculum, and how to bring those things together in sort of this new format I think that starting new things and getting excited about new things is really a strength of the educational staff here.

Table 3

Shared Innovation Purposes

Theme	Definition	n
Design thinking school	This innovative process of empathizing, designing, ideating, prototyping, and testing is used to solve problems at every level of the organization: staff, faculty, students, parents, as well as the surrounding community; design thinking is integrated into the curriculum.	9 (82%)
Growth mindset	Professional development, continued learning that challenges staff and students	7 (64%)
Teamwork	Collaboration, communication - dialogue, inclusivity, information and resource sharing, cohesion, leverage each other's strengths, learning how each other works	4 (36%)

N = 11

Seven participants (64%) also cited having a growth mindset, referring to professional development for staff and faculty and continued learning that challenges both staff and students. One teacher described the mindset in this way:

> I mean, I want to keep improving, I want to be a better teacher. They think about it, we as a group think about it as a craft, as an art. I mean, you don't want to be the same painter you were when you were twenty, right? Why dedicate your life to a career if you're just going to be the same way all the time?

Another teacher expressed both concepts of design thinking and growth mindset:

> It feels very much in the last 2 years that we have had a shared purpose in innovation as far as [the executive director] bringing to the table a lot of recent papers, some things to read and books and the latest research and changing some our structures to match that. So, it feels that we do share wanting to be current and changing to be doing the best practices. . . . We did work on number talks and different strategies in math, and a lot of [design thinking approaches]. . . . I'm not part of the reading program, but they also did a lot of work on bringing in new reading program this year.

Rules of engagement. To understand better the rules of engagement of the organization and how they interact with one another and solve problems, participants were asked how do ambition, responsibility to community, collaboration, and learning interplay with their organization's values. The most common theme cited by nine faculty and staff, was teamwork, characterized by collaboration, communication and dialogue, inclusivity, information and resource sharing, cohesion, leveraging each other's strengths, and learning how each other works (see Table 4).

Table 4

Rules of Engagement

Themes	Definitions	n
Teamwork[1]	Involves collaboration, communication and dialogue, inclusivity, information and resource sharing, cohesion, leverage each other's strengths, learning how each other works	9 (82%)
Expected student learning outcomes	Intended goals are for students to become tenacious learners, compassionate humanitarians, and individuals with humble confidence.	8 (73%)
Design Thinking	This innovative process of empathizing, designing, ideating, prototyping, and testing is used to solve problems at every level of the organization: staff, faculty, students, parents, as well as the surrounding community; design thinking is integrated into the curriculum.	6 (55%)
Integrated curriculum	Science, technology, engineering, art, and math are integrated into the curriculum through project by design. Design challenges solved through experimentation (e.g. homeless population) result in social impact.	4 (36%)
Individualized Learning	There is dedication to continuously meeting the needs of each child through differentiated, personalized learning and a holistic approach to their education: academic, social, behavioral; this results in engagement.	4 (36%)
Growth mindset[1]	Involves professional development and continued learning that challenges staff and students	4 (36%)

N = 11; [1]These themes were cited only by faculty and staff

One manager shared,

> Everywhere I've gone with my work, I tend to build friendly relationships with my colleagues, and it's no different [here]. I think that's sort of a feeling here too, like we're friends, I hang out with the other teachers all the time.

Another manager added, **"**I think we definitely teach by example in terms of collaboration and learning that we as teachers work together a ton and really see the benefit in that." One of the teachers referenced how the design and management of the physical space of the campus helps to foster needed collaboration saying "It's also small enough campus that people are often passing, cross, you know seeing each other in a day, we share rooms and space." There are many shared spaces at the school and the campus is designed so that people naturally pass by each other several times a day. In this way the physical space itself supports collaboration.

The second most common theme was expected student learning outcomes, referring to the school's goals that students become tenacious learners, compassionate humanitarians, and individuals with humble confidence. One teacher shared that she sees the school's expected student learning outcomes in this question, "Ambition is having humble confidence and with tenacious learning, you have to have ambition in order to be tenacious." When it comes to responsibility to community, she sees the compassionate humanitarian in the activities the school participates such as: beach clean ups, adopting families in need, and regular donations to a local food bank.

A manager also stated:

> If someone is feeling safe in their environment, it means that they are going to take risks in their learning. So, they are going to attempt to solve a problem on their own whether or not they fail. That's not going to be the, the thing that stops them from taking the plunge and trying to solve the problem, which weaves right into our value of tenacious learning.

The third most common theme was design thinking, referring to the school's innovative process of empathizing, designing, ideating, prototyping, and testing for the purpose of solving problems at every level of the organization. For example, the executive director expressed:

> I really feel like as a leader, my ambition to fulfill a vision and to create a shared vision of an innovative place to learn with a very solid foundation in research methods and things that have been researched and proven to be solid way students learn. . . . I feel like my ambition . . . gets sort of infused in my staff who then gets excited about collaborating together and creating new and invigorating experiences that haven't been created before. So, the way they are learning, they are learning along with the students. And their learning is about techniques and design, curriculum design and all these pieces that go into innovating a learning experience.

Summary. Examining the responses that emerged related to fostering the willingness to innovate across the interview questions reveals several common themes (see Table 5). Teamwork was cited as a key ingredient to the school's sense of community (64%), central to its shared innovation purposes (36%), and a prominent rule of engagement (82%). Participants reported that expected student learning outcomes were central to the school's mission and values (45%) and its rules of engagement (73%). Individualized learning similarly was part of the school's mission and values (64%) and rules of engagement (36%). Design thinking and a growth mindset were cited as part of the school's shared innovation purposes (82% and 64% respectively) and its rules of engagement (55% and 36% respectively).

Table 5

Summary of Themes for Fostering the Willingness to Innovate

Theme	Contribution to Sense of Community	Mission and Values	Shared Innovation Purposes	Rules of Engagement
Teamwork	7 (64%)		4 (36%)	9 (82%)
Expected student learning outcomes		5 (45%)		8 (73%)
Individualized Learning		7 (64%)		4 (36%)
Design thinking			9 (82%)	6 (55%)
Growth mindset			7 (64%)	4 (36%)
Personal relationships	7 (64%)			
Close-knit culture	6 (55%)			
Support from leaders	4 (36%)			
Trust and safety		4 (36%)		
Science, technology, engineering, art, and math				4 (36%)

N = 11

Building the Ability to Innovate

Three key areas were examined related to building the ability to innovate within the organization. These concerned the extent to which creative abrasion, creative agility, and creative resolution are fostered within the organization.

Creative abrasion. The extent to which creative abrasion was occurring in the organization was examined by asking participants how the team generates ideas. Key themes for this question are presented in Table 6. All participants cited teamwork as characterized in the section above. One teacher simply said, “We talk so much. You know our team is really, we are really open and honest.” Another teacher expressed it this way:

> I’m really lucky because I work in a small team here. I’ve got Jonnie in the kindergarten, Karyn in the pre-school. I’d say we are our own team within the greater of our teachers here. We meet every week and collaborate, we talk every day, we don’t always wait for a meeting to express an idea. We just sort of say it,

> we have that relationship where we can bounce it off one another. They are one of my favorite collaborations here. It would be nice to collaborate more with the entire staff, but I also think that that is a challenge that maybe most staffs face because there is not enough hours in the day really. When we get those opportunities I do cherish them.

