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THE INFLUENCE OF INDEPENDENT SECONDARY SCHOOL HEADS ON SHAPING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

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THE INFLUENCE OF INDEPENDENT SECONDARY SCHOOL HEADS ON SHAPING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the
College of Education
at the University of Kentucky

By
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

THE INFLUENCE OF INDEPENDENT SECONDARY SCHOOL HEADS ON SHAPING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

This dissertation examined the experiences and connections between head of school leadership and culture in small, independent boarding schools in New England. This study was the result of the participation of eight heads of school from eight separate institutions, engaging in semi-structured interviews. All of the schools were secular in their practice, all-gender, and had a formal dormitory-based boarding program. Each school enrolled 400 or fewer students, focusing the impact of these leaders on a tighter, interactional lens. This study explored a relatively under-researched area of K-12 education and used exploratory, qualitative methods to gather the stories of these formal leaders. The geographic boundaries of this study were limited to the six New England states. As a result of this study, several key themes involved in the practice of leadership and cultural development arose through the conversations with these heads.

KEYWORDS: Culture, Leadership, Independent School, Boarding, Private, Change

Ian D. MacPhail

January 2024

THE INFLUENCE OF INDEPENDENT SECONDARY SCHOOL HEADS ON SHAPING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS…… iii
LIST OF TABLES…….. x
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION……..……..……...……..... 1
Introduction…….…..…..... 1
Defining School Culture…….…..…..... 2
Problem Statement…….…..…..... 3
Theoretical Framework…….…..…..... 4
Purpose and Significance……...…..…..... 4
Research Questions and Design…….…..…..... 6
Key Terms…….…..…..... 6
Summary…….…..…..... 7
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW…..……..…… 9
Introduction…….…..…..... 9
Leadership and Management……..... 9
Rational Leadership…….…..…..... 12
Reframing Leadership Within Organizations……..... 13
Structural Leadership…….…..…..... 14
Human Resource Leadership…….…..…..... 19
Political Leadership…….…..…..... 23
Symbolic Leadership…….…..…..... 26
Theoretical Framework…….…..…..... 29
Leadership and Culture…….…..…..... 33
Culture and Climate…….…..…..... 35
Understanding Leadership and Culture in Private Boarding Schools... 36
School Culture in Context…….…..…..... 38
Operationalizing School Culture……..... 39
Independent School Leadership…….…..…..... 47
Summary…….…….. 50
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS…….……...……..…….. 51

Introduction……..…..…..... 51
Research Design……..…..…..... 51
Research Setting and Context……..…..…..... 53
Data Collection……..…..…..... 54
Interviews……..…..…..... 55
Sampling Procedure……..…..…..... 60
Document Collection and Use……..…..……..... 63
Ethical Procedures……..…..…..... 63
Researcher Bias……..…..…..... 67
Data Analysis……..…..…..... 71
Role of the Researcher……..…..…..... 75
Summary……..…..…..... 78
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS……..……. 79
Introduction……..…..…..…..……... 79
Organization……..…..…..…..……..... 81
Preliminary Analysis……..…..…..... 82
Interview A: Eastwood School……..…..…..... 86
Communicating Mission and Vision……..... 87
Societal Challenges to Leadership……..... 88
Investing in People……..…..…..... 90
Balancing Tradition and Progress……..... 91
Reflective Leadership……..…..…..... 93
Interview B: Maple Ridge School……..…..…..... 94
Walking the Walk……..…..…..... 95
Communicating Mission and Vision……..... 96
Societal Challenges to Leadership……..... 97
Unifying Organizational Purpose……..…..…..... 99
Balancing Tradition and Progress……..... 100
Leadership in “The Bubble” ……..…..…..... 101
Interview C: Storm Coast School……..…..…..... 102
Walking the Walk……..…..…..... 103

Communicating Mission and Vision……..... 104
Societal Challenges to Leadership……..... 105
Balancing Tradition and Progress……..... 106
Reflective Leadership……..... 107
Leadership in "The Bubble" ……..... 108
Interview D: Redwood Academy……..... 108
Communicating Mission and Vision……..... 109
Societal Challenges to Leadership……..... 110
Balancing Tradition and Progress……..... 110
Reflective Leadership……..... 111
Interview E: Meadows School……..... 111
Communicating Mission and Vision……..... 112
Societal Challenges to Leadership……..... 113
Unifying Organizational Purpose……..... 114
Investing in People……..... 115
Balancing Tradition and Progress……..... 115
Reflective Leadership……..... 116
Leadership in "The Bubble" ……..... 117
Interview F: Highland School……..... 118
Communicating Mission and Vision……..... 118
Unifying Organizational Purpose……..... 120
Investing in People……..... 121
Balancing Tradition and Progress……..... 122
Interview G: Bear Valley Academy……..... 123
Communicating Mission and Vision……..... 123
Societal Challenges to Leadership……..... 125
Balancing Tradition and Progress……..... 127
Reflective Leadership……..... 128
Interview H: Southview School……..... 129
Walking the Walk……..... 129
Communicating Mission and Vision……..... 130

Societal Challenges to Leadership……..... 131
Investing in People…….…..... 132
Reflective Leadership…….…..... 132
Leadership in "The Bubble" …….…..... 133
Summary…….…….. 134
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION…..……... 137
Introduction…….…..…….…….. 137
Leadership in Schools…….…..... 138
Communicating Mission and Vision……..... 138
Walking the Walk…….…..... 143
Investing in People…….…..... 148
Reflective Leadership…….…..... 151
Embracing Change and Honoring Tradition……..... 155
Societal Challenges to Leadership……..... 155
Balancing Tradition and Progress……..... 164
Leadership in "The Bubble" …….…..... 168
Unifying Organizational Purpose…….…..... 169
Leadership in "The Bubble" …….…..... 171
Answering Research Questions……..... 176
Question 1…….....…….…..... 176
Question 2…….....…….…..... 177
Question 3…….....…….…..... 178
Question 4…….....…….…..... 179
Expanding Leadership Theories…….....…….…..... 180
Implications for Leadership Practice……..... 181
Limitations…… 186
Recommendations for Future Research……..... 188
Conclusions……..... 191
APPENDICES……. 193
Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter……..... 193
Appendix B: Participant Cover Letter……..... 194

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form……..... 197
Appendix D: Head of School Interview Script and Sample Questions…… 198
Appendix E: Participant Email……..... 201
REFERENCES…… 202
VITA...……..…….…….……. 214

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1, Operational Definitions of Key Terms……... 7
Table 2.1, Research Questions and Schein's Model…… 31
Table 3.1, Interview Questions and Research Questions……. 58
Table 4.1, Thematic Development and Cooccurrences……... 134

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Since 1746, when the Moravian Church founded Linden Hall, a private school for girls in Pennsylvania, there has been a national conversation among educators about the importance, nature, and impact of private education in the United States. While shifts in public education have trended toward more standardized testing, uniformity, and increased oversight, private education has rapidly shifted toward differentiated instruction, communal identity formation, and the individualization of learning. These characteristics contribute to cultural identifiers of belonging that permeate the school community. Private education also transfers a sense of identity, purpose, and social capital to those who become *insiders* to the community and organization. As leaders of these institutions, heads of school (formerly headmasters, provosts, and the like) display a level of leadership that is both strategic in its scope and tactical in its implementation. The head of school represents an amalgamated role that is part principal, part superintendent, and part evangelist proselytizing the identity and mission of the institution. These individuals are uniquely situated not only to define the mission of the school, but also to nurture the culture of their institutions.

Scholars have suggested that highly successful organizations in both the public and private sector create and maintain cultures that reflect the shared norms, values, and beliefs that shape their members' behavior patterns and contributions to accomplishing their goals. Public schools broadly share a culture defined by society; they are influenced by a wide array of social, community, and contextual forces that shape their unique

characteristics in time and place. Although their private, independent school counterparts are also influenced by the same socio-cultural dynamics, they may be shaped by a different set of sociological and contextual forces that are both interpreted and enacted by school heads. In this regard, they have a distinct advantage over their public school counterparts in that they typically have greater longevity and decision-making autonomy. These circumstances provide private school heads with opportunities to interpret, maintain, and transmit their schools' culture in a manner that creates a unique image of their school.

During the last several decades, literature on the role of leaders in shaping school cultures has emerged as a critical dimension of the transformation of public schools. However, there is a dearth of scholarly work on the influence of private, independent school heads on their role in shaping school cultures. The study of the role of private school heads in shaping organizational culture provides a unique opportunity to contribute to the current literature in the field.

Defining School Culture

In order to understand the nature of school culture, it must be defined and operationalized. A wide array of scholars has contributed to our understanding of school culture. For example, Schein and Schein (2017) defined *culture* as "learned patterns of beliefs, values, assumptions, and behavioral norms that manifest themselves at different levels of observability" (p. 2). Barth (2001) described culture as "the way we do things around here" (p. 7). Deal and Peterson (2016) stated that "culture crops up in response to persisting conditions, novel changes, challenging losses, and enduring ambiguous or paradoxical puzzles" (p. 223). In addition, Deal and Peterson (2016) identified culture as

a “cohesive and shared set of values” (p. 18). Further, Fiore (2000) emphasized the importance of personal connection in school cultures, stating that “embedded in school culture is an understanding of the need for schools to operate as communities” (p. 12). This approach, emphasizing the importance of communal values and shared interactive experiences, provides a foundation for Deal and Peterson’s (2016) categorization of the elements of culture. Framing these cultural elements is crucial to operationalizing the term and exploring individual variations in cultures across settings.

Problem Statement

There is an extensive body of literature on organizational culture, especially concerning businesses, religious organizations, and public schools. Although it is highly informative, the context in which culture is enacted matters. For example, private (independent) boarding schools are largely protected from the cultural and societal pressures placed on public schools regarding educational imperatives, national mandates, and shifting local demographics. Rather, they may be shaped by a different set of sociological and contextual forces entirely. These forces are interpreted, and changes enacted by school heads, who typically have greater longevity and levels of decision-making autonomy than their public school counterparts These circumstances provide private school heads with opportunities to interpret, maintain, and transmit their schools’ culture in a manner that creates a unique image of their school.

Despite a substantive body of literature on organizational culture across a number of public and private sector contexts, there is a dearth of scholarly literature on the influence of independent school heads in shaping school cultures, particularly with regard to those serving in private boarding schools. This study aims to collect, document, and

share the perceptions and experiences of heads of independent boarding schools in relation to their understanding, preserving, changing, and transmitting culture under the aegis of their formal leadership role.

Theoretical Framework

According to Eisenhart (1991), theories provide the underpinning for understanding the world and interactions between people, groups, or organizations. They help to align the researcher's motivations for conducting a study with the body of scholarly literature on the topic and the broader exploration of phenomena or conceptual understandings. The theoretical framework that helped guide this exploratory research study was Schein's (1992) Organizational Cultural Model. Schein and Schein (2017) distinguished between the *content* and *structure* of culture in his development of the model, noting that content is incredibly difficult to contextualize without a structural understanding of the culture in question. Schein's structural model layered culture into three levels of observability ranging from most to least observable. The levels included "Artifacts, Espoused Beliefs and Values, and Basic Underlying Assumptions" (p. 18). Schein and Schein (2017) also noted that leaders are often engaged in "creating culture, whether or not they explicitly intend to and whether or not they are aware of their impact" (p. 204). Schein's model was used to construct the research questions and to frame the initial categorization codes for data analysis. A more complete discussion of the theoretical framework is included in Chapter Two.

Purpose and Significance

Private boarding schools present a unique context to study how heads of school influence their respective school cultures as part of their leadership role. Because of a

boarding school's insular, campus-centered nature and its application-based admissions process, there is an opportunity to study culture that is not inherently tied to external societal forces in a way that public schools, and even private day schools, must be tied by virtue of their geographic model. The broad range of students attracted to boarding schools, whether domestic or international, provides the school with diverse perspectives and the imperative to craft a unified culture from heterogeneous parts. Private boarding schools are also likely to be led by the same individuals for more extended periods than public schools. The average tenure of a private school head has historically been longer than that of a public school principal or superintendent. While the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has altered this pattern to some extent, there remains a disparity in the duration of service for independent school leaders compared to their public school counterparts. This extended tenure allows private school heads the opportunity to shape the school's mission, curriculum, physical plant, and culture in more diverse and lasting ways.

According to the National Association for Independent Schools (NAIS, 2020), “Heads of school are vital to ensuring student success. Effective heads help maintain a positive school climate and advocate for the school in the community. Their faculty recruitment practices, financial management, and strategic planning indirectly impact student achievement” (p. 12). The potential impact of this position cannot be overstated; they serve as models, leaders, and curators of their school’s culture. Understanding their role in shaping that culture can ultimately aid in understanding how culture can contribute to and transform private boarding school organizations. Importantly, findings

from this study may increase the knowledge base in the field characterized by a paucity of scholarly literature.

Research Questions and Design

This study seeks to explore and articulate the leadership role of heads of school serving in independent, secular boarding secondary schools in New England, concerning shaping organizational culture. Research questions guiding the exploratory study include the following:

1. How do school leaders at long-standing private boarding schools define and articulate the identity and mission of their respective institutions?
2. How do school leaders at long-standing private boarding schools ensure that their school's identity and mission are reflected in its curriculum, culture, and policies?
3. How do heads of school at long-standing private boarding schools enact their respective role in shaping and leading the culture of the school?
4. How do heads of school at long-standing private boarding schools balance the cultural preservation of tradition with the need for change?

Key Terms

The unique organizational context of this study suggests the need to broadly define *school culture* and more specifically relate terms to the unique context of the study, as well as terms pertinent to these school organizations. These terms may sometimes be used interchangeably, as noted in the definitions in the following table.

Table 1.1

Operational Definitions of Key Terms

Term	Operational Definition
Independent school	A school that has separate tuition structures and operates independently from local school board or national mandates in curriculum or operation; also called *private school*
Boarding school	A school with a formalized residential program and on-campus communal housing for students
Head of school	The formal leader of an independent school; traditionally called a *headmaster*, this title has also morphed to *head* as a shorthand
Artifact	A tangible and/or clearly observable function of an organization's identity; the artifact may be physical or conceptual
Mission statement	A formal statement of a school's values, purpose, or goals

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of this empirical, exploratory study of the perceived role and impact of heads of school in independent, secular, secondary boarding schools in New England. This study contributes to the knowledge base on culture and identity as a function of leadership in independent schools.

Chapter Two will present an overview of the scholarly literature relevant to leadership, a theoretical framework, management, culture and symbols, school organization and leadership, and the roles of leaders in educational institutions. Chapter Three will present a discussion of the research methodology, research setting, sample size, data collection, and data analysis procedures as well as the role of the researcher. Chapter Four will present the findings of the study, and Chapter Five will discuss and

summarize the findings, present study limitations, and provide recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to better understand the leadership role of heads of school serving in independent boarding secondary schools in New England with regard to shaping organizational culture. The literature review includes a discussion of the notions of *leadership* and *management* and a discussion of organizational culture and how organizational leadership may influence its formation and modification. Following this is a more thorough exploration of the theoretical framework, which was introduced in Chapter One. A discussion of Schein's (1992) Organizational Cultural Model, particularly its transferability to schools, provides a framework for understanding the roles of leaders in educational organizations and their influence on culture in private schools.

Leadership and Management

From a historical perspective, leadership and management have long been intertwined in the lexicon of business, human interaction, and education. Rost (1991) argued that the "practice is pervasive in the mainstream literature of leadership" (p. 122). Further, Rost (1991) posited that this was an outgrowth of the industrial paradigm of leadership and that, since the 1930s, it created a framework that "equated good management with leadership" (p. 122). This conflation of terms created a need for a post-industrial examination of leadership and management, which Rost (1991) proposed as a "new framework . . . to make a clear separation between the two concepts" (p. 129). Selznick (1957) provided the earliest attempt to distinguish *leadership* from *management*,

stating that "leadership is not equivalent to office-holding or high prestige or authority or decision-making . . . the activities we have in mind may or may not be engaged in by those who are formally in positions of authority" (Rost, 1991, pp. 129-130). Other scholars focused on the concept of power and its role in distinguishing between *leadership* and *management*. Graham (1988) stated that the distinction "rests on the degree of free choice exercised by followers" and that "appropriate labels for the person giving orders . . . include 'supervisor' and 'manager,' but not 'leader'" (p. 74). Indeed, Tucker (1981) distinguished *leadership* and *management* as to the timing of direction, stating "in ordinary, day-to-day group life . . . groups are in need of being directed. But routine direction might better be described as *management*, reserving the term *leadership* for the directing of a group at times of choice, change, and decision" (p. 16). Further, Kotter (1990) argued that the inherent functions of *management* and *leadership* are different: "The central function of management is to provide order and consistency to organizations whereas the leadership is to produce change and movement" (pp. 3-8). Bass (1981) stated that "leadership must be defined broadly. Leadership is an interaction between members of a group . . . Leadership occurs when one group member modifies the motivation or competencies of others in the group" (p. 16). *Leadership*, therefore, transcends formal hierarchical roles and exists both laterally and vertically within organizations. *Management*, on the other hand, depends on formal hierarchical authority in its application. However, the two often exist simultaneously and somewhat indistinguishably in their day-to-day processes.

The difficulty in making a clear distinction between *leadership* and *management* stems from a lack of unity in the scholarly definitions of leadership. In fact, Stogdill

(1974) stated, "There are as many definitions of leadership as there are scholars" (p. 7). Three broad schools of thought surrounding the genesis and practice of leadership arose over the mid-twentieth century, as outlined in Northouse (2007): a) trait approach; b) skills approach; and c) style approach. The trait approach presented key leadership traits as the foundation for "born" leaders. While traits vary depending on the researcher, *intelligence* (Stogdill, 1948; Mann, 1959; Lord et al., 1986), *self-confidence* (Stogdill, 1948; Stogdill, 1974; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991), *determination* (Stogdill, 1948; Stogdill, 1974; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991), *integrity* (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991), and *sociability* (Stogdill, 1948; Mann, 1959; Stogdill, 1974) form the core of most leadership traits identified by researchers. Alternatively, skills-based leadership is understood by scholars to be a teachable set of abilities. For example, Katz (1955) identified technical, human, and conceptual skills as the core competencies of leadership. Mumford et al. (2000) expanded this conceptualization to include individual attributes and environmental influences in determining leadership outcomes. Blake and Mouton (1969) focused on leadership *style* in an attempt to define leadership by observing the behaviors of leaders directly. They also conflated management and leadership in their discussion of leadership behaviors and management style. Rost (1991), on the other hand, strongly opposed the interchangeable use of *leadership* and *management*: "Confusing leadership and management and treating the words as if they were synonymous have a long and illustrious history in leadership studies" (p. 129).

