

DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION: EMPOWERING TEACHERS AND
SHAPING SCHOOL CULTURE

By

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DEDICATION

The work of this dissertation is dedicated to my family. It is impossible to fully convey the depth of my gratitude for the love, encouragement, and support you have provided throughout this doctoral journey.

To my husband Dave, I am profoundly thankful for your unwavering belief in me. You have been a constant source of strength and there are no words to fully capture my gratitude for your unconditional love and unwavering companionship throughout this process. Your steadfast presence and unconditional love have been invaluable throughout this entire process. You were my anchor through every high and low, never once wavering in your support. Your belief in me never faltered, and I will always cherish your strength and dedication.

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unforgettable. I am so grateful for the friendships we have built, and I look forward to our continued relationship for years to come.

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ABSTRACT

For the current research, the researcher set out to explore the impact of distributed leadership in terms of teacher empowerment and effects on school culture. The first main objective was to assess the approaches considered by school leaders when distributing tasks. The researcher also investigated the various factors considered by the leaders when distributing tasks, specifically the qualifications they recognized. The third and fourth objectives revolved around the teachers experience and perception of the distributive leadership framework. Finally, the researcher investigated how distributive leadership impacted the school culture. This study was done at Walker High School where the researcher interviewed two administrators and 20 teachers. 11 of the 20 teachers were under distributive leadership and the remaining 9 either wishing for an opportunity or not interested. This study takes a qualitative approach as the researcher focuses on the experiences, perception, and impact of distributive leadership on the workplace atmosphere in general. Data was collected through tape recording then transcribed and prepared for analysis. The collected data was coded and presented under each objective. The study's findings indicated that administrators take either a formal or informal approach to task distribution. Among the most considered qualifications for assignment included past performance, collaboration and initiative, communication and reliability, and professional relationships at the workplace. While teachers under distributive leadership appreciate the opportunity for professional development, they believe the institution's decision-making framework could be more inclusive to ensure fair task distribution. A major concern was the favoritism impacting task assignment leading to the nine teacher being left out and some of them feeling resentment towards the system.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

My dissertation investigates distributed leadership within educational institutions, aiming to explore its macro to micro dynamics and how it shapes the school's culture. At its core, distributed leadership challenges the traditional, hierarchical model by dispersing leadership responsibilities among various individuals within an organization. To understand this phenomenon, I investigate the broader educational landscape, exploring the evolving paradigm shift in educational leadership and its implications. The macro perspective considers the systemic factors that shape the distribution of leadership roles within schools. This involves an examination of policies, institutional structures, and the broader societal context that influences the allocation of leadership tasks to particular individuals or groups. It raises crucial questions about the why and how behind leadership distribution, bringing to light issues of power dynamics, equity, and the demands of modern education.

Narrowing the focus, the dissertation investigates the micro-level, scrutinizing the personal and professional experiences of teachers involved in distributed leadership. It explores their motivations, aspirations, and anxieties as they assume leadership roles or conversely, experience exclusion from these opportunities. By studying the emotional dimensions of those involved, the research seeks to illuminate how teachers' feelings, whether of empowerment or disempowerment, shape their engagement, commitment, and overall contributions to the school community. Finally, the dissertation considers the implications of distributed leadership on the school's culture. It examines how the distribution of leadership tasks, and the resulting emotions influencing teachers' collaboration, trust, and innovation within the school. By discerning the nuanced interplay between these elements, the research endeavors to paint a picture of how distributed leadership can either strengthen or undermine the overall culture of an educational institution.

In essence, this dissertation embarks on a journey from the macro-level landscape of educational leadership paradigms to the micro-level experiences of teachers, in order to discern the complex relationships and emotions that underlie the distributed leadership model and its overall influence on school culture.

Statement of the Problem

My dissertation focuses on the problem of practice surrounding the divide in distributed leadership within the context of educational institutions. Harris (2008) posits that distributed leadership is constituted through the interaction of leaders, teachers, and the situation as they influence instructional practice. It is characterized by sharing leadership practices among organizational members, emphasizing interactions between leaders, followers, and situational elements (Sol, 2021). Distributed leadership is not a top-down approach but rather a collaborative and holistic model that shapes organizational influence and decision-making through collective interaction rather than individual direction (Bolden, 2011; Spillane, 2005).

Within this context, the problem of practice emerges as a disconnect between those who are given leadership roles and tasks and those who are not. This division can lead to disparities in power dynamics, equity, and the overall functioning of the school. Teachers who are granted leadership roles may experience empowerment and increased commitment, while those excluded from such opportunities may grapple with feelings of disempowerment and disenchantment. This divide, driven by how leadership tasks are distributed, has far-reaching implications for the school culture, affecting collaboration, trust, and innovation.

By honing in on this specific problem of practice, my dissertation aims to offer insights and solutions for educational institutions facing these challenges, ultimately contributing to a better understanding of how distributed leadership can either strengthen or weaken the school culture. It will investigate the processes determining who receives

leadership roles, why certain individuals are selected or excluded, and how these decisions influence the emotions and engagement of teachers, thereby shaping the broader educational landscape.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study with thematic analysis research will be used to understand distributed leadership, how school leadership decide what roles will be distributed, how they distribute those roles to both formal and positional leaders, and how these distributed leadership decisions affect the culture of Walker High School. My study seeks to address the pressing issue of the divide in distributed leadership within educational institutions and aims to accomplish several important objectives. Building upon Harris's (2008) and Sol's (2021) perspectives, my research will explore the intricacies of distributed leadership as it is practiced, considering the interactions between leaders, teachers, and the situational factors influencing instructional practices.

Moreover, my dissertation explores root of the problem of practice, which is the division between individuals who are assigned leadership roles and those who are not. Drawing from the conceptualization of distributed leadership as a collaborative and holistic model by Bolden (2011) and Spillane (2005), the study will investigate the reasons behind the allocation of leadership tasks, thereby determining the dynamics of power, equity, and organizational functioning. By doing so, it aspires to shed light on the intricate web of emotions experienced by teachers involved in distributed leadership, understanding the feelings of empowerment and disempowerment that can result from these roles.

Ultimately, the study's core aim is to offer practical insights and solutions for educational institutions grappling with this challenge. By shedding light on the dynamics of leadership distribution, it seeks to inform educational leaders, policymakers, and practitioners on how to enhance collaboration, trust, and innovation within schools. In doing so, this

research contributes to a better understanding of the implications of distributed leadership on school culture and provides guidance for fostering a more inclusive and effective educational environment.

Demographic Information

This chart provides an overview of the demographic information, economic status, attendance, staff-student ratios, and student enrollment for Walker High School, Cedar City School District, as well as the state average where available. The names of the School and School District are pseudonyms.

Table 1: Demographic Information

Demographics	Walker High School	Cedar City School District	State Average
Black or African American	13%	10%	24%
White	58%	76%	60%
American Indian/Alaska Native	<5%	<1%	< 1%
Hispanic	22%	9%	13%
Asian	5%	4%	3%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	<5%	<1%	<1%
Economic Status			
Economically Disadvantaged	6%	11%	30%
Students with Disabilities	11%	12%	13%
Homeless	<5%	2%	1%
ELL Students	5%	6%	8%
Attendance			
Chronically Absent	25.90%	8.60%	20.20%
Staff & Student Ratios			
Teachers	99	2,831	67,915
Student to Teacher Ratio	15:01	15:01	14:01
School Services Support Personnel	11	413	8,378
Student to Support Personnel Ratio	134:1	100:1	115:1
Instructional Leaders	6	144	4,102
Student to Instructional Leader Ratio	246:1	288:1	236:1
Graduation Rate	95%	97.10%	88.70%
Student Enrollment			
2023/24 School Year	1,447 Students	41,504 Students	967,356 Students

Research Questions

My dissertation embarks on an exploration of the complex framework of distributed leadership within educational institutions. It explores micro dynamics and how it influences a school's culture. Distributed leadership represents a paradigm shift in educational leadership, challenging the traditional hierarchical model by dispersing leadership responsibilities across various individuals within an organization (Spillane, 2005). This study aims to explore the nature of distributed leadership by investigating the broader educational landscape, examining the evolving paradigm shift in educational leadership, and analyzing its implications. At its core, distributed leadership raises critical questions about the distribution of leadership tasks, power dynamics, equity, and the demands of modern education (Harris, 2008). This research aims to not only understand the structural shifts within leadership models but also to critically analyze how these changes challenge existing notions of authority, questioning who holds influence and how decision-making processes are transformed.

The macro perspective of this dissertation explores the systemic factors that shape the distribution of leadership roles within schools. It involves an examination of policies, institutional structures, and the broader societal context influencing the allocation of leadership tasks to specific individuals or groups. This inquiry seeks to address the "why" and "how" behind leadership distribution, shedding light on the intricate issues of power dynamics, equity, and the evolving landscape of education (Harris, 2008). Narrowing the focus, this research ventures into the micro-level, scrutinizing the personal and professional experiences of teachers involved in distributed leadership. Teachers' varying levels of engagement, shaped by institutional expectations and personal motivations, often illuminate broader challenges within leadership frameworks, where misalignment between policy and practice can significantly affect school functioning and staff morale. It aims to uncover their

motivations, aspirations, and anxieties as they take on leadership roles or experience exclusion from these opportunities. By delving into the emotional dimensions of those engaged in distributed leadership, this study endeavors to unveil how teachers' feelings of empowerment or disempowerment shape their engagement, commitment, and overall contributions to the school community.

Ultimately, this dissertation dives into the heart of the matter: the implications of distributed leadership on the school's culture. It examines how the distribution of leadership tasks and the emotions experienced by teachers affect collaboration, trust, and innovation within the school. Understanding how distributed leadership reshapes social relationships within the school community is crucial, as it determines whether collaborative practices and shared responsibility truly enhance educational outcomes or merely redistribute burdens unevenly. By discerning the nuanced interplay between these elements, the research strives to paint a picture of how distributed leadership can either strengthen or undermine the overall culture of an educational institution. In essence, this study embarks on a journey from the macro-level landscape of educational leadership paradigms to the micro-level experiences of teachers, seeking to provide a better understanding of the relationships and emotions that underlie the distributed leadership model. This exploration serves to provide valuable insights and practical solutions for educational institutions facing challenges related to leadership distribution. The following research questions will guide this study:

1. What methods do school leaders use to decide what tasks are distributed?
2. What qualifications do school leaders seek when deciding whom to distribute tasks and roles?
3. How do distributed leadership decisions affect teachers' experiences and feelings of being included or excluded in the distributed leadership process?

4. What is the overall perception of the staff of the school's distributed leadership practice?
5. How does this shape the school culture?

Significance of Study

The central focus of the research is to investigate how school leaders distribute leadership tasks and roles, who they distribute them to, and the perception of how this practice influences the school culture. Distributed leadership refers to the sharing and dispersal of leadership responsibilities and decision-making across various individuals within an organization instead of being solely concentrated in formal leadership positions like principals. This concept recognizes that leadership can emerge from multiple sources and levels within an organization (Hallinger & Heck, 1999). Researching Distributed Leadership at Walker High School will provide a deeper understanding of distributed leadership within the school context. (Spillane, et.al., 2001). Utilizing a qualitative case study will allow me to create an in-depth exploration and analysis of how distributed leadership is used in Walker High School. This approach provides an understanding of the topic and rich, detailed data (Creswell, 2002).

In conclusion, this qualitative case study with thematic analysis will explore the concept of distributed leadership within the context of Walker High School. By investigating the protocols used by school leaders to decide on task distribution, understanding the recipients of these tasks, and examining the experiences of teachers and their perceptions of the school's culture, this research aims to shed light on the effectiveness of distributed leadership in enhancing school culture and teacher engagement. Through a deeper understanding of the distributed leadership model and its potential to empower educators, this study intends to contribute valuable insights that can inform decision-makers and educational

leaders about the importance of collaborative leadership approaches for creating a positive and supportive learning environment within schools.

Context

This study will be conducted at Walker High School, which is situated within the Cedar City School District in Tennessee (TN). Walker High School serves students in grades 9 to 12 and is a representative educational institution in this district. The choice of this school as the research setting is strategic in understanding how distributed leadership operates in a relatively typical high school within the broader educational landscape of the Cedar City School District. Walker High School provides an important microcosm of the educational context in TN, representing the challenges and opportunities faced by many high schools across the state. With a total of 533 students and a teaching staff consisting of 38 teachers, the school maintains a student-to-teacher ratio of 18 to 1. These figures are indicative of a typical high school in Tennessee, reflecting the usual distribution of students and educators, thus making it a suitable site for the study. By focusing on this specific institution, the research aims to provide insights and solutions that can be broadly applicable to other similar high schools in the state.

Furthermore, it is important to note that Walker High School's performance, with an average proficiency test score of 37.0% in mathematics and languages, slightly outperforms the state average by 6%. This is significant as it establishes the school as a relatively average or typical institution in the context of TN. The school's existing leadership structure, which includes a combination of formal and informal leadership roles among staff members, further provides a rich context for exploring the nuances of distributed leadership in action.

Therefore, the study at Walker High School is well-positioned to explore how distributed leadership practices function in an environment that shares common characteristics with numerous other high schools in the state. By conducting this research at Walker High School,

the aim is to gain a nuanced understanding of distributed leadership within the specific context of this school, while also drawing insights that can be generalized to a broader population of similar educational contexts in Tennessee. Through this approach, the study seeks to offer findings that have relevance and practical applicability for educators, policymakers, and leaders across the state who are navigating the challenges and opportunities presented by distributed leadership in their respective institutions.

Reflexivity Statement

My research is deeply influenced by both my professional experiences and my personal convictions. Having taught in Middle and High School settings for over 20 years, I have had the opportunity to assume various leadership positions, some voluntarily and others involuntarily. These roles have included responsibilities such as writing district-wide scope and sequence documents, serving on instructional leadership teams, fulfilling interim administrative roles, and conducting professional development sessions for the State Department of Education. These experiences have given me invaluable insights into the dynamics of leadership within educational institutions and have fueled my interest in distributed leadership.

In the course of my career, I have also encountered situations where my potential for career advancement and formal leadership roles was overlooked or dismissed. For instance, I sought an assistant principal position at the school where I was teaching, but the principal's response was, "You and I do not see eye to eye; you push back too much, and professionally you should just go to a new school." This principal proceeded to hire someone they knew both socially and professionally without consulting the school's leadership team or faculty. A similar scenario unfolded when I applied for a Dean of Instruction position. The job was posted, but within 18 hours, the principal had already hired someone they had planned to

appoint, without any consultation with the school community. These experiences have underscored the need for more inclusive leadership practices within educational institutions.

My personal journey, combined with my academic studies and research, has convinced me that distributed leadership can have profound effects on school culture, teacher engagement, and teacher satisfaction. It can either empower educators and foster a sense of pride and responsibility or lead to feelings of frustration and undervaluation when leadership tasks are not distributed. My research aims to explore the impact of distributed leadership in schools, understanding its influence on school culture and the levels of teacher engagement and satisfaction. It is my firm belief that a thorough examination of distributed leadership in this context will provide insights into how it can cultivate better educational settings and promote greater teacher involvement in decision-making processes, ultimately benefiting all individuals involved.

Table 2: Definitions and Abbreviations

Key Term	Definition	Source
Distributed Leadership	an approach to leadership that emphasizes shared responsibilities and collaborative decision-making among multiple individuals within an organization, with leadership roles and expertise distributed throughout the group rather than concentrated in a single leader.	Spillane, J. P. (2005). Distributed leadership. <i>The Educational Forum</i> , 69(2), 143-150.
School Leadership	The term "school leadership" refers to the process and practice of individuals or groups guiding and overseeing the operations, management, and development of a school. It encompasses the roles and responsibilities of school principals and assistant principals that are involved in decision-making process,	"The impact of school leadership on pupil outcomes" (Day et al., 2009)
Formal Leader	A formal leader is an individual who holds an officially designated leadership position within an organization, such as a principal, superintendent, or department head, and derives authority from their formal role.	"Distributed Leadership in Organizations: A Review of Theory and Research" (Bolden, 2011)
Positional Leader	a leader who derives authority and influence from their specific job title or position within an organization, such as department chair, mentor teachers, and other teacher leaders without an official title. They lead based on their formal position rather than through informal or personal qualities.	Rizvi, H. (2022, December 9). The Debate Over Positional Leadership Vs Personal Leadership
School Culture	"School culture" refers to the collective beliefs, values, norms, practices, and behaviors that characterize a school or educational institution. It encompasses the shared attitudes and behaviors of the staff, students, and other stakeholders within the school community.	"Shaping School Culture: The Heart of Leadership" (Deal & Peterson, 1999)
Teacher Leader	A "teacher leader" is an educator who takes on leadership roles and responsibilities in addition to their teaching duties.	"Teacher Leaders, Classroom Champions: How to Influence, Support, and Renew School Communities" (Millner, 2023)

Summary

My dissertation explores distributed leadership within educational institutions, aiming to provide a better understanding of its macro to micro dynamics and its profound impact on

the school's culture. At its core, distributed leadership challenges the traditional, hierarchical model by dispersing leadership responsibilities among various individuals within an organization (Spillane, 2005). To understand this phenomenon, I investigate the broader educational landscape, exploring the evolving paradigm shift in educational leadership and its implications. The macro perspective considers the systemic factors that shape the distribution of leadership roles within schools. This involves an examination of policies, institutional structures, and the broader societal context that influences the allocation of leadership tasks to particular individuals or groups (Harris, 2008). It raises crucial questions about the why and how behind leadership distribution, bringing to light issues of power dynamics, equity, and the demands of modern education.

Narrowing the focus, the dissertation explores the micro-level, scrutinizing the personal and professional experiences of teachers involved in distributed leadership. It explores their motivations, aspirations, and anxieties as they assume leadership roles or conversely, experience exclusion from these opportunities. By studying the emotional dimensions of those involved, the research seeks to illuminate how teachers' feelings, whether of empowerment or disempowerment, shape their engagement, commitment, and overall contributions to the school community. Finally, the dissertation looks into the implications of distributed leadership on the school's culture. It examines how the distribution of leadership tasks, and the resulting emotions of teachers impact collaboration, trust, and innovation within the school. By discerning the nuanced interplay between these elements, the research endeavors to paint a clear picture of how distributed leadership can either strengthen or undermine the overall culture of an educational institution. In essence, this dissertation embarks on a journey from the macro-level landscape of educational leadership paradigms to the micro-level experiences of teachers, in order to better understand the

relationships and emotions that underlie the distributed leadership model and its profound influence on school culture.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership is undeniably one of the core aspects that impact the overall performance in the education field. It inspires leaders, teachers, and other stakeholders in the education field and creates the modalities required to promote an effective culture. In recent years, distributed leadership has gained impetus and has been adopted in various fields (Sol, 2021). Harris (2009) claims that this form of leadership has caught the attention of researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and educational reformers. The keen interest is due to its ability to change the leadership discourses in education and address some of the pressing predicaments experienced in the sector. Harris (2009) further asserts that the idea of distributed leadership has unquestionably been fueled by its connection with specific organizational benefits. Therefore, learning institutions that desire to motivate, engage, and elevate teachers have embraced the model.

Harris (2008) states that distributed leadership “is constituted through the interaction of leaders, teachers, and the situation as they influence instructional practice.” It is a form of lateral leadership that shares leadership practices among organizational members. Sol (2021) indicates that leadership entails considerable interactions between leaders, followers, and elements of their situations. Bolden (2011) says that “distributed leadership is not something ‘done’ by an individual ‘to’ others, or a set of individual actions through which people contribute to a group or organization.” It provides the promise of a model through which leadership could be viewed holistically rather than merely summing personal contributions (Spillane, 2005). As a result, organizational influence and decision-making are largely dictated by the interaction of individuals rather than individual direction.

Available literature asserts that distributed leadership is anchored on four concepts. First, in a learning institution setting, the leadership takes the form of an instructional leadership team. Göksoy (2015) asserts that this team represents the larger school

community, whereby each team member is involved due to their content and pedagogical expertise compared to their years of experience or formal leadership role in the learning institutions. Secondly, the principals and their assistants take an essential role in creating a setting that allows the team to implement distributed leadership (Modeste & Kelley, 2018). Third, a team in distributed leadership takes the most critical task, including supporting the development of high-quality teachings, continuous improvement assessments, and engaging teachers in cycles of observations, reflection, and feedback (Coyle, 2018). Fourthly, leadership is not about dividing tasks and responsibilities among individuals; rather, it is concerned with the interactions among individuals to drive the improvement of instructions and student outcomes (Göksoy, 2015). Therefore, these aspects make leadership ideal in education to improve the teaching environment and student outcomes.

Theoretical Framework: Understanding Distributive Leadership

A theoretical model offers a lens through which practitioners and researchers can analyze Distributed Leadership in education sectors. Several models can be used to understand Distributed Leadership in-depth and effectively adopt it in education. The first framework is the Distributed Leadership theory, which James Spillane and others advanced. The hypothesis states that leadership is a collective activity encompassing various educational stakeholders, such as principal teachers, administrators, and the community (Harris & Spillane, 2008). The second one is the transformational theory, which James Burns advanced and later expounded by Bernard Bass. The hypothesis is that the leader plays a vital role in motivating followers to attain the desired outcomes (Leithwood et al., 1996). In the context of Distributed Leadership, the model proposes that teachers can implement leadership to inspire change in learning and attain the desired performance.