Table 6

Approaches for Generating Ideas

Approach	Definition	n
Teamwork	Involves collaboration, communication and dialogue, inclusivity, information and resource sharing, cohesion, leverage each other's strengths, learning how each other works	11 (100%)
Frequent meetings	Planned and ad hoc meetings occur daily, weekly, bimonthly, monthly, and yearly	10 (91%)
Small group work	Problem solving is divided up. Structure doesn't lend itself to dominance	8 (73%)
Design thinking	This innovative process of empathizing, designing, ideating, prototyping, and testing is used to solve problems at every level of the organization: staff, faculty, students, parents, as well as the surrounding community; design thinking is integrated into the curriculum.	6 (55%)
Growth mindset	Involves professional development and continued learning that challenges staff and students.	5 (45%)

N = 11

Other common themes were generating ideas within the context of frequent meetings (91%) and during small group work (73%). One teacher explained, "We do have a morning meeting, so sometimes those are little ideas coming to the table." One manager who acts as the instructional coach described a meeting with a teacher, during which they co-created approaches to instructional challenges, representing both the themes of meetings and small group work:

> So as the instructional coach I met with [a teacher] and he said, "Well these were my goals for the year and so how do we figure out how to collect data to show that I'm meeting these goals." So, he's very much a statistician and how do I crunch this information into numbers so that's direct feedback to me and then I can show the kids and it can be direct feedback to them and we can have sort of this circular closing the loop conversation. So, it really took the two of us sitting down together and saying, "Okay, these are your goals, these are the questions I'd

> like to ask, but are they appropriate for third grade? How do we break this language down to third grade comprehension so they can really be accurate in answering the question so they know what it is that they're supposed to be answering?

The executive director similarly described small group work as she explained the use of a specific intervention called Appreciative Inquiry:

> I believe very strongly in co-creation. So we have started, when I came here we did an appreciative inquiry cycle to really look at what was going to be optimal, what does [our school] look like if it's an optimal place to work, learn, spend your life here. From there, that created an action plan of what we needed to do next. We co-create everything. I brought the parent community in. I facilitated an appreciative inquiry cycle with them as well. See those posters around the office as well. We just did an audit of our, what's working and what's not working because we put so many new things into place this year so in December we did what's working, what's not working and then we broke up into groups to address some of the things that need tweaking or need changing. So we co-create anything.

Participants again cited design thinking as a method for generating ideas (55%). One manager shared,

> Before we start the school year [we are introducing] lots of new things before the kids come. We are pushing ourselves to add new things to our tool belt—"Here, try this. Here, exercise together." Sort of retreat situation where you're like, "Here's the challenge. Here's what we're trying to learn," and then working together, coming back, reflecting. Sort of essentially modeling the design thinking format in our own training. So, "Has this worked? How did it go? What's our issue? What are some ideas that we have? What can we build or create from that? How is it going?" Then executing that and coming back and asking, "Is that working?" "How did the test go?" "How do we get grow and improve from that?"

Creative agility. Participants were asked how team members test ideas to determine the organization's ability to test and experiment through discourse and debate. Themes are presented in Table 7. The most common theme, cited by 82% of participants, was design thinking, meaning the school's innovative process of empathizing, designing, ideating, prototyping, and testing to solve problems at every level of the organization.

The executive director described how design thinking is used among the faculty and staff as well as with the students:

> We practice with each other first, some of it is in the classroom, we for example we became a design thinking school. One of the things we did was we practiced those with the facilitator who came in and taught us. Then we practiced with the kids and had kids go through this learning experience. We were learning together with them. Then we took it to a whole school level where we were all working on inventions, using the design thinking process. Then we brought in outside organizations and have them to propose a problem, a challenge they were dealing with like nature conservancy. They came in and said, "This is a local issue we're dealing with." The kids went through the design thinking process to design solutions and prototypes for the issues that conservancy is having with the run off of fertilizer into a local watershed. Then they came back and judged the ideas and the kids presented. Because we are [a] learning institution, teachers practice with kids, and we practice on each other.

Table 7

Approaches for Testing Ideas

Approach	Definition	n
Design thinking	This innovative process of empathizing, designing, ideating, prototyping, and testing is used to solve problems at every level of the organization (e.g., staff, faculty, students, parents, surrounding community). Design thinking is integrated into the curriculum.	9 (82%)
Teamwork	Involves collaboration, communication and dialogue, inclusivity, information and resource sharing, cohesion, leverage each other's strengths, learning how each other works	8 (76%)
Frequent meetings	Planned and ad hoc meetings occur daily, weekly, bimonthly, monthly, and yearly	7 (64%)
Evaluation	Involves assessment of how initiatives, products and processes are going for the purpose of improving purposes	5 (45%)

N = 11

Another common theme was teamwork, where one manager shared her experience:

> We're doing a [combined class of fourth through sixth graders] this year for humanities. That's new to me. I've taught sixth grade for a long time—just sixth grade for those subjects, with the exception of history. . . . [So] that's a huge jump. How do you create a curriculum that's going to work [for all the age ranges]? . . . Luckily I have another co-teacher who is doing the same thing. So, we . . . probably have a big meeting every 2 weeks where we are looking ahead. . . [and adapting to changing student needs and class dynamics]. We are always kind

> of shifting, moving, and adding these different things [and] co-teaching. Like, "Hey, what's? Are you having this? Yeah, this kid is shy. I've had this kid before he did that or yeah, I'm experiencing this phenomenon in my group. So, what do we do? Let's try this. How did that go 2 weeks later?"

Creative resolution. Finally, the organization's ability to make integrative decisions was explored by asking for participants' observations of the team making integrative decisions, rather than compromising or letting some people dominate. The most common theme that emerged, cited by 91% of participants, was that consensus is a common practice at the school (see Table 8). The executive leader, according to participants, is a particularly strong proponent of consensus practices. One strategy found that supports group decision-making processes are liberating structures such as "1, 2, 4, All". Here, all the voices are able to get into the room as the whole group is liberated into smaller groups starting with individual reflection, pairs and small group share outs and finally, whole group analysis of what has emerged in the room. This process supports consensus-building in that many voices and opinions can be shared, providing opportunities for increased insight into one's own and other's thinking. One manager shared:

> I think back at one of the, or several of the meetings that [the executive director] ran where all of our ideas had to be heard. I don't feel like anybody left feeling like they were compromised. I think the process and the methods that she used didn't allow for domination because everybody had to give input. I will tell you though, there have been times that hasn't happened and it is when she wasn't there leading the meeting. [For example,] she was not part of [a] discussion . . . with the board and the teachers. It felt very dominating and we felt like we compromised. So, that's an example of the opposite. But as far as the team and our leader, we do make integrative decisions rather than decisions based on compromise or dominance.