Rost (1991) made an important scholarly contribution in that he differentiated leadership and management in four critical interactional areas, including a) influence vs. authority relationship; b) leaders and followers vs. managers and subordinates; c)

intending real changes vs. producing and selling goods and/or services; and d) mutual purpose vs. coordinated activities (pp. 149-152). In differentiating the terms in this manner, Rost (1991) focused on the relational nature of leadership and management and contrasted the types of relationships inherent to the different practices. According to Rost (1991), leadership is inherently multidirectional; leaders can be managers or subordinates, while followers can be subordinates or managers. Management, on the other hand, is exclusively a top-down relationship. The purpose and function of the relationship indicate whether leadership or management is practiced in a given relationship or interaction. The intended outcome of the leadership relationship is intentional change based on mutual purposes, while the management relationship focuses on production (p. 150). This emphasis on the relational nature of leadership and management concentrates explicitly on the very different relationships inherent in the two phenomena.

Relational Leadership

Rost (1991) explicitly defined *leadership* as "an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes" (p. 102). Rost's model has been described as a "postindustrial" understanding of the phenomenon (Uhl-Bien, 2006). This focus on leader-follower collaboration was built on the model of leadership as a relational process by Hollander (1958). Further, Hollander (1979) explained leadership as a two-way influence and social exchange relationship between leaders and followers. According to Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), the Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) states that leadership occurs when "leaders and followers are able to develop effective relationships (partnerships) that result in

incremental influence" (p. 225). Uhl-Bien (2006) posited that a focus on relational leadership necessarily transitions the focus from "the individual to the collective dynamic," and that "relational perspectives identify the basic unit of analysis in leadership research as *relationships*, not individuals" (p. 662). Drath (2001) and Murrell (1997) individually coined the term *relational leadership* to describe the process-oriented models of leadership built on webs of interaction and influence rather than individual cognitive or social behaviors. Drath (2001) referred to a process of *relational dialogue*, in which members construct knowledge systems through engagement and interaction. Murrell (1997) called leadership a "shared responsibility" and "a social act, a construction of a 'ship' as a collective vehicle" (p. 35). Importantly, Murrell (1997) asserted that relational leadership moves beyond the "hero myth" and focuses instead on understanding leadership as a collective act. In examining leadership through a relational lens, Murrell (1997) stated that "it is possible to see relationships other than those built from hierarchy . . . the social change process occurs well outside the normal assumptions of command and control" (p. 39). Because of this shared expression of leadership, the focus on process necessitates an understanding of both leaders and followers in their interactions. Approaching leadership from a multi-directional and constructivist perspective presents the opportunity to examine relational leadership as a process of social influence to create change through coordinated interactions.

Reframing Leadership Within Organizations: Four Frames

Bolman and Deal (2021) describe a *frame* as "a mental model—a set of ideas and assumptions—that you carry in your head to help you understand and negotiate a particular 'territory'" (p. 10). Frames, like maps, provide leaders with an understanding

of “a terrain and the tools for navigating its contours . . . The right tool makes a job easier; the wrong one gets in the way” (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 15). Over time, organizations have “become pervasive and dominant, they have also become harder to manage” (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 22). This makes it necessary for leaders to learn “multiple perspectives, or frames” in order to effectively provide guidance and avoid “thrashing around” (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 22). Bolman and Deal (2021) provided four leadership frames to provide an opportunity for leaders to reframe situations: a) structural; b) human resource; c) political; and d) symbolic. Reframing provides leaders with “a powerful tool for gaining clarity, regaining balance, generating new questions, and finding options that make a difference (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 23). Each of the frames is explored in the subsequent sections.

Structural Leadership

The structural frame is focused on managing organizations and is rooted in two intellectual schools of thought. The first, scientific management, was built on the work of Taylor, Fayol, Gulick, and Urwick (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 51). Taylor (1911) aimed to maximize industrial efficiency by structuring tasks into individual parts and training workers to maximize efficiency. This was then built upon by Fayol (1949) and Gulick and Urwick (1937), who developed ideas based on “specialization, span of control, authority, and delegation of responsibility” (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 51). The second school was based on the ideas of Max Weber (1947), who developed his “monocratic bureaucracy” theory to maximize “efficiency and norms of rationality” (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 51).

The structural frame is based on a firm belief in rationality and faith that "an appropriate array of roles and responsibilities will minimize distracting personal static and maximize people's focus on the job" (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 50). Six assumptions form the structural frame's foundation. These were articulated by Bolman and Deal (2021) as "undergirding" the structural frame. The first assumption is that organizations "exist to achieve established goals" and, therefore, "devise strategies" to reach these goals. The second assumption is that organizations "increase efficiency and enhance performance through specialization and appropriate division of labor." The third assumption is that "suitable forms of coordination and control ensure that diverse effort of individuals and units mesh." The fourth assumption is that organizations "work best when rationality prevails over personal agendas and extraneous pressures." It is also necessary that an "effective structure fits the organization's current circumstances." These circumstances comprise the organization's strategy, technology, workforce, and environment. The last assumption is that "when performance suffers from structural flaws, the remedy is problem-solving and restructuring" (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 50). These assumptions create the foundation for the practical application of the structural frame, which many have viewed as being managerial in nature.

Bolman & Deal (2021) articulated two overarching methods of organizational communication: vertical coordination and lateral coordination. Vertical coordination consists of hierarchical organization with the upper levels controlling the work of subordinate levels through authority, rules and policies, and planning and control systems. According to Bolman and Deal (2021), authority is created by designating an official "boss" and investing that person with formal authority over other employees.

These roles (for example, executives, managers, and supervisors) are tasked with "keeping action aligned with strategy and objectives" (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 59). This then creates a chain of command with a specified communication and control structure. According to Dornbusch & Scott (1975), this method works best when authority is endorsed by subordinates and authorized by superiors. Rules and policies were discussed in detail at the upper levels and then implemented from a top-down approach, creating uniformity in production and response to stimuli through an organization. While these rules and policies provide consistency, they often limit lower-level flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances.

Planning and control systems have become ubiquitous in the digital era. The increased availability of data allows managers to respond to feedback and trends in real time, which increases control over performance. Mintzberg (1979) noted two key approaches to planning and control: a) performance control; and b) action planning. Performance control focuses on specific goals and desired results, which, combined with clear and measurable targets, motivates individual efforts and maximizes the effectiveness of performance control (Locke & Latham, 2002). Action planning provides specific instructions on *how* to do something related to the overall objective. Such planning also helps a company pursue ambiguous goals without losing sight of the activities that these goals engender in employees.

Lateral coordination is more flexible and less formal than vertical coordination, and it often arises to "fill the gaps" between goals, rules, techniques, and the daily operation of employees (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 61). These lateral strategies often have the advantage of convenience because they are easier to schedule and quicker to execute

than vertical interactions. Lateral coordination uses coordinating roles and is broken into four categories: a) meetings; b) task forces; c) matrix structures; and d) networks. Meetings, both formal and informal, are the backbone of lateral coordination. While all organizations have meetings, informal interactions can often help organizations navigate more turbulent situations effectively. The consistent and constant level of communication creates an environment where different departments or areas of an organization can coordinate laterally as needed. Task forces are created to address new problems or opportunities and draw together diverse specialties and functional groups. These arise when the situation is complex or changes quickly (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 62). Often, a task force employs "coordinating roles" where product managers or project managers work to compile information from various sources and bring teams together to ensure success (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 62). Matrix structures arose in the 1960s to link increasingly complex organizations across geographic and organizational distances. Such organization can be cumbersome (Peters, 1979; Davis & Lawrence, 1978), but if organized correctly, it can solve many problems (Vantrappen & Wirtz, 2016). Such a design carries the risk of confusion, tension, and conflict between various managers and works best with multiple axes of control, mixing vertical and lateral coordination. This approach is commonly used in global corporations (Ghoshal & Bartlett, 1990; Gulati & Gargillio, 1999). Finally, networks allow lateral connection between groups of stakeholders. While networks have always existed, they are more common or influential in some locations than others. The digital age has allowed for a proliferation of networks using the internet, for example. Digital networks have often "supplanted vertical strategies" and led to new network structures "within and between organizations"

(Steward, 1994). This “mushrooming” (Powell et al., 1996) of inter-organizational networks allows information and knowledge to be shared in a way that provides new research and opportunities that no single organization could pursue alone. As such, horizontal connections can supplement vertical networks and create a more communicative and effective organization.

In the structural frame, management, as conflated with leadership, is broken down into three key components. The first component is rationality and a rational approach to decision-making, hiring, and organization. The second is the effective design of a social architecture for the organization. The third component is the concept of a strategic apex or administrative group within the organization making critical decisions.

According to Taylor (1911), Weber (1947), and Thompson (1967), organizations seek rationality as a method for goal setting, adjustment, hiring, and myriad other functions. An effective manager operates on the “scientific management” approach, which focusing on breaking down tasks, dividing labor, control, and delegation. This “scientific management” method closely monitors employee performance and can reward or retrain based on the needs of the organization. Thompson (1967) further expanded on this idea using his “problem facing and problem solving” concepts to define how a manager must approach the push-pull dynamic between the need for flexibility or discretion and the desire for reduced uncertainty in the organizational structure.

Further complicating the management calculus is the need to spend significant time focusing on social architecture—designing structures that allow people to do their best. This often competes with myriad other items for the time and energy of management in a structural sense. However, Bryan and Joyce (2007) posited that CEOs

would “be better off focusing on organizational design” because it allows managers to focus on the efficiency of their organization (p. 22). According to Bryan and Joyce (2007), this produces “superior performance” based on the ability to take advantage of modern sources of profit and growth. This focus on differentiation (or allocation of work) and integration (or coordinating effort) provides leaders with an opportunity to create harmonious structures (Bolman & Deal, 2021, pp. 57-58).

Lastly, Mintzberg (1979) created a five-sector *logo* that separated groups based on their functions and roles in an organization, which helps managers “get their bearings” when crafting an organizational structure (Bolman & Deal, 2021, pp. 80-81). Such a division creates two levels of management: a) the administrative component; and b) the strategic apex. The administrative component supervises, coordinates, controls, and provides resources for the operating core. The strategic apex, on the other hand, tracks changes in the environment and determines both the “grand design” and the strategy of the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 81). This separation of day-to-day management and visionary or “big picture” leadership allows managers to better fulfill their roles in an organization’s structure.

Human Resource Leadership

The human resource frame centers on three major schools of thought with regard to the theoretical basis for its assertions: a) motivation; b) leadership; and c) the Theory of Action. Maslow’s (1954) “Hierarchy of Needs” theory represents one of the most popular and most utilized theories of human motivation and productivity. Maslow (1954) began with the notion that people are motivated by a variety of wants, some more fundamental than others, He created a five-stage process wherein after needs from one

stage are met, it allows individuals to pursue the next stage. Maslow's first stage is the need for literal sustenance (air, food, water). After individuals have a sufficient supply of these needs, they can move to the second stage: physical well-being and safety. Maslow (1954) posited that these first needs are "prepotent" and must be met in order to pursue any higher motivations. Maslow (1954) referred to the third stage as "social" needs, and these include love, belongingness, and inclusion. After achieving a place in society in the third stage, Maslow's progression turns inward and focuses on the "ego" needs: esteem, respect, and recognition. This stage provides the individual with opportunities to seek internal and external worthiness and is the final step before Maslow's fifth stage. The final achievement in Maslow's process is "self-actualization," which refers to an individual's fullest potential development. If individuals reach this stage, Maslow posited, they will be at their peak in both self-worth and ability to produce, create, or lead (1954). While Maslow's hierarchy of needs is commonly depicted as a pyramid, with each stage representing a smaller yet higher piece of the structure, Bolman and Deal (2021) made sure to point out that the process is not as linear or ironclad as it would seem.

In McGregor's (1960) X & Y Theory, managers' expectations, or assumptions about people "tend to become self-fulfilling prophecies" (p. 123). This concept was built on Maslow's (1954) theory by including the role that supervisors can play in the development of individuals as integrated members of an organization. Leaders, McGregor (1960) said, hold Theory X assumptions that employees are "passive and lazy, have little ambition, prefer to be led, and resist change" (pp. 311-312). Such assumptions led to either a "hard" or "soft" response to the perceived traits of subordinates. A hard

response to Theory X assumptions emphasized "coercion, tight controls, threats, and punishments" and resulted in conflict between workers and managers. This conflict included "low productivity, antagonism, militant unions, and subtle sabotage" (McGregor, 1960, p. 312) and was prevalent in workplaces in his era (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Soft versions of Theory X, McGregor (1960) said, would avoid conflict and lead to "superficial harmony," but also "apathy, indifference, and smoldering resentment" (p. 312). This resulted, according to McGregor (1960), from the underlying assumption that workers were lazy and needed to be guided and the workers' subsequent fulfillment of that level of expectation. Instead, McGregor (1960) posited that his Theory Y, based on Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs (1954), be utilized to reframe thinking about how to lead organizations. The fundamental proposition of Theory Y is that "the essential task of management is to arrange conditions so that people can achieve their own goals best by directing efforts toward organizational rewards" (McGregor, 1960, p. 318). Creating an environment where individuals can find inherent satisfaction in their roles and performance is a vital piece of Theory Y. Failure to do so, McGregor (1960) said, necessitated a Theory X approach and represented a failure of leadership (Bolman & Deal, 2021).

Argyris (1957) added the concept of *conflict theory* to the understanding of the dynamic between workers and organizations. He theorized that, in any interaction between organizations and individuals, there were two types of theory: a) espoused theory; and b) theory in action. An *espoused theory* is used to explain or predict one's personal behavior. In contrast, the *theory of action* refers to what is actually done in response to interactions, conflict, or other stimuli. Argyris' (1957) early theories (Argyris

& Schon, 1974) focused on the fact that organizations treated employees "like children" and that this created a reflexive response from the workers that became known as Model I Theory-in-Use (Argyris & Schon, 1996). This model explored the "self-protective" behaviors that employees use to cope with challenging work environments (Argyris & Schon, 1996). Model I is divided into four "core values," or goals, which then predict action and outcome based on the idea that there is an inherent conflict between espoused theory and theory in action. The four core values are: a) define and achieve goals; b) maximize winning and minimize losing; c) minimize generating or expressing negative feelings; and d) be rational (Argyris & Schon, 1996). Approaching these goals from a Model I standpoint creates a conflict between individuals by creating the assumption that there is an *us vs. them* dynamic inherent in all interactions. Employees will not experience the growth they need under this model, as it creates minimal learning, strains relationships, and deteriorates decision-making qualities (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Argyris (1964) stated that a worker in this environment would pursue six distinct options for "staying sane": a) physical withdrawal; b) psychological withdrawal; c) resistance; d) ladder-climbing; e) alliance forming; and f) fomenting apathy. These coping strategies, created by interpersonal conflict and the conflict between unfulfilled workers and their organizations, create an unproductive and untenable organizational environment.

As a counter to the challenges faced by Model I organizations, Argyris and Schon (1996) crafted Model II. This approach, they said, would create an organization where communication was prized, and "advocacy and inquiry" were integrated. According to Argyris and Schon (1996), Model II is achieved when organizations pursue three key ideas: a) emphasizing common goals and mutual influence; b) communicating openly and

publicly; and c) combining advocacy with inquiry. An organization that effectively employs these strategies in its interpersonal and hierarchical relationships, Argyris and Schon (1974) stated, ensures that information reaches decision-makers, eliminates uncertainty and subterfuge, and creates a shared stake in positive interactions and outcomes.

Political Leadership

The political frame relies on five major assumptions for its theoretical framework. The first assumption is that organizations are coalitions composed of various individuals and interest groups. The second assumption is that there are enduring differences among individuals and groups concerning their values, preferences, beliefs, information, and perceptions of reality. These different positions change slowly over time—if they change at all. The third assumption is that most of the crucial decisions in organizations revolve around the allocation of resources. This concept of "who gets what, when, and how" is central to both political theory and the political frame. The fourth assumption is that conflict is central to organizational dynamics due to scarce resources and enduring differences, and power is the most critical resource. The fifth and final assumption of the political frame is that organizational goals and decisions emerge from bargaining and negotiations between or among key players in organizational coalitions.

Unlike the structural frame, in which conflict is a problem of role definition, or the human resource frame, where it results from a mismatch of goals and personnel management, the political frame views conflict as both a natural and inevitable condition based on the differences between individual and group interests. Therefore, strategy and tactics for managing conflict successfully are central to the political frame. Organizations

can experience too much or too little conflict (Brown, 1983), and the extreme on either end of the spectrum can be detrimental to organizational success. According to Heffron (1989), an organization lacking conflict can become "apathetic, uncreative, stagnant, inflexible, and unresponsive" (p. 185). Conversely, poorly managed conflict can lead to infighting and destructive power struggles (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 204), while conflict managed properly can "stimulate creativity and innovation," leading an organization to build its adaptability and effectiveness while improving the energy or activity of the groups (Kotter, 1985, p. 196). According to the political frame, conflict is most likely to occur at boundaries or interfaces between groups and units (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 204) in horizontal and vertical organizations. External conflict also occurs between cultures and can impact workspaces with issues around "gender, ethnic, racial, and other" boundaries (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 204). Internally, organizations also experience value disputes between management and front-line employees. Overall, Bolman and Deal (2021) stated that the main challenge for management is in recognizing and managing interface conflict (p. 204). The management of conflict can lead to greater productivity or grinding issues depending on its success, and managers operating in the political frame need to develop their skills in negotiation and persuasion to effectively advocate and develop alliances to succeed in a political world.