Distributed Leadership is reviewed using the social-constructivist perspective and social network theory. According to Merchant (2011), social network theory proposes that

individuals interact within a social system and create different relationships. The social-constructivist perspective focuses on the role of interaction and how it results in knowledge creation. In the context of Distributed Leadership, multiple stakeholders interact. Hence, the hypothesis informs on how the interaction assists in the knowledge creation required to adopt Distributed Leadership in education settings. Overall, the framework allows the researcher to understand Distributed Leadership in-depth and adopt it successfully.

Historical Perspectives on Distributive Leadership in Education

Even though scholars and practitioners have embraced the concept of Distributed Leadership since the turn of the millennium, its origin dates back a bit further. According to Bolden (2011), Distributed Leadership dates back as far as 1250 BC, making it one of the oldest concepts that propose improving organizational objectives through people. However, the concept resurrected in the 1980s due to the growing interest from scholars to change the discourse of leadership-based transformational leadership, which was embraced by senior executives in most corporations (Bolden, 2011). Also, in tracking the theory's origins, several concepts emerged. First, the concept represents human cognition and experiences, which were intrinsically connected with the physical, social, and cultural context in which it happened (Lave & Wenger 1991). Second, it outlined how material, personal, cultural, and social factors enabled and restrained individuals' activities.

The emergence of Distributed Leadership in the education sector is attributed to two factors. First, "charismatic heroes' failures are connected with transformational leadership. Hartley (2007) argues that three elements make an organization work effectively: the competence of its members, leveraging of initiative, and establishing a shared destiny anchored on trust and collective endeavor. However, this model failed to leverage these attributes, resulting in Distributed Leadership adoption in the education sector. The second factor related to the tasks' complexity beset school leaders. Hartley (2007) claims that the

education sector required a model that leveraged partnerships and collaboration for better outcomes. In addition, many policies the government advocated required stakeholders to work together to adopt them effectively and yield the anticipated outcomes. Göksoy (2015) further asserts that Distributed Leadership represents a clear model that schools can leverage to increase teachers' engagement, boost education outcomes, and, more importantly, retain teachers. The transformational model's failure and the tasks' complexity inspired the Distributed Leadership style to become more widely adopted in learning institutions.

The Role of School Leaders in Distributive Leadership

School leaders hold a vital position in the Distributed Leadership model. To begin with, school leaders must develop a collaborative culture, a key aspect of the leadership model. Göksoy (2015) assert that leaders develop a collaborative culture primarily by encouraging open communication and teamwork and creating a setting that allows teachers to share idea required to improve student outcomes. It is worth noting that when a collaborative culture is promoted, it yields an environment that embraces the trust necessary in the leadership model. (Louis, 2007). Secondly, they primarily empower teachers and other staff by delegating and offering them leadership opportunities. Bennett and Anderson (2003) assert that leaders acknowledge and leverage the followers' strengths and expertise within the school community to improve decision-making. Creating a collaborative team and empowering teachers is the core role of the school leaders in the Distributed Leadership model.

Building capacity, supporting innovation, monitoring, and evaluating are the roles of leaders in Distributed Leadership approaches. The school leader is responsible for investing in the professional development of teachers and other staff to enhance their knowledge and skills. For instance, they provide opportunities for professional development, training seminars, and coaching to teachers and other staff in the learning institutions. Doing so

creates a setting that allows Distributed Leadership to thrive. According to O'Shea (2021), school leaders motivate and support innovative initiatives from teachers and staff, primarily by creating an environment where they are motivated to take risks, implement new strategies, and learn from failures. Such practices promote innovation and empower educators to make better decisions in learning settings. Lastly, the Distributed Leadership approach requires that the school leader assess the progress. Hence, school leaders have a crucial role in monitoring and evaluating the progress of their followers. Therefore, school leaders are pivotal in the Distributed Leadership model to improve student outcomes and engage teachers in decision-making.

Teacher Leadership and its Impact on Distributive Leadership

In the Distributed Leadership approach, the role of teachers is highly emphasized. Rumeli et al. (2022) claim teachers impact Distributed Leadership by promoting collaboration and shared ownership. In a school setting, teacher leaders create an environment that allows collaboration between the various stakeholders. They share skills, expertise, and perspective, resulting in a collaborative culture that supports and promotes collective decision-making and is a key aspect of Distributed Leadership (Rumeli et al., 2022). It is worth noting that the teachers' participation in decision-making allows leaders to make informed choices. Secondly, when teachers are given a leadership role, it creates a sense of leadership, which inspires collective responsibility and accountability. Many learning institutions embrace the Distributed Leadership model since it improves student outcomes. Therefore, teachers improve the effectiveness of the Distributed Leadership model mainly by adopting practices that improve instruction, resulting in better student outcomes. Lastly, the teacher role allows the Distributed Leadership model to thrive in schools. The feat is accomplished when the teachers assume leadership roles, increasing their level of investment in the process.

Four Types of Teachers (Anthony Muhammad)

Teachers play a vital role in education by acting as links between students, parents, and other stakeholders. Hence, schools seeking to improve student outcomes, engage teachers, develop a positive school culture, and elevate the retention rate must have an in-depth understanding of the four types of teachers. Anthony Muhammad, a former teacher, administrator, and current educational speaker sheds light on the four types of teachers and illustrates how each can be leveraged to improve the school setting, increase engagement, and boost student outcomes. The four teacher types include tweeners, believers, survivors, and fundamentalists. Muhammad (2018) claims that school leaders need to be aware of these features to inspire a setting that benefits teachers, students, and other stakeholders in the education sector.

According to Muhammad (2018), the first category of teachers is tweeners. This group of teachers is optimistic and open educators, and in most cases, they are new teachers in a school faculty. Hence, they showcase an elevated level of effort into socialization and seek professional development of any new teacher or staff in the learning setting. Muhammad (2018) asserts that they believe that socialization with new staff members is associated with positive outcomes. Also, they believe that the socialization process allows them to have an in-depth understanding of the school, its vision, and its core goals. In this regard, these teachers have the potential to become leaders who can assist in educating the new staff concerning changes, goals, and missions of the school. Cansoy and Parlar (2018) further claim that these teacher leaders are goal-oriented and more concerned about their staff's well-being. Therefore, tweeners can be critical in adopting the Distributed Leadership approach and assist learning institutions in achieving their goals.

The second type of teacher is referred to as a believer. According to Muhammad (2018), these are teacher leaders who embrace change and self-reflection. It is worth noting

that having individuals who embrace change is critical, especially in schools adopting the Distributed Leadership model. The study of Eliophotou and Lefteri (2021), which was anchored on Bandura's views on self-efficacy, posits that as individuals improve themselves, they become exceptional individuals who grasp the concept of transformational leadership. Besides, Bandura expounds that a transformational leader seeks to improve overall performance, ultimately enhancing society. A transformational teacher leader aims to boost student outcomes through teaching techniques. Muhammad (2018) argues that this type of teacher leader inspires a healthy working culture through how they perform their tasks. However, Muhammad and Hollie (2011) postulate that in a toxic setting, the believer is drowned by negative energy propagated by pessimists and selfish colleagues. It is worth noting that believers with excellent communication and oratory skills can speak up and eventually bring change. Unfortunately, those lacking mental resilience can succumb to negative energy, and their ideas fail to yield the anticipated impact. Therefore, having this category of a teacher leader is essential for the Distributed Leadership model to thrive and impact change in a learning institution.

The third type of teacher belongs to the survivor group. According to Muhammad (2018), it refers to teacher-leaders who have burnt out and are disillusioned by education in some cases. This teacher category is, in most cases, protesting about what they have to do and opposes new ideas and changes. Besides, they put in little effort to acquire new skills required to inspire changes in learning institutions and, more importantly, improve student outcomes. Muhammad (2018) further claims that their skills and knowledge are not utilized outside their expertise. Therefore, such teachers are not ideal for changes since they are less motivated to make changes in learning settings, and in most cases, they oppose new ideas proposed to make changes in schools. This group is hard to leverage for schools seeking to impact student outcomes using Distributed Leadership.

Fundamentalists are the fourth type of teacher. Muhammad (2018) asserts that they showcase an attitude that is self-servicing and less concerned about the well-being of others. They firmly believe that some students can attain academic success and others cannot. Muhammad (2018) further claims that this group tends to defame others, especially opposing the ideas of others. An in-depth understanding of the type of teacher is important, especially for learning institutions seeking to leverage the Distributed Leadership model to inspire changes. For instance, assigning fundamentalist leadership roles can be detrimental due to their self-serving attitude. However, Muhammad (2018) argues that the believer type of teachers can inspire a healthy working culture through how they perform their tasks. Hence, assigning them leadership roles can allow a school to harness the benefits associated with Distributed Leadership.

Distributed Leadership and School Improvement

Distributed Leadership is an approach implemented in schools to improve areas such as student outcomes, teacher engagement, school culture, and teacher retention. The leadership approach inspires changes in schools in various ways. First, Distributed Leadership builds capacity by promoting the development of leadership skills and capacity among teachers and other staff in learning institutions. According to Bryck (2010), developing professional capacity is one way of promoting school improvement since it empowers teachers and creates growth opportunities. As a result, teachers become more engaged in their work, and retention rates surge. Also, developing capacity results in improved instructional practices, student support, and effective initiative adoption. The study of Harris (2004) indicates that DL yield better outcome by improving student outcome and increasing teacher engagement. Secondly, DL inspires improvement in school through shared vision and goals. The model ensures that all stakeholders' concerns are considered, easing the process of goal setting. Also, this leadership model offers a clear direction for

school improvement. Distributed Leadership creates an environment that improves schools by building capacity and allowing various stakeholders to share visions and goals.

The Distributed Leadership model emphasizes collaborative decisions making and enables schools to distribute expertise. According to Bryck (2010), leadership drives change in school, a core aspect that schools must have to attain desired changes. It is worth noting that principals in improving schools engage in a dynamic interplay of instructional and inclusive facilitative leadership. For instance, on the instructional side, school leaders impact local activities such as instructional programs and the hiring and development of staff. The Distributed Leadership model creates a setting that allows them to make collaborative decisions since it will enable each member to contribute to the developmental process (Göksoy, 2015). Also, Distributed Leadership leverages the strength of each individual within the school community. For example, teachers, principals, and other staff members possess diverse skills that can be utilized to improve the school. This inclusive approach addresses each participant's uniqueness and inspires change.

Monitoring, evaluation, and supporting innovations are other areas that Distributed Leadership impacts. O'Shea (2021) claims that school leaders motivate and support innovative initiatives from teachers and staff, primarily by creating an environment where they are motivated to take risks, develop and implement new strategies, and learn from failures. Such practices promote innovation and empower them to make better decisions in learning settings. The Distributed Leadership approach creates an environment that allows schools to support innovations and improve outcomes. For instance, when teachers adopt effective teaching practices, their performance improves. DeFlaminis et al. (2016) assert that monitoring and evaluation are the other Distributed Leadership areas that impact school improvement. In particular, Distributed Leadership promotes a culture of data-driven decision-making, which encourages evaluation and monitoring. Distributed Leadership

improves schools primarily by supporting innovation and promoting evaluation and monitoring.

Challenges and Barriers to Implementing Distributive Leadership

Even though Distributed Leadership has more recently been widely implemented in the education sector, the model has inherent challenges and barriers that limit its adoption. Sol (2021) indicates that Distributed Leadership has several barriers limiting its adoption. The first barrier is related to time and resources. Available studies assert that implementing Distributed Leadership requires resources and time, which may be limiting in some learning institutions (Tahir et al., 2016). For instance, training is a pillar of the leadership model that seeks to improve professional development to boost collaboration. The study of Grenda and Hackman (2013) argues that time and resources are the key barriers that limit the adoption of Distributed Leadership, especially in middle schools. Sol (2012) further assert that the issue of time and resource is commonly raised when the school chooses to adopt the model to inspire changes in academic performance and improve teacher engagement as well as retention of teachers. Hence, even though Distributed Leadership is associated with positive repercussions in schools, time and resources pose a primary barrier in most cases.

Resistance to changes and lack of clarity are the other barriers associated with Distributed Leadership in schools. Harris (2013, p. 73) asserts that “culture is an important factor, but it is also important to recognize that the way leadership is shared or distributed can, in itself, have a powerful impact on cultural norms.” Therefore, when schools lack an ethical culture, resistance to change emerges, limiting Distributed Leadership adoption. Besides, most teachers, principals, and other staff are well acquainted with the traditional leadership model. They may be reluctant to embrace Distributed Leadership since it is anchored on the sharing decision-making authority (Tahir et al., 2016). Therefore, schools seeking to implement Distributed Leadership must embrace ways of circumventing

resistance, which include clear communication, transparency, and dialogue. Grenda and Hackman (2013) further assert that Distributed Leadership requires a setting where goals and vision are shared. However, a lack of clarity on such issues often emerges in schools adopting Distributed Leadership. According to Sol (2012), some school leaders often fall into “getting it wrong” thoughts, leading to ambiguity. Arguably, resistance to change and lack of clarity are the key barriers to Distributed Leadership.

Tahir et al. (2016) state that teachers may not welcome an extension of opportunities to take on leadership. Distributed Leadership is anchored on shared vision and leadership, which empowers individuals to lead (Spillane, 2005). The situation can be worse when the fundamentalists and survivor group teachers are assigned such roles since they are resistant to changes. Muhammad (2018) asserts that the survivor group teacher-leaders have burnt out, and in some cases, they are disillusioned by education. Also, they are, in most cases, protesting about what they are required to do and opposing new ideas and changes. Available studies assert that most teachers lack a proper understanding of Distributed Leadership (Tahir et al., 2016). A study conducted by Lizotte (2013) reported that most teachers had a high feeling of inadequacy and deemed themselves unfit to lead because most were trained to be team members instead of team leaders. Distributed Leadership implementation is hindered by the feeling of inadequacy of teachers to lead.

Distributed Leadership implementation is associated with challenges in developing trust and collaboration. The Distributed Leadership model emphasizes collaborative decisions making and enables schools to distribute expertise. According to Bryck (2010), leadership drives change in school, a core aspect that schools must have to attain the desired changes. It is worth noting that building trust and fostering collaborative relations can be problematic, especially if there are pre-existing tensions between teachers, principals, and other staff. Grenda and Hackman (2013) indicate that building positive relationships and

creating an atmosphere of trust and commitment from all the stakeholders are the core challenges affecting the principals implementing Distributed Leadership. Therefore, to overcome the challenge, Grenda and Hackman (2013) propose that school leader must invest in professional development and educates teachers and other staff on the benefit of Distributed Leadership. Open and transparent communication and active listening can be adopted to overcome the challenge and allow schools to harness the benefits associated with Distributed Leadership. The model has several barriers and challenges that school leaders must develop strategies to overcome to leverage Distributed Leadership's benefits.

Benefits and Outcomes of Distributive Leadership in Education

Adopting Distributed Leadership in the education sector is connected to many benefits and outcomes. To begin with, Distributed Leadership increases collaboration and shared decision-making in schools by creating a setting that allows various stakeholders, including teachers, school leaders, staff, and the community, to make prudent decisions that improve overall performance. Supovitz and Tognatta (2013) indicate that collaborative decision-making is a central tenet of Distributed Leadership. The Distributed Leadership approach is anchored on the fact that decision-making in learning institutions is developed by changing configurations of groups involved in different levels of group decision-making. Also, Distributed Leadership allows schools to effectively use data to promote better decisions among the group members. The study of Datnow et al. (2007) discovered that the collaborative examination of data by teachers was a primary feature of high-performing school systems. The research further indicates that the benefits of collaborative data review are closely associated with increased engagement of team members. Distributed Leadership implementation in the education sector has improved collaboration and increased teacher engagement.

Improved professional development is the other benefit associated with Distributed Leadership adoption in schools. The leadership model provides teachers and staff members professional growth and development opportunities. In particular, they are given a leading role, whereby they assume leadership roles. The feat allows them to develop their leadership skills, expand their knowledge, and improve their instructional practices. Several studies have explored the connection between Distributed Leadership and enhanced professional growth. The study by Lin (2022) asserts that Distributed Leadership has positive repercussions on teacher innovativeness, autonomy, and professional collaboration. Amels et al. (2020) further state that teachers' perceptions of Distributed Leadership favorably impact their motivation and capacity for school development and educational change. Distributed Leadership also promotes collaboration between teachers, improving their ability to change education systems. It is worth noting that when innovativeness among teachers increases, it improves the education outcome since they are able to implement teaching practices that resonate with student needs.

The study of Lin (2022) further indicates that teacher autonomy positively impacts teacher innovativeness. It is worth noting that from an individual perspective when teachers are provided with adequate personal autonomy in the classroom, they take innovative initiatives in their classrooms to boost teaching and learning. The study by Nguyen et al. (2021), which leveraged data from teachers from forty-eight nations, concluded that teachers who reported a high degree of autonomy were key to teacher innovativeness. The principal's leadership style impacts innovation capability and promotes creative demeanors among teachers. Distributed Leadership model has inspired these changes in most schools, positively affecting overall performance. Lam et al. (2010) claim that when teachers believe their school is more collegial and supports teacher autonomy, they are more inspired to continue adopting educational innovation. Distributed Leadership adoption in learning

institutions increases teacher autonomy, which improves innovation and education outcomes.

Distributed Leadership is associated with enhanced instructional practices in schools. Available studies state that Distributed Leadership increases collaboration and shared decision in schools by creating an environment that enables stakeholders, including teachers, principals, administrators, and the community, to make prudent decisions that improve overall performance. Supovitz and Tognatta (2013) indicate that collaborative decision-making is a central tenet of Distributed Leadership. It is worth noting that teacher leaders can share effective instructional approaches and mentor and support colleagues. The feat improves instructional practices and boosts student engagement. DeFlaminis et al. (2016) claim that Distributed Leadership allows schools to create programs that facilitate the adoption of new instructional strategies. Rowean et al. (2004) further assert that Distributed Leadership has inspired school reform that seeks to improve instructional practices, primarily through re-organizing. Accordingly, Distributed Leadership improves school instructional practices by creating a setting that allows teachers to share information.

Distributed Leadership is associated with a better culture in learning institutions. The leadership model emphasizes collaborative decision-making and enables schools to distribute expertise. Bryck (2010) claims that leadership drives change in school, a core aspect that schools must have to attain the desired changes. It is worth noting that principals in improving schools engage in a dynamic interplay of instructional and inclusive facilitative leadership. Distributed Leadership model creates a setting that allows them to make collaborative decisions since it will enable each member to contribute to the developmental process (Göksoy, 2015). Also, Distributed Leadership leverages the strength of each individual within the school community. For example, teachers, principals, and other staff members possess diverse skills, which can be harnessed to improve the school. Distributed

Leadership further build capacity by promoting the development of leadership skills and capacity among teachers and other staff in learning institution. Bryck (2010) asserts that developing professional capacity promotes school improvement since it empowers teachers and creates growth opportunities. Essentially, Distributed Leadership has inspired several changes in the school, creating a culture that promotes positive outcomes.

Distributed Leadership model has a significant impact on student outcomes. The approach has been adopted in learning institutions to improve student outcomes by creating a conducive setting, improving instructional practices, and enhancing collaboration and shared learning. The study of Supovitz and Tognatta (2013) states that collaborative decision-making is a central tenet of Distributed Leadership, enabling teachers to share information, thereby improving effective instructional approaches. The approach allows teachers to adopt effective instructional practices, ultimately improving student educational outcomes.

Distributed Leadership provides teachers with growth opportunities, increasing their job satisfaction levels, a key parameter that affects student academic success. The study of Heck and Hallinger (2009) discovered that adopting Distributed Leadership leads to improved math through better instructional practice and improved teacher-student relationships. Other studies indicate that Distributed Leadership enhances teachers' autonomy and innovativeness, improving learning techniques. The study by Lin (2022) asserts that Distributed Leadership has positive repercussions for teacher innovativeness and autonomy, which are key determinants of students' academic achievement. Lastly, the model creates a conducive culture that allows different educational stakeholders to collaborate and inspire changes. Distributed Leadership improves student achievement by improving the school setting, engaging teachers, and improving instructional practices through collaboration.

Distributed Leadership Models and Approaches

Even though Distributed Leadership has gained impetus in education, several models and approaches are used to impact changes. The choice of model is influenced by the changes that schools seek to attain. Shared collaboration is one of the approaches of Distributed Leadership that is anchored on distributing the decision-making power among the various groups, including teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders. This approach views leadership as a collective duty, and choices are made via collaboration. Esen (2021) claims that collaboration is a perspective that encompasses several attributes such as governance, norms, administration, organizational autonomy, and mutuality, which, if properly implemented, create better avenues of making decisions and improve effectiveness in organizations. However, it is worth noting that managing partnerships is problematic since collaborations are complicated entities. When Distributed Leadership is adopted in learning institutions, collaboration among teachers, principals, and administrators is increased to improve culture and educational outcomes.