Another manager similarly expressed:

> I think we try to be integrated and make sure that everybody is on board. If someone makes a stand saying, "No, it's not right," we totally address that. I can't

remember the last time someone vehemently opposed something and we just said, "Tough."

Table 8

Approaches for Creating Integrative Decisions

Approach	Definition	n
Creating consensus	Leader facilitates a collaborative process of decision-making; however leader is ultimately responsible for making the final decision	10 (91%)
Teamwork	Involves collaboration, communication and dialogue, inclusivity, information and resource sharing, cohesion, leverage each other's strengths, learning how each other works	6 (54%)
Design thinking	This innovative process of empathizing, designing, ideating, prototyping, and testing is used to solve problems at every level of the organization: staff, faculty, students, parents, as well as the surrounding community; design thinking is integrated into the curriculum.	4 (36%)
Trust and safety	Involving the ability to express one's whole self and take risks	4 (36%)

N = 11

A second common theme was that teamwork was leveraged for creating integrative decisions (54%). One teacher stated,

> This is such a cohesive team. We value, we, you know there are strategists on our team, [there] are the risk takers on our team, there are those that are a lot more articulate than others. There are some that have just this experience, there's other people that are very flexible. So kind of knowing your team, you know your strength. We all have the same kind of value idea, we all have the same kind of community sense. It's a real strong cohesive team, I say it's teacher utopia but really it's an amazing team.

Summary. Examining the responses that emerged related to building the ability to innovate across the interview questions reveals several common themes (see Table 9). Teamwork and design thinking were cited by participants across all three tasks involved in building the ability to innovate. Frequent meetings were cited as being central to generating and testing ideas.

Table 9

Summary of Themes for Building the Ability to Innovate

Approach	Creative Abrasion	Creative Agility	Creative Resolution
Teamwork	11 (100%)	8 (76%)	6 (54%)
Design thinking	6 (55%)	9 (82%)	4 (36%)
Frequent meetings	10 (91%)	7 (64%)	
Small group work	8 (73%)		
Growth mindset	5 (45%)		
Creating consensus			10 (91%)
Evaluation		5 (45%)	
Trust and safety			4 (36%)

N = 11

Developing Conditions for Collective Genius

Participants were asked what the leaders' primary job and style were as well as how they handle conflict and diversity. Participants also were asked about leaders' approaches to the innovation paradoxes.

Leader's primary job and style. Participants were asked what the primary job of a leader in their school is. Participants in a leadership position were asked what their primary job was, while teachers were asked what they perceived the school leaders' primary job was (see Table 10). The most common theme, cited by 64% of participants, was supporting faculty, including listening, offering help balanced with empowerment, allowing failure, celebrating birthdays, providing training, and fostering community building and bonding. One manager shared:

> My primary job as a leader is to guide my team and not dictate. To be there for them, to support them, to let them make their decisions and let them fail and to be there to help them if they need it. I mean that's been a real big part of the success with preschool. I can go in and tell them exactly what to do and it's just not my philosophy. I think that being a good leader is letting your team do what they need to do. Giving them the reign to make decisions.

Table 10

Leader's Primary Job

Themes	Definition	n
Supporting faculty	Involves listening, offering help when needed, helping faculty come up with solutions, supporting faculty goals, assuring follow through, guiding rather than dictating, being there for the faculty, allowing failure, allowing faculty to make decisions, celebrating birthdays, providing training, fostering community building and bonding	7 (64%)
Practicing teamwork	Involves collaboration, communication and dialogue, inclusivity, information and resource sharing, cohesion, leverage each other's strengths, learning how each other works	7 (64%)
Unifying the community	Involves consensus building, shared decision making processes, development of a shared purpose, diplomacy, and working directly with all stakeholders	6 (-55%)
Being relational	Listening, being happy, fun, and non-judgmental	6 (55%)

N = 11

Teamwork also was cited by 64% of participants. One teacher described it as knowing one's staff and working well together:

> Communicating, inspiring, in my time here learning how we all work. Being a mom, really, and I mean I guess a parent. If you know your staff and what they're doing and passionate about then you are able to pull that in just like you would do with your student.

Next, participants were asked to describe the leadership style practiced in the school (see Table 11). While the executive director and managers were asked to describe their own styles, the teachers specifically described the executive director. Key themes are presented in Table 11. Six participants (55%) emphasized that leaders in the school are relational. The executive director explained, "I have an open door policy: Come talk to me about whatever it is and we will find a solution. I would say my style is more relational." A teacher described the executive director as:

> She is happy, which is important. I think she's someone who you can tell that she loves what she is doing. I think that's her style. She's a wealth of information and

> happy to give it, and eager to push someone often to what they proposed or whatever.

Table 11

Leadership Styles Practiced in the School

Themes	Definition	n
Relational	Listens, is happy, fun, and non-judgmental	6 (55%)
Mission-driven	Maintains values related to achieving expected student learning outcomes, is goal focused and makes the necessary difficult decisions	5 (46%)
Innovative	Introduces and fosters new, non-traditional ideas and practices	5 (46%)

N = 11

A second theme is that the leaders are mission-driven (46%), meaning they uphold expected student learning outcomes, are goal focused, and make difficult decisions when necessary. The executive director emphasized, "I will make the hard decision and I will do what is best for the organization no matter what." The final theme that emerged was being innovative (46%), referring to introducing and fostering new, non-traditional ideas and practices. One teacher explained:

> I think progressive and innovative definitely are her style. This school has been around for years and it had a very old school mentality I think before [the executive director] got here. . . . She's more on fire as to what is happening currently in education and professional development and technology and what's out there, more than we've ever experienced prior before her coming on. . . . So, it's not just business as usual and she has brought forth some new programs that have helped increased us professionally, which we hadn't had before either.

Leaders' approach to conflict and diversity. The next question examined how leaders handle conflict on the team during ambiguous and complex situations. The most common theme, cited by 76% of participants, was building the team by empowering members to solve conflicts through skill development, socializing, giving feedback, listening for understanding, increasing awareness of self and others, and leveraging

differences while upholding a common goal (see Table 12). In particular, the executive director has used tools such as the Johari Window and DISC assessment to enhance awareness of self and others. The executive director described her approach:

> I work to empower my team to solve their own conflicts. If it is my team, we can disagree with each other and that doesn't cause conflict. I want to listen to each person's opinion. For example, I asked them to be much more collaborative this year because of all the changes we were making . . . . I noticed they were starting to have conflicts with each other because they didn't really know how to do [the things I was asking of them] very well. When I saw that, I stopped our agenda and I realized that we needed to have some time to learn about how to give each other feedback and how to work together. So I gave them the tools they needed to be able to solve their own challenges and that has allowed us to work together much more smoothly.