The concept of *power* in the political frame refers to a leader's ability to get an individual to do what they want to be done. As such, power is more than the authority espoused by the structural frame or the empowerment ideals of the human resource frame. Political frame theories emphasize that power is not inherently evil. Foucault (1995) stated that "power produces; it produces reality" (p. 194). The political frame also

emphasizes the concept of the *power gap* as the idea that formal authority, as only one form of power, is rarely enough to exert control over subordinates and could make a manager more vulnerable to challenges from below. This was laid out in the exploration of "authorities and partisans," in Bolman and Deal's (2021) research. In this concept, authorities are the recipients of influence and the initiators of social control, while partisans occupy the opposite roles of initiators of influence and recipients of social control (Gamson, 1968). Power is divided into nine *sources* or *types* of power: a) position; b) personal; c) expert; d) coercive; e) control; f) reputation; g) alliance/network; h) access; and i) framing power. These various forms of power present leaders with tools and resources to exert influence over individuals and interest groups.

In the political frame, interest groups are vital in their continued commitment to pursuing action on their chosen subject. Such interest groups attempt to gain support for their position (Björk, 2005) by building coalitions or lobbying decision-makers to support their cause. Interest groups work to generate interest and therefore affect change in their sphere of influence. While interest groups can be short-term, they are often long-lasting and comprise a shifting group of underlying coalitions. Interest groups often align with each other in shorter-term coalitions, such as those found in educational policy, where membership can change based on the position of those interested in policy and change. Coalitions are temporary unions or alliances of different groups working together to achieve a common goal. These unions can consist of individuals or various interest groups that ally themselves to pursue a specific purpose, which often requires a reconciliation of their different perspectives and interests (Björk, 2005). Coalitions work to get assistance from other individuals or groups both within and outside a particular

organization. Organizations often have multiple and conflicting goals due to the interaction between different coalitions within the organization. The efficacy of a coalition is dependent on the ability of the various participants to reconcile their differences and pursue a unified outcome.

Symbolic Leadership

The symbolic frame is grounded in the notion of culture and focuses on how "myth and symbols help humans make sense of the chaotic, ambiguous world in which they live" (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 248). This frame focuses on three central concerns: a) meaning; b) belief; and c) faith. As a result, the symbolic frame operates on five core assumptions of organizational theory. The first is that what is important is "not what happens but what it means" (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 254). The second assumption is that actions and meanings are only loosely related and that events have multiple meanings as people interpret and experience them differently. The third assumption is that, when faced with ambiguity, symbols help resolve confusion, anchor faith, and find direction. The fourth assumption is that events and processes are often more important for what they signal or express than for the intent or outcome. This "emblematic form weaves a tapestry of secular myths, heroes and heroines, rituals, ceremonies, and stories," and helps people in organizations find purpose and passion (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 254). The final assumption is that culture is the "superglue that bonds an organization, unites people, and helps an organization to accomplish desired ends" (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 254).

Culture is often broken down into several key aspects, each with its own purpose and display in organizational leadership. The first aspect (myths, vision, and values)

explains events, expresses values, legitimizes decisions, and creates or maintains solidarity within an organization. This mythology establishes an organization's identity and often explains how or why it began, what it believes in, or why it acts in the way it does. The second aspect, heroes and heroines, uses figures in an organization as exemplars for the values and personal traits organizational members aspire to embody. Fairy tales and stories, the third aspect, tend to focus on an organization's history or founding, or on some aspect of its product or development that, while not plausible in its overall content, expresses something important about the organization. Fairy tales and stories convey myths and morals, keep legends alive, and express the humanity of a person or organization to outsiders and members alike. According to Denning (2005), stories serve eight major functions: a) they spark action; b) communicate who you are; c) communicate branding or company identity; d) transmit values; e) foster collaboration; f) tame the *grapevine*; g) share knowledge; and h) lead people to the future. Stories also serve as a key method of communicating corporate myths in that they establish, explain, and perpetuate traditions. The fourth aspect, rituals, gives meaningful structure to daily operations, both within the organization and in the lives of individuals. Rituals connect individuals and groups to something "mystical" (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 264) and greater than themselves. The creation and pattern of ritual "anchor us to a center" (Fulgham, 1995, p. 261). The creation of rituals emphasizes identity within a group or organization and serves as a method for indoctrinating new members. This "becoming" process allows the new member to become a part of the organization's collective membership (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 265) and confers status and knowledge on that individual. Ceremony is the next aspect. Like rituals, ceremony is used to create "order,

clarity, and predictability" (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 254). At first glance, ceremonies and rituals may seem to be identical. However, ceremonies contrast with rituals in that, while rituals are daily routines or frequent occurrences, ceremonies are usually considered to be "episodic, grander, and more elaborate" than rituals (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 268). Ceremonies can consist of several intertwined rituals and are generally used to mark significant events or transitions. Such ceremonies serve four essential purposes or roles: a) socialization; b) stabilization; c) reassurance; and d) communication with external constituencies. The use of ceremonies to induct new members, build enthusiasm, or maintain faith in organizations is a vital piece of any organizational culture and represents a central symbolic act in most circumstances. The final aspect (metaphor, humor, and play) helps organizations frame symbols in the abstract and create familiarity with strange or unfamiliar concepts. They draw people together, capture subtle themes, and socialize members of all levels.

The notion of *culture* is captured in the symbolic frame and provides an important understanding of how organizational leaders may enact their roles in changing the organization. Enacting a leadership role in a complex organization may involve employing several distinct yet related frames. This role imbues an individual with authority and power in the structural and political frames. They may view their work through the lens of the human resource frame as they try to create a unique culture in their school organizations. These several frames will help the researcher better understand the position of the leader inside the culture of their organization. As Bolman and Deal (2021) stated, life in organizations is "packed with activities and happenings that can be interpreted in a number of ways" (p. 316). Interpreting decisions and actions,

whether evaluative, organizational, or strategic, through the four frames will aid in understanding and categorizing leadership behaviors. This will be particularly useful in identifying and understanding the dimensions of leadership associated with culture.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework provides a foundation for constructing knowledge, rationalizing the study, and grounding the focus of the literature review (Grant & Osanloo, 2016). A *theoretical framework* is defined as "a structure that guides research by relying on formal theory . . . constructed by using an established, coherent explanation of certain phenomena and relationships" (Eisenhart, 1991, p. 205). The creation of a theoretical framework accomplishes three main purposes. First, it comprises the theory or theories that serve as the foundation for thinking about understanding or conducting research on a topic. Second, it defines the concepts that are relevant to the topic. Third, it clarifies the definitions that apply to the topic (Grant & Osanloo, 2016). Additionally, the theoretical framework provides a lens from which the rationalization and structure for the study can be developed and supported (Grant & Osanloo, 2016). A theoretical framework is best defined as the answer to two key questions: "1) What is the problem or question? and 2) Why is your approach to solving the problem or answering the question feasible?" (Lederman & Lederman, 2015).

The theoretical framework that will help guide the current research study is Schein's (1992) Organizational Cultural Model (Schein & Schein, 2017). Schein's model distinguishes between *macro* cultures such as nations, occupations, or large organizations, and *micro* cultures, including small organizations or subcultures. Schein and Schein (2017) used this macro/micro tension to create their "dynamic definition of

culture," which may be used to understand various organizations and groups (p. 6). Their model separated culture into three levels of observability, ranging from most to least observable: a) artifacts; b) espoused beliefs and values; and c) basic underlying assumptions (Schein & Schein, 2017, p. 18). The first level, articles, represented the most concrete manifestations of culture. Although Schein and Schein (2017) recognized their meaning may be subjective and based on membership in the organization, they referred to artifacts as the "visible products of the group and reflections or manifestations of culture" (p. 17). According to Deal and Peterson (2016), artifacts or symbols are "the outward manifestation of those things we cannot comprehend on a rational level" (p. 37). The second level of observability of culture is espoused beliefs and values, which focus on the guiding operational principles of an organization. According to Schein and Schein (2017), espoused beliefs and values are typically used as an effective way of communicating during times of change or crisis. Additionally, beliefs and values serve a "normative or moral function" (Schein & Schein, 2017, p. 20) and help organizations determine how to deal with emerging circumstances or as a way to initiate new members into the organization. Over time, repeated successful application of beliefs and values may transform them into underlying assumptions. The third and least observable level of the organizational culture model is basic underlying assumptions, which represent the *why* of the organization and are often difficult to articulate or explain. Furthermore, they are difficult to identify unless the observer is immersed in the specific organizational culture (Martin, 2006). Assumptions are displayed through the "perceptions, thoughts, emotions, and behaviors of members of the organization" (Hatch, 2004, p. 662). Consequently, they represent the most significant obstacle to organizational change. The

three levels of their cultural model provide insight into how culture may be exhibited, observed, and described.

Schein's model underpins the current study in several key aspects (Schein & Schein, 2017). First, it frames the research questions, creating an inherent connection between the theory and the experiences of the participants. These connections are outlined in Table 2.1. Second, as discussed in Chapter Three, the model provides a level of initial, deductive coding that creates a framework for understanding the connections between avenues of inquiry and the overarching framework of the theory. Finally, the application of the model to the research allows the participants and researcher to explore the connections between higher levels of observability and their potential for deeper meaning within the context of each individual school. This presents an opportunity for inductive coding in the research and reflective practice during the interview process.

Table 2.1

Research Questions and Schein's Model

Level	Research Questions
Level 1: Artifacts	How do school leaders at long-standing private boarding schools ensure that their school's identity and mission are reflected in its curriculum, culture, and policies? How do heads of school at long-standing private boarding schools enact their respective role in shaping and leading the culture of the school?
Level 2: Espoused Beliefs and Values	How do school leaders at long-standing private boarding schools define and articulate the identity and mission of their respective institutions? How do school leaders at long-standing private boarding schools ensure that their school's identity and mission are reflected in its curriculum, culture, and policies?

Table 2.1 (continued)

Level	Research Questions
Level 3: Underlying Assumptions	How do heads of school at long-standing private boarding schools balance the cultural preservation of tradition with the need for change? How do heads of school at long-standing private boarding schools enact their respective role in shaping and leading the culture of the school?

Culture stands as the most important, yet often least understood, dimension of organizational leadership. Schein and Schein (2017) defined *culture* as "learned patterns of beliefs, values, assumptions, and behavioral norms that manifest themselves at different levels of observability" (p. 2). Similarly, Deal and Peterson (2016) identified culture as a "cohesive and shared set of values" among members of an organization (p. 18). More succinctly, culture refers to "the way we do things around here" (Barth, 2001, p. 39). Culture, whether formal or informal, is a pervasive characteristic of organizations and, by its very nature, is viewed as stable and enduring; and consequently, it may have a profound influence on how organizational leaders enact their roles. However, scholars recognize that leaders may influence the nature and direction of organizational culture to either affirm or change the way work is done. Understanding this dynamic relationship is of critical importance to organizational scholars and practitioners who are concerned with how leaders may enhance their efficacy.

According to Schein (1992), culture is "A pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems." Deal and

Kennedy (1982) summarized culture as "the way we do things around here" (p, 49). This concept of culture recognizes it as both a process and a product. Cultures exist, but they are also the result of constant renewal, revision, and adjustment. As the membership of an organization changes, so does the culture—although transmission of culture is also a vital aspect of leadership.

The use of the symbolic frame's understanding of culture in this study may help to explain the leadership behaviors of individuals serving as headmasters of private, independent boarding schools because of the nature of this leadership. Private schools are insulated from many of the external factors that influence leadership decision-making in public schools. This allows heads of schools a great deal more latitude in shaping the type of organization they oversee. These types of schools also may place a greater emphasis on belonging to the inside group, and they can celebrate traditions and symbols with a more significant, enduring impact than public schools. Exploring the heads of school's understanding of their organizational cultures presents an opportunity to understand their actions and behaviors from a perspective of tradition and cultural positioning within the framework of the changing nature of education. Lastly, the longevity of private school leadership lends itself to the study of culture and the change of culture across time through the lens of a single individual rather than exploring culture change across the tenure of multiple leaders, as may be the case in examining leadership in public schools.

Leadership and Culture

Schein and Schein (2017) defined leadership as "the management of culture" (p. 125). Although organizational leaders may endeavor to create a new culture in a young organization, they may also be responsible for maintaining an established culture in a

more mature organization. In addition, leaders may be responsible for managing change in an organization's culture when circumstances require adaptation. In this regard, they may have to attempt to influence its underlying subcultures, particularly with regard to identifying aspects of the culture that are dysfunctional or out of sync, and then focus their influence on the evolution of its culture. Schein and Schein (2017) described this interaction between leaders and culture using two key mechanisms: a) primary embedding mechanisms; and b) secondary reinforcement and stabilizing mechanisms. The primary embedding mechanisms are most often defined as *climate* and represent visible artifacts of the emerging, changing culture. They most often deal with human interaction and the promotion or demotion of certain behaviors or qualities. Secondary reinforcement and stabilizing mechanisms are equally visible artifacts, but they may be more "difficult to interpret without insider knowledge obtained from observing leaders' actual behaviors" (Schein & Schein, 2017, pp. 250-251). These artifacts may be manifested in the organizational aspects that a leader may emphasize, including its physical characteristics as well as the stories told about the founding, work, and shared beliefs and values. Schein and Schein (2017) also noted that leaders are often engaged in "creating culture, whether or not they explicitly intend to and whether or not they are aware of their impact" (p. 204). Deal and Peterson (1999) additionally provided some insight into this process in describing the key functions of leadership, including reading the culture's history and current condition, uncovering and articulating core values, and working to fashion a positive context. They viewed the role of school leaders in guiding and crafting culture as "pervasive" (Deal & Peterson, 1994), and posited that school

leaders may “develop the foundation for change and success” (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 5).

Culture and Climate

Building on the seminal work of Lewin et al. (1939) on the nature of organizational climate, scholars posited that climate and culture are inextricably intertwined. While culture is pervasive and stable, climate consists of the “day to day feelings of the members of the organization” (Martin, 2006, p. 2). *Climate* has been further defined as the perception of formal and informal organizational policies, practices, procedures, and routines (Schneider et al., 2011). Schein and Schein (2017) noted that climate provides contextual behavioral evidence for culture and those behaviors form the basis for employees’ conclusions about the values and beliefs that characterize their organization. Consequently, the examination of practices, policies, and procedures links climate to culture and, importantly, allows researchers to connect the behaviors of an organization and its leaders to the values and beliefs (i.e., culture) of the organization as a whole. In this regard, researchers may describe the conscious effort of leaders to change climate through shifts in practices, policies, and procedures that may result in a shift in an organization’s culture, or, as Barth (2001) said, “the way we do things around here” (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 272). As leadership behaviors guide a shift in the climate and daily operations of organizations, their reinforcement and positive outcomes in the long term may influence the changes in an organization’s culture.

Peterson and Deal (2002) raised a compelling question: "Can culture be shaped by leadership, or is it so amorphous and unalterable that it has a life of its own” (p. 21)? Understanding how leaders may affirm or alter an organization’s culture has been

addressed by scholars who have articulated definitions and models that categorize levels of observability and speculate on the dynamic relationship with climate and context.

Understanding Leadership and Culture in Private Boarding Schools

A Brief History of Boarding Schools. At the turn of the twentieth century, boarding schools in the United States began to provide educational havens for children, primarily the sons and daughters of the upper class. These schools presented alternatives to the rise of industrial education and the public school system taking shape in the Northeast United States. They also represented a logical socializing progression from the private tutors and private day schools that educated the sons of wealthy families in the early United States (Levine, 1980). The rise of public secondary schools necessitated a shift in the form and function of many private schools, and these institutions began to focus solely on preparation for college studies. This shift moved several of the oldest institutions from local academies to private, residential communities with distinct housing and campus environments. According to Baltzell (1958), the rise of boarding schools helped fulfill two critical functions in industrializing America: a) forming a cohesive national elite to manage an increasingly complex economic system; and b) integrating the established upper class with the *nouveau riche* of the industrial era. The growth of private schools to fulfill this role began in the colonial era but found its heyday at the peak of the Industrial Revolution in the late 1800s.

There is some debate on the oldest boarding schools in the United States, as several schools predate the nation's founding. Linden Hall, in Pennsylvania, is the oldest continuously operating boarding school for girls, having opened its doors in 1746 (Linden Hall, 2022). Governor’s Academy, located in Massachusetts, also claims the title

of the oldest continuously operating boarding school, commencing operations in 1763 (Governor's Academy, 2022). The oldest incorporated "American" boarding school is Phillips Academy Andover, however, founded in 1778 in Andover, Massachusetts (Phillips, 2022). While each of these schools claims a variation on the title of "oldest boarding school," by 1800, there were 14 private boarding schools in the United States, and by 1900, there were 134. The number of boarding schools increased alongside the growing presence of private educational institutions throughout the twentieth century, creating a substantial presence in American education in the modern era.

Today, there are 30,492 private schools in the United States, serving 4.65 million students and employing nearly 600,000 teachers (NCES, 2020). Approximately 300 schools offer formal, on-campus boarding programs (Kennedy, 2023). While there are boarding schools in 47 of the 50 states, nearly one-third of these institutions are located in New England, with 92 schools centered in the six-state region (Kennedy, 2023). These schools range widely in size, age, mission, and structure, including elementary, middle, and secondary educational institutions. According to the Association of Independent Schools in New England (AISNE), out of the 92 boarding schools in New England, 76 serve high school populations; 65 of these schools are secular, while 11 hold an official religious affiliation (AISNE, 2022).

According to Levine (1980), "very little historical or sociological research has been done into American private schools" (p. 63). Cookson and Persell (1985) agreed, stating, "There is virtually no systematic research on the specific topic of elite boarding schools" (p. 20). Despite the intervening years, this dearth of organized research, especially into boarding schools, continued. This could be, as Cookson and Persell (1985)

asserted, because “less than 10 percent of American high school students attend private school and only 20 to 30 percent of those are enrolled in private residential schools” (p. 8). Much of the research into private schools has focused on the broad swath of private schools rather than differentiating between the various types of private institutions populating this educational field. Furthermore, the bulk of extant research centers around school choice and the decision about whether to send students to private schools instead of public ones. Consequently, a detailed ethnographic framework is necessary to focus on both the setting and understanding the influence of leaders serving as heads in boarding schools.