Teacher leadership is among the most common approaches adopted in Distributed Leadership in schools. Available studies assert that the role of a teacher is highly emphasized in Distributed Leadership. Rumeli et al. (2022) claim that teachers can impact this form of leadership by promoting collaboration and shared ownership. For instance, in a school setting, teachers' leadership creates an environment that enables collaboration between the various stakeholders. They share skills, expertise, and perspective, resulting in a collaborative culture that allows collective decision-making and is a key aspect of Distributed Leadership (Rumeli et al., 2022). It is worth noting that their participation in decision-making will enable leaders at all levels to make informed choices. The Distributed Leadership model also further gives teachers leadership roles, creating a sense of leadership and inspiring an aspect of collective responsibility and accountability. O'Shea (2021) further

claims that teachers directly affect leadership in an educational institution by improving instructional practices. The approach recognizes the skills and insights of teachers and leverages their contributions to inspire improvement and boost student outcomes.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and leadership teams are the other approaches to Distributed Leadership in schools. Antinluoma et al. (2021) state that PLCs have been widely used in learning institutions as a construct of professional development and collaboration. Jones et al. (2013) propose that teachers work within successful PLCs to enhance instruction, improve student achievement, and positively impact a school's overall performance. One of the distinguishing aspects of PLCs is that they are able to consider several factors, such as cultural, educational, and regulations, which impact education outcomes in schools (Antinluoma et al., 2021). PLCs also have the ability to impact teacher engagement, improving student outcomes. Hence, the model has been embraced when adopting Distributed Leadership in schools to improve multiple outcomes. Besides, Distributed Leadership is adopted using teams, teams, or committees that focus on particular areas of school improvement. For instance, if a school intends to improve teacher engagement, a committee is formed to shed light on the issues, and collaboration efforts are initiated to ensure it succeeds. It is worth noting that each team takes responsibility for its designated section and includes members from different roles within the school community. The framework encourages collaboration and collective decision-making, which are key pillars of Distributed Leadership.

Distributed Leadership and Student Achievement

Leadership is undeniably one factor that directly affects education outcomes in learning institutions. For instance, if the leadership can address all the concerns raised by all the stakeholders, students' achievement is attained. Distributed Leadership has been adopted in learning institutions to improve student outcomes by creating a conducive setting,

boosting instructional practices, and enhancing collaboration and shared learning. The study of Supovitz and Tognatta (2013) asserts that collaborative decision-making is a central tenet of Distributed Leadership, enabling teachers to share information, thereby improving effective instructional approaches. The strategy allows teachers to adopt effective instructional practices, ultimately improving student educational outcomes. In addition, Distributed Leadership provides teachers with growth opportunities, increasing their job satisfaction levels, a key parameter that affects student academic success. The study of Heck and Hallinger (2009) discovered that adopting Distributed Leadership leads to improvement in math due to better instructional practice and improvement in teacher-student relationships. Other studies indicate that Distributed Leadership enhances teachers' autonomy and innovativeness, improving learning techniques (Lin, 2022). Accordingly, Distributed Leadership improves student achievements by impacting the process and the setting.

Several studies have explored the connection between Distributed Leadership and student achievement. Daniel and Lei (2019) argue that many studies have focused on measuring institutional factors such as graduation rate, standardized tests, and longitudinal test scores to determine the effectiveness of Distributed Leadership. The Tian (2016) study claims that Distributed Leadership's effectiveness was mainly determined through organizational goals such as students' academic achievement. Research by Silins and Mulford (2002) affirmed that DL impacts students' learning achievement in two ways; first, it allows collaboration between all stakeholders, enabling them to work toward a common goal. Secondly, the model of a low leader, such as a school administrators, motivates and encourages teachers, leading to better student outcomes. The work of Copland (2003) indicates that participatory and distributed patterns of Distributed Leadership directly affect student achievement. Also, the Day et al. (2009) study claims that Distributed Leadership is

positively associated with staff members' morale and alleviates challenges such as low job satisfaction and commitment.

The Influence of Context on Distributive Leadership in Education

The influence of Distributed Leadership in education is significant, and its adoption has increased in recent years. The efficacy of the Distributed Leadership implementation is influenced by several contextual factors within the school and the education systems at large. The learning culture and climate play a pivotal role in determining the success and efficiency of Distributed Leadership. For instance, a learning institution with a positive and supportive culture ensures the success of Distributed Leadership. Dean (2007) claims that such a setting values collaboration, trust, and shared decision-making, which are primary pillars of Distributed Leadership. In addition, the structure of the school influences the success or failure of Distributed Leadership; for instance, a culture anchored on the hierarchical structure may present resistance, impeding changes. Dean (2007) further asserts that an environment invested in knowledge acquisition provides an ideal setting for Distributed Leadership. Therefore, the school climate and adopted culture are critical in determining whether Distributed Leadership will fail or thrive.

Leadership and organizational policies also impact the success of Distributed Leadership. Spillane (2012) claims that leadership is the process of influencing organizational changes, and the type adopted affects the success or the failure of Distributed Leadership. Dean (2007) argues that effective leadership creates a setting that allows individuals to thrive and grow professionally while improving overall performance. For instance, a school with effective leaders can successfully implement Distributed Leadership and harness its benefits. O'Shea (2021) claims that school leaders motivate and support innovative initiatives from teachers and staff by creating an environment where they are motivated to take risks, learn new strategies, and learn from failures.

On the other hand, policies within a school or educational system at large can either support or impede Distributed Leadership. For instance, learning institutions with flexible structures and policies that encourage shared decision-making and teacher autonomy are highly likely to implement Distributed Leadership (Miller, 2023) successfully. Lin (2022) claim that teacher autonomy is one of the strategies that Distributed Leadership leverage to improve education outcome and increases teacher retention. However, rigid structures and policies limit opportunities and view Distributed Leadership as a way of undermining authority. Accordingly, leadership and school policies are the contextual factors that influence the success or failure of Distributed Leadership in the education sector.

Teachers' skills and external pressures affect the success of the Distributed Leadership implementation. In Distributed Leadership, teachers play a vital role in the adoption process. For instance, when teachers have a strong professional identity, the success of Distributed Leadership increases. Their skills and expertise greatly affect the decision-making process (Rumeli et al., 2022). Hence, when schools have skilled teachers open to new ideas, it sets an ideal setting for Distributed Leadership. However, when teachers belong to the survivor and fundamentalist groups, the success rate of Distributed Leadership plummets (Muhammad, 2018). Secondly, the government, through various agencies, influences the leadership of the school setting. For instance, standardized testing requirements and accountability policies shaped the context under which Distributed Leadership operates. This pressure either shapes or dismantles Distributed Leadership. Accordingly, Distributed Leadership is shaped by teachers' skills and external pressures such as government policies.

Resources and social-cultural context also affect the success or failure of Distributed Leadership. Available studies indicate that implementing Distributed Leadership requires resources and time, which may be limiting in some learning institutions (Tahir et al., 2016).

For instance, training is a pillar of the leadership model that seeks to improve professional development to boost collaboration. The study of Grenda and Hackman (2013) argues that time and resources are the key barriers that limit the adoption of Distributed Leadership, especially in middle schools. Sol (2012) further assert that the issue of time and resource is commonly raised when the school chooses to adopt the model to inspire changes in academic performance and improve teacher engagement as well as retention of teachers. Besides, the social-cultural context, such as demographics, community expectations, and socio-economic status, shapes Distributed Leadership. For instance, a community that places a high value on education is ready to invest the resources required to ensure the success of Distributed Leadership. Therefore, resource availability and social-cultural context shape Distributed Leadership implementation in learning institutions.

Power Dynamics and Distributive Leadership

While distributed leadership aims to promote shared responsibility and decision-making, its implementation is significantly influenced by pre-existing power structures, individual agency, and the specific context of the organization. Several sources emphasize that distributed leadership does not automatically equate to a neutral or equitable distribution of power. Lizier et al. (2022) found that school-level leaders often experience distributed leadership as a top-down delegation of tasks rather than a genuine sharing of decision-making authority. This disparity in experience stems from enduring hierarchical structures and a reluctance among those in higher positions to relinquish control. Similarly, Humphreys and Rigg (2020) argue that the discourse of distributed leadership can "naturalize oppressive power relationships" by encouraging individuals to conform to the dominant narrative even if it means accepting their exclusion from certain decision-making processes. They observed that individuals may prioritize a sense of belonging and the accumulation of professional

capital over challenging power imbalances, leading to a form of self-delusion that perpetuates the status quo.

Both Lizier et al. (2022) and Humphreys and Rigg (2020) consistently identify trust and clarity as essential factors in mitigating power imbalances and fostering a more equitable distribution of leadership. Lizier et al. (2022) found that a lack of trust between faculty-level and school-level leaders hindered the successful implementation of distributed leadership. Building trust is crucial for enabling individuals to feel confident and empowered in taking on leadership responsibilities. Furthermore, clarity regarding roles, responsibilities, and the goals of distributed leadership is crucial for its success. A lack of clarity can exacerbate existing tensions and create confusion about who holds decision-making authority. When individuals understand what is being distributed, how it will be distributed, and what successful implementation looks like, they are more likely to embrace shared leadership and challenge power imbalances.

It is also important to recognize that power dynamics in distributed leadership are shaped by the specific context of the organization and its pre-existing culture. Lizier et al. (2022) and Humphreys and Rigg (2020) suggest that factors such as the size of the organization, the nature of its work, and the prevailing leadership style can all influence how distributed leadership is experienced and enacted.

Research Methodologies and Approaches to Studying Distributive Leadership

Researchers use several approaches and methodologies to study Distributed Leadership. Several factors, such as the research aim, scope, time, and target population determine the techniques. For instance, some study objectives can be achieved better using a qualitative approach than a quantitative one. Qualitative research is adopted to explore and understand individuals' experiences, perceptions, and demeanors in Distributed Leadership. Researchers adopt focus groups, interviews, and observation approaches to gather in-depth

data. Thematic analysis is commonly compiled to discern the data collected. For instance, the study of Hulpia and Devos (2010) adopted a qualitative approach to explore the connection between Distributed Leadership and teacher commitment. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather information in four schools, and the outcomes indicated that relationships exist between the two variables. Quantitative research is also adept in studying Distributed Leadership. For instance, the study of Abdul Rashid and Abd Latif (2021) adopted quantitative and questionnaires to determine the relationship between Distributed Leadership and teacher collective efficacy. Descriptive analysis was used, and a connection exists between the two variables.

Case, comparative, and longitudinal studies have been used in researching Distributed Leadership. Case studies are utilized when the researcher needs to acquire in-depth details concerning Distributed Leadership. A school that has adopted Distributed Leadership is selected, and in-depth analysis is used. The study of Bagwell (2019) adopted a case study approach to explore Distributed Leadership practices in urban elementary schools. Semi-structured interviews and observation were adopted, followed by cross-case analysis. Comparative studies entail comparing multiple schools to determine the similarities and differences in Distributed Leadership practices, outcomes, and contextual aspects. It is worth noting that one of the key aspects of comparative studies is generalizability. The study of Scribner et al. (2007) adopted a comparative analysis and discourse analysis to determine leadership as a distributed phenomenon. Three constructs emerged from the study: purposes, autonomy, and patterns.

In longitudinal studies, data is gathered over a protracted period to explore trends, changes, and the long-term repercussions of Distributed Leadership. To review the viability, significance, and development of dispersed leadership initiatives, researchers track the adoption of Distributed Leadership methods in schools or educational systems over a

specific time period. The study by Tian et al. (2015) adopted a longitudinal approach and provided a meta-analysis of studies conducted on Distributed Leadership from 2002 to 2013. The study claims that most research has failed to conceptualize Distributed Leadership or its empirical application and proposes a further study on these two domains. Several research techniques are adopted in exploring Distributed Leadership to allow organizations, especially in the education sector, to successfully implement and harness associated benefits such as better collaboration, sharing authority, improved student achievement, and creating an environment conducive to learning institutions.

Critiques and Debates in Distributive Leadership Research

Distributed Leadership adoption has recently increased, especially in school, since it is associated with several benefits. However, Distributed Leadership has elicited several debates and criticism from scholars. To begin with, a conceptual clarity issue exists since it lacks a standard definition, affecting the outcome of various studies. Harris and DeFlaminis (2016) assert that Distributed Leadership is interpreted differently, resulting in variations in conceptualizations and operationalization. However, Harris and DeFlaminis (2016) claim that the Distributed Leadership model has certain aspects that delineate it from other leadership practices. Spillane (2005) further indicates that Distributed Leadership emphasizes interactions more than action, creating a thick line between it and other leadership practices. Distributed Leadership has further raised questions and debates concerning its impact on power and authority. Some scholars have criticized the model because it remains concentrated among certain individuals despite being anchored on the idea of distributing power. For instance, in schools, principals, in most cases, are central to most of the decision-making process, questioning their ability to decimate traditional hierarchical structures in learning institutions.

Distributed Leadership is further criticized due to its associated barriers in adoption, which raises questions about its efficacy. For instance, the DL model emphasizes collaborative decision-making and enables schools to distribute expertise. Bryck (2010) claims that leadership drives change in school, a core aspect that schools must have to attain the desired changes. It is worth noting that building trust and fostering collaborative relations can be problematic, especially if there are pre-existing tensions between teachers, principals, and other staff. Grenda and Hackman (2013) further assert that Distributed Leadership requires setting where goals and vision are shared. However, a lack of clarity on such issues often emerges in schools adopting Distributed Leadership. Distributed Leadership has attracted much debate and criticism since its adoption has increased in educational institutions.

Implications for Policy and Practice in Distributive Leadership

Distributed Leadership is essential in education, especially in policy and practice domains. The model can potentially influence key areas of education such as teacher autonomy, shared leadership, collaboration, and professional development and leadership policies. Policy development is one of the areas that Distributed Leadership can impact. For instance, policymakers can leverage Distributed Leadership to provide a guideline for improving resource incentives and empowering teachers to boost educational outcomes. Amels et al. (2020) state that teachers' perceptions of Distributed Leadership favorably impact their motivation and capacity for school development and educational change. Also, Lin (2022) claims that Distributed Leadership impacts teacher autonomy and innovativeness. These are attributes that policymakers can harness to inspire changes in learning institutions. The collaborative decision process is the other area of Distributed Leadership that can influence education. Supovitz and Tognatta (2013) indicate that collaborative decision-making is a central tenet of Distributed Leadership. The leadership approach is anchored on

the fact that decision-making in learning institutions is conducted by changing configurations of groups involved in different levels of group decision-making. These areas can be leveraged to develop an education structure that promotes collaborative decision-making.

Distributed Leadership can also impact leadership development programs and teacher empowerment. For instance, Rumeli et al. (2022) claim that Distributed Leadership promotes collaboration and shared ownership, empowering teachers in the process. Besides, teachers are given leadership roles, creating a sense of leadership and inspiring collective responsibility and accountability. O'Shea (2021) further claims that teachers directly affect leadership by improving instructional practices. Therefore, Distributed Leadership has large implications for teacher-empowering strategies. Besides, learning institutions must invest in leadership programs that build capacity based on Distributed Leadership. Bryck (2010) argues that developing professional capacity is one strategy for promoting school improvement because it empowers teachers and creates growth opportunities. As a result, teachers become more engaged in their work, and retention rates surge.

Furthermore, developing capacity results in improved instructional practices, student support, and effective initiative adoption. Harris (2004) indicates that Distributed Leadership yield better outcome by improving student outcome and increasing teacher engagement. Accordingly, Distributed Leadership has a large implication for teacher empowerment and creating leadership programs in schools. Distributed Leadership has an implication for school culture and further studies. The Distributed Leadership model creates a setting that allows teachers and other staff to make collaborative decisions since it will enable each member to contribute to the developmental process (Göksoy, 2015). Also, Distributed Leadership leverages the strength of everyone within the school community. The feat creates a conducive setting that allows individuals to grow professionally and improve educational

outcomes. Also, available studies outline gaps in Distributed Leadership adoption and model, making room to further explore the leadership model.

Future Directions for Research on Distributive Leadership in Education

Adopting Distributed Leadership in learning institutions has created many avenues for further research. The current dearth of research has focused on several aspects pertaining to Distributed Leadership, but there is still room for more. To begin with, the long-term effect of Distributed Leadership, particularly on achievement and school improvement, needs further research. Most of the current studies have focused on aspects of leadership such as collaborative decision-making, shared responsibilities, and education outcomes (O'Shea, 2021; Lin, 2022; Kılınç & Özdemir, 2022; Heck & Hallinger, 2009). Hence, most studies focus on the long-term repercussions of Distributed Leadership in schools. Secondly, more studies need to be done on contextual factors such as social and economic status, cultural diversity, school size, and how they shape Distributed Leadership. It is worth noting that equity and social justice are core matters emanating from Distributed Leadership adoption in school. More research needs to be done on these areas to locate its effects.

Synthesis and Key Findings in Distributive Leadership Research

The review has focused on Distributed Leadership and explores different aspects that shape its adoption, impact, and implication on the education sector. Available studies assert that Distributed Leadership is undeniably one of the oldest concepts seeking organizational objectives through people (Bolden 2011). Its adaption in education is attributed to two factors: the failures of 'charismatic heroes' connected with transformational leadership and the complexity of the tasks (Bolden, 2011; Hartley, 2007). Göksoy (2015) further asserts that Distributed Leadership represents a clear model schools can leverage to inspire change. Teacher leaders play a vital role in Distributed Leadership, including creating a collaborative culture, building capacity, supporting innovation, monitoring, and evaluation (O'Shea 2021:

Bennett & Anderson, 2003; Louis 2007). Muhammad (2018) outlines the four types of teachers (Tweeners, believers, fundamentalists, and survivors) and how they shape the Distributed Leadership discourse. Distributed Leadership has an extended history, and teachers play a critical role in its adoption in schools to yield anticipated outcomes.

Other studies explore how Distributed Leadership improves a school's improvement. Building the capacity of collaborative decision-making, monitoring, evaluation, and supporting innovations are the areas that Distributed Leadership impact in school (O'Shea, 2021; DuFour & DuFour, 2009; DeFlaminis et al., 2016; Bryck, 2010; Millner, 2023). Supovitz and Tognatta (2013) assert that increased collaboration and shared decision-making in schools create a setting that allows various stakeholders, including teachers, principals, administrators, and the community, to make prudent decisions that improve overall performance. Other studies assert that Distributed Leadership is associated with better instructional support and culture in learning institutions (Hallinger, 2009). However, the leadership approach is associated with challenges and barriers, such as challenges in developing trust and collaboration, resistance to changes, and lack of clarity, time, and resources. For instance, building trust and fostering collaborative relations can be problematic, especially if there are pre-existing tensions between teachers, school administrators, and other staff. Grenda and Hackman (2013) indicate that building positive relationships and creating an atmosphere of trust and commitment from all the stakeholders are the core challenges affecting the principals implementing Distributed Leadership.

Distributed Leadership has several models and institutional factors that affect its success or failure. Shared collaboration, teacher leadership, and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are the models adopted in education (Rumeli et al., 2022; Antinluoma et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2013): positive and supportive culture, leadership, organizational policies, teacher's skills, and external pressures. For instance, when teachers have a strong

professional identity, the success of the Distributed Leadership model increases. Also, Dean (2007) claims that effective leadership creates a setting that allows individuals to thrive and grow professionally while improving overall performance. Distributed Leadership literature has focused on several aspects that impact the learning setting. However, other studies need to be conducted in different areas on the long-term repercussions of Distributed Leadership in schools and contextual factors such as trust, distribution of leadership opportunities, socio-economic status, cultural diversity, and school size and how they shape Distributed Leadership within educational organizations.

Summary

This study thoroughly explores Distributed Leadership in education, highlighting its transformative potential, theoretical foundations, and the pivotal roles of school leaders and teachers. It emphasizes how this model aims to reshape hierarchical structures by fostering collaboration and interaction among stakeholders to enhance instructional practices and drive organizational improvements. The chapter investigates the diverse theoretical frameworks like Distributed Leadership theory, transformational theory, and social-constructivist perspective, illustrating their role in comprehending Distributed Leadership's nuanced application. It also discusses the historical evolution of this model, emphasizing its response to limitations in traditional leadership and the crucial role of school leaders in cultivating collaborative cultures, empowering teachers, and fostering innovation.

Moreover, the chapter explores Anthony Muhammad's four teacher archetypes within Distributed Leadership—tweeners, believers, survivors, and fundamentalists—showcasing their diverse impacts on school cultures. It underscores Distributed Leadership's instrumental role in school improvement by promoting shared visions, collaborative decision-making, and leveraging diverse expertise. However, the chapter reveals obstacles hindering its implementation, such as resource constraints, resistance to change, and lack of clarity.

Despite these challenges, it highlights the potential benefits like enhanced collaboration, data-driven decision-making, improved professional development, and positive impacts on student outcomes. The discussion encompasses various models and approaches, including collaborative decision-making, teacher leadership, and Professional Learning Communities, showcasing strategies to implement Distributed Leadership in educational settings. As research methodologies in this area involve a qualitative case studies, and comparative analyses, further investigation is crucial to understand its conceptual clarity, long-term effects, and contextual influences. Addressing issues related to conceptual clarity, power distribution, and adoption barriers remains essential for its effective application within educational institutions.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted at Walker High School, a representative educational institution within the Cedar City School District in Tennessee. Walker High School serves students in grades 9 to 12 and was strategically chosen as the research setting to gain insights into how leadership tasks and opportunities are distributed within a typical high school context in the state. With a student-to-teacher ratio of 15 to 1 and slightly above-average proficiency test scores in mathematics and languages, it mirrors the characteristics of many other high schools in Tennessee. By focusing on this specific institution, the research offered practical solutions and nuanced insights that were broadly applicable to similar high schools across the state, addressing the challenges and opportunities associated with distributed leadership in education.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework behind distributed leadership centers on the belief that effective leadership can be achieved through collaborative efforts between formal leaders and those occupying positional power, as Hallinger & Heck (1999) suggested. The distributed leadership model offers opportunities for individual empowerment while encouraging trust-building collaborations within teams by striving towards a fairer allocation of duties amongst team members and providing necessary resources and support for informed decision-making processes. (Spillane et al., 2001). This approach seeks to establish an inclusive culture that acknowledges the contributions of all team members. (Spillane et al., 2001).