Table 12

Leadership Approach to Handling Conflict

Themes	Definition	n
Building the team	Empowering the team to solve conflicts through skill development, socializing, giving feedback, listening for understanding, increasing awareness of self and others, leveraging differences while upholding a common goal	8 (76%)
Creating trust and safety	Supporting members in expressing their whole selves and taking risks	6 (55%)
Being relational	Being relational; listening; being happy, fun, and non-judgmental	5 (46%)

Another manager shared:

> We certainly, as a school, have gone through a lot of conflict. I think that for myself, in particular, it's been my intuition [and] my knee jerk response is to want to help solve it. But a lot of it is knowing where that's appropriate, like what's your problem and what's not your problem, and to realize that, in a lot of ways, there are certain players who are responsible for working those things out and sort of providing the space.

A second theme, cited by 55% of participants, was creating trust and safety. One teacher described her view of the executive director:

> I think she's a communicator. She doesn't let it fester, and you're able to go and speak to her and have that confidentiality, which is really key and important. I mean that shows it's a good quality of a leader. So there's a trust there.

Participants were then asked whether and how leaders amplify differences among team members within the school. Three themes were evident in their answers (see Table 13). Nine participants (82%) stated that leaders embrace diversity by recognizing, valuing, and leveraging the different backgrounds and working styles of staff, faculty, and students.

Table 13

Leaders' Approaches to Amplifying Differences

Themes	Definition	n
Embracing diversity	Recognizing, valuing, and leveraging the different backgrounds and working styles of staff, faculty, and students.	9 (82%)
Building the team	Empowering the team to solve conflicts through skill development and promoting socializing and communication.	9 (82%)
Having a growth mindset	Promoting professional development and continued learning that challenges staff and students.	6 (54%)

N = 11

The executive director discussed her reactions to the DISC assessments of her staff. Her reactions, which involved educating her staff about the need for differing working styles, reveal her desire for diversity:

> I wanted to do the DISC assessment because I wanted people to see that it takes people from all different perspectives to really create a dynamic team. One of the things that we noticed is that most of us are all the same. . . . I said, "Well, okay, this is a problem for us, because we think too much alike and we are coming from things too much from the same perspective." . . . There have been times when it has been very important for us to realize that we need people that don't think exactly like us.

A manager similarly spoke favorably about the diversity of teaching approaches at the school and how this enriches students' educational experiences and helps them recognize their own preferences:

> Our faculty members [have] . . . strengths [that] are so diverse. [One] classroom, for example, is very structured, almost rigid [while another] . . . classroom is almost chaos. . . . To me, that's really valuable for the kids to have these experiences that are so different [and] to be able to identify which of those feels better for them. To me, streamlining a teaching style or how a particular classroom works is counterproductive to helping these little humans discover what feels best to their little personality. So, for me personally I love to amplify the differences between the way that our teachers handle their kids and teach their classes. They're all different, so different, and I think it's beautiful.

Other themes cited by participants regarding how leaders amplify differences is through building the team (82%) and having a growth mindset (54%).

Leaders' approach to innovation paradoxes. Participants were then asked to describe how leaders approached the six innovation paradoxes outlined by Hill et al. (2014). The first paradox is affirming the individual and affirming the group (see Figure 2). Participants primarily stated that leaders in the school take a balanced approach of affirming both individuals and groups (76%).

The executive director stated she routinely does this during daily morning meetings:

> So I need to make sure that individually, that each of my staff members know that I appreciate who they are, I appreciate what they do, I appreciate what they bring. At the same time, I have to look at [the] . . . preschool group [and] my leadership team and I need to make sure that they know that collectively as individuals they are producing. . . . I'm encouraging them as a group and how they work together. There are times when I make very clear and purposeful decisions to go and make statements and just specifically watch for when a group is doing something that's really, they are doing it well.

The executive director then provided the example of acknowledging the significant effort she and the preschool team, their spouses, and their friends dedicated to enable the school to open its preschool the previous fall.

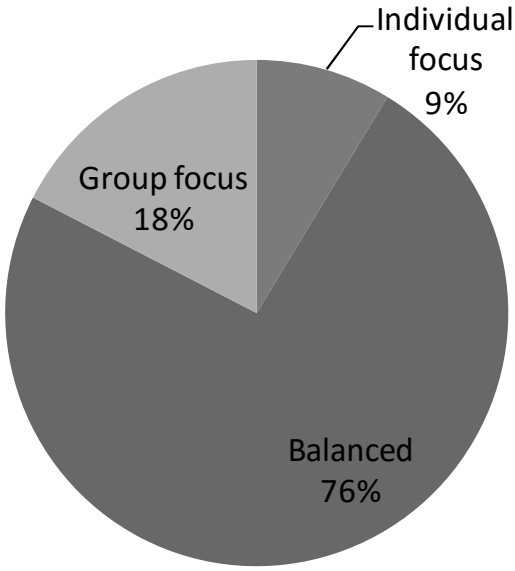

Figure 2

Affirming the Individual v. Affirming the Group

One manager similarly explained:

> I think that they are equally important. I think that when you affirm the individual heavily, then it can often be to the detriment of the group, but if you are affirming the group too heavily, then you lose the individuals.

Another leader, who is also a teacher, described his approach: "What we can do as a group is much more successful than we can as one person. To do that, I'm affirming each person on the team—what they do, who they are, and what they bring." Notably, one leader who is also on the board expressed a slight preference for affirming the individual so he or she feels comfortable within that group.

More than half of the teachers interviewed asserted the leaders take a balanced approach to affirming the individual and the group. One teacher shared, “I think that the leadership does both. They make you feel great as an individual and then belonging to the group.” Two other teachers believed leaders emphasize the group more. One participant speculated this was “because sometimes the need of the group is higher than the individual.”

The next question examined whether leaders balance demonstrations of support and confrontation. The majority of participants (76%) believe leaders demonstrate support, whereas 27% reported leaders demonstrate a balanced approach. No one reported that leaders demonstrate a focus on confrontation (see Figure 3).

The executive director explained she has learned how to confront people in her position and asserts she takes a balanced approach:

> I try to be as supportive as possible, but when somebody comes who is really doing something that is causing havoc or a situation needs to be addressed, I will confront that situation without a lot of hesitation. I have done the same thing with parents. I’ll listen, I will support, but once I hear that somebody is doing something damaging, I will confront them and say, “Hey, this is what I’m hearing.” . . . We have to create a dynamic where [we are] . . . respectful of each other as adults, and when that is not happening, I will confront it.

The other leaders in the school explained their focus on support rather than confrontation. One leader shared, “being really confrontational puts up . . . people’s defenses.” Another expressed, “As a leader, it is always my goal that I’m supportive 90% of the time. I hope I’m never confrontational.” A teacher described the support she has received from the executive director:

> I think she has worked on supporting people and [making them] feel loved and taken care of, versus confronting issues. Issues come up anyway. She has worked really hard in making us all feel like a team because she was a new person.

Another teacher expressed the balanced support and confrontation she observes: “I think that because we have a morning time of communication, which we’ve never had before . . . those issues [no longer are] set aside and [unaddressed]. So I think there's a pretty good balance there.”