School Culture in Context

Despite its tremendous daily impact on individual stakeholders, school culture is often considered a prerequisite and potential obstacle to change instead of a stand-alone phenomenon. In order to better understand school culture, it may be helpful to briefly discuss how it is defined and operationalized. Schein and Schein (2017) defined *culture* as “learned patterns of beliefs, values, assumptions, and behavioral norms that manifest themselves at different levels of observability” (p. 2). Barth (2001) described culture as “the way we do things around here” (p. 7). Deal and Peterson (2016) stated that “culture crops up in response to persisting conditions, novel changes, challenging losses, and enduring ambiguous or paradoxical puzzles” (p. 223). Further, Deal and Peterson (2016) identified culture as a “cohesive and shared set of values” (p. 18). As noted previously, Fiore (2000) emphasized the importance of personal connection in school cultures, stating that “embedded in school culture is an understanding of the need for schools to operate as communities.” This approach, emphasizing the importance of communal

values and shared interactive experiences, provides a foundation for Deal and Peterson's (2016) categorization of the elements of culture. Framing these cultural elements is crucial to operationalizing the term "culture" and exploring individual variations in cultures across settings.

Operationalizing School Culture

Private schools celebrate, value, and display culture in myriad ways unique to the individual school despite shared commonalities in broad categorical areas. In order to explore the culture of these schools and the interaction between leadership and that culture, specific cultural terms must be defined and explored. Deal and Peterson's *Shaping School Culture* (2016) was used in this study to accomplish this categorization, definition, and explanation. Importantly, their work aligns with Schein and Schein's (2017) definition of *micro-cultures* and the dynamic existence of culture as a whole.

Schein and Schein (2017) separated culture into three levels of observability ranging from most to least observable: a) artifacts; b) espoused beliefs and values; and c) basic underlying assumptions (p. 18). Schein and Schein (2017) ordered these levels from most observable to least observable, focusing on the meaning and importance of each.

Deal and Peterson (2016) further broke down school cultures into six observable elements: a) artifacts, architecture, and routines; b) history; c) myth, vision, and values; d) stories and tales; e) rituals; and f) ceremonies and traditions. When placed within the framework of Schein's model, elements a, b, e, and f exist within artifacts, while elements c and d complement espoused beliefs and values. Each of these elements represents a tangible aspect of cultural identity in a school, and each can be vital to

understanding and explaining what makes the school operate well, which connects to underlying assumptions.

In order to operationally define culture, this research focused on each of the following six observable elements (Deal & Peterson, 2016) to facilitate uncovering the underlying assumptions that drive leaders and cultures forward or hold them in place.

Artifacts, Architecture, and Routines. Schools utilize symbols to communicate a variety of values and identifying characteristics. Schein and Schein (2017) referred to *artifacts* as the "visible products of the group," as well as the "climate" or manifestation of culture (p. 17). According to Deal and Peterson (2016), symbols are "the outward manifestation of those things we cannot comprehend on a rational level" (p. 37). Symbols create tangible representations of cultural values, beliefs, and identity. Deal and Peterson (2016) identified a "panoply" of potential symbols in schools (p. 38). However, this study focused on several symbols as critical indicators of school culture, including a) mission statements; b) websites and digital media; c) symbols of diversity; d) mascots; e) historical artifacts and collections; f) the physical plant; and g) "Living Logos" (p. 44).

School mission statements allow independent schools to differentiate themselves from peers and competitors in a way that public schools do not. A public school may publish core values or portraits of graduates that exemplify their ideal goals. However, they remain beholden to their geographic orientation, while private boarding schools draw from local, national, and international applicant pools. These mission statements present an opportunity to state a school's values and its reason for operation; they enhance the school's ability to attract and retain students, faculty, and staff, and provide a framework for understanding the *why* as well as the *who* and *how* of a school's operation.

Mission statements often guide schools' actions and serve as both a marketing tool and an internal check on the operations and outcomes of the institution as a whole. If a school does not link its actions with its mission, it will likely face internal and external challenges from stakeholders and potentially from community members.

The mission statement also creates an opportunity to delve into the culture of a school from its published core tenets. These mission statements are often prominently displayed on school websites, banners, and promotional materials, and referenced in curriculum guides or descriptions of a school's history and purpose. Exploring mission statements through discussion with school leaders enhances the understanding of the connection between a school's mission and the action taken by leadership in the school's operation.

Websites and digital media allow schools to create outward-facing messaging and easily accessible information. These modern tools are used to promote schools in myriad ways and to give current and potential stakeholders access to a school's values, mission, and identity through digital interaction.

Diversity is commonly stated as a value held by many schools, and symbols of that diversity are often prominently displayed. Symbols of diversity include art; flags representing national, cultural, or identity heritage; affinity groups; clubs; and student organizations. How a school approaches diversity in its community emphasizes a cultural identity.

Mascots are often the most easily recognizable symbol of a school to outsiders, but they hold special meaning for individuals and groups within a school. As "the spirit that welds a school into an organic whole," the mascot often represents intangible values

or “skills, traits, and attitudes” the school wishes to display (Deal & Peterson, 2016, p. 41). The mascot itself may be serious or even silly, but the meaning behind the mascot serves as an identifying and unifying factor in school culture.

As discussed previously, history and tradition hold great importance, especially in private schools. Schools celebrate their history through artifacts and collections, which tie “past and present together in a shared culture” (Deal & Peterson, 2016, p. 41).

Schein and Schein (2017) and Deal and Peterson (2016) highlighted architecture and the physical environment as manifestations of culture in schools. Schein and Schein (2017) stated that it is essential to remember that this level of the culture is “both easy to observe and very difficult to decipher” (p. 18). While different schools often have similar physical features like athletic fields, classroom buildings, and dormitories, the meaning and purpose of these facilities may differ tremendously. Deal and Peterson (2016) concurred, adding that “the physical setting and architecture of schools speak volumes about cultural beliefs and values” (p. 41). Further, Cutler (1989, as cited in Deal and Peterson, 2016, p. 41-42) added that the “architecture of schools reflects important beliefs as to what schools are about and the meaning they hold for students and for the community.” Private schools, especially boarding schools with defined campuses and “territories,” reflect such importance consistently, and the architecture of the buildings creates a defined aesthetic that separates the school from the surrounding community or differentiates it from its peers.

Finally, Deal and Peterson (2016) explained that leaders operate as tangible symbols or “Living Logos” (p. 44) in their daily routines. Embodying this role often involves signaling priorities and values through daily interactions and behaviors. Schein

and Schein (2017) asserted that “all group learning ultimately reflects someone’s original beliefs and values” (p. 19), and in the case of small private schools, that person is most often the head of school. Their work lives are “placards, posters, and banners of symbolic meaning” (Deal & Peterson, 2016, p. 44). To understand a school's culture, it is necessary to observe and explore the beliefs, words, actions, and values a leader conveys in their work.

History and Rituals. The impact of history and rituals in private schools is tremendous. Schools display their history in architecture, convocation and baccalaureate rituals, school meetings, named facilities, awards ceremonies, and celebrations of major milestones or endowed positions. Schools often reference their history and tradition to justify current and future actions. As Deal and Peterson (2016) explained, “What went before not only shapes the present, but outlines the future” (p. 51). In this, history is often leveraged as a means of “reducing anxiety in critical areas” (Schein & Schein, 2017, p. 20). Rituals are used to “act out in a collective setting what otherwise is unseen and hard to touch or comprehend” (Deal & Peterson, 2016, p. 100). Rituals connect and import meaning into daily activities and social events. In schools, rituals like morning meetings, advisory groups, Founder’s Days, or convocation ceremonies convey the importance of community, history, or structure to the school’s stakeholders. The use of history and rituals ties the current form of the school to its core values and traditional beliefs, creating a communal understanding of what it means to be a member of that group.

Myth, Vision, and Values. Schools in general, and private schools in particular, take their founding myths very seriously. Deal and Peterson (2016) stated that a school’s “purpose and mission serve as the bedrock of its culture” and that the “embedded values

are often embodied in a unique founding story or myth" (p. 66). This myth or vision of identity connects and "orients a group's worldview and channels behavior" (p. 68) while providing a compass for organizational members.

School mission statements represent the core guiding principles of the school in question. Often featured prominently on school websites (Deal & Peterson, 2016, p. 38), school mission statements outline the school's core purpose and attempt to communicate the *why* of the school to those inside and outside the school community. These narratives are built both as origin stories and in response to organizational change or crisis and represent the "hub of a school's culture" (Deal & Peterson, 2016, p. 70). Further, these myths and identifying core characteristics allow different schools to define success and purpose within their specific organizational context. Schein (1992) noted that the "definitions of success reflect the purposes of organizations . . . and vary from place to place."

These myths and visions provide the context for an organization's values. Values are the "conscious expressions of what an organization stands for" (Deal & Peterson, 2016, p. 75). Values aid in focusing attention and defining success, and they are deeper and more lasting than goals or outcomes. In a school, values provide the "symbolic glue" (Deal & Peterson, 2016, p. 75) that holds the school together and provides a framework for understanding decisions and behaviors on both an organizational and individual level.

Stories and Tales. While myths represent grand stories and founding principles, everyday stories "carry values, convey morals, describe solutions to dilemmas, and shape the patchwork of culture" (Deal & Peterson, 2016, pp. 81-82). Heads of school, as

leaders, carry the responsibility of keeping these stories "positive and long-lasting" (p. 82) as a function of affirming and changing their respective school culture.

Because of the mundane nature of many of these stories, they are often put aside or forgotten, but they serve a vital function in communicating both inside and outside of an organization. Inside stories "reinforce a unique identity . . . that of 'who we are and what we stand for'" while outside stories "communicate special brands or images to customers and the general public" (Deal & Peterson, 2016, pp. 83-84). School leaders use stories to communicate their messages and provide solutions to challenges that arise in their specific schools.

Ceremonies and Traditions. Ceremonies are "complex, culturally sanctioned occasions" that schools use to connect the community, induct new members, celebrate cultural events or segments of the population, and recognize change (Deal & Peterson, 2016, p. 112). More than daily rituals, ceremonies and traditions represent major planned events in a school's calendar. They represent opportunities for leaders to affirm values or display traditional cultural artifacts and behaviors.

Ceremonies can take many forms, but regardless of their genesis or the rituals inherent within their pageantry, they are "carefully designed and arranged to communicate and solidify values, celebrate core accomplishments, and build a close-fitting sense of community" (Deal & Peterson, 2016, p. 121).

Traditions represent bookmarks in a school's lifetime. They are specific to each organization and can energize culture while providing symbolism for participants and observers. Heads of school use these traditions to "mark special occasions, reinforce values, and perpetuate rituals that provide connection" (Deal & Peterson, 2016, p. 123).

These events encompass many of the ceremonies and rituals that schools use to affirm or change their cultures. The incorporation of ceremonies and traditions, along with their accompanying rituals, allows schools to showcase what they hold important and significant, and to build a coordinated and unified identity and purpose.

Espoused Beliefs and Values. Beliefs and values determine and explain why schools "do what they do" (Schein & Schein, 2017, p. 19). Additionally, these attributes serve a "normative or moral function" and help organizations determine how to deal with circumstances or initiate new membership (Schein & Schein, 2017, p. 20). The purpose behind beliefs, vision, and values is often expressed through myths about the organization. Deal and Peterson (2016) referred to *myth* as the anchor that "orients the group's worldview and channels behavior" (p. 68). This myth, or core story, incorporates the history, purpose, and direction of the school, or the "story behind the school" (Deal & Peterson, 2016, p. 70) that presents the purpose for the school's existence.

Purpose and mission drive the programming and tangible expressions of the school's "soul" (Deal & Peterson, 2016, p. 71), often referred to as the *values* of the school. A school's values are conscious expressions of the organization's purpose (Deal & Peterson, 2016, p. 75). Such expression represents a tangible espousal of mission-in-action. It includes the structure of the academic plan, as well as diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work, student health and wellness work, athletic or artistic scheduling, and even the pacing of the day itself. Values "capture a deeper sense of the school's priorities" (Deal & Peterson, 2016, p. 75) and define the parameters for success in the context of the institution. Schein and Schein (2017) noted that values can often define "desired" behavior rather than "observed" behavior (pp. 20-21) and distinguishing

between the two is vital to understanding the difference between aspirational values and the core ideological aspects of the school itself. To get to the root of this concept, it is necessary to explore the underlying assumptions and beliefs that form these espoused values. The role of a leader in these situations is to understand, challenge, and shape existent assumptions and merge aspiration with action in pursuit of the success defined by the values of the school.

Independent School Leadership

There are several schools of thought around leadership worth exploring in order to grasp the challenges that independent school heads face. Because of the lack of specific research into private school leadership, there is some extrapolation in this section from public school research and widely researched educational leadership behaviors. The first is an approach to understanding culture and change in educational organizations. The second is an examination of transformational leadership and empowerment, and the third is an exploration of the roles of leaders within a school.

Understanding Culture and Change. Heads of school are faced with numerous daily challenges, and it requires a deep understanding of the school they lead to effectively address these challenges in a manner consistent with the culture and identity of the school. Deal and Peterson (2016) referred to these challenges as "deeper issues agitating beneath a seemingly rational veneer of activity" (p. 223). Because these challenges can take various forms, Deal and Peterson (2016) advised framing the strategies for approaching them through the lens of *culture*. School leaders must consistently ask three questions about any issue: 1) *What is the culture of the school now?*; 2) *What can we do to strengthen aspects of the culture that already fit peoples'*

images of an ideal school?; and 3) *What can be done to change or reshape existing cultural values and ways when we see a need for a new bearing?* (Deal & Peterson, 2016, p. 223).

Effective leaders rely on their comprehension of school culture to make decisions and successfully guide a school (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Leithwood & Reihl, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2001). When leaders understand a school's current culture, they can begin to work at addressing the need for change. They cannot, of course, simply will change into existence through desire alone. Successful school heads are those who disperse the leadership powers for change among various stakeholders, including "staff and community members and, at times, students" (Spillane et al., 2004, p. 227). Heads of school must actively seek to engage the community in change and address challenges as they arise; this is a categorical imperative and requires an understanding of transformational leadership practices.

Transformational Leadership and Empowerment. Transformational leadership practices center on shared values and emotions, building capacities for action, and increased commitment to organizational goals (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009). Sergiovanni (2001) stated that transformational leadership involves leaders and followers working together to achieve "higher-level goals." Understanding, communicating, and changing culture is an iterative process and will likely involve missteps and mistakes. Bass (1998) asserted that transformational leaders accept those mistakes as part of the process, and then work to foster growth, understanding, and empowerment. This empowerment is vital in the environment of independent schools, which are often smaller and more intimate, and where issues of culture often take a front seat in the climate of the school.

Heads of school cannot impact culture from an isolated position, nor can they enact lasting change without support. They must engage with stakeholders and empower community members to take action. According to Harris (2004), empowering teachers and other staff with leadership responsibilities is correlated with an increased capacity for change and growth. School heads who actively empower the school community, including students themselves, lead to a more engaged and democratic culture (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009). For heads of school to tackle the challenges of cultural development, maintenance, and change, they must invest their stakeholders with the tools to participate in the necessary process of culture building.

The Roles of a Leader. Deal and Peterson (2016) outlined eight personae that school leaders of all positions inhabit: a) Historian; b) Anthropological Sleuth; c) Visionary: d) Icon or Champion; e) Potter; f) Poet; g) Actor; and h) Healer. While individual heads of school may embody one or more of these informal roles, they are not limited to those in formal leadership positions. In fact, these roles "can be assumed by principals, teachers, staff members, custodians, parents, community members, and others" (Deal & Peterson, 2016, p. 227). Several of these roles fit the expected performance and engagement of school heads, however, and it is the responsibility of the head to cultivate the other leadership functions in others, as described previously in the empowerment section.

The roles that lend themselves to the job functions of a formal head of school are those of the Visionary, the Icon, the Potter, and the Healer. Visionaries "communicate communal hopes and wishes, capturing the essence of the school's purpose and mission" (Deal & Peterson, 2016, p. 229). As an Icon, heads of school's "interests and actions send

powerful messages," and they perform the role of a cultural teacher (Deal & Peterson, 2016, p. 230). The Potter role "contours the elements of school culture" (Deal & Peterson, 2016, p. 234), and school leaders do this in various ways in their daily interactions. Finally, heads of school play a crucial role in "healing" the culture during times of challenge or change. This includes marking beginnings and endings and recognizing "key transitions in the occupational lives of staff members" (Deal & Peterson, 2016, pp. 243-244). Heads of school who effectively embrace these roles find themselves in a position to shape the culture of their school in meaningful ways.

Summary

To understand the role of private school heads in influencing culture, it is vital to explore both forms of leadership and displays of culture through the context of private boarding schools. Framing organizational culture through Schein's (1992) Organizational Cultural Model provides the theoretical framework for exploring both the structure and content of school cultures and the influence of heads of school on their respective organizations. Chapter Three provides a discussion of the research design and methods proposed to explore this phenomenon.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This study sought to understand and articulate the leadership role of heads of school serving in independent, secular boarding secondary schools in New England concerning shaping organizational culture. Research questions guiding the exploratory study included the following:

1. How do school leaders at long-standing private boarding schools define and articulate the identity and mission of their respective institutions?
2. How do school leaders at long-standing private boarding schools ensure that their school's identity and mission are reflected in its curriculum, culture, and policies?
3. How do heads of school at long-standing private boarding schools enact their respective role in shaping and leading the culture of the school?
4. How do heads of school at long-standing private boarding schools balance the cultural preservation of tradition with the need for change?

Research Design

The study employed the descriptive phenomenological process of Colaizzi (1978) to explore and analyze the data. As Tracy (2020) stated, “Phenomenology is focused on richly describing the experiential essence of human experiences” (p. 64). This approach, emphasizing both the subjectivity of experience and the necessity of applying one’s own experience when interpreting data, is rooted in the existential-phenomenology espoused by Merleau-Ponty (1962). Merleau-Ponty (1962) asserted that all phenomenology is subjective because of the meaning people gave to their perceptions of the world and,

therefore, the experiences of the researcher and the participants inherently color the interpretation of the data. Due the subjective nature of phenomenology, the researcher used bracketing to emphasize the responses of the interviewees, rather than the interpretation of their words. Bracketing is a process, initially conceived by existential phenomenologist Edmund Husserl, through which the researcher takes stock of their own biases and habits in an attempt to separate them from the research in an effort to gain purer insight (Tracy, 2020, p. 65). This approach emphasized the experiences of those interviewed by utilizing semi-structured interview procedures to explore the perceptions and subjective experiences of heads of school within the context of their environments and allowed their responses to tell the story of cultural leadership through the lens of those engaged in the practice, using their own words to establish emergent themes. Because of this descriptive framing, a qualitative approach, focused on understanding the self-explored leadership role of school heads in affirming and changing school cultures, was best suited to the nature of the study.