This framework contains six central components: team dynamics, formal and positional leadership, leadership development and support, organizational culture, empowering leaders, and trust and collaboration. Team dynamics capture interpersonal interactions within teams alongside relationships of formality between designated authorities (Spillane et al., 2001). Formal and positional leadership signify those who play distinct

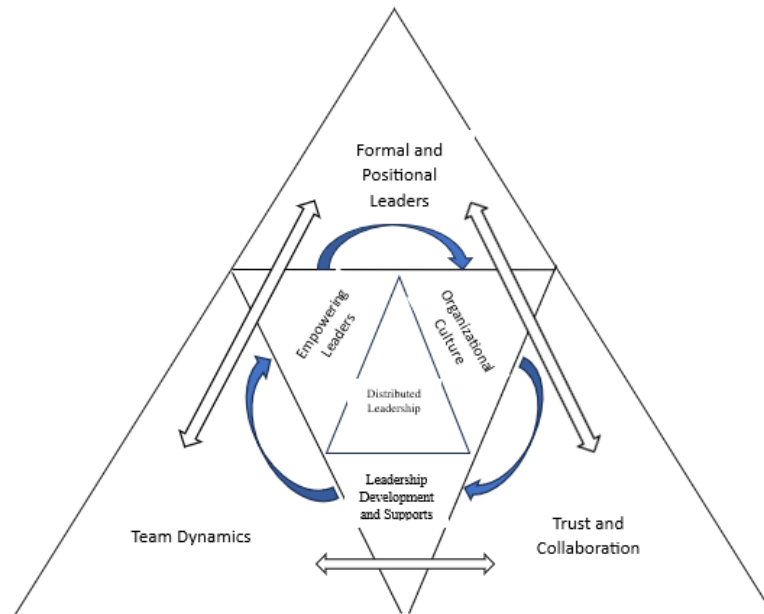
authority figures among groups (Rizvi, 2022). Leadership development oversees providing the necessary resources such individuals require within their roles. Organizational culture aggregates shared values and hope or trust for outcomes from lives preceding them into all aspects of interacting on a level playing field (Wong, 2020). Empowering leaders transpires through elements such as trust and acknowledgment of ability, which affect the empowerment of said impactful persons tasked with independently making unanimous decisions. Trust and collaboration are essential in schools. They create a positive and supportive learning environment, foster effective communication and teamwork among students and educators, and lead to better personal and professional growth and satisfaction (Gavin, 2019). Additionally, trust and collaboration build strong relationships between stakeholders, enabling sharing of ideas and resources and enhancing the educational institution's overall effectiveness and success (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

The fundamental principle underpinning distributed leadership has been analyzed through rigorous examination by Spillane et al. (2001). Their investigation dispels preconceived notions that merely decentralizing power will automatically lead to improved outcomes. Their study found that effective distributed leadership needs coordination and collaboration to attain goals. Overall, Spillane et al. (2001) showed the complexity of distributed leadership and the importance of interactions, collaborations, and coordination in its practice. Furthermore, Deal and Peterson (1999) strongly advocate considering multiple perspectives when making organizational decisions to bolster the school's culture. Consequently, this body of research posits that distributed leadership is better positioned to foster the creation and development of a shared vision (Spillane et al., 2001)

To better understand how distributed leadership can enhance school culture and boost teacher retention, this study aims to analyze the successful application of the theoretical framework. By doing so, it intends to offer stakeholders an increased awareness of the

significance of the distributed leadership model in fostering a positive and supportive environment conducive to promoting the growth of skilled educators.

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework



Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this qualitative case study using thematic analysis research was to understand distributed leadership, how principals decide which roles are distributed, how they distributed those roles to both formal and positional leaders, and how these distributive leadership decisions affected the culture of Walker High School. Therefore, the research questions for this study were:

1. What methods do school leaders use to decide which tasks are distributed?
2. What qualifications do school leaders seek when deciding whom to distribute tasks and roles?
3. How do distributed leadership decisions affect teachers' experiences and feelings of being included or excluded in the distributed leadership process?
4. What is the overall perception of the staff of the school's distributed leadership practice?

5. How does this shape the school culture?

Research Design/Methodological Approach

The combined use of a case study and thematic analysis in research allowed for an exploration of complex social phenomena, providing in-depth insights into specific contexts while uncovering the relational dynamics and networks that shaped and influenced the phenomenon under investigation (Carolan, 2021; Merriam, 1998). A qualitative case study is an in-depth research approach that examined a particular case or phenomenon within its real-life context (Creswell, 2002), aiming to provide a detailed understanding of the complexities and dynamics involved. The researcher analyzed this data to develop detailed descriptions, explanations, and interpretations of the case under investigation (Merriam, 1998). Research on qualitative case studies demonstrate their effectiveness in exploring complex social phenomena and gaining in-depth insights into specific contexts (Creswell, 2002). This method allowed the researcher to explore unique cases, individual experiences, and organizational processes, making it particularly suitable when research questions are focused on understanding the "how" and "why" behind a phenomenon and when context-specific factors and dynamics is central (Crowe et al., 2011).

This qualitative case study approach offered a powerful research approach for understanding complex social phenomena within Walker High School (Johnson & Christensen, 2020). By conducting in-depth qualitative investigations while examining thematic patterns, the researcher was able to explore the interactions, relationships, and decision-making processes that contributed to the phenomenon being studied (Carolan, 2021). This integrated approach provided an understanding of distributed leadership, role distribution, and their impact on organizational culture at Walker High School (Johnson & Christensen, 2019).

Research Site

Determining the site selection for the case study at Walker High School within the Cedar City School District involved a systematic and methodical approach. The researcher began by defining the research objectives and questions, clarifying the specific aspects to investigate (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). This step enabled the identification of ideal site characteristics that align with the research goals. The researcher sought a school within the Cedar City School District that demonstrated the implementation of distributed leadership practices (Hallinger & Heck, 1999). By identifying a school utilizing distributed leadership, the researcher employed a detailed approach to examine various aspects of the school's protocols, including school structure, culture, and practices. The researcher also assessed the school's organizational charts and decision-making processes to establish how leadership tasks and roles are distributed.

The final determinant for site selection was the availability of relevant and willing participants (Carolan, 2021). The researcher assessed whether Walker High School could provide the participants essential for the case study (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). Participants, including school leaders, teachers, and staff, were identified based on their willingness to participate in the research (Patton, 1990). A positive and supportive attitude from the school community is highly valued, as it enhances the validity and reliability of the study (Creswell, 2002). By aligning research objectives, obtaining permissions, and ensuring data availability and participant cooperation, the researcher effectively determined Walker High School as the site for the dissertation case study within the Cedar City School District (Johnson & Christensen, 2019).

Participant Selection

As this study focused on understanding the construct of distributed leadership from the participants' perspective, criterion sampling was used for selection (Patton, 2001). The

researcher utilized both criterion and snowball sampling to determine who would be interviewed. Criterion sampling involved intentional selection based on the potential manifestation or representation of important constructs, making the sample representative of the phenomenon of interest (Carolan, 2021). This method was applied when selecting school leadership to be interviewed.

The researcher employed a snowball sampling method for selecting the teachers to be interviewed. This selection process began with school leadership being asked to name teachers to whom they distributed and did not distribute leadership opportunities and tasks. The teacher participants were selected from the names provided to the researcher during the interviews with the school leadership. Members holding positional leadership at Walker High School identified these teachers, who were then contacted next (Carolan, 2021). The identified teachers included those who received distributed tasks and opportunities, ensuring a diverse representation of experiences.

Criterion sampling allowed for the intentional selection of participants based on their relevance to the phenomenon being studied, ensuring that those with direct experiences and insights into distributed leadership practices were included (Patton, 2001). The critical decision-makers and school leaders contributed valuable insights into the factors influencing leadership role distribution (Carolan, 2021). The teachers—both those receiving distributed tasks and those not—offered perspectives on the impact of such decisions on their experiences and involvement within the school (Johnson & Donaldson, 2019).

In addition to criterion and snowball sampling, the researcher integrated purposeful sampling to ensure a detailed and well-rounded representation of participants. Purposeful sampling focused on selecting individuals who possessed specific knowledge or experiences relevant to the study's objectives, enhancing the depth and quality of the data collected. This approach allowed the researcher to target participants who were not only directly involved in

distributed leadership practices but also those who may have unique or contrasting viewpoints regarding the implementation and effectiveness of these practices (Patton, 2001). By including both leaders and teachers with varied roles and experiences, the study aimed to capture a wide range of insights into how distributed leadership impacted school culture and teacher engagement. Furthermore, purposeful sampling supported the goal of exploring potential gaps or inconsistencies in how leadership roles were distributed and perceived, offering a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon in question.

Data Collection

To gather data on how school leaders determined the distribution of leadership tasks and roles, what roles and tasks were distributed, and how teachers perceived distributed leadership within the school, one-on-one interviews were conducted. The researcher utilized a snowball data collection method starting with the school leadership. From these interviews with the school leadership (Principal and Assistant Principal(s)), the researcher obtained the names of the teachers who received tasks and opportunities and those who did not, creating the teacher interview list.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the school leadership team members, including the Principal and all Assistant Principals in the school. These interviews allowed for a prescribed list of questions and provided an opportunity for participants to share additional information (Merriam, 1998). Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes (Carolan, 2021). For a list of the interview questions, see Appendix A.

In addition to the interviews, the researcher ensured that the questions posed to participants were carefully designed to probe into the nuances of distributed leadership within the school. The semi-structured format allowed for a fluid conversation, but specific focus was given to understanding how leadership tasks were distributed, how decisions were communicated, and how these practices influenced the overall school culture. These

questions aimed to elicit detailed responses that provided insight into both the formal and informal processes of leadership distribution within the school. Additionally, follow-up questions were strategically used to encourage participants to reflect on their personal experiences and feelings regarding their inclusion or exclusion from leadership tasks. This structured yet flexible approach ensured that the data collected remained detailed, enabling the researcher to capture the full complexity of the leadership dynamics at Walker High School.

For the teacher interviews, the researcher utilized a semi-structured format for data collection, allowing for a prescribed list of questions and an open-ended opportunity for the respondents to share additional information (Merriam, 1998). These interviews gathered information about the teachers' feelings regarding having tasks distributed to them or not (Creswell, 2002). Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes (Carolan, 2021). For a list of interview questions, see Appendices B and C. Interview data collected from school leaders and teachers was gathered in a digital format using a digital audio recorder and transcribed by the researcher (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). The researcher held the collected data in strict confidence, ensuring that the names of participants, schools, or school districts were not used to protect their identities (Patton, 1990).

The data collection process was carefully designed to ensure an exploration of distributed leadership practices and their impact on school culture (Johnson & Donaldson, 2019). By utilizing one-on-one interviews, the researcher assessed the participants' perspectives and experiences regarding leadership role distribution (Creswell, 2002). The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility, enabling participants to express their interpretations and feelings surrounding distributed leadership practices (Merriam, 1998).

By mapping and analyzing the connections and information flow patterns, the researcher identified critical actors and their roles in decision-making processes (Creswell,

2002). Using a digital audio recorder ensured accurate capture of interview data, allowing the researcher to transcribe and analyze the responses in detail (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). Maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of participants was paramount to protecting their privacy and encouraging open and honest sharing during the data collection process (Patton, 1990). A rigorous methodology guided the data collection process to provide a rich and detailed understanding of distributed leadership practices and their implications for school culture within Walker High School (Creswell, 2002). The combination of qualitative interviews and survey data offered diverse perspectives and insights from various stakeholders, contributing to the depth and validity of the research findings (Johnson & Donaldson, 2019). The careful consideration of ethical considerations and data confidentiality ensured the integrity of the study and respect for the participants' contributions (Carolan, 2021).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was fundamental in the research. When conducting data analysis, several aspects were taken into consideration. First, the researcher established what was learned from the data by clearly understanding the research question (Carolan, 2021). Secondly, using the right tools for analysis was essential. Transparency in data coding and analysis was crucial. Lastly, critically evaluating results made the research reliable (Carolan, 2021). The researcher explored the data (Carolan, 2021) to understand the context by examining the variables, data types, and distribution related to how school leadership assigned tasks and roles. The researcher cleaned all exported data to eliminate errors and inconsistencies (Carolan, 2021). The technique employed for cleaning the data was data imputation. Cleaned data was coded descriptively and emotionally, with codes assigned to responses for ease of analysis. Coded data was analyzed using statistical techniques to test

hypotheses and make inferences (Carolan, 2021). The final step in the research was data interpretation, which explained the study's results and implications.

While the study outlined a robust approach to data collection and analysis, certain challenges and delimitations existed that needed to be considered to ensure the credibility and interpretability of the results. First, the use of one-on-one interviews for data collection may have introduced potential biases and subjectivity. The researcher's presence and the interpersonal dynamics during interviews could have influenced participants' responses. Additionally, interviews relied on the participants' willingness and ability to articulate their experiences and perceptions accurately. This reliance introduced a risk of social desirability bias, where participants provided responses, they believed the researcher expected, rather than their genuine perspectives (Creswell, 2002).

To mitigate these concerns, it was essential to ensure that the interview questions were open-ended and non-leading, allowing participants to express their thoughts and feelings freely (Merriam, 1998). The researcher also established rapport and trust with participants to encourage honest and candid responses. Moreover, employing a diverse set of participants, including both those who received distributed leadership roles and those who did not, helped triangulate the data and provided a clearer picture of the distributed leadership landscape (Johnson & Donaldson, 2019).

Regarding the coding and analysis of interview data, it was important to acknowledge the potential subjectivity in this process. The act of assigning codes and themes to responses was inherently interpretative. Different analysts may have interpreted the same data differently, introducing a level of subjectivity (Carolan, 2021). To address this, the researcher maintained transparency in the coding process by documenting their coding decisions and rationale. Additionally, employing multiple coders or peer debriefing ensured the robustness and reliability of the analysis (Merriam, 1998).

In addition to the measures taken to address potential biases in data collection, the researcher also took steps to ensure rigor in the data analysis process. After cleaning and coding the data, the researcher engaged in constant comparison methods to identify patterns, themes, and relationships within the interview responses. This technique allowed for the continuous refinement of codes and categories, ensuring that emerging patterns were rooted in the data itself rather than preconceived notions (Carolan, 2021). By consistently revisiting the data throughout the analysis phase, the researcher ensured that the coding process remained flexible and adaptable to new insights. Furthermore, the use of thematic analysis was carefully aligned with the qualitative data to triangulate findings, adding depth and a visual layer to understanding the informal leadership structures within the school. This combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches strengthened the overall analysis, providing a clear view of how distributed leadership functioned at Walker High School and how it impacted the school's culture and teacher engagement.

In conclusion, while the data analysis process outlined in the research plan was methodologically rigorous, it was essential to recognize the challenges and potential subjectivity involved in data collection, coding, and interpretation. By addressing these limitations through careful design, transparency, and the use of multiple data sources and analytical methods, the study enhanced the trustworthiness and validity of its findings, ensuring that the insights drawn from the research were robust and reliable.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

Merriam (1998), in her work *Qualitative Research and Case Study Application in Education*, emphasize the need for trustworthiness and rigor to ensure data quality and validity. According to her study, these concepts refer to credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of research results. Several techniques are recommended by Merriam for maintaining trustworthiness and rigor. The researcher used peer debriefing to

enhance trustworthiness and rigor. This involved seeking input and feedback from colleagues to examine and discuss the research processes and results (Merriam, 1998). Having another researcher or a team of researchers review and critically evaluate the research process, data analysis, and interpretations helped identify potential biases, errors, or alternative interpretations the researcher might have missed. This external review played a key role in ensuring transparency and openness.

The researcher considered both emic and etic perspectives to understand the phenomenon in detail. The emic perspective referred to an insider's view, where the researcher sought to understand the participants' cultural, social, or individual meanings and interpretations. In contrast, the etic perspective involved an external or outsider's view, where the researcher analyzed the phenomenon based on objective, universal criteria or theories. The researcher examined the cultural understanding of teachers on distributed leadership and its impact on their satisfaction. By utilizing both perspectives, the researcher was able to understand the participants' experiences from both a cultural and contextual view, while considering the broader outsider's perspective (Merriam, 1998). Incorporating these perspectives demonstrated methodological rigor and helped establish the findings' validity. Using the emic perspective ensured that the study captured the nuanced and contextualized experiences of the participants, thereby increasing the authenticity and trustworthiness of the research. Simultaneously, employing the etic perspective allowed for identifying patterns, generalizing findings, and connecting them to existing theoretical frameworks, enhancing the study's broader applicability and generalizability.

The researcher managed their position and biases throughout the research process to maintain objectivity and minimize personal influence on the results. This was done by employing techniques such as reflexivity, where the researcher continuously reflected on assumptions and experiences and how they might affect the study. The researcher was clear

and transparent about their background and potential influence on the study (Le Compte & Preissle, 1993). They identified their position in terms of their background, biases, beliefs, and values, which could have influenced the research process and findings. By doing so, the researcher demonstrated self-awareness and an understanding of the potential impact on data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

In conclusion, the researcher utilized peer debriefing, considered emic and etic perspectives, and identified their positionality to bolster trustworthiness, rigor, and validity in data collection and analysis. These methods produced reliable and robust findings, which the case study confidently applied and built upon.

Subjectivity and Positionality Statement

My dissertation did not aim to establish an absolute “truth” regarding my problem in practice. Instead, it explored distributed leadership from various perspectives. Furthermore, the researcher offered an intricate depiction of Walker High School’s specific circumstances, and the initiatives implemented for distributed leadership to enhance school culture. By employing qualitative case studies and thematic analysis as research methods, my dissertation provided readers with a vivid description of this context while offering insights into distributed leadership via perspectives from those actively engaged in it. This research sought to enhance our understanding of distributed leadership and its potential to empower educators while cultivating better educational settings for all individuals involved (Carolan, 2021).

I had witnessed firsthand how traditional hierarchical models constrained creativity and innovation. This firsthand experience inspired me to explore the potential benefits of embracing distributed forms of leadership. By analyzing both the positive and negative outcomes of distributed leadership at Walker High School, this research aimed to provide practical recommendations for fostering more equitable leadership practices in schools. Thus, this research investigated whether adopting a distributed leadership approach could

effectively empower teachers while enhancing overall job satisfaction levels within educational institutions (Hallinger & Heck, 1999). Teaching for over 20 years in the Middle and High School setting, my background experiences greatly informed my views on distributed leadership. Throughout my journey, I had the opportunity to assume various leadership positions, some by choice and others involuntarily. Some of these roles included writing district-wide scope and sequence documents, serving on instructional leadership teams, fulfilling interim administrative responsibilities, and facilitating professional development sessions for the State Department of Education and many teacher leader roles. Despite accumulating considerable experience, my potential for career advancement or securing formal leadership roles continued to be overlooked. This observation led me to believe that teachers should be allowed to actively participate in the decision-making processes if they were to truly make a meaningful and enduring impact within their school communities (Johnson & Donaldson, 2019). I provided two examples of being overlooked for career advancement.

The first was when I discussed an assistant principal position opening at the school where I was teaching with a principal. “You and I do not see eye to eye; you push back too much, and professionally you should just go to a new school.” This principal then hired someone they knew both socially and professionally. This principal did not discuss this hire with the other people on the administrative team or anyone in the school. The next opportunity for advancement was for a Dean of Instruction position. I applied for the position, but the principal did not conduct interviews. The job was posted, and less than 18 hours later, the principal had the person they already knew they were planning to appoint to this position hired. There was no discussion about this hire with anyone on the leadership team or faculty. The staff at the school was not happy with the “appointment” or how the principal decided without consulting anyone. In this case, I had more than double the years of

teaching experience, had worked at the district and state levels in curriculum development and implementation, ran the RTI program at the school, and presented district, state, and national training on multiple topics and held an instructional leadership license. Conversely, the hired person had no experience in curriculum and instruction, limited classroom instruction experience, and did not have an instructional leadership license, nor had they finished their coursework in school leadership when they were hired.

As a teacher leader with skills in educational leadership, I brought a deep-seated conviction based upon a diligent study into the far-reaching effects of implementing distributed leadership within schools. Through my studies and personal experiences, it became evident that distributed leadership could play a vital role in positively and negatively impacting school culture, teacher engagement, and teacher satisfaction. Drawing upon my experiences as a teacher leader across various districts and educational environments, I had witnessed firsthand how traditional hierarchical models constrained creativity and innovation. This firsthand experience inspired me to investigate the potential benefits of embracing distributed forms of leadership. Thus, this research investigated whether adopting a distributed leadership approach could effectively empower teachers while enhancing overall job satisfaction levels within educational institutions (Hallinger & Heck, 1999).