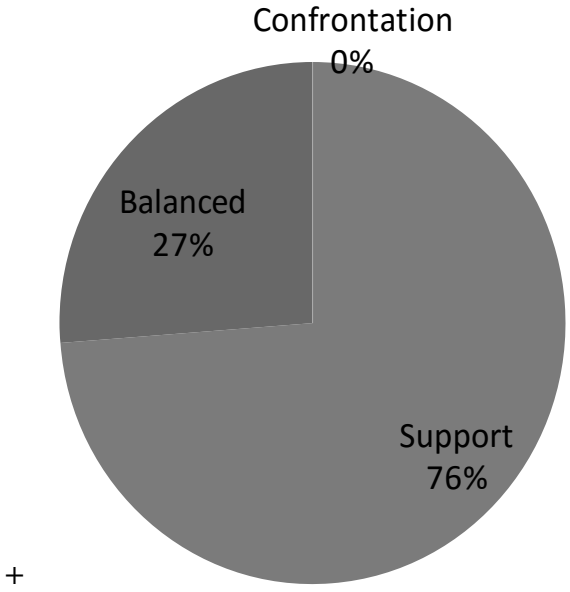

Figure 3

Demonstrating Support v. Demonstrating Confrontation

The next question examined leaders’ focus on experimentation and learning versus performance. The majority of participants (76%) asserted that leaders focus on experimentation and learning, whereas only 27% expressed that leaders take a balanced approach (see Figure 4). No one said leaders focus on performance. Participants explained that performance emerges as the result of experimentation, learning, and having the safety to fail; hence, an initial focus on experimentation is necessary. The executive director acknowledged the need for performance and value for parents (customers) while elaborating:

> I felt closer to foster experimentation and learning because I think you need to have a safe environment to learn, to grow, to increase your performance. If I'm only worried about performance, I'm not going to have the learning taking place and innovation taking place. If you are going to be in an innovative organization, you have to have room to fail.

Another leader shared, "Fostering experimentation [is] who I am. I want my kids to take chances and to take risks. So, I have to support that in my team. . . . If you model that, that comes, performance comes from that."

Three of the five teachers indicated that leaders take a balanced approach. One shared, "I think that they want [to emphasize experimentation and learning] as important and . . . meet [student] performance levels. That's important to them too." A teacher who asserted that leaders focus more on experimentation and learning shared, "We've definitely worked more on experimenting and learning rather than like rating how we are doing."

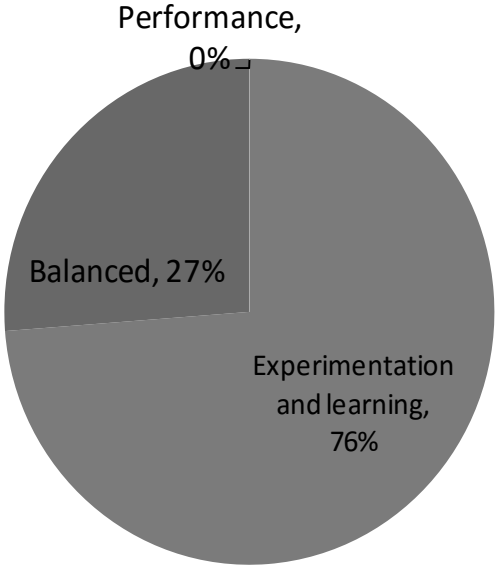

Figure 4

Facilitating Experimentation and Learning v. Spurring Performance

The next question inquired about leaders' encouragement of improvisation versus structure. Roughly half the participants (56%) stated that leaders encourage improvisation and 36% state they take a balanced approach (see Figure 5). The executive director reported she promotes structure more than improvisation, explaining that structure enables improvisation:

> I'm a little more on the structure part. . . . When you create structures, it allows for people to be a little more flexible. I'm not thrilled when teachers are flying by the seat of their pants, but I have also been a teacher and know sometimes that's what you have to do. . . . [For example,] we changed the structure of our upper school. There is improvisation that has to go with that because we haven't gotten all the kinks out. But the basic structure is there so that, within that structure, there is freedom to say, "We are going to think about that, we are going to make that decision right now and go."

Other leaders expressed a similar sentiment of having structure but being prepared to deviate and improvise when necessary. Despite describing this similar orientation, different leaders placed themselves at different points on the spectrum. One shared:

> I have my lesson plans, and I have my objectives, but you have to [consider] the teachable moment, what's working and what's not working, and be ready and flexible to [figure out] . . . how to deal with [what arises]

Another expressed:

> I really thrive in structure. That's not to say that I don't deviate from that structure regularly, but I need it to fall back on. . . . Not having [structure] at all feels almost scary. Like, where are my tools? What's the outcome?

One teacher described his reasoning why he perceives leaders as favoring improvisation over structure:

> Things happen so fast and need to change so quickly that we improvise more than we have structures. Often, if we spend a lot of time setting up a structure, it won't be the same problem next year or the year after. So, there is no need for the structure.

Another teacher speculated that lack of resources requires leaders and the whole organization favor improvisation over structure.

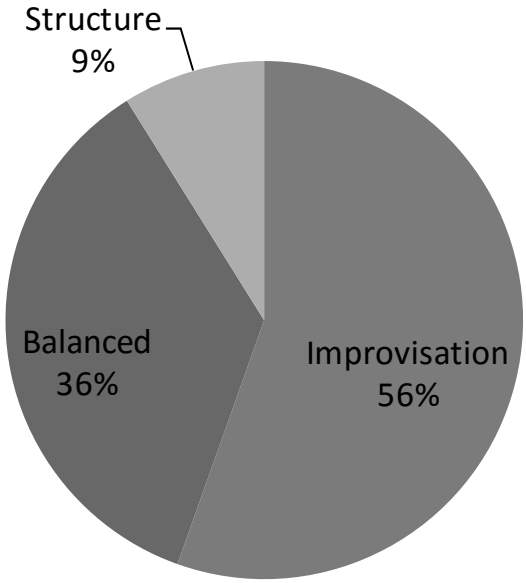

Figure 5

Encouraging Improvisation v. Encouraging Structure

Nearly two thirds of participants (64%) reported that leaders in the school show patience more than urgency (see Figure 6). Although 9% reported a balance, the remaining 27% believed they show more urgency than patience. The executive director reported she takes a balanced approach but may slightly favor urgency:

> I wish I showed more patience. I fall a little further, just a little bit, on the urgency side . . . because the school was failing and it was basically had three and a half nails in a coffin, needing four nails to be done. I felt the urgency of making the changes to get things done. But as far as staff learning, and the staff taking risks and all those things, I'm very patient.

Another leader asserted that focusing on urgency is counterproductive: "When you step on the urgency peddle, it can cause anxiety. It just feels really heavy, like a lot of pressure. . . . When you are patient, the process occurs quicker than if you are pushing for urgency." Other leaders described the need for urgency as the need for focus in meetings or the need for decisions. One explained,

> As a leader, sometimes you have to just be like, "Let's make a darn decision here. We can be in committee forever but we have to move. Let's make a darn choice. Okay?" And maybe that means not everybody gets to share right now. That happens in the classroom too.