As Maxwell (2013) stated, “The data in a qualitative study can include virtually anything that you see, hear, or that is otherwise communicated to you while conducting the study” (p. 87). These data often included verbal responses, linguistic choices, body language, and other nonverbal cues gleaned from the subjects. Maxwell (2013) posited that researchers are “the research instrument,” and their tools were their senses. This approach meant the interpretation of the input determined how data were collected and organized.

Consequently, a structured approach to qualitative research, as explained by Miles and Huberman (1994), was the most appropriate structure. The selection of this approach

was informed by the multiple-site characteristics of the proposed research and the flexibility it allowed in organizing data in thematic and topical areas. Maxwell (2013) indicated that structured or semi-structured approaches "can help ensure the comparability of data across individual settings . . . and are particularly useful in answering questions that deal with differences between people or settings" (p. 88).

While the explicit goal was not to explore differences between styles of leadership and culture building, it was anticipated that different leaders would understand their individual organizational cultures in diverse ways and behave appropriately. However, it was also likely that some common characteristics of heads of school in affirming or changing their respective school cultures would be found.

Research Setting and Context

This research focused on the setting of boarding schools in New England. There are roughly 90 of these schools, comprising nearly one-third of all such institutions nationwide. There is wide variation in the types of boarding schools in the region, with some having religious affiliation or foundations, some built on single-sex educational models, and still others that offer residential options that are not campus-based. While some of these schools approach the size of many public schools, the average enrollment of boarding schools is in the 300-400 student range.

This study was limited to all-gender boarding schools without religious affiliation in New England, with fewer than 400 students. Such limitations served several purposes. First, focusing on secular institutions eliminated the religious imperative of moral and personal development, instead allowing for a focus on mission statements absent an appeal to a higher authority. Second, capping the size of the school at 400, while

seemingly somewhat arbitrary, was a relatively common delineation between “small” and “large” boarding schools. This focus on smaller schools allowed the research to center on heads of school who were more likely to be personally engaged with the daily lives of their community. As schools grew, it became more likely that intermediary administrators would fill the daily role of life and culture creation on the micro-scale of the organization, potentially limiting the cultural and professional impact of the heads of school in their role. Finally, the focus on boarding schools was driven by the *Bubble* atmosphere that residential settings provided, increasing the potential impact of leaders on the organization's culture and limiting the number of outside influences.

Data Collection

This section includes the process for identifying schools and interviewing subjects, as well as the proposed technological tools. Interview style, procedures, and the limited use of documentary data are also covered, followed by a discussion of ethical procedures and the role of the researcher in conducting the study. Finally, the section closes with an examination of potential biases and the methods for accounting for and addressing these biases.

Interviews were conducted using videoconferencing technology to capture the audio and video for transcription. This medium facilitated interviews despite the dispersed geographic locations of schools in the region and provided the ability to record and transcribe the interviews digitally. After recording the conversations, *Descript*, an AI-based transcription software, was used to aid in the automatic transcription and check the accuracy of interview transcripts.

Initial research identified 33 schools that represented appropriate potential settings for research. These schools fit the size, all-gender, and geographical parameters to form the potential pool of interviewees. Each school also had a formal head of school, responsible for the school's leadership and guidance. This strategy addressed several potential issues of sampling, including response, rapport, and intentionality.

Following IRB approval, emails were sent to each of the heads of the 33 institutions soliciting their participation and outlining the purpose and goals of the research. A limit of eight respondents satisfied two critical goals for the work. First, it provided at least "five richly researched cases as a minimum for multiple-case sampling adequacy," established by Miles et al. (2014, p. 34). Second, it also kept the collection, coding, and documentation of responses manageable for a deep, descriptive exploration of the material. Interviews then commenced during the early winter of 2024, consciously avoiding the scramble of the end-of-year ceremonies and rituals engaged in by private schools.

Interviews

In-depth, semistructured interviews were conducted to collect and examine the perceptions of culture and leadership in culture creation from the perspective of heads of school in independent boarding schools in New England. The interview script and sample questions are included in Appendix D. Because these interviews were "more organic in nature" and mimicked a discoursive approach to questioning, they presented the opportunity for "more emic, emergent understandings to blossom" during the interview process (Tracy, 2020, pp. 157-158). This exploratory and descriptive process aimed to shed light on the perceptions and actions of private school heads through their reflections.

While various aspects of the private school world have been the subject of scholarly research, examinations of individual perspectives of heads of school on culture and their role in its creation and transmission are underrepresented in the literature. This process aligned with Weiss (1994) and his assertion that "in the qualitative interview, the respondent provides information while the interviewer, as a representative of the study, is responsible for directing the respondent to the topics that matter to the study" (p. 8). The use of a semistructured, open-ended interview design limited the volume of data and simplified analytical methods (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 16) while also allowing the participants to "tell stories rather than just answer questions" (Tracy, 2020, p. 159).

Potential participants were contacted by email with an introductory explanation of the research, including its purposes and possible outcomes. The email script for potential participants is included in Appendix A. Potential participants were asked to confirm their participation via email (Appendix E) and invited to select a time from a password locked *Calendly* link and read the Informed Consent Form, included in Appendix C. Then, interviews were self-scheduled based on the participants' availability and professional schedule. Any communication between the initial recruitment email and the interview was conducted through email to document the process for future validity and ethical practice checks. Each participant scheduled an individual videoconference session using a scheduling application to avoid any crossover and to maintain anonymity from other potential participants. Follow-up emails confirming appointments were sent as needed to ensure smooth scheduling and organized conversations around the timeframe that fit the needs of the participants.

As described previously, the approach to the interview work was conducted both inductively and deductively. Such a process afforded the researcher the opportunity to refine the questions based on the feedback and interactions of each successive interview. This combination of interview question testing and iterative induction helped ensure that the research tools captured the stories and perspectives accurately and clearly. This most clearly impacted the clarification process and helped anticipate questions or potential confusion points for interviewees. While questions were not rewritten along the way, there were contextual opportunities provided, especially when it came to framing the questions around external influences on the culture of a school (Questions 8 and 9). Earlier respondents focused on various cultural events, which allowed the researcher to contextualize the questions for later interviews. This process also provided the ability to showcase the experiences and perspectives of the interviewees in a concerted approach that maintained the freedom to answer questions as the interviewee processed them—without a specific agenda or desired topical direction beyond the guiding theme.

Because the research centered on the lived experiences and perceptions of the heads of school concerning their leadership role in cultural development, their narratives intentionally drove both emergent topics and follow-up questions throughout the interview. Using semistructured interview techniques also allowed a preview of the general areas of discourse with the participants, which increased both initial rapport and comfort with the interview process.

Interview questions were conceptualized within the framework of the broad research questions and approached thematically rather than in a more formally structured

question-by-question interview. Table 3.1 connects the research questions with the sample questions and establishes the thematic elements of the interview.

Table 3.1

Interview Questions and Research Questions

Research Question	Sample Interview Questions
How do school leaders at long-standing private boarding schools define and articulate the identity and mission of their respective institutions?	How would you describe the identity and mission of your school? What key values or elements of your school's identity do you emphasize in communications with various stakeholders?
How do school leaders at long-standing private boarding schools ensure that their school's identity and mission are reflected in its curriculum, culture, and policies?	In what ways does the mission statement shape the policies and procedures at your school? How do you ensure the mission and identity of the school align with the curriculum and programs?
How do heads of school at long-standing private boarding schools enact their respective role in shaping and leading the culture of the school?	What concrete actions or behaviors do you engage in to shape the culture of your school? What role do you play in maintaining or evolving traditions and rituals in your school? How do you balance preserving institutional tradition while also adapting to current needs regarding school culture? When facing pressure to change elements of your school's culture, how do you decide what to maintain versus change?

The broad question topics and research goals were included in the informed consent form to allow for any clarifying questions during initial conversations and to further develop a collaborative and positive relationship. Structuring the topics of questions and then allowing freedom and space for active, conversational reflection

provided the ability to explore the perspectives and perceptions of school heads specific to their context within the parameters of the study's goals. Weiss (1994) described the purposes of utilizing interviews, namely "developing detailed descriptions," "integrating multiple perspectives," and "bridging intersubjectivities" (pp. 9-10) in order to draw out emergent themes around leadership and culture.

The choice to focus on heads of school in small, independent boarding schools in New England served several purposes. The size of the school, under 400 students, increased the potential impact of cultural leadership and the likelihood of daily interaction between the head of the school and stakeholders across the spectrum. It also increased the burden of direct and impactful leadership on the head of the school, thereby creating situations where significant behaviors were likely to occur. The target for responses was at least six, with a goal of eight, heads of private boarding schools whose organizations fit the aforementioned description. The final number (i.e. eight) allowed for sufficient variety in potential leadership style, school purpose, and population to get targeted, purposive sampling. The final number of total interviews was eight, which achieved the target for subjects in the study.

Krathwohl & Smith (2005) recommended running a pilot study in situations that allow it. Due to the timing of the school year, the nature of the inquiry, and the limited sample pool, a complete pilot study was not feasible in this study. However, the questions were field tested with peers and experts in similar positions to the heads of school on the potential participant list to ensure that the questions and approach were appropriate for the interview process. The field test involved asking peers to read and interpret the questions, allowing for adjustments to wording as necessary. This feedback resulted in a

reordering of some of the questions, including adding the follow-up questions that made up the final interview script (Appendix D). It also provided a better idea of the timing and structure of the interviews, which helped to connect interview questions topically.

Sampling Procedure

Because of the intentionality of both geographic limitations and qualitative sampling, the researcher initially intended to use a combination of the primary method, purposive sampling was used to select the pool of appropriate institutions, and convenience sampling was used in selecting heads. In this context, a purposive approach guaranteed that respondents came from both the position and school type established as the vehicles to explore the phenomenon of leadership in this context. Convenience sampling was used in selecting the first eight respondents who expressed a willingness to engage in the interview process. This process, as well as its benefits and challenges, is discussed in successive paragraphs. As a tertiary research method, snowball or chain-referral sampling was prepared for use. The use of snowball sampling has helped researchers gain access to groups that otherwise present higher barriers to entry, either via membership limitations or the nature of the work involved. However, as discussed later in the section, snowball sampling was not needed due to the success of the initial purposive/convenience chain of inquiry.

In purposive sampling, the researcher aims to select a respondent population that would yield applicable data for the study. According to Etikan (2016), the researcher "decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience" (p. 2). Unlike the broad, random samples used in quantitative analysis, Krathwohl and Smith (2005) stated that

purposive sampling involved “choosing those cases from which one can learn the most” (p. 128). Purposive sampling accomplished this objective by consciously selecting settings and subjects that could provide rich narratives and deepen the knowledge of the field (Patton, 2002). Because of the specialized knowledge in this field, expert sampling—a form of purposive sampling—was chosen as the primary tool for determining potential study participants. Expert sampling calls for “experts in a particular field to be the subjects of the purposive sampling” (Etikan, 2016, p. 3). The focus on the experiences of heads of school, an area established as one that is currently not heavily researched, lent itself to this form of purposive sampling.

Convenience sampling is a form of non-probability sampling where participants are selected based on their accessibility or proximity to the research. A common form of convenience sampling is the use of volunteers, as was the case in this research study. This has the advantage of being efficient and simple to implement (Jager et al., 2017). In this study, the geographic spread of schools and the relatively small pool of potential respondents led to the intentional use of volunteer respondents. Convenience sampling lacks generalizability and often leads to estimation bias (Jager et al., 20117), where generalizable assumptions are made about a population that may not be represented effectively in the data. The potential for sampling bias is inherent in convenience sampling, as it does not guarantee a representative sample of a population. However, in a study where there is both a paucity of literature and barriers to entry, convenience sampling provided an opportunity to gather experiential reflections from heads of appropriately situated schools who are willing to speak to someone about their work. The nature of this exploratory study, focusing on stories and lived experiences, mitigated this

issue of generalizability as it was not designed to generate data for generalization. The focus of the study on individuals in a specific role, Heads of schools, and in a purposively defined set of schools, created the opportunity for future research, but also necessitated a willing pool of volunteers. The use of a validated interview script, as discussed previously, helped to ensure questions were focused on personal experience and therefore were not focused on generalizable or broad areas. This, according to Stratton (2021), helps to alleviate some of the bias concerns inherent to convenience sampling.

If necessary to supplement the convenience sampling outlined previously, the plan was to engage in a snowball technique using positive respondents to suggest future potential participants in completing the data collection phase of the study. Coleman (1958) identified snowball sampling as an effective method for accessing social networks of hard-to-reach populations. In this study, the group in question, heads of school, was a group that was challenging to access without introduction. This secondary approach provided the opportunity for an outside researcher to access this otherwise difficult-to-penetrate social network (Sudman & Kalton, 1964). However, initial purposive sampling yielded the results necessary to conduct the study; so, while the potential for future research presents an opportunity for snowball sampling, it was not necessary in this initial research.

The final sample was eight heads of schools that fit the initial, purposive criteria. As discussed previously, these criteria included schools in New England, with under 400 students, no religious foundations (secular), and a formal on-campus boarding program. The IRB-approved sampling method was used to define the parameters of the research study and to define the pool of potential participants. The potential pool of 24 schools

yielded 10 positive respondents (30.3%), but the eight were chosen using the convenience sampling method discussed previously. The other two were informed that they would be contacted if any of the first eight participants withdrew from the study, though none did. The small pool of potential respondents led the researcher to take precautions in protecting participant anonymity, which is discussed in the Ethical Procedures section of this chapter. As noted previously, convenience sampling can result in sampling bias by highlighting "eager participants," though this was mitigated somewhat by the potential pool size and the exploratory nature of this study.

Document Collection and Use

In the current study, document data about the schools and the settings were gleaned from publicly available sources, including school websites and mission statements, the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), the Association of Independent Schools in New England (AISNE), and *Niche* profiles, among other sources. Document sources provided context for the positionality of the heads of school as well as the demography and history of the school. The documentation helped enrich narratives but was not analyzed as stand-alone data nor quoted in a way that would provide opportunities for deductive disclosure. These data were necessary to frame some of the thematic elements of broad school missions and vision concerning culture, and to provide context for the settings and history of the schools that were examined.

Ethical Procedures

Due to the personal nature of face-to-face interviews, even when conducted via videoconferencing technology, several vital ethical considerations had to be addressed in framing this work. The significant ethical considerations inherent to this study were

procedural, including informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, and avoidance of deductive disclosure.

To ensure informed consent, each respondent received an IRB-approved form outlining the interview's goals, procedures, and data utilization (Appendix C). This form included any potential risks identified during the design of the research process and information about the safe storage of data and identifiable information. Upon indication of interest, the forms were sent out to all participants during the initial prospective communication to allow them to read the forms and ask any questions before deciding whether to participate. This stage also included potential topics of inquiry to inform the participants and give them an opportunity to consider the content of their participation, as well as the process of it.

Participants were encouraged to ruminate on their practice, apply their own lens to the questions, and take the question in whatever direction they deemed appropriate, keeping with the nature of emergent research. Because of the interpretivist paradigm guiding this research, participants could and did read different meanings into the questions than the researcher initially intended, potentially producing discourse, and increasing the process's authenticity.

Data was collected through video recording and transcription. These two items were stored separately via password-protected university cloud storage, per IRB requirements, with a third identifier key stored separately from either data source. This process increased the level of anonymity and confidentiality for participants in the interview process and after their participation was completed. The storage and transcription of data occurred via password-protected hard drives and software, including

Descript and *Dedoose*, as discussed previously, to avoid any unintentional dissemination of data or identifying information. The Zoom sessions were recorded in both audio and video. Because the researcher's presence within the industry presented the probability of knowing one or more respondents, only the audio files were used for transcription purposes. This was done intentionally to focus on the words and stories of the interviewees, rather than to incorporate visual cues. Because of the potential for familiarity with some respondents, accurately transcribing the words and not the overall impressions of the researcher as to the responses helped to limit any interpretational bias or misinterpretation of physical cues due to greater or lesser familiarity with interviewees. This, combined with the validity testing of the interview questions, helped to create a level of uniformity in the interview process that explored the experiences and practices of the interviewed Heads rather than incorporating interpretive data in the interview transcripts.

Each participant and their respective school were assigned a letter identifier in keeping with the letter-based identification process utilized by many researchers. An exception to confidentiality and disclosure was noted in potential instances of mandatory reporting due to the nature of the work of schools. Mandatory reporting exists when working with vulnerable populations in circumstances such as reportable diseases or conditions, child or elder abuse, or a situation where an individual poses a danger to themselves or others. This exception was outlined in the informed consent form and the opening conversation prior to beginning to record the interview.

Because of the nature of the research and the relatively small sample size and pool of potential participants, great care was taken to generalize and limit secondary

documentary data usage to avoid the possibility of deductive disclosure. Additionally, tenures were generalized, when possible, as the potential pool was further defined by geographic descriptions of the school's location and size. Deductive disclosure occurs when indirect identification of participants is possible through the use and parsing of known data points (Sales & Folkman, 2000). To limit the possibility of deductive disclosure, specific data such as the region of a state or the founding date of a school was omitted or broadened (e.g., from "Western Massachusetts" to "Massachusetts" or 1835 to "the early 1800s"). While it is impossible to eliminate the potentiality of deductive disclosure, it was minimized as thoroughly as possible, and the potential for deductive disclosure was included in informed consent forms and addressed verbally during the pre-interview discussion.