This research sought to “enhance our understanding of distributed leadership and its potential to empower educators while cultivating better educational settings for all individuals involved” (Carolan, 2021). In my experience, the prevailing type of leadership still appeared to be hierarchical; however, distributed leadership offered an alternative approach that could show promise for enhancing school culture while promoting greater involvement from teachers in decision-making processes. When distributed a leadership role or task, teachers felt excitement, pride, and a sense of responsibility. Being entrusted with leadership responsibilities boosted self-esteem and motivated them to excel in their duties.

These educators felt empowered and eager to collaborate with colleagues to achieve common goals. On the other hand, feeling undervalued or overlooked was prevalent when not given any leadership tasks in a distributed setting. Not being afforded these distributed opportunities could lead to frustration or disappointment due to having many valuable skills and insights to offer. The absence of recognition affected morale, enthusiasm for teaching, and overall job satisfaction.

Logic Model Charts

The idea of this study began with an earnest pursuit to understand the decision-making processes of school leaders concerning the allocation of tasks—a fundamental aspect of distributed leadership. The initial focus centered on delineating the methods employed by school leaders and the essential qualifications sought in individuals chosen for various roles. Through a meticulously structured series of interviews with school leaders and descriptive coding analysis, I unveiled the systematic patterns underlying their decision-making strategies.

Concurrently, the investigation expanded to encompass the experiences and perceptions of teachers within the framework of distributed leadership. The inquiries sought to illuminate the emotional dimensions surrounding teachers' feelings of inclusion or exclusion in this leadership model. By employing an emotion coding approach, I extracted the nuanced emotional responses embedded within their narratives, thus capturing the affective essence of their experiences. The subsequent phase of this study involved teacher interviews, which, although not explicitly mirroring all aspects of the leadership research questions, offered invaluable insights. Teachers provided varying perspectives on distributed leadership, articulating its impact on their personal growth, team dynamics, and perceptions of the school's cultural landscape. Using a hybrid methodology that combined descriptive and

emotion coding, I was able to understand the factors shaping teachers' perceptions and experiences within this framework.

The following charts stand as visual representations meticulously crafted to illustrate the alignment between raw data, analytical techniques employed, and the overarching research inquiries. These visual aids show relationship between acquired data, analytical methodologies, and the research questions that guided this study.

Table 3: Coding Techniques Part 1

Research Question	Corresponding Sources of Data School Leader Interview	Data Analysis Techniques
What methods do school leaders use to decide what tasks are distributed?	School Leader Interview Questions 4: When looking at tasks – WHAT process do you go through to decide what tasks you will distribute to others?	Descriptive Coding
What qualifications do school leaders seek when deciding whom to distribute tasks and roles?	School Leader Interview Questions 5: How do you assess a staff member’s readiness for a leadership position? School Leader Interview Questions 6: What qualities or characteristics do you look for in potential leaders? School Leader Interview Questions 7: Do you involve other staff members or stakeholders in decision-making?	Descriptive Coding
How do distributed leadership decisions affect teachers’ experiences and feelings of being included or excluded in the distributed leadership process?	School Leader Interview Questions 10: When you distribute tasks to others – how do you feel it affects the team dynamics of the school? School Leader Interview Questions 11: How does it affect the school’s culture when you distribute tasks to others? School Leader Interview Questions 12: How does implementing distributive leadership in your school impact the feelings and attitudes of individuals chosen for leadership roles and those not selected?	Emotion Coding
What is the overall perception of the staff of the school’s distributed leadership practice?	School Leader Interview Questions 16: Is there anything else that you would like to share with me?	Descriptive coding
How does this shape the school culture?	School Leader Interview Questions 12: How does implementing distributive leadership in your school impact the feelings and attitudes of individuals chosen for leadership roles and those not selected? School Leader Interview Questions 13: How does the school assess and measure the effectiveness of its distributed leadership model in cultivating a culture of trust and collaboration among school leaders, teachers, and staff?	Descriptive Coding

The interview questions aimed at understanding the methods used by school leaders and the qualifications sought for task distribution are analyzed using descriptive coding. Conversely, questions exploring the impact on teachers' experiences and feelings, as well as the overall perception of the school's distributed leadership practice, are analyzed using emotion coding. This approach captured the emotional and attitudinal aspects of the responses, providing an understanding of both the operational strategies and the affective dimensions of distributed leadership.

Table 4: Coding Techniques Part 2

Research Question	Corresponding Sources of Data Teacher/Staff Interview of those distributed tasks and roles	Data Analysis Techniques
What methods do school leaders use to decide what tasks are distributed?	No teacher interview questions directly address this research question.	N/A
What qualifications do school leaders seek when deciding whom to distribute tasks and roles?	Teacher Interview Questions 11: From your perspective, how much do teachers' experience and qualifications influence their chances of being chosen for leadership roles? Teacher Interview Questions 13: How do you think distributed leadership contributes to your personal leadership development and growth as an educator? Have you encountered any challenges or learning opportunities while in this role?	Descriptive Coding
How do distributed leadership decisions affect teachers' experiences and feelings of being included or excluded in the distributed leadership process?	Teacher Interview Questions 4: How do you feel about taking on distributed leadership roles and responsibilities within the school? What excites you the most about this opportunity? Teacher Interview Questions 6: How has your involvement in distributed leadership roles impacted your perception of the school culture? Teacher Interview Questions 14: Can you share a recent example where the distributed leadership practices have impacted the team dynamics within the school? Either positively or negatively Teacher Interview Questions 16: In your opinion, what are some key factors that contribute to the success of distributed leadership within the school? Teacher Interview Questions 18: When you are distributed a task who are the top team members (please give specific names) you would identify as who you go to when you need to seek help or advice? (These can be both positional and formal leaders) Teacher Interview Questions 19: When you are distributed a task who are the top 3-5 team members (please give specific names) you would identify as who you DO NOT go to when you need to seek help or advice? (These can be both positional and formal leaders)	Emotion Coding
What is the overall perception of the staff of the school's distributed leadership practice?	Teacher Interview Questions 5: "In what ways do you think the distributed leadership model influences collaboration among teachers and staff members?" Teacher Interview Questions 20: Is there anything else that you would like to share with me?	Descriptive Coding
How does this shape the school culture?	Teacher Interview Questions 6: How has your involvement in distributed leadership roles impacted your perception of the school culture? Teacher Interview Questions 14: Can you share a recent example where the distributed leadership practices have impacted the team dynamics within the school? Either positively or negatively Teacher Interview Questions 16: In your opinion, what are some key factors that contribute to the success of distributed leadership within the school?	Descriptive Coding

The teacher interview questions were categorized according to the relevant research question categories, with the coding approach specified for each set of questions. The analysis employed both descriptive coding and emotion coding to capture the emotional and attitudinal aspects of the teachers' responses related to distributed leadership practices. This dual approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of how teachers perceive and experience distributed leadership, highlighting not only the practical implications but also the emotional resonance of their experiences.

Table 5: Coding Techniques Part 3

Research Question	Corresponding Sources of Data Teacher/Staff Interview of those NOT distributed tasks and roles	Data Analysis Techniques
What methods do school leaders use to decide what tasks are distributed?	7.Does your administration involve others in the decision-making process of distributing the work of the school.	Descriptive Coding
What qualifications do school leaders seek when deciding whom to distribute tasks and roles?	8. Distributed Leadership is a shift away from the traditional, hierarchical, “top-down” model of leadership to a form of leadership that is collaborative and shared. How would you say your school embodies this practice? 11. From your experience, how has school leadership supported and/or empowered you as a leader?	Descriptive Coding
How do distributed leadership decisions affect teachers’ experiences and feelings of being included or excluded in the distributed leadership process?	Teacher Interview Questions 3. Have you been assigned any leadership tasks or roles by your administration? Teacher Interview Questions 4: How do you feel about taking on distributed leadership roles and responsibilities within the school? What excites you the most about this opportunity? Teacher Interview Questions 6: In your opinion, does the distributed leadership model promote trust and collaboration among teachers and staff members? a. Have you experienced any specific instances that have reinforced this sense of trust and collaboration? b. Have you experienced any specific instances that have harmed this sense of trust and collaboration?	Emotion Coding
What is the overall perception of the staff of the school’s distributed leadership practice?	Teacher Interview Questions 5: Have you encountered any challenges or learning opportunities while in your current role? 12. In your opinion, what are some key factors that contribute to the success or failure of distributed leadership within the school? 13.Is there anything else that you would like to share with me?	Descriptive Coding
How does this shape the school culture/climate?	Teacher Interview Questions 10.How does distributed leadership impact your perception of the school culture/climate? (Culture is how we do things here) (Climate is how we feel) 9. Can you share a recent example where the distributed leadership practices have impacted the dynamics within the school? Either positively or negatively	Emotional Coding

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents the outcomes of the interviews held by the researcher at Walker High School. The researcher had the opportunity to converse with the school's administration and the teachers and staff. The teachers and staff were split between those with distributed leadership tasks and those without. For the structure of this chapter, the researcher organizes and presents the findings using the research questions. The research questions have been redefined as sub-topics and will be used to organize the main themes identified in the raw data. The raw data collected and presented here include the transcripts from interviews with 2 members of the administration, 11 Teachers/Staff assigned Distributed Leadership tasks and roles, and 9 Teachers/Staff not assigned Distributed Leadership tasks. In total, the researcher interviewed 22 participants. The two administrators answered 14 open-ended questions, and the two subsequent groups answered 18 and 13 open-ended questions respectively. The administrators, on the other hand, responded to a customized set questions which will be embedded in the results. The finalized interview questions have been included in the appendix.

The data analysis started by transcribing the audio from the interviews using an online site, Transcribe Me. The transcribed data was then downloaded in word documents and sorted based on the groups identified above: administrators, teachers under distributive leadership, and teachers not under distributive leadership. In the open coding phase, the researcher started with open coding where the text was broken down into small segments, including words, phrases, and sentences, and labeled each with a code that reflects its meaning. The researcher then proceeded to axial coding where the open codes were grouped into broader categories and subcategories based on their relationships and meanings for example, codes related to "workload stress," "task distribution," and "feeling unsupported"

were grouped under "challenges of distributed leadership." Throughout the coding process, the researcher documented each code and category in a codebook created on Microsoft Office Excel where the letter X was used to mark the respondents affiliated with specific themes.

Table 6: Sampling Outcomes and Participant Data

Recruitment Method	Description
Planned Method	Criterion-based approach targeting administrators first, followed by teachers/staff via snowball sampling.
Actual Method	Open invitation to entire staff, as no interviewees were willing to recommend colleagues.
Total Number Invited	Entire staff (159)
Total Number Participated	22
Participants Declined	137

Participant Characteristics Table

Pseudonym	Position	Years of Experience	Gender	Race	DL Role
Alex	Administrator	15	Male	African American	Yes
Jordan	Administrator	22	Female	White	Yes
Taylor	Teacher	5	Female	Hispanic	Yes
Morgan	Teacher	12	Female	White	Yes
Casey	Teacher	8	Male	White	Yes
Jamie	Teacher	10	Female	African American	Yes
Robin	Teacher	6	Male	White	Yes
Drew	Teacher	7	Female	Hispanic	Yes
Avery	Teacher	4	Male	White	Yes
Taylor	Support Staff	19	Female	African American	Yes
Devon	Teacher	11	Male	White	Yes
Jesse	Teacher	13	Female	White	No
Pat	Teacher	14	Male	Hispanic	No
River	Teacher	5	Female	Asian	No
Casey	Teacher	6	Male	African American	No
Skylar	Teacher	8	Female	White	No
Reese	Teacher	17	Female	Hispanic	No
Charlie	Support Staff	10	Male	White	No
Dakota	Teacher	9	Female	White	No
Sage	Teacher	11	Male	White	No
Rowan	Teacher	3	Female	African American	No
Emerson	Teacher	5	Male	White	No

Note: Data Collection Outcomes and Participants Information

Decision-making Process in Task Distribution

The first set of interviews was with the two administrators, as the researcher began collecting data in response to research question 1; the approaches to decision making regarding task allocation. The researcher attempted to determine their approach in task distribution and the main themes that came up include staff expertise, workload and availability, and the formality of the process. Table 4.1 below summarizes the coding scheme.

Table 7: Research Question 1, Coding Scheme

Codes (Descriptive)	Administrator 1	Administrator 2
Staff Expertise	X	X
Workload and Availability		X
Formal		X

Note. Research question one coding scheme and school leaders responses

The sub-categories autonomy and team structure contributed to the staff expertise code, reflecting a trust in staff's specific skills and independence. Sub-categories like strengths, interests, and assessment were instrumental in developing the workload and availability code, emphasizing a structured approach to balancing workload based on individual capacity. Sub-categories such as formal process, framework, and fit highlighted formality, showing a preference for structured, equitable assignment methods. Administrator 2's emphasis on growth further reinforced formality by linking it to personal development and fair opportunities. Finally, sub-categories like assertiveness, multi-tasking, self-motivation, and potential also contributed to staff expertise, as they underscored desirable attributes that align with task allocation based on professional strengths.

Both administrators agreed that the best process for deciding the tasks to distribute to others should consider staff expertise. In the words of administrator 1, "I allow, assistant principals to lead their content areas without feeling like I need to oversee everything... for teachers, I believe in autonomy within a team structure." Administrator 2 supports the view

of administrator 1, by explaining that they “consider the strengths and interests of staff members, as well as their current workload.” Regarding workload administrator 2 believed in the role of a needs assessment before task distribution. Administrator 1 believed that this should be an informal process that is based on trust and autonomy. However, administrator 2 explains that formality in this process “helps identify the best fit for each task and supports the professional growth of all staff members...” In essence, school leaders have varying approaches to task distribution. While others believed it is more of a formal process and deserves a consistent framework, others trusted in their colleagues’ and subordinates’ expertise, competence, and general work ethic. A stable formal framework ascertains equity and fairness in task allocation while trust and autonomy improve the workplace culture and relationships. In support of a formal approach, the Principal narrated, “I look for people who are assertive, can multi-task, and are relational. They need to be able to relate to their group and communicate well. I also look for people who step up when needed and are self-motivated. Problem solvers are key. I look for experience where relevant...” These are all professional attributes and can be identified through a formal assessment. However, the Principal also says, “I also see leadership potential in people who don’t necessarily stand out but show signs they’d be good leaders. There’s someone in my English department who was doing an excellent job and didn’t see herself as a leader, but now she’s thriving in that role.”

Decision-Making System

Table 4.2 below outlines responses to Teacher Interview Question 7, exploring staff perceptions of the decision-making process in distributing school tasks. The key themes included exclusivity, unfair task distribution, lack of collaboration, and trickle-down decision-making. Most teachers, whether part of distributed leadership or not, felt excluded from these processes, with decisions perceived as top-down and tasks often unfairly allocated.

Table 8: Research Question 1, Coding Scheme

Teacher Interview Question 7: Does your administration involve others in the decision-making process of distributing the work of the school (Distributed Leadership Staff).											
Codes (Descriptive)	Teacher 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Exclusive	X		X	X		X	X	X	X		X
Unfair Task Distribution	X						X	X	X	X	X
Inclusive		X			X						
Not Collaborative	X		X	X			X	X	X	X	X
Teacher Interview Question 7: Does your administration involve others in the decision-making process of distributing the work of the school (Non-Distributed Leadership Staff).											
Codes (Descriptive)	Teacher 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9		
Exclusive	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Trickle-down system	X		X	X		X			X		

Note: Research Question 1, Coding Scheme

The sub-categories contributing to the codes are as follows: exclusive was supported by terms like "top-down," "behind closed doors," and "decisions made by specific individuals," indicating a lack of broad input. Unfair task distribution emerged from phrases like "unequal distribution," "overwhelmed," and "huge stake of responsibilities," showing imbalances in workload. The inclusive sub-category appeared through mentions of "more voices need to be heard" and "great ideas to the table," indicating a desire for greater involvement. Not collaborative was reflected in phrases like "decisions are made at the top" and "decision-making isn't as collaborative." Finally, trickle-down system was evidenced by comments like "decisions made at the top and trickle down," reflecting the hierarchical nature of decision-making.

Eighty-five percent of the staff that was interviewed at Walker High School, both within and out of distributive leadership, believed the school decision-making system was exclusive and did not value the input of everyone. Teacher 10 said, "Honestly, it feels pretty top-down. The decision-making isn't as collaborative as it should be, especially when it comes to distributing work. More voices need to be heard in these decisions, especially those who are constantly given tasks." Teacher 11 explained, "sometimes decisions about task

distribution are made collaboratively, but more often than not, it feels like decisions are made at the top and trickle down. I think involving more people in the process could lead to better outcomes.” The staff suggested that the system was not as effective as it could be. Most decisions are decided by specific individuals at the top and others have to implement. This pattern of responses with regards to this system of decision making raised the theme of a perceived sense that assignment of tasks could be unfair at times leaving just a few individuals to end up with a huge stake of the responsibilities. One interviewee said, “I wish they did, but no. Decisions seem to be made behind closed doors. There’s no open conversation about who should be leading or why. It’s frustrating because there are so many talented teachers who could bring great ideas to the table, but they’re never given the chance.” This opinion was also supported by another teacher who exclaimed, “No. It feels like they already have a list of people in mind, and they stick to it.” This was also proven later on when a majority of the staff agreed they are overwhelmed and did not get enough support for the tasks assigned.

Qualification for Task Allocation

For this objective, three questions were posed to the administrators and four to the distributed leadership staff. Several themes were identified by the researcher in response to the qualification for task allocation by the two groups. In responses to the research question on what qualifications school leaders seek when deciding whom to distribute tasks and roles, the researcher embedded three interview questions in the sessions with the 2 leaders. Below are the themes that came up in the transcripts.

Table 9: **Research Question 2, Coding Scheme (School Leaders)**

Codes (Descriptive)	Administrator 1	Administrator 2
Past Performance and Feedback	X	X
Collaboration and Initiative	X	X
Codes (Descriptive)	Administrator 1	Administrator 2
Communication and Reliability	X	X
Growth and Vision		X
Codes (Descriptive)	Administrator 1	Administrator 2
Formal Process		X
Inclusivity and Shared Responsibility	X	X

Note: Qualification for Task Allocation Interview Responses

The sub-categories identified from the interviewees' responses leading the six themes in table 8 above include past performance, current ability, willingness, collaboration, initiative, problem-solving, teamwork, communication skills, reliability, collaborative mindset, willingness to learn and grow, inspiring others, transformative leadership, informal process, formal process, inclusivity, shared responsibility, collaborative culture, and final decision-making.

One of the key themes under this research question from the interview was on the role of staff experience and general feedback. All the leaders agreed that it was imperative to consider the past experiences of staff members before allocating tasks. It is also important to evaluate their current ability and willingness to undertake such tasks to ensure the best outcomes. In the words of Administrator 2, "I assess readiness by looking at their previous experiences, their willingness to take initiative, their ability to collaborate effectively, and their commitment to professional development." The second theme arising from the analysis was on collaboration and initiative, which was supported by Administrator 2 reinstating the value of collaboration and ability to deliver. The principal supported his assistant principal's points-of-view on this saying they "look for experience where relevant," and look for people who "step up when needed" and are problem-solvers. The principal was also a believer in collaborative cultures as this statement suggests, "in all the successful teams I've been on, no

one cared who got the credit. We all knew our value. That's how I lead: in a way where everyone feels valued. Of course, I make the final decision, when necessary, but I believe in a collaborative culture where everyone's perspectives are heard.”

When asked about the qualities they would normally look for in potential leaders, both administrators agreed on the vital nature of communication and reliability.

Administrator 2 said, “I look for qualities such as strong communication skills, reliability, initiative, and the ability to work well with others.” Administrator 1 stated that they “look for qualities such as strong communication skills, a collaborative mindset, reliability, a willingness to learn and grow, and the ability to inspire and motivate others.” Essentially, these school leaders appreciated transformative and servant leadership based on their responses. They assessed potential leaders based on their availability to help, ability to take charge of situations, willingness to better themselves, and ability to influence their teams towards the set objectives. Transformative leadership plays a key role in learning environments by encouraging both staff and students to take charge of their jobs and studies, while also pushing them to strive beyond the limits in order to achieve set goals.

The final interview question under this objective was on the involvement of staff members and stakeholders in decision-making. The first theme standing out was the informality of this process where administrator 1 stated their inclusion protocol was informal. On the other hand, Administrator 2 explained that, “this is a formal process where we use structured meetings and feedback sessions to gather input and make collective decisions.” The second theme was on inclusivity and shared responsibility. There was a massive consensus in the responses under this section where both administrators shared the same opinions on this matter. Despite their varying approaches, both participants agreed that their process “ensures that decisions are well-rounded and consider multiple perspectives... and ...promotes a sense of shared responsibility and collaboration within the school community,”

in the words of Administrator 2. These themes captured the essential aspects of how school leaders assess readiness for leadership roles, the qualities they value, and their decision-making processes involving staff and stakeholders.

The researcher then posed two questions to the distributed leadership staff concerning their perspective on the qualification for leadership roles and whether these opportunities were beneficial or challenging. Nine themes were identified, as coded in table 4.4 below.