Teachers similarly voiced that the leaders primarily demonstrate patience. One described the executive director's patience during decision making:

> She goes to four or five people she knows before she decides. . . . The other thing is understanding that some things take time to develop and to grow, like a technology or something like that, and dealing with the parents, students.

Another teacher shared, "They're very patient. I don't feel that there is any urgency, [or that] I always have to be stressed. It's like we always say, "the no stress zone." So, it feels good in there." Other teachers, however, do experience more of a sense of urgency. One shared, "We react quickly and have to do some things with urgency. So, I saw this as having more urgency to change rather than being patient because our kids' [needs] are so immediate."

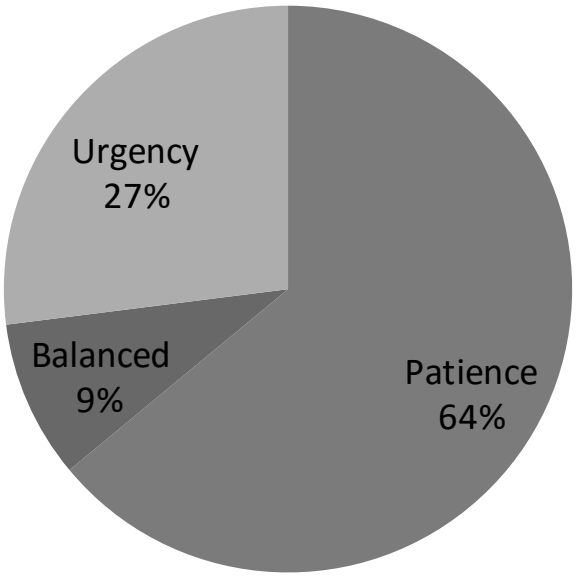

Figure 6

Expressing Patience v. Expressing Urgency

The majority of participants (82%) stated that leaders in the school encourage bottom-up initiatives rather than intervene top-down (see Figure 7). Although 18% asserted leaders take a balanced approach, no one stated a focus top-down intervention. The executive director explained her rationale for encouraging bottom-up initiatives:

> I encourage them to create and co-create with me as far as encouraging bottom up initiative. . . . I [do] have to intervene . . . when somebody needs to be supported, . . . [but] I try not to intervene when it is not invited.

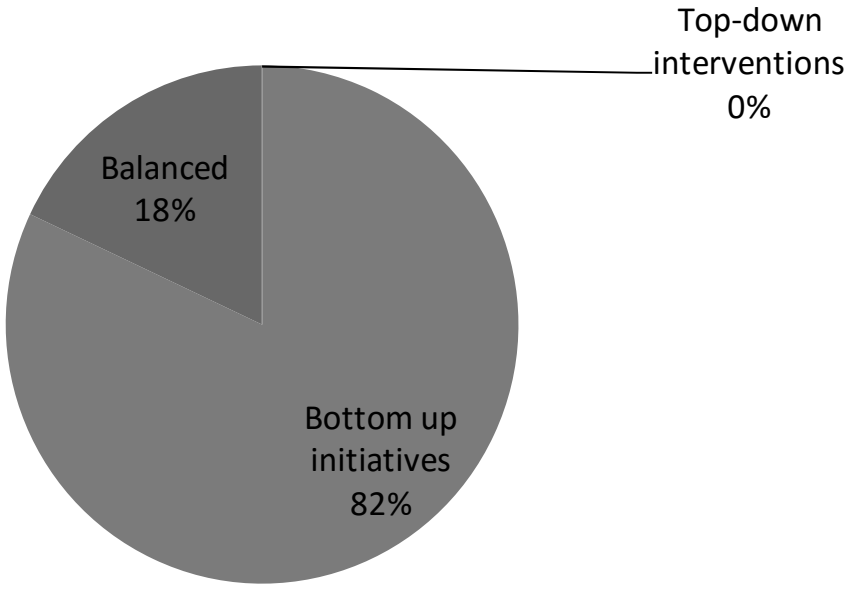

Figure 7

Promoting Bottom-Up Initiatives v. Instituting Top-Down Interventions

Another leader, like many others, expressed that empowering staff and students to be part of the problem-solving and solution design process was more effective than telling people what to do:

> Helping people get to the place that they . . . figure out how to get there is so much more satisfying [for them] than saying, "This is the way things should be done and you're not following these rules." I think it takes away that sense of self . . . if they are not part of the problem-solving process.

A teacher similarly shared, “They are very supportive and don’t come in and interrupt or try to take over. So, it feels that it’s on that they support and promote individual classrooms.”

Summary. Examination of the data related to leaders’ development of conditions for collective genius reveals several similarities (see Table 14). A focus on teamwork was cited as the leaders’ primary job (64%), a key approach to conflict (76%), and a means for embracing differences (82%). Being relational was central to the leaders’ job (55%), style (55%), and approach to conflict (46%).

Table 14

Summary of Leaders’ Development of Conditions for Collective Genius

Themes	Primary job	Leadership Style	Approach to Conflict	Approach to Differences
Practicing teamwork	7 (64%)		8 (76%)	9 (82%)
Being relational	6 (55%)	6 (55%)	5 (46%)	
Supporting faculty	7 (64%)			
Unifying the community	6 (55%)			
Being mission-driven		5 (46%)		
Being innovative		5 (46%)		
Creating trust and safety			6 (55%)	
Embracing diversity				9 (82%)
Having a growth mindset				6 (54%)

Table 15 presents a summary of leaders’ reported approaches to the six innovative paradoxes. These results indicate that leaders are balanced in their affirmation of the individual and the group (76%), focused on support versus confrontation (76%), and focused on experimentation and learning versus performance (76%). Additionally, they

favor improvisation versus structure (56%), patience versus urgency (64%), and bottom-up versus top-down initiatives (82%).

Table 15

Summary of Leaders' Approaches to Innovative Paradoxes

	Balanced	
Individual 9%	76%	Group 18%
Support 76%	27%	Confrontation 0%
Experimentation and learning 76%	27%	Performance 0%
Improvisation 56%	36%	Structure 9%
Patience 64%	9%	Urgency 27%
Bottom-up initiatives 82%	18%	Top-down intervention 0%

Summary of the Results

This chapter reported the results of the study. Leaders' typical approaches to fostering the willingness to innovate included emphasizing teamwork, expected student learning outcomes, individualized learning, design thinking, and a growth mindset. Leaders' approaches to building the ability to innovate often involve teamwork, design thinking, and frequent meetings. Related to developing conditions for collective genius, leaders again reportedly focus on teamwork as well as being approachable. In terms of their management of the six innovative paradoxes, the school leaders tend to balance their affirmation of the individual and the group, support staff and parents, focus on experimentation and learning, improvisation, patience, and bottom-up initiatives. The next chapter provides a discussion of the results.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This study examined leaders' roles in creating and sustaining collective genius and subsequent innovation within one elementary school. Three research questions were examined:

1. To what extent is a willingness to innovate fostered within the organization?
2. To what extent is the ability to innovate built within the organization?
3. In what ways does the leader foster conditions for collective genius?