In a population this size, and with the boarding school world being relatively interconnected, it was also certain that the researcher would know some of the potential participants either professionally or by reputation. The researcher has been employed in the boarding school world for the last 15 years and has encountered numerous administrators in this field through professional development, coaching, or the employment process. This potential familiarity was mitigated by testing the validity of questions and employing reflective journaling, bracketing of interview data, and utilizing audio for transcription rather than video to limit any potential interpretive behaviors based on familiarity with personal behaviors or responses. Instead, any kind of physical notes were limited to journaling and noted in reflection.

It was vital to the quality of this research and the researcher's professional practice ethical care was taken with the interview subjects and their data. The private

school world is, as noted, small, and ensuring that the work accurately captured the experiences of the heads of school with whom the researcher spoke and protecting their privacy was vital to establishing the validity and ethicality of this research and the researcher's future career prospects. As such, great care was taken to maintain the confidentiality of the material and the participants. This protection was designed to ensure that schools and school leaders were not identifiable through either explicit or implicit deduction within the confines of mandatory reporting as previously noted.

Researcher Bias

It was necessary to examine, understand, and work to separate the researcher's own biases and preconceived notions from the research itself. Because of the inherent connection between the researcher's role as the creator of the instrumentation and the deliverer of the questioning, as well as their employment in the field being studied. The researcher continually assessed his process for biases of interview or interpretation, including his initial coding in keeping with the deductive and inductive process outlined previously.

The researcher employed the role of "facilitator" in this study, asking questions and recording answers, but not engaging in participatory or detached observation. The nature of the interviews allowed the participants words and experiences to surface while limiting the bias or impact of the researcher's interpretation of events, questions, and responses. The role of the researcher in qualitative research is to attempt to assess the thoughts and feelings of participants (Sutton & Austin, 2015), and this approach led the researcher to take a role of delivering questions and asking for expansion rather than engaging in a more conversational approach with participants. This was accompanied by

a reflective journaling process where the researcher examined the interview process and explored their impressions and the conducting of the interview.

Journaling and "notes to self" were used to catalog and examine the researcher's thoughts or impressions during the interviews (Meloy, 1994) to identify any ambiguities or challenges that surfaced during the process. Along with the previously discussed instrumentation testing and question-piloting, this process ensured that any researcher bias was accounted for during the process and appropriately addressed. The journaling process was reflective and took place immediately after the interviews. This was done while the recording files were uploaded, and the initial digital transcription was processing. This allowed the researcher to reflect on fresh memories and the immediate process. The journals were handwritten notes and covered several areas. The first reflection question answered was always "how did that go?" and the researcher explored the overall experience, the give-and-take of the questioning process, and whether the planned questions were answered. Then, the researcher wrote notes around the responsiveness and overall engagement of the participants, including whether follow-up prompting was needed to expand upon answers, clarifying questions asked by the participants, or whether answers to particular questions explored the content of successive questions, rendering them redundant. The researcher further proceeded to noting any major ideas, content pieces, or quotations that stuck out in the interview. These notes were later used to build some of the common themes, especially that of "The Bubble" and its unique context for leadership. In several journal entries, the researcher noted the "boat" or "bus" metaphor was used by Heads to describe the organization, and that the concept of a vehicle heading to a destination was one that multiple participants

referenced as a model for their leadership. Earlier journaling also helped inform later interviews in an iterative manner. For example, when discussing external challenges to leadership, early participants discussed COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement. This helped the researcher to clarify for later participants that external challenges could mean something major and concrete like these events, but that it could also mean things that they felt impacted the operation of their school without being part of their organization. Several participants expressed that they were not sure if "that was what [the researcher] was looking for" in an answer, and this was noted in journal entries as well. This helped the researcher to clarify the nature of an exploratory study for participants and give them the freedom to direct the responses based on their own experiences.

The journaling process helped the researcher to examine both the conduct and content of the interviews, take notes on their own feelings and thoughts, and establish common patterns in responses. It was also used to help bracket the material, especially Step 4 of Colaizzi's (1978) process, as outlined below. This involved noting emerging themes between interviews, as described above, as well as Step 3, where the researcher made note of meaning and worked to eliminate presuppositions as much as possible. Some of these notes, focusing on potential thematic elements or useful quotations to revisit, were used in Chapters 4 and 5 when generating the inductive codes and selecting similar or related quotations to use when supporting theme generation and explanation.

As an insider in the independent boarding school community, having been employed in the field for the last 15 years in various capacities, I was aware that I needed to remain as neutral as possible with my interactions and responses and assume the role

of a researcher, rather than a participant. While this insider status certainly aided in finding participants willing to speak with me, it also presented the challenge of limiting my own participation in the interviews and attempting to serve as a research instrument rather than a participant. This included the challenge of setting aside my own views on leadership or experiences with boarding schools. Doing so was difficult, however, and so I used the literature on leadership to help craft my interview questions in a manner that would allow participants to discuss their experiences while minimizing the impact of my own experiences. Journaling allowed me to reflect on the process, ensure that I was consistent in my approach to interviews, and to note any places where I could clarify without inserting my own interpretations of questions into the interviews.

Journaling also helped me to note ideas or practices that stuck out to me as useful for my own development and practice. This included Dodson's "highlight reel" as discussed in Chapter 4, as a useful way to synthesize and track tangible progress in a leadership role. Additionally, Christensen and Baker mentioned the lack of formal review tools within their schools for their own performance, and this caused me to contemplate how I would collect and utilize feedback in a leadership role. There were also instances where I felt heads were utilizing practices that I would not, and noting this in the journal helped me to recognize potential bias in the interpretation of data in these situations. Making note of these instances in the journal, while not included in the recounting or thematic organization of responses, informed the Chapter 5 sections of Recommendations for Practice and Recommendations for Future Research, as they provided areas where potential programmatic or policy ideas could be implemented, or further inquiry appeared warranted.

In attempting to both describe and explore the perceptions and experiences of private school heads, it was necessary to apply Husserlian bracketing to the questioning and examination of leadership. Bracketing is a process, initially conceived by existential phenomenologist Edmund Husserl, through which researchers take stock of their own biases and habits in an attempt to separate them from the research in order to gain purer insight (Tracy, 2020, p. 65). While most researchers agree that removing all bias or experience is, at best, impractical and most likely impossible, taking stock of and understanding personal biases and preconceived notions is a central task of phenomenological research. To maximize the voices of participants while minimizing researcher bias in the findings, this study employed a semi-structured, open-ended interview to explore the perceptions and subjective experiences of heads of school within the context of their environments. This design allowed the researcher to tell the story of cultural leadership through the lens of those engaged in the practice, using their own words to establish emergent themes.

Data Analysis

The research consisted of interviews with the six heads of school identified through purposive sampling. Individual interviews were conducted with participants via recorded videoconferences and transcribed. In keeping with the process of descriptive phenomenological analysis, Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step process for data analysis was used. As Morrow et al. (2015) explained, these steps were:

1. Familiarization: The researcher familiarized himself with the data by reading through the participant accounts several times.

2. Identifying significant statements: The researcher identified all statements in the accounts that were of direct relevance to the phenomenon under investigation.
3. Formulating meanings: The researcher identified meanings relevant to the phenomenon that arose from a careful consideration of the significant statements. The researcher reflexively *bracketed* his presuppositions to stick closely to the phenomenon as experienced.
4. Clustering themes: The researcher clustered the identified meanings into themes that were common across all accounts. Again, bracketing of presuppositions was crucial, especially to avoid any potential influence of existing theory.
5. Developing an exhaustive description: The researcher wrote a full and inclusive description of the phenomenon, incorporating all the themes produced in Step 4.
6. Producing the fundamental structure: The researcher condensed the exhaustive description down to a short, dense statement that captured only those aspects deemed essential to the structure of the phenomenon.
7. Seeking verification of the fundamental structure: The researcher returned the fundamental structure statement to all participants to ask whether it captured their experience. The researcher may have gone back and modify earlier steps in the analysis in light of this feedback. However, this did not occur in this study, as the fundamental structure relied on individual stories and statements.

Because of the nature of this research, it was necessary to allow the data to tell the story. Utilizing Colaizzi's (1978) method in this study resulted in a "concise yet all-encompassing description of the phenomenon under study, validated by the participants that created it" (Morrow et al., 2015). This approach was inductive by nature, allowing

the researcher to improve and adjust the process as the research continued. However, the opportunity presented by framing the work within Schein's Organizational Model (2017) allowed for deductive initial coding, based upon the three layers of organizational culture identified in the model.

This study employed multi-stage coding in keeping with Maxwell (2013) and the goal of rearranging the data "into categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category" and to "aid in the development of theoretical concepts" (p. 106). Tracy (2020) described the first stage of coding as "naming" (p. 214) or "primary cycle coding" (p. 219), and this stage consisted of crafting descriptive labels in a deductive manner by framing the guiding questions within the three levels of Schein's (2017) model: a) artifacts; b) espoused beliefs and values; and c) underlying assumptions. These levels are described in detail in Chapter Two.

The initial deductive work in this study was performed by framing initial subcodes within each level of the model. Artifacts were subcoded with symbols, language, rituals, ceremonies, stories, and the physical environment. Espoused beliefs and values included the subcodes of mission, vision, diversity statements, ethos, motto, and stated commitments. Lastly, in basic underlying assumptions, subcodes included unquestioned beliefs, perceptions, norms, and expectations. These initial deductive codes framed the broader research questions within the model and allowed for a deeper analysis of the broader conversations with the participating school heads about their practice.

Then, secondary stage coding, or "assembling the initial codes into a working skeleton" (Tracy, 2020, p. 214), involved attempting to tease out themes from the initially coded responses. These second-level codes aided in the attempt to "explain, theorize, and

synthesize" the emerging narrative (Tracy, 2020, p. 220). Provisional or open coding were used, which involved reading the data and developing categories based on what data "seemed most important" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 106). This deductive-inductive process helped ground the conversations in the theory while exploring the avenues of practice that the heads focused on in their responses.

Creative multi-stage coding categories were a "means of sorting the descriptive data" collected "so that the material bearing on a given topic could be physically separated from other data" (Bodan & Biklen, 2003, p. 161, as cited in Maxwell, 2013, p. 107), and using them allowed for critical examination of sets of data and narrative to establish themes or commonalities for writing. The process resulted in what Maxwell (2013) described as "substantive" categories (p. 107). Unlike the initial codes, these secondary categories were descriptive in their function and did not imply an abstract theory. As previously discussed, the creation of these categories, based on the contents of responses, was inductive, and was used to develop a "more general theory of what's going on" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 108). Utilizing the constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2004, as cited in Tracy, 2020, p. 220) to analyze the coding and adjust or recode helped to categorize and code items that initially did not fit within the deductively created first codes. This "circular, iterative, and reflexive" (Tracy, 2020, p. 220) approach to coding kept the data centered in the work and aligned with Colaizzi's (1978) seven steps of phenomenological analysis.

After the data were coded into substantive categories, exemplars and vignettes were used to illustrate the connections exposed through coding. Exemplars and vignettes serve similar functions, but Tracy (2020) distinguished them in how they emerged

through analysis. Exemplars were found through coding, a process Tracy (2020) described as "finding jewels through an ongoing process" (p. 245) and represented a single quotation or data point operating independently to convey meaning. Conversely, vignettes were constructed or reconstructed by "purposefully collecting and piecing together data" (Tracy, 2020, p. 246) to illustrate a series of events or an aspect of the coded theme in connection with or amalgamating multiple exemplars or responses. This process helped develop a thick description of the experiences and perceptions of the participants and explore the connecting themes and experiences that made the stories substantive.

In crafting the interviews, the researcher developed a typology around leadership concepts and behaviors related to affirming and changing school culture. The researcher drew on his own experiences in independent schools and the theoretical framework Schein (1992) established around artifacts, espoused values, and basic underlying assumptions to craft the semistructured interview questions. Utilizing these "big bin" concepts helped to frame the ideas, behaviors, and perceptions of the participants within the language of the study. Such concepts presented an opportunity for some pre-framing work in a deductive manner and some crafting of initial first-level codes for data analysis, as well as the inductive process of allowing the stories and experiences of the school heads to guide the final product.

Role of the Researcher

In exploring the researcher's own background and experiences in preparation for the study, the researcher realized that he most closely identified with Bolman and Deal's (2021) human resource framework, as explored in Chapter Two. The human side of

organizational leadership has always appealed to the researcher's sensibilities, and he was aware that his likely bias for human-centered leadership could potentially affect his interpretation of events and experiences. The researcher is indeed still formulating what style of leader he himself is in practice, so he consciously approached the interviews as learning opportunities for research and future work. His professional experience in independent schools and background in education provided him with a solid practical understanding of these institutions' mechanics and general dynamics.

After earning his M.Ed. in Secondary Education from Boston College, the researcher began teaching in private schools. He has worked in independent boarding schools for the last 13 years, serving in teaching and administrative roles, coaching, residential life, and coordinating various aspects of student-focused programming. Multiple heads of school and administrators with different cultural backgrounds, academic philosophies, and educational pedagogical approaches helped to frame his understanding of boarding school life. Throughout his career, the researcher developed curriculum, trained and mentored faculty, and worked on various issues of operation under the direction of heads of school in coordination with Boards of Trustees committees and school-based task groups.

The researcher's employment in independent boarding schools offered both opportunities and potential for bias in interpretation and interaction. The world of independent boarding schools is small, and the parameters established during the purposive sampling process described previously narrowed the pool further. Of the 92 boarding schools in New England, only 33 fit the criteria, including schools where the researcher knew employees or heads of school. This was beneficial in providing a level

of credentialing that helped gain access to these participants and allowed the researcher to explore their experiences with them as an insider to the industry, if not the specific school. As discussed above, however, it also presented the possibility of firsthand knowledge of participants' personalities, leadership styles, or practices. As such, the researcher worked to embody the role of facilitator, rather than observant or participant. This entailed crafting questions, testing them with similarly situated peers and administrators, revising them to clarify wording and eliminate overlap or redundancy, and to help order them in a way that made logical sense for the flow of the interviews. In doing this, the researcher also worked to create and test interview questions that allowed for expansion and for the experiences of the participants to drive the conversation and the narrative. Once the interviews were in progress, the researcher allowed the heads to speak freely and provided only minimal direction or clarification as requested. This facilitated the telling of stories and sharing of experiences through the lens of the participant, rather than giving the researcher leeway to drive the interview in a specific direction or to influence answers. Once the interviews concluded, the researcher used the journaling method described in this chapter to catalog impressions, reflect on the process, and explore any iterative aspects of the interview for continued improvement. The researcher used this to anticipate potential points of confusion or clarification that did not arise during the field-testing process. The researcher aimed to minimize his own impact on the words and stories of the participants by employing this facilitator role, rather than leveraging his experiences or industry knowledge to guide interviews in a specific direction.

During his Ph.D. coursework, the researcher explored and worked with each aspect of this study. He completed the core leadership courses in the Ph.D. track and explored the frames of leadership, as well as research on practice and situational leadership. He developed and tested interview questions with peers, conducted coding and analytical work with the results, and refined the interview questions based on feedback from peer experts. Many of these courses involved piloting aspects of the research study outlined in this work. The researcher spent significant time building an understanding of the research to maximize his comfort with in-depth qualitative research and the methods and theories underpinning the practice.

His professional, academic, and personal experiences have given him access to many aspects of the school leadership pantheon, including team development and leadership, curriculum and instructional design, DEI work and policymaking, assessment strategies, and coordination of small and large teams of educators. These activities touched on all aspects of the professional culture of a school and were impacted in some manner by school culture and leadership behaviors. The researcher's insight into the *ground level* of the work provided a vocabularic and experiential framework for conversations around cultural and organizational leadership.

Summary

This chapter outlined the research design, proposed sampling methods, and theoretical framework guiding the study. The research began with narrowing the list of potential schools to define the scope of the study, then followed the path of data collection, interview procedures, and analytical tools used in conducting the study. Semistructured interviews allowed the participants to guide the direction of the answers

in a manner that facilitated openness and personalization, which allowed the researcher to frame the responses within the theoretically based questions being asked. Chapter Four will share the interview results, organized based on the aforementioned coding system.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

This exploratory study utilized in-depth, semistructured interviews with eight heads of small, independent boarding schools in New England. The researcher sought to probe and articulate the leadership role of heads of school serving in independent, secular boarding secondary schools in New England concerning shaping organizational culture. All heads were currently operating in their role at their respective institution, and each school had fewer than 400 students enrolled. Pseudonyms were assigned by the researcher by using a name generator to generate last names for each head and their school. For the heads, an online "pen name generator" was used, while schools were named using a similar online tool designed for a similar purpose. Each head's pseudonym was chosen to match the letter of the last name with the coded interview number (A-H) and limited to a last name to avoid any disclosure of terminal degree status, while school names were chosen at random from a generated list. This was done to organize responses while maintaining an appropriate level of anonymity.

This study was guided by four overarching research questions:

1. How do school leaders at long-standing private boarding schools define and articulate the identity and mission of their respective institutions?
2. How do school leaders at long-standing private boarding schools ensure that their school's identity and mission are reflected in its curriculum, culture, and policies?
3. How do heads of school at long-standing private boarding schools enact their respective role in shaping and leading the culture of the school?

4. How do heads of school at long-standing private boarding schools balance the cultural preservation of tradition with the need for change?

Throughout this chapter, the interview findings are presented chronologically, beginning with the first interview conducted and concluding with the last interview conducted during the data collection phase. For each school, the researcher presented, organized, and then reported data that are aligned with a summary of the resulting themes that emerged from the transcription data.

Organization

At the beginning of each section under each heading, the researcher prepared a school description as the first subheading to provide relevant geographic and demographic context based on publicly available data and school websites, as discussed in Chapter Three. Because of the relatively small pool of schools, descriptive data were generalized to provide overall context while limiting easily identifiable school information. This included omitting the schools' published missions or core values, as they could be identifiable information. The subsequent subheadings are organized by common theme. Each common theme contains elements of Schein's (1992) Organizational Cultural Model and may encompass Artifacts, Espoused Beliefs and Values, and Underlying Assumptions. Not all of the resulting themes were present in each school district case, but the majority of themes were present in all eight interviews.

Finally, the quotations are direct, but they have been edited to remove the verbal tics or repetitive wording inherent in spoken interviews and to clarify unclear quotations. In places where there was a substantial content gap between statements, ellipses were

used to note this adjustment, and in places where context was needed, brackets were inserted to clarify topics.