Table 10: Research Question 2, Coding Scheme (Distributed Leadership Teachers)

Teacher Interview Question 11: From your perspective, how much do teachers' experience and qualifications influence their chances of being chosen for leadership roles?											
Codes (Descriptive)	Teacher 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Experience	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Qualification	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Skills & Attributes		X	X	X	X				X	X	X
Initiative	X	X		X				X		X	X
Interrelationships							X		X		X
Teacher Interview Question 13: How do you think distributed leadership contributes to your personal leadership development and growth as an educator? Have you encountered any challenges or learning opportunities while in this role?											
Codes (Descriptive)	Teacher 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Leadership Skills	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Professional Growth	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Challenges	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Learning Opportunities	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Note. Research Question 2, Coding Scheme (Distributed Leadership Teachers)

The subcategories for the themes for experience included prior leadership roles, classroom teaching, for qualification included education level, certifications, for skills & attributes were communication, problem-solving, for initiative was willingness to step up, for interrelationships included relationships with administration and trust, for leadership skills included decision-making, team leadership, for professional growth was skill development, career advancement, for challenges included balancing roles, time management, and for learning opportunities new responsibilities, personal growth.

While all the staff members agreed that experience and qualification matter in leadership selection, most of them also believed there are various other factors in play, including the skills and attributes, initiative and relationships. Teacher six said, “experience and qualifications definitely play a role, but it’s hard to say how much they influence the final decision. Sometimes it feels like other factors, like availability or relationships with administrators, might also come into play.” Five of the 11 teachers pointed out that sometimes leadership positions are open to those who are willing to take them up. Teacher number 7, 9, and 11 also believed that workplace relations also count in this process. One of the teachers frankly opened up to say, “at our school, it feels more like a popularity contest. The people who are in leadership roles aren’t necessarily the most qualified—they’re the ones who are closest to administration. It doesn’t build trust because it’s not transparent, and it doesn’t feel fair. It creates a lot of resentment among the rest of us. “Regarding the impact of distributive leadership, all the staff members agreed that the concept was challenging yet beneficial in terms of professional and personal growth.

Staff members who had successfully navigated the challenges in distributive leadership were automatically exposed to more opportunities. All the interviewed teachers currently under the school’s distributive leadership pointed out the inherent learning curves which had been instrumental in their personal development as leaders and professional development as educators. Teacher six explained that “distributed leadership has definitely helped me grow by giving me new responsibilities and opportunities to lead... learned a lot about managing projects and working with different teams... there have been challenges, like balancing these roles with my regular counseling duties, but those challenges have also been valuable learning experiences.” These success stories have brought them into the spotlight, making them strong contenders for larger leadership tasks and possibly higher positions.

Table 4.5, still on the qualification for task allocation, highlights themes from Teacher Interview Question 8, focused on distributed leadership practices at the school. Key themes included decision-making, teamwork, exclusive leadership, and inadequate support.

Table 11: Research Question 2, Coding Scheme (Distributed Leadership Teachers)

Teacher Interview Question 8: Distributed Leadership is a shift away from the traditional, hierarchical, “top-down” model of leadership to a form of leadership that is collaborative and shared. How would you say your school embodies this practice?											
Codes (Descriptive)	Teacher 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Decision-making	X	X		X			X	X	X		X
Teamwork	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X
Poor communication	X										
Exclusive	X		X	X	X	X	X	X			X
From your experience, how has the school leadership supported and/or empowered you as a leader											
Codes (Descriptive)	Teacher 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Opportunities	X	X	X	X	X			X	X		X
Recognition	X		X	X		X			X	X	
Inadequate support		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Training		X	X	X	X	X			X	X	
Autonomy		X		X	X		X	X	X	X	

Note. Research Question 2, Coding Scheme (Distributed Leadership Teachers)

The key words and phrases leading to the identified code of decision-making, expressed through phrases like "talk about it," "not there yet," "top-down," and "assigned tasks over and over." Teamwork was reflected by terms such as "autonomy," "professional development opportunities," "recognizing my efforts," and "workload management." Poor communication was captured by "poor communication" and "coordination," while Exclusive relates to "the same people are assigned tasks" and "feels less like leadership is distributed." Opportunities was identified through phrases like "opportunities to grow as leaders" and "professional development opportunities." Recognition was shown by "recognizing my efforts," and Inadequate support refers to "inadequate support," "more consistent support," and "better workload management." Training connected to "professional development opportunities," and Autonomy is conveyed through "autonomy" and "little micromanaging."

Most of the staff members agreed that the institution had empowered them and given the opportunities to grow as leaders. The trickle-down decision making, despite being functional, was not as effective as it should be. Most staff members were excluded from the process. There was poor communication and coordination, excess workloads for specific individuals and inadequate support. Teacher 11 said, “We’re not there yet. We talk about it, but in practice, it still feels very top-down. The same people are assigned tasks over and over, and it feels less like leadership is distributed and more like it's piled onto a few.” Therefore, the merit system used by school leaders when deciding whom to distribute tasks and roles to, was inaccurate and exclusive. While the staff loved the autonomy and tons of opportunities they were offered, they pointed out that a little help was needed a little minimal micromanaging. Teacher 4 said, “the leadership team has supported me by providing professional development opportunities and recognizing my efforts. However, I feel there’s room for improvement in terms of offering more consistent support and better workload management.”

Teacher Inclusion and Exclusion in Leadership

For this objective, a total of 11 questions were posed to the interviewees. The school leaders were asked three questions, while the distributed leadership staff answered five questions, and the non-distributed staff answered three. Table 4.6 below presents themes from interviews with school leaders on the emotional and cultural effects of task distribution.

Table 12: Research Question 3 Coding Scheme

School Leader Interview Questions 10: When you distribute tasks to others – how do you feel it affects the team dynamics of the school?		
Codes (Emotional)	Administrator 1	Administrator 2
Empowering	X	X
Job Satisfaction	X	
Motivation		
School Leader Interview Questions 11: How does it affect the school’s culture when you distribute tasks to others?		
Codes (Emotional)	Administrator 1	Administrator 2
Synergy	X	
Positivity	X	
School Leader Interview Questions 12: How does implementing distributive leadership in your school impact the feelings and attitudes of individuals chosen for leadership roles and those not selected?		
Codes (Descriptive)	Administrator 1	Administrator 2
Underutilized		X
Low morale		X
Undervalued		X

Note. Research Question 3 Coding Scheme

The subcategories leading to the identified codes included "sense," "voice," "approach leadership," and "ownership" for empowering, which highlighted how distributive leadership fosters respect, appreciation, and a collaborative environment. Job satisfaction was linked to "job satisfaction," "respect," and "appreciate," while motivation emerged from "motivation" and "growth opportunities." Synergy was reflected in phrases like "synergetic environment" and "help each other," with positivity captured by "positive energy" and "shared in the roles." The feelings of being underutilized, low morale, and undervalued were expressed through terms like "left out," "not often assigned," "overlooked," and "unappreciated."

All administrators agreed that task distribution was empowering and positively affected the team dynamics. Administrator 1 said, "I think most people respect and appreciate it. It gives them a sense that they have a voice and that they can approach leadership without feeling apprehensive. It also builds ownership in the process. Not everyone takes that

approach, and getting 100% consistency is hard, but overall, I think it builds a collaborative environment.” Three of the leaders pointed out the role of distributive leadership in job satisfaction while two of them acknowledged the motivation that comes with it. Evidently, distributive leadership had some considerable impact on those directly involved in it. Two of the major themes arising under the role of distributive leadership in workplace culture were synergy and positivity. Based on the responses, distributive leadership contributed to the synergetic environment full of positive energy where staff members helped each other and shared in the roles and responsibilities.

However, there were still some shortcomings. The schools trickle-down leadership approach and exclusivity in decision-making left some teachers out in the distributive leadership framework. The teachers felt undervalued, unappreciated, underutilized, and with low motivation to work. Administrator 2 explained this quite well saying, “distributing tasks can have both positive and negative impacts. For those who are assigned tasks, it can be empowering and provide growth opportunities. For those who are not often assigned tasks, it can sometimes lead to feelings of being undervalued or overlooked... Teachers who are given tasks often feel more engaged and valued, which can boost their morale and professional growth.”

The next group under this objective was the teachers under distributive leadership. In total, they were asked five questions, and the responses are outline in the next three tables, 12, 13, and 14.

Table 13: Research Questions 3, Coding Scheme (Distributed Leadership Staff)

Teacher Interview Questions 4: How do you feel about taking on distributed leadership roles and responsibilities within the school? What excites you the most about this opportunity? (Distributed Leadership Staff).											
Codes (Emotion)	Teacher 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Recognition	X	X	X	X		X					X
Trust & Opportunity		X				X			X	X	X
Overwhelming			X	X			X		X		X
Positivity & Excitement					X			X		X	
Teacher Interview Questions 6: How has your involvement in distributed leadership roles impacted your perception of the school culture? (Distributed Leadership Staff).											
Codes (Emotion)	Teacher 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Support	X		X		X	X					
Appreciation		X	X	X	X	X	X			X	
Positivity	X			X	X		X				
Pride		X	X			X	X				
Unfair	X		X	X					X	X	X

Note. Research Question Coding Scheme (Distributed Leadership Staff)

The key sub-categories from the quotes that led to the identified codes include recognition, trust, opportunity, overwhelming, positivity, excitement, support, appreciation, pride, and unfair. Teachers expressed feelings of recognition and trust when taking on distributed leadership roles, noting how rewarding it was to contribute to the school's success. They also felt excitement and positivity about collaboration but mentioned feeling overwhelmed at times due to the limited number of leaders. Support, appreciation, and pride were common emotions regarding school culture, while some expressed feelings of unfairness about the leadership selection process. In response to how distributed leadership decisions affect teachers' experiences and feelings of being included or excluded in the distributed leadership process, the staff at Walker high school had a lot to share. The teachers, currently under distributive leadership, pointed out both the benefits and shortcomings of this concept. The first major theme was support and collaboration. Teachers appreciated the trust and recognition when they are assigned tasks under distributive leadership. For example,

teacher five said, “I would just like to emphasize how much I appreciate the collaborative culture at our school. Distributed leadership has been a rewarding experience, and I’m grateful for the opportunity to contribute to our school’s success in this way.” They were excited to collaborate with the team, but with the few chosen individuals becoming the focus of leadership, they got overwhelmed.

Table 14: Research Question Coding Scheme (Emotional)

Teacher Interview Questions 14: Can you share a recent example where the distributed leadership practices have impacted the team dynamics within the school? Either positively or negatively (Distributed Leadership Staff).											
Codes (Emotion)	Teacher 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Collaborative	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Overwhelming	X		X	X			X		X	X	X
Synergy		X			X						
Exclusivity	X		X				X		X	X	
Teacher Interview Questions 16: In your opinion, what are some key factors that contribute to the success of distributed leadership within the school?											
Codes (Emotion)	Teacher 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Support	X	X	X	X				X	X		X
Feedback & Communication	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Equality	X	X	X	X					X		
Trust & Respect		X	X		X	X		X		X	X
Teacher Interview Questions 8: In your opinion, does the distributed leadership model promote trust and collaboration among teachers and staff members? a. Have you experienced any specific instances that have reinforced this sense of trust and collaboration? b. Have you experienced any specific instances that have harmed this sense of trust and collaboration? (Distributed Leadership Staff).											
Codes (Emotion)	Teacher 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Trust	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Bonding	X	X	X	X	X	X				X	
Tension & Resentment	X	X	X	X					X	X	X

Note. Research Question Coding Scheme (Distributed Leadership Staff)

Key terms and phrases identified as subcategories that led to the present themes included "worked together seamlessly," "share the responsibility," "feeling overlooked," "harmed trust," "collaboration felt strong," "constant micromanagement," and "uneven distribution of responsibilities." These phrases highlight both positive aspects like

collaboration, trust, and support, as well as challenges such as exclusivity, resentment, and tension that arose due to perceived inequalities. Many teachers agreed distributed leadership promotes trust and bonding, but only if founded on equality, support, communication, and respect. The teachers felt that distributive leadership brought them together, enhanced collaboration and for a few of them, it improved support. However, the support became questionable as the theme of exclusivity and inequality came up. Teacher 9 says, “When done right, distributed leadership can build trust and collaboration. I’ve had experiences where colleagues worked together seamlessly on a project, and it felt great to share the responsibility. However, there have been times when certain people are always assigned leadership tasks, leaving others feeling overlooked, which harms trust.”

A greater percentage of the other teachers supported teacher 9’s point-of-view and evidently, the distributive leadership framework at the institution focused on just a few individuals. The few who were always targeted in turn felt overwhelmed as the others felt resentment, leading to tension between the team. Teacher 11, in a rather unfiltered way explained that “in theory, distributed leadership should build trust, but in practice, it doesn’t always work that way here. There have been moments, like when mentoring new teachers, where collaboration felt strong. But the constant micromanagement and the uneven distribution of responsibilities have harmed that trust. When people feel like they’re being watched all the time, collaboration takes a hit.” Nonetheless, most of the teachers agreed that distributive leadership was good for trust and bonding at the workplace, but only if it was established based on equality, support, communication, and respect.

The last group to be interviewed under this objective were teachers under non-distributed leadership. They responded to a total of three questions from which nine emotional themes were extracted during coding. Table 4.8 below presents the findings.

Table 15: Research Question 3 Coding Scheme (Non-Distributed Leadership Staff)

Teacher Interview Questions									
3. Have you been assigned any leadership tasks or roles by your administration? (Non-Distributed Leadership Staff).									
Codes (Emotion)	Teacher 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
No Opportunity	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Not interested		X		X			X		X
Frustration			X		X	X		X	
How do you feel participating in leadership tasks contributes to your personal leadership development and growth as an educator? (Non-Distributed Leadership Staff).									
Codes (Emotion)	Teacher 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Beneficial	X				X	X	X	X	X
Unnecessary		X		X					
Essential	X		X		X	X	X	X	
Pride									
Unfair									
Teacher Interview Questions 6: In your opinion, does the distributed leadership model promote trust and collaboration among teachers and staff members? (Non-Distributed Leadership Staff).									
Codes (Emotion)	Teacher 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
No	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Exclusivity & Tension		X		X	X	X		X	
Resentment			X	X	X	X	X	X	

Note. Research Question 3 Coding Scheme (Distributed Leadership Staff)

Subcategories from the first coding phase that aligned with each code included “never come my way” and “frustrated about it” for No Opportunity and Frustration. Statements like “disinterested in this framework” reflected Not Interested. For Beneficial and Essential, phrases such as “ways to grow” and “crucial” appeared. The sense of exclusion and dissatisfaction was captured in phrases like “glass ceiling” and “overlooked for years,” aligning with No, Exclusivity & Tension, and Resentment. Additionally, “not at all” and “sense of resentment” indicated a negative view on trust and collaboration.

Almost 90% of the teachers excluded from the distributive leadership approach in the school felt the system was not effective. To begin with, most of these teachers would have liked an opportunity in the distributive leadership framework, but they ended up being

frustrated when the select few were chosen every time. Some of the teachers in this group were now disinterested in this framework. One of the teachers when asked the regarding assignment to leadership tasks said, “No, and I feel pretty frustrated about it. I’ve asked for leadership opportunities, but they’ve never come my way.” Approximately 67% of the teachers in this group believed distributive leadership was essential and beneficial in terms of personal leadership development and growth as educators. One of the teachers explained that, “I think it’s crucial. I’m always looking for ways to grow, and leadership roles help you see the bigger picture. When you’re stuck in the classroom without a voice in decisions that affect the entire school, it’s easy to feel like you’re just a cog in the machine. I’ve been ready to contribute to the school community in bigger ways” The same teacher however narrated that, “but it feels like there’s a glass ceiling for people like me.” This was a sentiment shared by a majority of the teachers here, that while distributed leadership could be good, the current situation was not.

Nonetheless, two of the nine teachers interviewed here did not believe it was completely necessary. In the end, the findings regarding the role of distributive leadership in trust promotion and workplace collaboration were 100% negative. When asked whether this model promoted trust, one interviewee responded saying, “not at all. I think it creates a sense of resentment among the staff, especially when you see the same people getting leadership roles repeatedly. “The teachers in this group felt they had been excluded from the select few and because of this, they resented the current administration and its initiatives. There was tension between the distributive leadership teachers and the non-distributive teachers. Teacher 1’s statement summarized it all, “it’s frustrating, to be honest. I feel like I’ve been overlooked for years while others, less experienced, get leadership roles handed to them...the biggest challenge is the lack of recognition. It’s demotivating to see others get leadership roles when I know I have the qualifications and the drive.”

Perception of Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership shifts responsibility from a hierarchical model to one where leadership is shared among staff members. For this objective, three questions were asked: one to the administrators and two to the distributed leadership staff. Below are the findings. Table 4.9 explores school leaders' perceptions of distributed leadership, focusing on key themes like collaborative culture, success, and equity.

Table 16: Research Question 4 Coding Scheme (School Leaders)

Codes (Descriptive)	Administrator 1	Administrator 2
Collaborative Culture	X	X
Success	X	
Equity		X

Note. Research Question 4 Coding Scheme (Distributed Leadership Staff)

In identifying the codes, phrases like "fostering a collaborative school culture" and "teachers work together and share responsibility" reflected the theme of a collaborative culture for both administrators. For Administrator 1, the term "success" was evident in the emphasis on how collaboration and shared leadership contributed to school performance improvements. Administrator 2's focus on "equity" was highlighted in phrases such as "continually reflect on and refine our practices" to ensure leadership opportunities are "equitable and effective." Both administrators connected distributed leadership with enhanced engagement, motivation, and positive student outcomes.

Both administrators highlighted the importance of fostering a collaborative culture in their leadership practices. They also recognized that creating an environment where teachers work together and share responsibility was essential for promoting engagement and motivation among staff. In their last comments, Administrator 1 said, "while I may not fully embrace distributed leadership as my preferred style, I recognize its value in fostering a collaborative school culture." Administrator 2, on the other hand, connected this to distributed leadership, emphasizing that when all teachers are involved in leadership roles, it

not only strengthens the collaborative culture but also benefits student outcomes.

Administrator two said, “by involving all teachers in leadership roles, we create a more engaged and motivated staff, which ultimately benefits our students.” For Administrator 1, leadership was tied closely to success, likely focusing on how effective collaboration and shared leadership can drive tangible improvements in school performance and overall staff satisfaction.

Administrator 2 placed a strong emphasis on equity, highlighting that “it’s important to continually reflect on and refine our practices to ensure that leadership opportunities are equitable and effective.” They explained that distributed leadership promotes engagement and motivation but must be continually refined to be both equitable and effective. This focus on equitable leadership pointed to the need to ensure that all staff members, regardless of background or position, had access to leadership roles. Through continuous reflection and adjustment, Administrator 2 believed leadership practices can support a more diverse and empowered team. Administrator 2 explained that “distributed leadership is essential for fostering a collaborative and dynamic school environment. By involving all teachers in leadership roles, we create a more engaged and motivated staff, which ultimately benefits our students. It’s important to continually reflect on and refine our practices to ensure that leadership opportunities are equitable and effective.”

Table 4.10 below presents experiences of distributed leadership staff at Walker High School, focusing on themes such as problem-solving, time management, and conflict of interest. Teachers reflected on the challenges and learning opportunities they’ve encountered in their roles, offering insight into how distributed leadership impacted their professional growth.

Table 17: Research Question 4 Coding Scheme (Distributive leadership staff)

Teacher Interview Questions 5: Have you encountered any challenges or learning opportunities while in your current role? (Distributed Leadership Staff).											
Codes (Descriptive)	Teacher 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Problem-solving	X	X	X	X		X	X				
Time-management	X	X	X			X				X	
Conflict of interest		X		X	X	X			X	X	
Teacher Interview Questions 20: Is there anything else that you would like to share with me? (Distributed Leadership Staff).											
Codes (Descriptive)	Teacher 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Communication	X										
Equity	X		X	X				X		X	X
Reward		X			X						

Note. Research Question 5 Coding Scheme (Distributive leadership staff)

The coding scheme for distributive leadership revealed key phrases and themes from teacher interviews. For problem-solving, teachers often referenced "strategic planning" and "overcoming challenges." Time-management was noted with terms like "balancing time" and "juggling responsibilities." Conflict of interest was connected to mentions of "conflicting opinions" and "fair distribution." In response to additional questions, communication was emphasized through phrases such as "better communication," while equity emerged in calls for "fair distribution of tasks." Lastly, reward was captured in reflections on distributive leadership as an "invaluable" and "growth" opportunity, though teachers expressed the need for more balanced role distribution to prevent burnout.

Overall, teachers under distributive leadership had encountered various challenges which formed a learning curve for their leadership skills. The three key themes that arose under challenges and opportunities included problem-solving, time-management, and conflict of interest. The teachers saw distributive leadership as an opportunity to better themselves pointing out how they overcame the challenges of time-management and conflict of interest as they tried to juggle their new responsibilities and tasks. Teacher 2 said, "taking on these tasks has been invaluable for my growth. I've learned so much about leadership, team

dynamics, and strategic planning. Of course, there have been challenges, like balancing time and dealing with conflicting opinions, but those have all been learning opportunities.” The teachers’ final thoughts revealed that while distributive leadership at the school was a rewarding opportunity, it could be improved through fair distribution of tasks and better communication. Teacher 11 frankly explained that “I think there needs to be a better system for distributing leadership roles. The current system overloads a few of us while others are left out. If leadership is truly meant to be distributed, we need to make sure it’s being done fairly and in a way that doesn’t lead to burnout.” Overall, distributive leadership at Walker High School was positively perceived by the teachers currently involved but lacked the staff’s feedback regarding equity.