This chapter provides a discussion of the results generated from this study. Conclusions for each research question are presented first, followed by a discussion of the implications of the conclusions for leadership practice. Recommendations for OD practitioners are presented next, followed by an acknowledgement of the limitations of the study. Suggestions for continued research are then outlined.

Conclusions

Fostering a willingness to innovate fostered within the organization. Leaders' typical approaches to fostering the willingness to innovate emphasized teamwork; expected student learning outcomes and a focus on science, technology, engineering, art, and math; individualized learning; design thinking; and a growth mindset. Additional strategies included building personal relationships and a sense of community, supporting faculty and staff, promoting an atmosphere of trust and safety.

These findings are consistent with past literature by Hill et al. (2014), which emphasized that willingness to innovate was fostered by a sense of community characterized by personal relationships, a feeling of togetherness, a high degree of teamwork, and a feeling of leadership support. They are also consistent with Kelley and Kelley (2013) who advise

that team members strive to be supportive, open and honest, empathic, comfortable with each other, and strive to have fun together—both inside and outside work. Focusing on these behaviors, according to the authors, will help build members' relationships and encourage the sharing of creative ideas. In short, effective teaming requires effective relationships. Additionally, the study organization was found to be united around a shared purpose and values also central to building willingness (Hill et al., 2014). In the case of the study organization, its shared purpose and values focus on design thinking, individualized learning, expected student learning outcomes, and promoting trust and safety. The school's rules of engagement additionally promote willingness through the focus on collaboration, teamwork, and a growth mindset, consistent with past literature.

Building the ability to innovate built within the organization. Leaders' approaches to building the ability to innovate often involve teamwork, design thinking, and frequent meetings. Additional strategies included small group work; fostering a growth mindset; creating consensus; assessing the effectiveness of initiatives, products, and processes; and promoting an atmosphere of trust and safety.

These findings are consistent with the creative abrasion, creative agility, and creative resolution needed to build members' abilities to generate ideas, according to Hill et al. (2014). Specifically, creative abrasion occurred during their frequent meetings and small group work, all within the context of a design thinking school where community members have a demonstrated growth mindset. In this way, teams are able to consistently generate ideas. Creative agility occurred through their use of the design thinking processes at all levels of the organization (amongst team members, students, and the parent population) and through consistent teamwork, frequent meetings, and evaluation. Integrative decisions were made possible by striving for teamwork and consensus rather

than compromise or domination by one or a few members. Additionally, the design thinking process, emphasis on trust and safety, and small group work resulted in more voices being heard and more individuals being given the opportunity to influence during the decision making process. Importantly, these various strategies and approaches promote collaboration and teamwork, discourse and debate, discovery-driven learning, testing and experimentation of ideas, and integrative decision-making (Hill et al., 2014). Effective relationships were found to support effective teaming which requires learning how to be together amidst members' uniqueness and diversity, emotions, humanness (Wheatley, 2006). Furthermore, members' natural diversity is allowed and encouraged to flourish through strategies such as striving for trust and safety (Kelley & Kelley, 2013).

Fostering conditions for collective genius. Leaders reported focus on teamwork as well as being approachable as key conditions to foster collective genius. Additional strategies included supporting faculty, unifying the community, being mission-driven, being innovative, creating trust and safety, embracing diversity, and having a growth mindset. In terms of their management of the six innovative paradoxes, the school leaders tend to balance their affirmation of the individual and the group, support staff and parents, focus on experimentation and learning, improvisation, patience, and bottom-up initiatives. It is important to note that whereas the executive director took a balanced approach to support and confrontation, the rest of the leaders in the organization favored support only. This may be because the executive director is ultimately the one whose role it is to confront issues. Additionally, the executive director takes a balanced approach to showing patience and urgency whereas the management team primarily prefers showing patience. This difference may be due to the executive director's responsibility to transform the organization from a failing school into a performing school.

Despite these differences, these findings regarding the executive director's and the leaders' styles generally suggest that they act effectively as stage setters who lead from behind rather than direction setters who lead from the front. This type of leadership is crucial for unleashing collective genius (Hemp, 2008) as well as allowing for unanticipated surprises, discovery, and new learnings to be uncovered (Wheatley, 2006).

Moreover, these leadership attributes provide an environment rich for student and adult learning, for social challenges in the internal and external community to be solved, and for the continuous ability to do the hard work of innovating within a sector that has long held a traditional approach to education.

Implications for Practice

Every industry and organization is different and finding common processes and practices that promote the ongoing needs necessary for innovation to flourish may not be possible or appropriate. However, should the leadership of any organization seek to reimagine or refine itself in such a way that fosters recurring innovation, the following sections summarize four key practices for consideration. Possible implications if such practices are not followed also are acknowledged.

First, leaders should strive to gain community buy-in for ongoing change. Once the leadership endorses either reimagining or refining its culture, processes, practices in order to unleash innovation amongst its stakeholders, and once that vision is clear, it is important to leverage the community. Utilizing the stakeholder community in further developing what this vision and mission looks like is the first step to gaining the buy-in necessary to accomplish the significant change that is sought. After all, it will be the stakeholders themselves who will need to undertake the hard work of rethinking beliefs, reimagining processes and practices, and developing the skills necessary to accomplish

the many goals embedded in this new direction. It is therefore important to keep the stakeholders involved throughout the phases of change, allowing them to own new systems, processes and procedures that will best work for them. Possible challenges as this goal is pursued include the degree to which board members have the necessary buy-in and capacity to adequately support the leadership team and teaching community in achieving organization goals.

Second, leaders should utilize processes that support innovation. The d.school at Stanford's methodology of design thinking can be used to address the needs of customers whether they are students gaining an education or those on the receiving end of a myriad of products and services offered from a variety of industries. Design thinking is a five-step process: empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test. This process can be used at every level of the organization, or a community-based or transorganization project, while working with stakeholders to establish or redesign: a vision, mission, processes, practices, procedures, goals. It can also be an integral part of the continual process of innovation and iterating upon ideas. In addition to the methodology of design thinking, it is important to leverage liberating structures as tools that support the ongoing process of both driving innovation and managing change. The large structure of groups can be liberated in ways that allow for partner and small group work to redefine the traditional practices of working together.

Third, stakeholders need to have the tools to manage conflict effectively and to best understand one another's unique working styles. The community must champion a growth mindset at every level of the organization and continual development of team members must be provided. This, plus ample socializing and leadership support for team members help build the sense of community that critically complements teamwork.

Fourth, leaders need to manage the ongoing paradoxes of innovation. Specifically, leaders of recurring innovation need to maintain awareness of the paradoxes of innovation. This required judgment and continuous reflection. They need to be comfortable being the stage-setter rather than the traditional visionary leading from the front. Some of the challenges in managing these paradoxes included recognizing that paying too close attention to the individual would be to the detriment of the group; while individuals want to feel supported, there should also be a recognition that what a group can accomplish together is greater than any one individual's needs. What supported managing such a paradox included paying close attention to a group so that they could be recognized for efforts that resulted in achieving intended goals. Challenges in supporting versus confronting included the leader taking the initiative to engage in the difficult conversations necessary to support the greater good of the team and organization.