Preliminary Analysis

The eight heads who were interviewed do not inherently present a cross-section of the population of heads of smaller independent boarding schools in New England. Of the eight interviewees, six were male and two were female. This is in line with stereotypical and historical expectations but may not be aligned with the current percentages of all heads in the pool. The average tenure of an independent school head is currently around eleven years (NAIS, 2020), but the average of the interviewees was just over six-and-a-half years, which represented a lower level of overall experience. Several heads took their roles during or after the COVID-19 pandemic or the major social movements of the mid-2010s, which may have impacted their impressions of the major external challenges to school leadership that were experienced by longer-tenured heads. This reflected the overall trends established by the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) in their 2020 survey of heads, which noted that the rate of turnover is increasing and that tenures were becoming shorter in the 2010s (NAIS, 2020).

Findings from the eight interviews were initially cataloged using the initial research question-interview question connection outlined by Table 3.1 in Chapter Three. Responses were initially collected for each interview before being organized by a three-stage coding process. First, responses were deductively coded based on the framework of Schein's (1992) Organizational Cultural Model, highlighting a) artifacts; b) espoused beliefs and values; and c) underlying assumptions. These deductive codes framed the research questions (Table 2.1), and the research questions were used to draft the

interview questions (Table 3.1). The discussion and responses were then collated by code, and each code was explored individually to establish emergent themes. This was accomplished using *Dedoose*, a common coding and thematic organizational research software tool. *Dedoose* was used to create excerpts which fit the initial codes of Schein's (1992) model, as described above. Then, excerpts were collected and pieced together in secondary codes, using an inductive process that combined the interview excerpts and journal notes.

The initially coded responses were inductively coded by examining themes that emerged both within and across the initial codes and utilizing researcher journaling to supplement organizational processes. This stage combined the responses across the initial codes into topically similar themes. The result of this combination was the creation of secondary codes based on thematic connections between responses, where eight overall codes framed the excerpts in the context of practice. Each of these codes included multiple levels of Schein's (1992) original model. The resulting secondary codes were a) daily habits and actions; b) communicating mission and vision; c) challenges and change; d) faculty and staff growth; e) stakeholder buy-in; f) human nature and social interactions; g) reflective leadership; and h) balancing tradition and progress. Daily habits and actions encompassed conversations about mission and identity, examinations of curriculum and facilities, and the various rituals and interactions that the heads noted they participated in on a regular basis. Communicating mission and vision focused on the messages and language used by the heads to explain the *why* of their school to both internal and external audiences, with a particular emphasis on the various types of communication that occurred in these interactions. Challenges and change took both the

espoused beliefs around change and the impact of external forces on the culture and actions of the heads and their institutions and connected them to the overall path of the school under the head's leadership. Faculty and staff growth and stakeholder buy-in arose from discussions with the heads concerning their approach to investing in the human side of their institution, with a particular focus on how they supported and advanced the agency of their employees and how they brought disparate members of the community together. Human nature and social interactions were derived from some of the noted challenges that boarding schools faced in relation to both the implementation of technology and the political discourse in the United States around social and educational issues; this was one of the only codes that directly tied to some of the underlying assumptions from which the heads operated. Finally, reflective leadership and balancing tradition and progress represented an amalgamation of some of the historical aspects of the artifacts, including rituals, ceremonies, and stories, and the espoused beliefs and values of various heads about the role of transformation and modernization in institutional identity.

During tertiary coding, the inductive secondary codes were amalgamated into common themes that connected the concepts from the initial deductive codes and the subsequent inductive codes into clearer habits and experiences that explored the leadership experiences of the interviewed heads. This was aimed at bringing the theoretical framing of the primary and secondary coding to the level of practice and transferability to commonly understood aspects of organizational leadership. The condensation of conceptual codes into practical themes resulted in eight "common" themes of leadership within the context of independent boarding schools. These eight

themes took some of the language from the secondary codes and made it more accessible to practitioners and researchers by reframing the language of the codes. Lastly, the eight common themes were condensed into three enduring themes that encompassed the material in the common themes. These themes were aimed at outlining the practice of leadership through the lenses of the participants in the study. The themes focused on aspects of leadership that might be recognizable in any context, but especially in schools, more specifically in boarding schools. Leadership in schools represented a combination of *walking the walk*, communicating mission and vision, investing in people, and reflective leadership. Embracing change and honoring tradition encompassed societal challenges to leadership and balancing tradition and progress. Leadership in the *Bubble* addressed the unique circumstances of life in boarding school, using a common term for campus communities in the industry (*Bubble*) as a nod to the environment and atmosphere that boarding school community members experience, and includes the common themes of leadership in the *Bubble* and unifying organizational purpose. This third theme, especially, centered the research within the context of the field of study and provided the researcher the opportunity to outline and explore what differentiates leadership in these schools from other schools and organizations. Table 4.1, in the Summary section of this chapter, illustrates the stages of this process.

Each common theme resulted from a combination of preliminary deductive codes and the subsequent inductive secondary codes. The themes incorporated several aspects of practice encompassing the roles and actions of the heads as espoused through their responses. While each of the schools fits the parameters established in Chapter Three, there was wide variation in both the operating behaviors and stated goals of the schools.

Across each of the interviews, however, there was a great deal of overlap in both the stated behaviors of school leaders, the events or traditions they referenced, and their espousal of the *how* and *why* of their daily practice, as well as some commonality in the underlying assumptions about education that guided their leadership style.

Interview A: Eastwood School

Eastwood is located in Connecticut and has been in operation for roughly 100 years. The campus is more than 100 acres, and the school emphasizes the engagement and learning opportunities presented by its physical space. Just over 200 students attend the school, and the school advertises a student-to-teacher ratio of under 6:1, focusing on small class sizes and interpersonal interactions. The school is led by the head of school, "Arnold," supported by two senior-level administrators with various areas of focus and employs 60 faculty members. Arnold has been in his role for over 10 years and is one of the longest-serving heads interviewed in this study. There was no available information about the Board of Trustees or its composition. The school noted that it awards nearly $1.5 million in financial aid to roughly 25% of its student body on a yearly basis. Eastwood notes that five to ten percent of its students are international boarding students from over ten different countries. The school offers 15 different interscholastic sports programs, with 20 varsity teams and a variety of junior varsity and intramural offerings. There is also a heavy emphasis on the arts, with three full performances yearly, and numerous scholastic offerings for visual and performing arts. There was no clear mention of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) or similar initiatives undertaken by the school, and it was not mentioned within the strategic plan of the school.

Communicating Mission and Vision

One of the most important things a leader can do in any school is to communicate the mission and goals of the institution effectively to individuals within and around the community. Arnold said that, while the mission of his school was clear and articulable, it was also important to communicate their mission consistently: “Our messaging is pretty consistent across the board. That's one of the reasons that I was drawn to come here. [It] was the clarity of its mission and the fact that it's not hard to remember, and it's pretty easy to articulate to everyone.” Arnold further explored the interaction between communicating mission and vision, saying:

> The mission is very clear for the school, so I think it's really articulating a vision about what [it means] in this day and age. So, if we say the mission is pretty constant to what we do and it's fairly clear, well, what does that mean with the particular group of students we have right now in the day and age that we live in? What are the challenges our kids today are facing that they didn't perhaps face 20 years ago? Certainly, post pandemic, [there have] been a lot of things that have changed. Helping our kids understand how to navigate everything from A.I. (Artificial Intelligence) to social media, [and so on]. It's articulating a vision for that.

This work to align practice with guiding principles also carried over into communication with parents and various stakeholders, whom Arnold felt were generally supportive of attempts to change how the school pursued its mission. He noted, “Our constituency, especially if you talk about alums and parents, [believe that the] traditional way is not the right way. We're open to change.” This openness to change, framed within the mission of

the school, allowed Arnold and his team to pursue a variety of programs and initiatives that he felt would be impossible at larger or more traditional schools.

Societal Challenges to Leadership

When asked about important challenges Arnold encountered during his tenure at Eastwood School, he noted that the COVID-19 pandemic was an existential challenge: "The biggest [challenge] that I faced, that probably most heads faced, was the pandemic" and the changes that it forced in practice and behavior. He emphasized the importance of in-person learning, especially for various populations of students, stating, "We knew we wanted our kids back on our campus because *everybody* wanted their kids on campus. But the reality is, for our population of students, remote learning is a [total] disaster. Couldn't be worse." This was multiplied by the fact that there was "nowhere we could [see as] an example of how to do it and do it right," with regard to bringing students back to campus safely.

While the initial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was jarring, Arnold also emphasized that it has taken nearly four years for the school to recover a sense of normalcy: "I think we're starting to [make] headway this year. We are finding that kids are better acclimated to the routine of schooling and better acclimated to what is appropriate behavior, both with my peers and with faculty. But I think that a lot of effort's gone into that." The lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on student interactions and development colored a great deal of the conversation around culture and school operations.

The second major, systemic issue that Arnold discussed was the legalization of marijuana in his state and many of the surrounding states. The issue brought the school

into conflict with parents and students because some of the students' parents believe that marijuana helps their children with anxiety, and they say they do not have a problem with it. Arnold noted that, despite some of the evidence around the benefits of marijuana for adult anxiety, the issue of teen use and school policy centered on development. He said, "We're saying no [to the legalization of marijuana]. Actually, in terms of brain development, [it] is horrible. It's really gonna have a negative impact." Aligning school policies with the changing landscape of legality and morality presented a major touchpoint for Eastwood's administrative team but provided them with the opportunity to collaborate with stakeholders and their greater community. As a result, Eastwood changed many of policies that they had in place and the way the school addresses things. Arnold noted that the school administration is "trying to be far more understanding of our students while not being a culture of tolerance for [marijuana]." He expressed that it was important to understand how to "better support [the] kids to not make poor decisions, and to understand [that] everything around them is probably telling them [that drugs are] okay."

When it came to facing these challenges, Arnold emphasized the collaborative nature of leadership, stating, "we have those challenges where you say there's not an easy solution, which is a lot of what I deal with. [There are] dilemmas, rather than anything else, which don't have solutions *per se*; it's helping everybody on the team think through that collectively and make sure it resonates with our vision and our values and our mission." Arnold's approach to team building placed a premium on finding and empowering his team to operate effectively.

Investing in People

Arnold spoke at length about both the faculty and student experience at Eastwood, especially regarding the necessity of human investment. The process of conversation and guidance for faculty, combined with the interpersonal interactions he recalled, led to the feeling that "you have an ongoing conversation with a faculty member over the course of two or three years, and you can see their growth. You can see the growth of them as a teacher. You can see that some of the things that you've made as suggestions are now just part of their practice." This development-centered approach also permeated interactions with graduates, an aspect of the role that Arnold really appreciated. He recalled a conversation with a young alumnus:

> I remember one of the girls we met with, oh, man, she'd [given me a] run for my money. She was there with some other faculty member, and she said, "I just want to apologize. I know that I was a complete [witch] to all of you." And she said, "You never gave up on me. You never gave up on me. I just want to tell you. I'm on the honor roll in college. I'm doing really well. I want to be an architect. I've already been thinking about graduate school. Let me tell you all the things that are going well." And she said, "The fact that you never gave up no matter how much grief I gave you just changed my life."

Arnold strongly emphasized the transformative impact of good communication and supportive leadership on the experiences of students and faculty, but also on the operations of a school as a whole. He spoke at length about the role of the head in facilitating collaboration and empowering individuals at various levels. He stated, "I would often say that the most important thing that I do as a head of school is [that] I hire

really good people who are smarter than me to oversee different areas of the school. And then [we build] a collaborative culture around that." When these people were effectively empowered and collaborative, his job then became to ensure that it was not a "series of silos." He said:

> My job is to make sure that all those strong people are not operating in a vacuum or not taught. They are talking to each other. They're collaborating together. So, I don't have the dean of students or the dean of residential life doing one set of things, my academic director doing another set of things, and the athletic office doing another set of things.

The emphasis on the human element of school culture and operation was evident throughout the conversation with Arnold, and he often reflected on how this approach was in keeping with the mission of the school.

Balancing Tradition and Progress

The nature of Eastwood's student population and the associated approach that Arnold took to changing the narrative around school experiences provided a unique window for the school to critically examine its traditions. It also provided a level of support for making changes with which other schools might struggle. When reflecting on his ability to reform or adjust traditional practices or rituals, he recounted a conversation he had with another head of a much larger school:

> I was friends with the head of one of the very big, very prestigious, boarding schools who said, "I am envious of your experiences at your school." And I said, "You've got to be kidding me. I have a tiny endowment, tiny budget. You've got an endowment [where] you don't have to charge tuition anymore. You guys are

fine." He said, "Yeah, but you can't change anything at the school, right? I can tinker around the edges. I can create an endowed, sustainable food program, but God forbid I talk about what the 10th grade reading list looks like for the summer." He said, "I can't touch it. My alums, my parents, etc. [will be mad]. There's no way you can touch it."

The ability to examine tradition and to discard past practices was a core piece of the identity of Eastwood School, and Arnold posited that much of that had to do with the characteristics of their student body. He reflected that many of the changes and experimentation the school had undergone during his tenure were made easier by the fact that many of the students came from schools where the experience was less than ideal. He said, "One of the things that's been positive for so many of our parents [is that] their child's previous school experience had not been positive. So, they're open to us saying, I think there's another way to do this, or I think there's a better way to do this." This ability to act in ways that balance the needs of current students with the traditions and identity of the school was one of the things that Arnold reflected on as a beneficial aspect of leading an institution with a long history.

Tradition remained important to Arnold, however, and there were aspects of the school's past that he found to be valuable and worthy of continuation, even within the context of changing traditions. For example, he joked:

I'm probably the only person at the school who loves community lunches [because] it *does* build community. It does. Having kids who don't know each other sit together with a faculty member that they don't have as a teacher or a

coach or a dorm parent—you build community that way. People don't love it, but it's a good tradition because it actually does have a purpose.

He found that the examination of tradition was vital as a process, and that change for change's sake was not a productive goal. Instead, "The ability to look at some of those traditions and say, what's the value? Why do we do this? Is it still meaningful today? Or is there something that we should be doing different that still gets at what, why we did that?"

This critical exploration of the goals and outcomes of tradition extended to the classroom as well as the daily rituals of school. Arnold stated that, when they look to achieve their mission through traditional or nontraditional means, "We want kids to have a traditional college prep experience, so we might say, 'is it really important?' How do we think about the literature program for when we know the population are not readers [who] don't love to read? How do we find some meaningful engagement?" The consistent push-pull between a *traditional* experience and the diverse needs of the population led to a great deal of the updating of traditional practices amid a changing environment.

Reflective Leadership

The ability to reflect on practice and examine the trials and tribulations alongside the successes of leadership presented Arnold with the opportunity to explore the definition of success in the context of his role. He contrasted the experience of leading adolescents with that of more traditional vocations, "It's unlike [how] you paint a room. At the end of [the day], you go, 'look, it's great; I painted the room. It's done.' Adolescents, every time you think you've made some progress with them, regress somewhere. You think, 'Oh, I thought we got past this issue with you, but we're right

back there, aren't we?' So, I think it's challenging that way." This made the examination of practice more challenging, but also provided Arnold with the opportunity to reflect that "I feel like we actually accomplished most of those things [his goals], and the things that we didn't accomplish, well, I feel okay that we didn't reach them, because, actually they changed what was important, or they just weren't as important anymore."

The impact of his time, he said, could be measured in "physical buildings to programmatic changes to the health of the student body," but that would only encompass some of the aspects of his tenure. He felt that it was more important that, "if you're really good when you have those moments in there [mentoring teachers], and we're having a conversation in their office, they [the teacher] can actually say, 'I remember you saying that if I did this actually would be helpful' and then they say, 'actually I've been doing that for a year and it is really helpful.'" The less tangible aspects of leadership resonated more fully with Arnold than the physical plant or the academic program, and these more nebulous aspects of change were central to his reflection on his tenure as a leader.

Interview B: Maple Ridge School

Maple Ridge is located on a small campus in suburban Massachusetts. Maple Ridge is close to 200 years old, but it has gone through several transformations and mergers in its lifetime. This school serves approximately 200 students from diverse geographic areas, including an international student population of roughly 25%. The school also highlights this space as an expanded classroom and a versatile space for students and the wider community. Additionally, the school emphasizes its proximity to Boston, mentioning its weekend programming and the opportunity for students to explore the city. A head of school, here named "Baker," and a Board of Trustees run the school.

Baker has been in his role for over 10 years and is one of the longest-serving heads in this study. Of the 22 listed members of the Board, 20 are parents of current or former students, and two are graduates of the school. There are roughly 60 faculty and staff employed at Maple Ridge. The school focuses its curricular and educational philosophies around transformation and individual success, offering a great deal of personalization to the academic options. Roughly 28% of the student body receives financial assistance, and the school said it awards nearly $2 million annually. Outside the classroom, the school offers 13 interscholastic sports programs across the three seasons and puts on three fully staged theater productions each year. The school also prominently placed its Anti-Racism & Equity work on its website, including the work in its strategic plan.

Walking the Walk

When Baker took on his position at Maple Ridge School, the timing coincided with a reimagining of the school's purpose and practice, which he led personally. He recalled that it was vital for the faculty and staff during this time to see him engaging in the work and inviting them into the process with him. He said, "I began by actually just doing the hard work, the grind work of redesigning the performance review process, redesigning the student handbook, redesigning the enrollment agreements, [and I committed to just] grind this work for two, three years." It was important for Baker to involve himself directly with the process of shifting the practices and policy around these aspects of the school's identity and for him to use the hard work to show that he was "here for the long haul. [I was] not going to come in and just try to change everything and then leave, but [I was] here to stay." This approach helped him to approach leadership

change and build a core of like-minded practitioners to guide the transition of the school into a “serious school” further.

Baker also reflected that he tried to apply the mission and practices of the school in his own interactions with various stakeholders: “We've decided as an institution that our pedagogical approach is going to be through differentiated learning and differentiated instruction. What I try to do is often apply this concept of differentiation to all aspects of the school enterprise.” This approach is, according to Baker, “really unique for us. It took us a few years to figure out what the pedagogical approach was. Differentiated learning and differentiated instruction. But now it's me always thinking about how I can apply that [approach] to this completely different thing that we're working on.” The commitment to practicing the methods of pedagogical instruction at the school in other aspects of leadership presented Baker with the opportunity to model the practices he feels best represent the school’s educational model.