Impact on School Culture and Climate

In reference to Table 11 Research Question 3 Coding Scheme (School Leader Interview Questions 12), the themes emerging from the administrators’ responses highlighted the impact of distributive leadership on those chosen and not chosen for leadership roles. Both administrators pointed out that those not selected for distributive leadership feel underutilized in their positions. Administrator 2 also pointed out low morale due to the limited distribution of leadership opportunities saying, “teachers who are not often given tasks might feel less involved, but I ensure they have other opportunities for growth and involvement in different aspects of the school’s operations.” Feelings of being undervalued were shared by the assistant principals. These findings indicated that distributing leadership roles unequally negatively affect the morale and sense of worth among teachers and staff ultimately disrupting the school's culture and climate. In reference to Table 12: Research Question 3 Coding Scheme (Teacher Interview Questions 6), teachers involved in distributed leadership exhibited a range of emotions reflecting both positive and negative impacts on school culture. A significant number of teachers expressed feelings of support, while others

felt appreciation. Teacher two said, “It’s made me appreciate the complexity of running a school and the importance of every single role. Being involved has made me more invested in our school’s culture and has given me a sense of pride and ownership.” Several also reported feelings of positivity. However, some teachers perceived the task distribution process as unfair, suggesting that while distributed leadership can foster a positive environment for some, it also created disparities that affected perceptions of equity in the school.

In reference to Teacher Interview Questions 14 Table 13: Research Question 3 Coding Scheme, the theme of collaboration dominated the responses, with teachers emphasizing a positive impact of distributed leadership on teamwork. However, several teachers explained how the school’s task distribution approach overwhelmed them, pointing to challenges in managing the demands of leadership roles. Teacher three responded, “while I do appreciate being recognized as a leader, I sometimes feel overwhelmed with the number of tasks. At this stage in my career, I wish the responsibilities were more evenly distributed.” Additionally, the feeling of exclusivity highlights concerns regarding unequal access to leadership opportunities hindered team synergy. Finally, in reference to Teacher Interview Questions 16 Table 13: Research Question 3 Coding Scheme, key factors contributing to the success of distributed leadership included support, feedback and communication (all teachers), and trust and respect. Equality was also emphasized, with five of the 11 teachers considering it a critical element. While communication and trust were foundational, equal participation in leadership roles remained a challenge which impacted the school's overall leadership dynamics. Teacher 11, based on one of the school events they were recently involved in, explained that “it was another instance where a lot was placed on my shoulders while others, equally qualified, were overlooked. This negatively impacted staff morale because it sends the message that only a few people are trusted to lead.”

In reference to Table 15: Research Question 3 Coding Scheme (Non-Distributed Leadership Staff - Teacher Interview Questions 3), the majority of the non-distributed leadership staff reported having no opportunity to engage in leadership roles. Only a few teachers expressed disinterest in leadership tasks, while several others indicated frustration due to their lack of involvement in leadership opportunities. Many non-distributed leadership staff felt overlooked, which led to dissatisfaction and disengagement, affecting the overall school climate.

In reference to Teacher Interview Questions on Leadership Development, when asked about the personal benefits of participating in leadership tasks, responses varied. Some teachers found leadership roles to be beneficial for their growth as educators, while others considered such roles unnecessary. Many teachers viewed leadership opportunities as essential for their development. These responses revealed that for those teachers who are engaged in leadership roles, the experience enhanced their professional growth and sense of competence, which positively impacted school culture. Teacher 1 said, “participating in these tasks has definitely contributed to my growth as a leader. It has taught me time management, collaboration, and problem-solving skills.” In reference to Teacher Interview Questions 6 on Trust and Collaboration, most non-distributed leadership staff indicated that the distributed leadership model does not promote trust or collaboration. Teachers 2, 4, 5, 6, and 8 expressed feelings of exclusivity and tension, while many reported resentments towards the model. In the words of teacher 5, “I think it creates a sense of resentment among the staff, especially when you see the same people getting leadership roles repeatedly.” These findings suggested that the distributed leadership model, as implemented, created a division rather than unity among staff members, with perceptions of unequal leadership opportunities fostering a lack of trust and collaboration.

Table 4.11 below presents the three major themes identified from the responses of teachers under non-distributive leadership when asked of their perception on the influence of this leadership approach on Scholl culture.

Table 18: Research Question 5 Coding Scheme (Non-Distributive leadership staff)

How does distributed leadership impact your perception of the school culture? (Non-Distributed Leadership Staff).									
Codes (Emotion)	Teacher 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Divided	X	X	X			X		X	X
Unhealthy	X				X	X		X	
Favoritism	X		X			X	X		

Note. Research Question 6 Coding Scheme (Non-Distributive leadership staff)

Non-distributive leadership staff, particularly those excluded from leadership roles, perceived the school culture as divided and unhealthy, often citing favoritism. Key phrases such as "cliquey," "inner circle," and "in crowd" reflected their sense of exclusion, while terms like "tense climate" and "not part of a team" indicated feelings of disconnection and lack of collaboration. Teacher 6 further emphasized this divide, describing favoritism as fostering an "unhealthy" environment where those outside leadership felt undervalued, impacting overall morale and teamwork. This feedback highlighted the need for a more inclusive leadership approach to promote a healthier, more cohesive workplace culture.

Teachers currently excluded from the distributive leadership framework majorly felt divided and a strong sense of favoritism in the school, which was unhealthy for the workplace. Teacher 6 gave more detail saying, "It makes the culture feel cliquey. There's an "inner circle," and if you're not in it, you don't have much of a voice. It's hard to feel like your part of a team when there's such a clear division between who gets leadership roles and who doesn't. The climate is tense because of it. People aren't working together—they're just doing their own thing." Therefore, for the school culture and climate, the current distributive leadership approach was less effective than presumed by the school leaders. While it was true that most of the other teachers and staff benefited from this approach, a healthy workplace

should accommodate everyone. It is therefore vital to take the staff's feedback into consideration since a greater portion of the staff is unhappy, feel undervalued, and are not doing their best work because of exclusion. Teacher 6 said, "it creates a divide. There's the "in" crowd, and then there's the rest of us. The climate isn't healthy—it feels like the administration picks their favorites, and the rest of us just have to deal with it."

Conclusion

The workplace environment at Walker High School could have benefited from major changes. Despite the plans to map out an outline showing who received leadership tasks and to whom they went for assistance, it was not possible due to the unwillingness of participants to divulge names. The administration did provide names; however, they did not provide names of whom they typically distribute tasks to. Administrator 1 gave names of those he thought the researcher should interview to get their perspective on how distributed leadership is divided and their perspective. The difficulty in collecting this data revealed a deeper aspect of the school's culture, particularly a lack of openness or trust. As established by the themes from the interviews, the teaching staff at Walker High School were divided and there was tension within the school, courtesy of the poorly implemented distributive leadership. Some of the teachers often received preferential treatment for these tasks while others were overlooked, which might have been a significant problem at the school. The few individuals under distributed leadership were overwhelmed implying that perhaps the framework was not effective since they also noticed the division. The excluded team, on the other hand, exhibited strong feelings regarding this leadership approach. There was limited trust and collaboration towards professional development and goal achievement. As a result, the institution's culture and climate was tense and counteractive to productivity.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Introduction

Distributed leadership plays a significant role in the successful management of learning institutions as it enables leaders to empower their teams and motivate them towards common objectives. With five research questions in mind, the researcher was able to carry out fairly successful interviews, the findings of which have been condensed and presented in chapter four. In this chapter, the researcher digs deep into the presented findings trying to identify the patterns and implications for practice. The discussion has been structured based on the research objectives. The researcher also discusses some of the challenges and limitations encountered, reflects on the implications for practice and policy, and suggests opportunities for future research.

Discussion

The decision-making framework regarding task distribution is a critical component in distributive leadership. As revealed in the findings, leaders can either take a formal or informal approach which both have upsides and downsides.

Methods Used by School Leaders to Distribute Tasks

Table 19: **Decision-making Frameworks**

Approach	Description	Upsides	Downsides
Formal Approach	A structured, objective method based on professional attributes like assertiveness, multi-tasking, and problem-solving skills. Teachers are assessed based on achievements.	Ensures fairness and consistency. Ideal for tasks requiring objectivity. Aligns with identifiable skills and achievements.	Ignores human potential and personal growth. Overlooks less visible leadership qualities.
Informal Approach	A flexible method where human attributes like potential are taken into consideration. Leaders may rely on observations and intuition to make task assignments.	Recognizes leadership potential in individuals who may not stand out initially. More adaptive and personalized.	Subjective and may lead to favoritism. Can be inconsistent and biased.
Blended Approach	A combination of formal and informal frameworks, using both professional attributes and potential for task distribution.	Balances objectivity and personal potential. Promotes inclusion of diverse leadership styles.	Requires skillful judgment to avoid bias. May be difficult to consistently apply.

Note. Approaches to Distributive Leadership staff

A formal framework is particularly instrumental in cases where objectivity is key. School leaders can employ formal frameworks which take into account specific attributes and achievements of teachers when deciding how to assign tasks. While this approach is relatively fair and consistent, it does not take into account the human attributes such as potential. This is where the informal approach can be more practical. A blend of both formal and informal approaches to decision-making is the best way to tackle task distribution. As Muhammad (2018) points out, not all teachers are the same.

Table 20: Formal Framework Impact

Teacher Group	Formal Framework Impact	Description
Fundamentalists	Neutral	Teachers focused on maintaining the status quo.
Survivors	Neutral	Teachers just trying to get by with little engagement.
Believers	Positive	Motivated and engaged teachers, thrive in formal setups.
Tweeners	Positive	May be favored by formal frameworks due to adaptability and potential growth.

Note. Distributive leadership approach vs. Muhammad's teacher classification

In fact, of the four groups; fundamentalists, survivors, believers, and tweeners; tweeners could be favored by a formal framework. The assistant principal interviewed takes a formal approach to task distribution. This could also justify why only a few teachers are considered for these tasks at Walker High School, leaving them exhausted and the rest undervalued. Overall, an appropriate decision-making framework is necessary for fair task distribution, inclusion, and improvement in collaboration.

Qualifications School Leaders Consider for Task and Role Distribution

The six tenets of distributive leadership as established in the conceptual framework are team dynamics, formal and positional leadership, leadership development and support, organizational culture, empowering leaders, and trust and collaboration.

Table 21: Core Components

Tenet	Current Situation at Walker High School	Implications for Leadership
Team Dynamics	Weak due to the trickledown leadership approach. Lack of collaboration and trust between leadership and staff.	Undermines cohesive work relationships, leading to gaps in communication and teamwork.
Formal and Positional Leadership	Leaders rely on both formal (qualifications, experience) and informal (potential, relationships) processes for role and task assignment.	A balance of these processes enables role allocation but may sometimes lead to feelings of inequity or favoritism.
Leadership Development & Support	Leadership development has been achieved through succession planning, but teachers lack adequate support to grow into their roles.	Failure to fully support developing leaders may lead to burnout or frustration.
Organizational Culture	Still developing, as there's a lack of a healthy, welcoming atmosphere. School climate reflects a trickledown leadership approach.	Negative culture can affect staff morale, collaboration, and retention.
Empowering Leaders	Focused on leadership growth through formal and informal assessment processes, but uneven empowerment between those chosen and others left underutilized.	Needs a more inclusive approach to leadership empowerment to prevent teacher exhaustion and undervaluation.
Trust and Collaboration	Still lacking, due to weak team dynamics and insufficient support structures.	Affects overall team cohesion, leading to inconsistent collaboration and issues with task distribution.

Note. Situational Analysis at Walker High

Leaders at Walker High School have managed to achieve leadership development, but not support. Additionally, because of the trickledown leadership approach, team dynamics including trust and collaboration, alongside a healthy and welcoming organizational culture are still lacking. As established, school leaders at Walker High use both formal and informal processes to assess their teachers' qualification for task and role distribution. Among the primary considerations are past performance and feedback, collaboration and initiative,

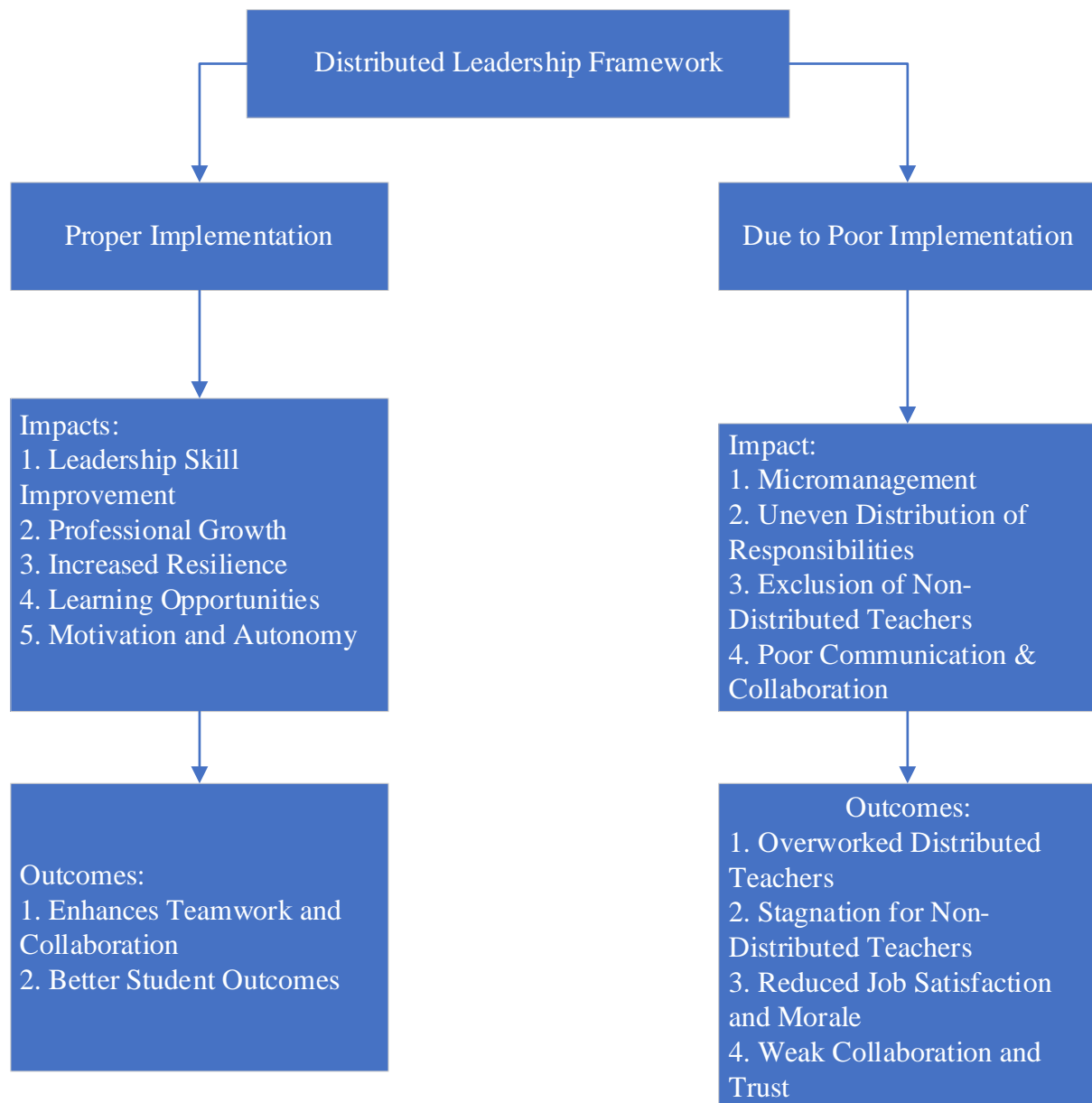
communication and reliability, and growth and vision. These are all considerable attributes for leaders as explained by the transformational theory. By embedding this theory in their distributive leadership approach, leaders at Walker High have not only helped teachers develop their leadership skills but have also established an effective succession framework which will ensure the institution's stability in the future.

Teachers, on the other hand, believe their experience, qualifications, skills, initiatives, and relationships matter. Merchant (2011), states that workplace relationships are vital as they control information flow, which then justifies relationships as a qualification. This aspect of distributive leadership is crucial to note since a teachers' ability to relate with colleagues and leaders reflects their relationships with parents and students. These relationships considerably weigh on an institution's ability to progress in terms of student outcomes since they determine a teachers' ability to motivate and influence students under transformational leadership.

Impact of Distributed Leadership on Teachers' Experiences and Inclusion

The benefits of being qualified for these tasks and roles include improvement of leadership skills, professional growth, resilience, and learning opportunities. A well implemented system of distributed leadership improves teamwork and motivates teachers through opportunities, training, autonomy, and recognition. All these factors are critical in the achievement of institutional goals as they encourage teachers to put their best effort which then translates to institutional gains.

Figure 2: **Impact of Distributed Leadership**



Note. Impact of Distributive Leadership on Teacher Experience and School Outcomes

Under distributive leadership, teachers get a platform to showcase their skills as leaders, where they can also make mistakes and learn at the same time. However, even for teachers under distributed leadership, a shortcoming on the leaders' side could be detrimental. According to Modeste and Kelley (2018), principals and their assistants are responsible for establishing a setting that supports distributive leadership. An inaccurate implementation of this leadership framework, such as in the case of Walker High, could lead to challenges like

exclusion, poor communication, lack of collaboration, and inadequate support for teachers. Göksoy (2015) states that this is not just about dividing tasks among individuals but should instead be focused on individual interactions towards institutional improvement and better student outcomes. Because of the preferential treatment at Walker High, an in-group has been formed; and those not in it are unlikely to support, collaborate, or communicate with the in-group members. This is not a good experience for either party.

Surprisingly, teachers from both categories; distributed and non-distributed, agreed on the current system being exclusive and non-supportive. Spillane et al. (2001), under the Distributed Leadership theory explains that this is supposed to be a collective process including all the major stakeholders such as teachers, principals, administrators, and the community as a whole. But from the interview, it became quite clear that decisions are made from top down. The specific shortcoming, according to Göksoy (2015) is the failure to establish a collaborative culture through open communication. It is safe to assume that the leaders' inability to involve the major stakeholders is among the pain-points in Walker High's distributive leadership framework currently harming the experience.

The distributive leadership at Walker High is currently counteractive to the institution's performance based on the teachers' experiences. Teachers currently within the framework, are tasked with more responsibilities than they can handle, as the theme of "overwhelming" suggests. This implies that while the teachers benefit from this work via professional development, their overall experience is unpleasant, which could be traced in their overall performance statistics. Because of overwhelming distributive leadership roles and the need to satisfy their leaders' expectations, these teachers may lack enough time to undertake their routine classroom duties. Non-distributive teachers, on the other hand, have enough time to take care of their classrooms but are professionally stagnated and perhaps emotionally distracted, courtesy of social network theory. There was a consensus that the

current system is exclusive, and the outer group feel resentment because they believe they are undervalued and not trusted enough to undertake these tasks. Such feelings alongside the lack of opportunity for professional development could significantly impact these teachers' approaches to teaching. Bryck (2010) explains that by developing professional capacity leaders can promote school improvement as it empowers teachers while ascertaining their job satisfaction.

Staff Perception of the School's Distributed Leadership Practices

Despite being implemented for a good cause, the distributive leadership framework at Walker High does not have good image. Most of the teachers believe the implementation could be better. The major issues currently affecting the system, as discussed in the three objectives above include exclusion and the lack of support. From the staff's points-of-view, changes should be made in the decision-making system, distribution system, support, communication and trust. According to O'Shea (2021), it is the responsibility of school leaders to build capacity, support innovation, monitor, and evaluate the distributive leadership framework for improvement purposes. This implies that through the perceptions of staff, distributed leadership practices can be improved to be more inclusive and supportive.