Recommendations for Organization Development

This study generated important insights related to how organization development practitioners may support the concept of leading from behind. Ultimately, the leader's style helps create and strongly shapes the environment in which innovation can flourish and change agent approaches and tools appear to be very helpful in this regard. For example, participants in this study described the executive director as being trained as a change agent, reasoning that this explained her growth and change orientation, and her active listening, among other things. Moreover, change is inherent during the process of innovation. It follows that the various techniques and tools of organization development may benefit leaders wishing to foster others' willingness and ability to innovate.

The literature reviewed and findings generated through this study additionally stressed the importance of determining how to navigate and manage the paradoxes of

innovation, emphasizing that different approaches are needed, depending upon the individuals and circumstances involved (Hemp, 2008). It follows that the leader's judgment is key to managing the paradoxes at any given time. Organization development practitioners could support leaders in implementing mindfulness practices to enhance their awareness and judgment in this way.

In the social impact arena, there are many diverse groups of stakeholders and change agents needed. However, this takes a different style of leadership. That is, although top-down direction setting may work within the context of one organization, this style of leadership becomes less effective when applied within less structured organizations such as transorganizational networks. In such cases, organization development practitioners could support the conveners and organizers to adopt lead from behind strategies for the purpose of spurring innovation and collective genius.

It additionally may also be of interest to organization development practitioners to help design and manage physical spaces within the organization to help foster the collaboration that spurs innovation and collective genius. For example, at the case school, there are many shared spaces and the campus is designed so that people naturally pass by each other several times a day. For example, one teacher shared, "It's also [a] small enough campus that people are often passing, cross, you know seeing each other in a day, we share rooms and space" in response to questions about how collaboration is fostered. The design of the space lends itself to continuous interaction, chance meetings and ideas are spurred reminiscent of the intentional design of Pixar where individuals pass by one another and these unplanned moments spark unintended ideas (Catmull, 2008). Sectors beyond education can learn from these approaches in order to rethink traditional spaces and layouts for the purpose of fostering innovation and collective genius.

Hill et al.'s (2014) research shows that conflict is inherent in the innovative process so a leader's ability to manage this is crucial in order for the diverse ideas of a group, so necessary for innovation to occur, to be realized. OD could support leaders by coaching them in ways that will further develop skills in conflict management. Similarly, participants in the present study reported that the executive director effectively mediated conflict and promoted the expression of all voices.

Limitations

Limitations of the present research concerns its setting. Namely, it was conducted within a private elementary school with small classes. Additionally, the school being examined was undergoing significant change and redesigning the classroom experience at the time of the study. Therefore, the findings have limited transferability to the public education sector and to other organizations. To what degree different types of leadership and educational innovations are possible in the public education sector may be limited. Demographics such as socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds of the participants and students also may be factors when considering how suitable the leadership approaches examined in this study may be for other settings. Further research may explore what leading for collective genius might look like in the field of education.

Suggestions for Research

Continued research on leading from behind for the purpose of fostering innovation and collective genius is needed specifically within the social sector. Although the leadership style of leading from behind that results in collective genius has been researched, the social impact arena has been less researched. Moreover, even less is known about what this style of leadership looks like in the field of education. Thus, more research is needed in the social impact arena and specifically education.

It is additionally notable that several of the leaders interviewed also taught full- or part-time and had other roles at the school. It may be of interest to explore further how those who lead from behind, that also are on the ground implementing products and services, impact the innovative capacity of the organization and enhance this leadership style.

Conclusion

As complex challenges in the world seek to be addressed in new, more innovative ways, and as organizations from non-profits, government, and the private sector seek to solve these, a new style of leadership may be called for. To truly innovate upon existing processes, products, and procedures relies on harnessing the collective genius of the whole to solve ongoing challenges amongst change, however seemingly similar they might be. The key take away from this study is it takes a certain kind of leadership ability to leverage the power of a community in order to redesign traditional organizational models and overcome the ongoing challenges that the needs for change and innovation present. This study identified some best practices in leading from behind and in creating a context in which innovation is enhanced within an organization, resulting in positive social impact.

Being willing to do the continual, deep dive work of team building, implementing the innovative method of design thinking at all levels of an organization and championing a growth mindset are necessary to create the environment within which innovation can flourish. Here, trust and safety provide the foundation upon which individuals can bring their whole selves to the process of managing ambiguity in the face of change, as well as in tackling ongoing challenges inherent in the innovation process. These provide the foundation, structure and capabilities within which teamwork can produce innovative

products, practices, and procedures. This environment, primed and prepped for innovation, is supported by leadership that continuously manages the paradoxes of innovation. Here, leaders are “stage-setters” rather than visionaries leading from the front. The conclusions and recommendations outlined in this study are helpful in supporting organizations in shifting toward innovation and the unleashing of an organization’s collective genius.

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Appendix: Interview Script

Thank you for participating in this research study. I have a few items that I would like to read through with you before we begin. This interview should take somewhere between 45 minutes and 1 hour. You don't have to answer every question. The data will be aggregated and therefore not associated with any individual. You can stop at any time. Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate and/or withdraw your consent and discontinue participation in the project or activity at any time. All reasonable measures to protect the confidentiality of the records will be taken and your identity will not be revealed in any publication that may result from this project.

1. Do you feel that you are part of a community here? What leads you to know this?

2. What is your mission?

3. Does your organization have a shared purpose around innovation?

4. What are your organization's key values?

5. How does ambition, responsibility to community, collaboration, and learning interplay with your organization's values?

6. How do you and your teams generate ideas? Tell me about a time when this happened.

7. How do team members test ideas? Tell me about a time when this happened.

8. Have you observed your team making integrative decisions, rather than compromising or letting some people dominate? Can you provide an example of when this has happened?

9. What do you think your primary job is as a leader?
   *(NOTE: Teachers are asked: What do you think **your manager's** primary job is as a leader?)*

10. How would you describe your style?
    *(NOTE: Teachers were asked: How would you describe **your manager's** style?)*

11. How do you handle conflict on your team in ambiguous and complex situations?

12. Are there times when you amplify differences among team members? Can you give me an example?
    *(NOTE: Teachers were asked: How does **your manager** handle conflict on your team in ambiguous and complex situations? Are there times when **he or she** amplifies differences among team members?)*

13. I am interested in learning about your perspective with regard to the Paradoxes of Innovation. Can you please look at this sheet and place a mark where you fall between each of the paradoxes.
    *(NOTE: Teachers were asked to place a mark where **your organization** falls between each of the paradoxes)*

    (Hand sheet to interviewee. After they are finished ask them to explain the rational for their choices for each of the areas.)
    a. affirming the individual…and the group

    b. supporting…and confronting

    c. fostering experimentation and learning…and performance

    d. promoting improvisation…and structure

    e. showing patience…and urgency

    f. encouraging bottom-up initiative…and intervening top-down

14. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we close?