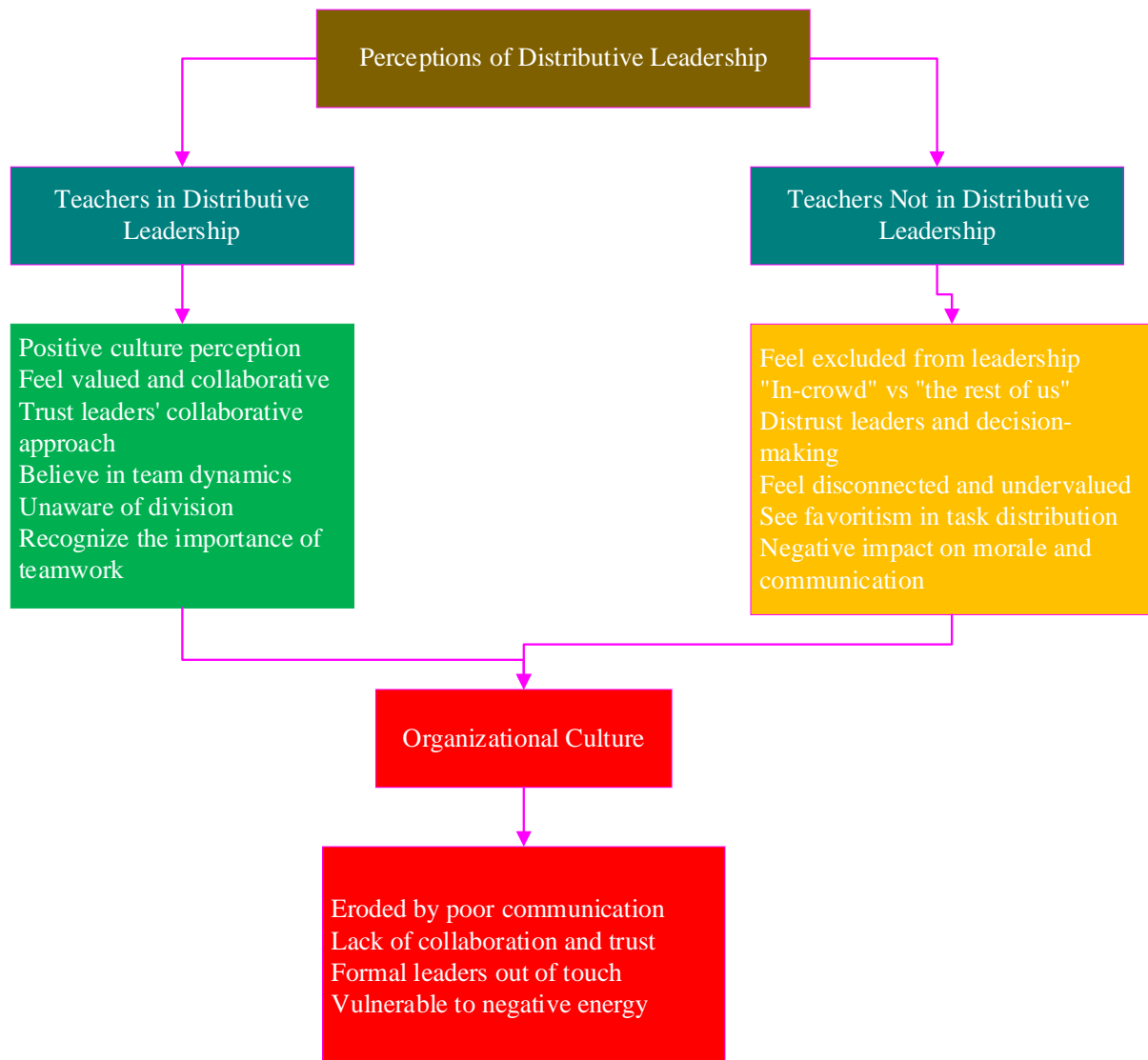
Bolden (2011) and Spillane (2005) explain that distributed leadership is not a top-down approach and is instead a collaborative and holistic approach that influences institutional decision-making through collective interaction rather than individual direction. Johnson and Donaldson (2019) propose that for a distributive system to work, teachers should be allowed to actively participate in the decision-making processes to enable them to make meaningful and enduring impact within their school communities. The decisions made, in this case, affect the teachers directly which justifies their involvement further. Because of their limited involvement, teachers at Walker High believe it is an area that needs change. A more inclusive and collaborative decision-making approach will have a domino effect that will

improve the other areas of concern. Involvement in the decision-making will first improve the task-distribution approach, making it fair and inclusive. It will then ease the teachers' roles enabling them to take on responsibilities they can handle and allow others to also contribute, which will then bring the teachers together, fixing the communication and trust issues. In the long-run, distributive leadership could help establish strong and mutually beneficial relationships between the major stakeholders which according to Deal and Peterson (1999) streamlines idea and resource sharing for the benefit of the educational setting.

Influence of Distributed Leadership on School Culture

As it stands, the distributive leadership framework at Walker High has eroded the culture and reforms are needed. Spillane (2001) explains that learning institutions require inclusive cultures that acknowledges and respects all team members. According to Deal and Peterson (1999), considering the diverse points-of-view in decision-making can significantly improve an institution's culture. Based on the conceptual framework, organizational culture is among the three aspects vulnerable to formal and positional leaders, team dynamics, and trust and collaboration.

Figure 3: Culture at Walker High



Note: Visual representation of the impact of distributive leadership on Walker High's culture.

At Walker High, trust and collaboration is limited, the team is divided, and the formal leaders are yet to evaluate and improve the distributive leadership framework based on the team's feedback. In the situation where leaders are out of touch with their team's needs, the teams are unable to communicate and help each other and communication is broken, the organizational culture becomes counterproductive to the entire school system. The school cannot improve and could struggle to attain its set objectives regarding student outcomes if the teachers are divided and the two groups are in not the same boat with the leaders.

Therefore, while distributive leadership is here to help, its current implementation is not appropriate. There is some distance between the leaders and their teachers and the exclusion currently inhibiting decision making leading to a negative culture. Surprisingly, teachers under distributive leadership believe the culture is positive and are completely unaware of the resentment brooding in the second team. Overall, an institution's culture, which is considerably relevant in the achievement of institutional goals, is vulnerable to the implementation and management of distributive leadership. Gaps in implementation opens the culture to negative energy which could find their way to classrooms.

Reflections

The key contradiction lies in the different levels of ambition and the subjective experiences of how leadership opportunities are distributed. Some teachers feel deeply frustrated by being excluded, while others are indifferent to leadership roles, causing mixed perceptions of fairness and the overall school climate. Essentially, exclusion in distributive leadership could be justified only for legitimate personal reasons. Some of the teachers desire to be included because they need an opportunity to grow professionally. On the other hand, some of the teachers currently not under distributed leadership believe it may be unnecessary because of where they are in their careers. A blend of both formal and informal assessment approaches would be critical in such cases to discern whether some of the teachers seeking to exclude themselves are not good team players or are right to request for exclusion.

The most surprising realization, however, is how united a team could appear under distributive leadership, to a point where the 'other' team members seem invisible. Having been a teacher for over 20 years, I have been a part of distributive leadership frameworks, and the segregation is true. The leaders at Walker High are certain they have established a cooperative and collaborative culture at the school, and the school is on its way to achieving the set student outcome goals. Some of the teachers under distributive leadership are also

certain they have a collaborative culture, but they admit the exclusion arising from this framework. A greater percentage of this group also admit they do not get enough support for the overwhelming tasks they are assigned. How then could there be a collaborative culture if there is no support and there is knowledge of a group that is excluded from this framework. It would be safe to justify the non-distributive staff's resentment since both leaders and distributive leadership staff are aware of their exclusion but still assume to be operating in a collaborative environment.

A revisit of the theoretical framework is essential to evaluate its alignment with the study's findings and to propose revisions based on participant feedback. This study, focused on distributed leadership at Walker High, aimed to explore how a collaborative leadership model could foster an inclusive school culture. The framework centers on six key elements: team dynamics, formal and positional leadership, leadership development and support, organizational culture, empowering leaders, and trust and collaboration. The findings, however, reveal a gap in equitable practice, particularly in leadership development and support, as staff members expressed concerns about favoritism and exclusion from leadership opportunities.

While the framework intended to create an environment of shared responsibility and empowerment, the participants felt a lack of inclusivity, suggesting that leadership development may not be as accessible or equitable in practice as it should be. To address these issues, the component of "leadership development and support" within the framework could be revisited and strengthened to ensure that support and growth opportunities are available to all, rather than a select few. By refining this component, the framework could better align with distributed leadership principles, actively promoting an inclusive school culture.

Implications for Practice

In practice, this research informs on the specific good practices necessary in the implementation of an effective distributive leadership framework. Firstly, leaders must bring their team members together in decision-making. This should involve regular discussions on how best to engage all team members to prevent any one person from feeling sidelined or overlooked. Being inclusive means actively encouraging participation from each individual and understanding their unique strengths and perspectives. Regular meetings concerning the assignment of different tasks could be critical. However, it is vital to perform both formal and informal assessments to ensure the people assigned such tasks are ready and available to work on the same.

To ensure inclusivity in task distribution and avoid sowing discord, leaders should strive for transparency and clarity in how assignments are allocated. Tasks should be assigned not merely on a general sense of people's abilities but on a well-structured assessment process that prioritizes fairness and equal opportunity. Formal assessments should focus on quantifiable factors such as experience and expertise while informal assessments consider non-quantifiable factors including potential and initiative. It is also advisable to develop a list of principles and guidelines which can ensure the operations under task distributions are fair thus preventing feelings and actions of resentment. Integrating these two approaches will make assessment process more accommodative, inclusive, objective, and fair. Additionally, no one should be excluded from assignments unless they specify their inability to deliver. This will ensure that no resentment broods within the team.

Inclusiveness and involvement in decision-making could significantly improve a team's efficiency since everyone will be motivated and will have opportunities for professional growth. Moreover, talent management should be a central feature in distributive leadership, as it allows leaders to empower individuals based on their skills and development

goals, thus creating a team dynamic where tasks are distributed in a way that fosters growth and keeps everyone engaged. It is also imperative to maintain open and consistent communication and seek feedback. A systematic approach to communication is essential in distributive leadership; having scheduled check-ins and clear channels for feedback can minimize misunderstandings and foster a supportive environment. Through open communication, teachers can seek help when necessary and can raise any issues as they arise.

Leaders have a critical role in monitoring and evaluating the framework from time to time. In particular, leaders should remain attuned to power dynamics within the team, being mindful of how authority and influence are perceived. Regular reflection and adjustments in the framework help ensure that these dynamics do not result in unfair task allocation or perceived favoritism. A feedback loop is critical in addressing problems and avoiding system-wide setbacks such as teams splitting and teachers getting burnt out. To handle the “loose” and “tight” aspects of distributive leadership, it is crucial to know when to delegate tasks freely (loose leadership) and when to maintain structured oversight (tight leadership). Balancing this approach ensures that tasks are distributed equitably without compromising individual autonomy or creating an environment where some feel overburdened.

Implications for Policy

The findings of this research offer valuable insights into policy decisions surrounding the implementation of distributed leadership in schools. One of the key takeaways is the importance of establishing clear policies that promote inclusivity and fairness in task distribution. Current leadership practices at Walker High show that exclusionary and uneven task distribution leads to teacher burnout and a divided school culture. To mitigate these issues, educational policy should mandate both formal and informal assessment methods for assigning leadership roles, ensuring that all teachers, regardless of their tenure or experience, have opportunities for professional growth.

In practice, policies could look like the following: Schools should implement structured frameworks for training, mentorship, and time management to prevent teachers from being overwhelmed by excessive responsibilities. These frameworks would involve dedicated time slots for leadership training within teachers' schedules and ensure access to mentorship programs where teachers in new leadership roles are guided by more experienced colleagues. Additionally, policies might promote ongoing professional development for teachers, creating clearly defined pathways for continuous skill enhancement and leadership training, such as annual professional development workshops focused on both general and role-specific leadership skills.

Policies must also emphasize transparency and collaboration in decision-making processes. This could mean establishing regular, open forums where teachers and school leaders collaboratively discuss role assignments and other key decisions, reducing the potential for misunderstandings and perceived favoritism. Fair task distribution should be prioritized, ensuring a balance between "loose" and "tight" leadership to allow teachers autonomy in some responsibilities while maintaining structure and accountability in others. Open communication channels between school leaders and teachers can foster a more inclusive environment, reducing the perception of favoritism or inequality.

Policies should encourage school leaders to regularly solicit and act on teacher feedback to refine leadership frameworks and ensure that all teachers feel valued and supported. In light of these findings, future policies must prioritize inclusivity, fair task distribution, and robust teacher support systems to maximize the benefits of distributed leadership while avoiding its potential pitfalls. Such adjustments will help establish a fair, balanced, and cohesive leadership approach that supports teachers and, ultimately, enhances student outcomes.

Recommendations for Future Research

The first recommendation is in line with generalizability. The current research only focused on Walker High School implying that its findings cannot be juxtaposed on the diverse regions. There is an opportunity to involve more schools and interview more teachers and their leaders regarding their perceptions of- and approaches to distributed leadership respectively. This could be instrumental in the identification of shared challenges alongside strategies that could be employed to overcome these issues. Quantitative studies on the correlations between distributive leadership and school success, based on survey responses and data analysis, could help shed more light on the vitality of distributed leadership. Another approach is to employ social network analysis to map and analyze the relationships and interactions among teachers and leaders within the distributed leadership framework, providing insights into how communication patterns, power dynamics, and task distributions impact team cohesion, teacher satisfaction, and the overall effectiveness of leadership practices in schools. Given the exclusion experienced by non-distributive teachers at Walker High, future research should explore effective strategies for creating more inclusive and equitable distributed leadership frameworks. Finally, investigating more robust and equitable methods of leadership development could reveal new approaches to distributed leadership that effectively support all staff members. A revised model could explore structured, transparent pathways for leadership development and support, thus providing an actionable plan to mitigate issues of exclusion and favoritism. This would ensure that the framework doesn't just advocate for collaborative leadership in theory but also promotes fairness in practice, directly responding to the experiences of staff and fostering a more cohesive organizational culture.

Limitations

The study outlined a detailed research plan to investigate distributed leadership practices at Walker High School in the Cedar City School District in Tennessee. While the research design was robust and carefully crafted, the researcher encountered several challenges that are discussed here alongside the solutions, where it was possible. While the study offers valuable insights into distributed leadership, the specific challenges and dynamics observed at Walker High—such as exclusion and uneven task distribution—may not fully capture the diversity of leadership practices in other schools, even within Tennessee. The qualitative case study methodology and thematic analysis approach employed here was effective for the research objectives. Nonetheless, these methods produced findings that are deeply rooted in the unique organizational culture of Walker High, making it difficult to extrapolate to other schools. For instance, the issue of teacher burnout and resentment arising from leadership exclusion could vary significantly across different educational settings.

Additionally, the study's use of criterion and snowball sampling may have inadvertently limited the scope of perspectives included. The original plan for the sample selection was a criteria-based approach alongside snowballing, where the researcher intended to first approach the administrators before approaching the teachers and staff using the snowball method. However, the plan had to be adjusted because none of the interviewees were willing to provide the names of their colleagues for the researcher to interview. As a result, the researcher had to send an open invitation to the entire staff, and all interviewees were volunteers who came forward on their own. This, in fact, contributed to one of the study's main themes which will be explored later in this chapter. Finally, while the study employs strategies like peer debriefing and considers emic and etic perspectives to enhance rigor, researcher subjectivity is a potential influence on data interpretation. The researcher's

own experiences, as reflected in the reflections section, may shape how findings are analyzed and presented, despite efforts to minimize bias.

Theoretical Framework Revisited

After the completion of the case study the researcher looked back at the original theoretical framework and realized that adjustments should be made. To fully embrace and implement distributed leadership, it is essential to first establish foundational structures that promote leadership development and support at all levels of the organization. This involves creating formal and informal opportunities for individuals to build their leadership capacity, regardless of their official roles. Leadership development structures, such as professional learning communities (PLCs), mentorship programs, and leadership training workshops, ensure that all participants are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to effectively contribute to shared decision-making processes. These structures serve as the scaffolding upon which distributed leadership can thrive, enabling individuals at all levels to take on leadership responsibilities confidently.

Equally important is fostering a collaborative space where capacity building is a continuous process, integrated within the organization's culture. This space encourages open dialogue, shared learning, and mutual accountability. It aligns with the organization's goals by empowering individuals and teams to innovate, take initiative, and collectively address challenges. In distributed leadership, leadership is not confined to formal roles but emerges from collaborative efforts and shared expertise. Thus, building capacity must go hand-in-hand with cultivating an organizational culture that values trust, collaboration, and empowerment. This synergy ensures that distributed leadership becomes a living practice, embedded in the daily operations and ethos of the institution.

Figure 4: New Theoretical Framework



Conclusion

Distributive leadership is a double-edge sword that could be both useful and harmful. As established in the current research, distributive leadership demands meticulous implementation otherwise leaders risk harming an institution's culture. While the risks are significant, the benefits are equally potent. Through distributive leadership, teachers are given the opportunity to improve themselves as people and professionals. A successful implementation of this system brings teachers together under a common objective where they share resources, ideas, and expertise to succeed. However, an inappropriate application divides teams pitting them against each other. Rather than collaborating and working in harmony, the split teams resent or are oblivious of each other and this is counterproductive. Exclusion and favoritism harm both distributed and non-distributed teams as leaders

overwork the in-team while making the outer team feel undervalued and not respected. It is therefore recommended that leaders employ inclusive decision-making frameworks to ensure all team members are heard. Leaders should also remember to monitor and evaluate their systems to ensure every team member is happy and fulfilled. Healthy and accommodative cultures depend on the success of distributive leadership and could significantly impact the outcomes of students.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Questions for School Leaders

Interview Questions for School Leaders

1. Tell me why you became a school leader (Get to know you question to get them talking)
2. What do you feel your leadership style is? (To get them talking)
3. What are your daily/weekly tasks?
4. What tasks are you more likely to distribute to others?
5. When looking at tasks – WHAT process do you go through to decide what tasks you will distribute to others? (Probe for protocols, feelings, etc.)
 - * Would you consider this method a Formal or informal process for selecting leaders?
 - * (If the participant is not answering my question, I will ask): Why do you employ this method for deciding who is being distributed leadership tasks and roles?
6. How do you assess a staff member's readiness for a leadership position?
7. What qualities or characteristics do you look for in potential leaders?
8. Do you involve other staff members or stakeholders in the decision-making process?
 - * Would you consider this method a formal or informal process for selecting leaders?
 - * Why do you employ this method to decide who is distributed tasks and roles?
9. How do you support those you distribute tasks to?
10. In what ways do you feel distributing these tasks impacts your teachers? (If they do not answer this question, ask the following more specific questions)
 - How does this impact the teachers that tasks and roles:
 - a. ARE distributed too.
 - b. ARE NOT often distributed too.
11. Do you involve other staff members or stakeholders in decision-making?

For:

- a. who gets assigned tasks
- b. what tasks are distributed.

12. What is your definition of distributed leadership?

- a. If they do not know what it is, explain it to them.
- b. If they grasp the concept, go to the next question.

13. Because I am interviewing teachers as well to see their perspective of distributed leadership, Who are 3-5 team members you would identify as those you distribute tasks to? (These can be both positional and formal leaders).

14. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me?

Appendix B: Interview Questions for Teachers that are Distributed Leadership Roles and Tasks

Interview Questions for Teachers (Distributed Tasks and Roles)

1. What made you decide to go into the field of education?
2. How long have you been a teacher/coach/educational assistant?
3. What type of tasks have you been assigned by your administration?
4. How do you feel about taking on roles and responsibilities within the school?
5. Why do you feel your leadership assigned you these tasks or roles?
6. How have you been supported after being given tasks and roles?
7. How do you think participating in these tasks contributes to your personal leadership development and growth as an educator? Have you encountered any challenges or learning opportunities while in this role?
8. In your opinion, how does the distributed leadership model promote trust and collaboration among teachers and staff members?
 - a. Have you experienced any specific instances that have reinforced this sense of trust and collaboration?
 - b. Have you experienced any specific instances that have harmed this sense of trust and collaboration?
9. How has your involvement in these roles and tasks impacted your perception of the school culture?
10. In general, how does your leadership involve others in the decision-making process of distributing the work of the school.
11. Distributed Leadership is a shift away from the traditional, hierarchical, “top-down” model of leadership to a form of leadership that is collaborative and shared. How would you say your school embodies this practice?

12. Can you share a recent example where the distributed leadership practices have impacted the dynamics within the school? Either positively or negatively
13. From your experience in these leadership roles, how has the school leadership team supported and empowered you as a leader?
14. In your opinion, what are some key factors that contribute to the success of distributed leadership within the school?
15. How do you balance your regular teaching responsibilities with your distributed leadership roles?
- a. How does the school support you in managing your time and responsibilities effectively?
16. When you are distributed a task who are 3-5 colleagues, you would identify as who you go to when you need to seek help or advice? (These can be both positional and formal leaders)
17. * Ensure that this question is confidential and will not be shared with the any participant.
** Let the participants know that they do not have to answer this question if they are not comfortable with it. However, this question is important to get the perspective of both sides of distributed leadership – Those who distributed tasks and roles and those who are not.*
Now that we have discussed Distributed Leadership and those who are distributed tasks and roles to, are there people at your school that are not being distributed tasks and roles.
18. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me?

Appendix C: Interview Questions for Teachers that are NOT Distributed Leadership

Roles and Tasks

1. What made you decide to go into the field of education?
2. How long have you been a teacher/coach/educational assistant?
3. Have you been assigned any leadership tasks or roles by your administration?
4. How do you feel participating in these tasks contributes to your personal leadership development and growth as an educator?
5. Have you encountered any challenges or learning opportunities while in your current role?
6. In your opinion, does the distributed leadership model promote trust and collaboration among teachers and staff members?
 - a. Have you experienced any specific instances that have reinforced this sense of trust and collaboration?
 - b. Have you experienced any specific instances that have harmed this sense of trust and collaboration.
7. Does your administration involve others in the decision-making process of distributing the work of the school.
8. Distributed Leadership is a shift away from the traditional, hierarchical, “top-down” model of leadership to a form of leadership that is collaborative and shared. How would you say your school embodies this practice?
9. Can you share a recent example where the distributed leadership practices have impacted the dynamics within the school? Either positively or negatively
10. From your experience, how has the school leadership supported and empowered you as a leader?
11. In your opinion, what are some key factors that contribute to the success or failure of distributed leadership within the school?
12. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me?