Communicating Mission and Vision

Baker stated that how the mission and vision for the school are communicated depends a great deal on the audience, saying, “I think heads of school need to be chameleons” and that “multiple times during the day, [I change] the way that I interact with people based on the way that I believe would be most comfortable for them, or the way that they will best receive the information or the news that I'm giving them.” This approach allowed him to differentiate the vehicle for the message while retaining the core meaning of what that message was, creating an opportunity to frame the conversation within the overall mission. Interestingly, Baker noted that Maple Ridge “does not have a [stated] set of core values. I don't think at my school it makes sense to just list a series of

words and say, ‘these are our core values.’” This represented a challenge for Baker, however: “My core values as a human certainly inform my core values as a leader and hopefully those inform the values of a school. And there's connection because I don't want to be disingenuous of who I am as a person with what I'm trying to espouse to the community. But at the same time, it's not my place to be sage on the stage and say, ‘this is what I believe in,’” but the lack of a stated set of values created a space where the divergence between personal and institutional values could sometimes be felt in practice.

Societal Challenges to Leadership

The interview with Baker unearthed two key areas of challenge during his tenure as head of school: the COVID-19 pandemic and the larger-scale push for racial justice that has occurred over the last decade. When reflecting on the pandemic, Baker explored the “impact of what a global health pandemic has done on the way school leaders need to think about overall institutional school safety,” and how the pandemic added another dimension of needed expertise for those tasked with leading schools. Such a seismic event created or exacerbated two trends that Baker noted continue to be central to his role: “We certainly saw a higher turnover of faculty right after the pandemic. Burnout, absolutely. People were just leaving the industry. There is an adolescent mental health crisis in America that is unprecedented, and the pandemic is one of the root causes for that.” These trends necessitated a change in perspective for Baker, deemphasizing in-class learning:

> How do I think about Maslow's hierarchy and the health and safety and security of my community first and foremost? That's actually more important to me than the teaching and learning that are happening in the classroom. If kids can't get into

> the classroom [physically or mentally], they're not going to be able to learn in the classroom. [So, it's important to] focus on having them be in a good place when they get to the classroom.

The need to focus on the socioemotional aspects of culture and community required Baker to pursue a different model for education that centered on holistic development rather than academic skills or instructional methods. The murder of George Floyd in 2020, and the subsequent movements for social change, featured prominently in the discussion on challenges to leadership. Baker recalled wrestling with the challenges of the pandemic and what the duty of a school was in response to issues of social justice:

> Many New England independent boarding school heads said, "we are going to, because we feel the moral obligation to do it, take it upon ourselves to think about how we can better integrate and elevate a DEIBJ (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging, Justice) curriculum at our school because our students need to understand what happened in the context of a larger movement that has been ongoing for decades and decades and decades in this country and what it means. There are other forces at play that are within the independent boarding school community that think that this is absolutely the wrong direction you should be going and want a much more conservative approach. Most [of those forces] think that schools have no business reimagining the curriculum through a DEI lens; [they think] that should not be taking place.

The role of the school in discussing, elevating, or pursuing such avenues for conversation also tied into parental involvement and their perceptions. "People have very mixed opinions about whether [approaching issues of race and equity and inclusion] is the job

and duty of independent schools, or whether this is something that should be left to families and homes to decide on how they want to approach the issues." The operating knowledge that there were competing dynamics in dealing with current events necessitated both establishing a consistent approach to external crises and understanding that not every stakeholder can be satisfied. Baker said,

> You are never going to satisfy everybody. You knew that they're going to be people that were not going to agree. You just do the best that you can, and you ask for a little bit of grace and forgiveness. People will generally grant that to you if you are upfront [and] forthright, [and] communicative in a timely manner, and [if you] really try to connect back to grounding principles to who you are as a school and what you're trying to do.

This approach to the larger, external challenges of the world surrounding a boarding school allowed Baker to frame responses and policies from the lens of purpose and human development.

Unifying Organizational Purpose

According to Baker, one of the most important things about creating a culture is centered on creating or establishing a unified purpose. He revealed that the senior leadership team provided an important sounding board and a check on his initiatives and interpretations:

> Certainly, when you work with an admin team as long as I have, [you give] pretty open and honest feedback to each other. If people don't agree with me, they're pretty comfortable telling me they don't agree with me. I find that there are more and more contradictions in thought, [and I think,] wait a second, that's got to be a

> little bit of an orange flag for me. How come members of my senior team aren't aligned with me on this approach, on this item, on this thing? And if that's happening again and again, then I know that there's a disconnect between where I am and where they are as educational leaders of the school.

The interaction and importance of a coordinated approach with the Board also came up during this conversation, with Baker noting that, "You have an obligation as a head to report to the Board. It's nice to have their endorsement, but I don't need it necessarily. But if I don't have it, and I move in a direction that they don't believe in, there's going to be a breakpoint at some point." However, Baker was clear in emphasizing that "I'm blessed that I have an aligned board," and that the work of establishing a clear identity for the school was aided tremendously by this fact.

Balancing Tradition and Progress

As noted previously, Maple Ridge is close to 200 years old, and this results in a great deal of interaction between enduring traditions and the need to critically examine the context of traditions through a modern lens. Baker focused on the tradition of senior presentations at his school, saying that before he began his tenure at the school, he wondered what the senior presentations were all about. He said that he used the first year to "absorb and learn, figure out the players and the landscape" before realizing, "I don't want to jettison [the senior presentations]. It's an important part of the school tradition and culture" and that the tradition could be improved by "elevating the space." He noted that he felt like the tradition could be better by giving "an alternative approach to some of our students. And we do that. We do that in the spring where we have a day of

workshops, and seniors lead the workshops. And that can be in lieu of their senior presentation," thereby allowing the tradition to evolve rather than simply replacing it.

On the other hand, Baker asserted, "Some traditions you want to get rid of right away because they're harmful; they're hurtful. [When] you can't figure out what the value of the tradition is in any way, shape, or form, [you ask,] why hold on to it?" This approach emphasized the intentionality of examining traditions and seeking opportunities to improve them when it was feasible to do so.

Further, Baker said that it was sometimes very difficult to start new traditions, stating, for example, "Every year, I've been advocating for the senior class to do a senior prank. I think it's a piece of the tradition of leaving and saying goodbye to a school with a funny moment that you are going to remember for the rest of your life. Each year, the senior class is [can't] be bothered with it."

The final piece of balancing tradition with progress comes from consultation with peers, especially those who have deep institutional knowledge. Baker recalled, "I leaned on one guy often to be like, tell me the history behind this. [Every time he'd] walk by my office, and I'd be like, 'Hey, come here. I got one for you. Where did this start?' or 'How did this happen?' [He happened to be] just one [person] with institutional memory because he worked at the school for 40 years." Such a depth of institutional knowledge allowed Baker to truly understand the genesis of traditions and be mindful of what changes were viable and which changes should be avoided.

Leadership in the "Bubble"

During the interview, Baker made several references to the school being a "Bus" and that a big part of school leadership in a boarding environment was making sure

everyone “was on the right seat on the bus,” in terms of their roles and responsibilities. In contrast to a more corporate atmosphere, Baker felt that one of the key tasks in a campus atmosphere was to have conversations that asked faculty and staff if they were truly doing what they wanted to do. He said, “There were several people doing jobs they did not like and didn't want to do. It didn't mean that [they] didn't want to be at the school. It was just that they weren't doing stuff that made them [truly happy], made their heart full. [They weren’t doing work] that they enjoyed doing.” This led to a holistic examination of the roles and responsibilities inherent to a boarding school campus: residential life, coaching, dean roles, and more, because, according to Baker, the job of boarding school faculty and staff encompasses “your critical core, working directly with the students. Supervising the dorm, coaching them in the afternoons, [and so on].” It was sometimes necessary to ask, “Is this the right bus for you? It's not so much maybe the seat on the bus, but maybe it's not even the right bus. And that's not a judgment call. This is all about a judgment-free zone. There's a right school for everybody out there.” This all-encompassing facet of the boarding school *Bubble* is one that is unique to the environment and requires a different type of leadership.

Interview C: Storm Coast School

Storm Coast School, which is almost 100 years old, is also located in Massachusetts, but much farther outside Boston. This school’s campus is over 300 acres. Consequently, much of the school’s description of its location focused on the campus itself, highlighting new construction and outdoor opportunities to increase the impact of the setting. There was a clear emphasis on athletics at this school, with 12 highlighted alumni, all male, playing professional sports. The school also offers 10 different

interscholastic sports programs, for both boys and girls, with various levels of competition in several of them. Storm Coast has just under 300 students from 15 countries and 15 states, with an international population of roughly 20%. The school is led by a head of school, here called "Christensen," and two assistant heads, working under the auspices of the Board of Trustees, as well as about 60 faculty members. Christensen is in his first year as the head of Storm Coast and is the newest of the interviewed heads in this study. The school did not identify its Board of Trustees online nor explore their relationship with the school. The school's curricular design emphasizes experiential learning and impactful academic interactions divided into a non-traditional academic structure. The school asserts that it provides nearly $3 million per year in financial support, but there is no clear description of the type or percentage of students afforded financial aid. Storm Coast School's website discussed DEI and its work on its Student Life page, but there was no dedicated DEI director or office identified.

Walking the Walk

The role of a head of school varies, depending on the status and composition of their institution, and Christensen felt that his role was "really modeling and setting an expectation in terms of how faculty behaves and how faculty interact with kids. What is our tone? How do we model confidence [and] also humility? How do we talk through a challenging issue?" These feelings coincided with his belief that the head needed to be similar to "a mayor of a small town, or the pastor or rabbi of a small congregation because you can do kind of service, [and be] that kind of like moral center. [You can have] that value center that you have to model and be available for everybody when

they're struggling with their own center" and the ability of a head to embody all of these roles when necessary was his mark of a successful head.

He also said that his role was defined by tone-setting, "That's where I see my role. Tone and culture. Establishing a basic expectation of behavior, how we engage with each other, and how we engage with kids. And holding faculty accountable to that. And then on improving our organizational efficiency." This approach allowed Christensen to operate with the daily interaction and visual leadership that he felt his institution needed based on its current composition.

Communicating Mission and Vision

Rather than articulating a specific mission statement or set of core values, Christensen focused on the type of student that Storm Coast works to serve:

> It's this idea of being an institution that's adaptable or agile enough, [to be one] that's able to meet the needs of each individual student. One that trusts us with their education. [Having] that adaptability to see and meet each student and kind of push them each along [is important. We have] this heterogeneous group of kids in a college prep setting [that] really importantly serves really bright, but less self-actualized [students. They are] college bound [or] college potential kids; that to me is our mission. That's our purpose. Bright kids, a lot of potential built a little bit different than the self-actualized kid that's going to go to Exeter or Deerfield, and that needs a place like [Storm Coast] to push them.

This approach to communicating purpose around students was reiterated by Christensen's statement that "there aren't enough schools [like ours], and I think that there are actually a lot of independent schools [that] actually are this way, but there's not

enough independent schools that really kind of unabashedly [trying] to say, this is the student that we exist to serve. [Few of them] just say it and own it." Ownership of the purpose of the school helped Christensen combat what he called the "mission creep" that sometimes enters the equation. He said, "We're tuition driven, right? It's a contracting market. So, I think that we kind of reflexively can open ourselves up to this [mission creep] where [we say], we've got to fill seats; we need tuition revenue.' That's a constant pressure." The importance of remaining grounded in the type of mission-appropriate students and the role of the school in their development was a recurring topic in the conversation with Christensen.

Societal Challenges to Leadership

Christensen's reflection on the external challenges to school leadership centered on the role of the school in navigating the pressures of global events. He said, "the role of the school is to help students develop a vocabulary and an emotional stress tolerance, as hard as that is, to actually enter into a space where they can navigate really challenging conversations from different angles." The importance of this guidance came up again when he stated,

> We're never going to be able to make, and I don't mean to sound like an apologist or make excuses for myself, we're never going to be able to make a statement about every experience of trauma that exists in the world. It's our position that is this is a safe space for students to develop and think about [whether they can] actually engage with it in a thoughtful way.

This approach centered on the school's role as an educational institution and put development at the forefront of this head's purpose in navigating events and was further

cemented by his statement, “I do think our impact is helping our kids learn how to talk about things thoughtfully. I don't mean to come across as an educational reductivist, but that's it.”

Balancing Tradition and Progress

Christensen is relatively new in his role, and he noted that a lot of his work currently involves slowing the pace of change and getting the core fundamentals of the school’s educational model in place, saying, “My change actually has been stepping back from innovation, back to our fundamentals, back to our first principles. And just articulating, ‘This is who we are. This is where we are. This is what we need to do. And this is how we're going to step forward,’” and that this necessitated a shift in focus for the school as a whole. “I don't care about innovation. I want to think about participation. How do we get our kids to engage positively? Be on time and learn how to prepare for whatever. Tie your shoes before you go to work. Distill the fundamental characteristics of how to show up and be productive at work.” He noted this was a major shift in his approach from when he was a lead teacher and middle administrator, but also one that required him to communicate effectively and to truly articulate a plan. “I try to be just really active and say, ‘this is where we are, this is who we are, this is where I want to go.’”

Institutional inertia exists in all organizations, and Storm Coast is no different. Christensen explored this:

> It's interesting to also think about the concept [of institutional inertia], and how to [also manage] the different stakeholders who come at it from different angles. Because, [you think,] “okay, we've got to change some stuff; but I’ve got to also

> be responsive to an alumni base and an older faculty base that think nothing needs to change." When you talk about alums, [they seem to feel] there's like an almost beautiful, but kind of an irrational love and memorialization of some of the old things.

The balance between refining the practices of the institution and embracing important changes necessitated that Christensen frame a great deal of his work in the spirit and language of the mission, saying that he worked to ensure that he was "articulating how whatever change or initiative is really done in the spirit of the mission," and by doing this, he believed that it helped "people see that it's actually not like a *change*, but it's a *maturation*. It's a maturation of the school."

Reflective Leadership

Christensen noted that, while internal reflection was a practice he engaged in with regard to his approach, his communication of the mission and purpose, and his work with others, the practice of formal feedback was lacking at Storm Coast School. "We're a school that prides itself on being reflective practitioners and giving meaningful feedback to our students. Yet we don't actually meaningfully collect any feedback on ourselves." This gap was identified as an area of focus for his work in this role and provided him with the opportunity to critically examine both his priorities and his message. "Some of [the feedback I get is] just like, 'we love him, but he might be trying to do too much too fast.' It's [about] patience. [The feedback] almost highlights where I need to adjust my message more than my priorities."

Leadership in the "Bubble"

Christensen emphasized the need to explore the boarding school experience holistically when trying to understand the focal points of leadership on a campus, saying that his role required him to focus on, "community life, athletic and co-curricular experience, academic experience, operations from food to Wi-Fi, to cold [temperatures]. And then also just feelings of belonging within the community." He compared the experience to rowing, saying, "Even if you're struggling with paddles, if you're all in, I'll help you. But if you're like, actually, that boat is better for me. I'm like, I want to help you get on it." He emphasized that sometimes these difficult conversations were even more important to have in a boarding school. Especially in a boarding school where teachers fill so many roles, when there are teachers who aren't supported or empowered, "you kind of like settle [into not necessarily] *actively unhappy*, but kind of like *passively unhappy mediocrity*, and that's the scourge of schools. When that [mediocrity] kind of starts to permeate your culture." The multifaceted nature of boarding school campuses necessitated an approach that Christensen felt was aimed at supporting teachers, even if that meant supporting their departure from the school in favor of improving the overall culture.

Interview D: Redwood Academy

Redwood Academy, located in New Hampshire, has both the largest campus and largest enrollment of the schools in this study, with well over 300 students and a campus that provides tremendous opportunities for outdoor experiences. Redwood has an international student population of roughly 14% from 15 countries. The school is one of the oldest of the group and was founded prior to the Industrial Revolution. The school,

like several others in the current study, places a heavy emphasis on relationships and their role in the educational experience. The school also places a heavy emphasis on athletics, advertising a substantial percentage of its graduating seniors playing intercollegiate sports and supporting more than 40 different teams across its interscholastic offerings. The school is led by a head of school, herein "Dodson," a listed Board of Trustees, which is heavily populated by graduates and current or former parents, and just over 80 faculty and staff. Dodson became the head after the COVID-19 pandemic began and is moving on from his position at the end of the year. Redwood provides nearly $4 million in financial aid to over 30% of its student body. This was one of the only schools in the group to describe its overall educational model, rather than a core series of academic programs or departments. This model also included a clearly delineated section on Equity and Belonging, with an emphasis on the community aspects of DEI initiatives and several dedicated DEI faculty/staff members.

Communicating Mission and Vision

Dodson described relationships as the core of the mission of Redwood Academy, emphasizing that, "Relationships are at the center of everything that we do. So, that's basically the mission of the school, which is relationships drive everything." He stated that he ensures that this message is "articulated daily in our assemblies, in our social media posts, in what I write about [in] a weekly blog that talks about the journey of kids through our community." His job in this area was to "write a lot and talk to people about the [mission]. I've got a big microphone and I talk about people. I try to stay on key message. The school's key messaging really does talk about those things that are very

important to the school and not just to me. So that's how we do it." The emphasis on staying consistent resonated throughout the conversation with Dodson.

Societal Challenges to Leadership

Dodson took a different approach to societal challenges than some of the other heads when faced with societal events like Black Lives Matter or the Middle East, saying, "We were doubling down on this community. We weren't really necessarily thinking about the larger world." This emphasis on their own community and connection permeated the approach to turbulent times, with Dodson emphasizing that "Our job is to connect again individuals to community. Our community first, but the larger community next. There is a norming effect when that happens. There is a way that's like, 'Oh, that's, that's more of the [Redwood] way of doing things.'" Dodson maintained that this approach helped build relationships within the community more than broad statements or organizational positioning.

Balancing Tradition and Progress

Progress and change were a focus for Dodson, and he noted that, as school head, he was meant to "navigate and shape culture more than anything else and [remove] everything in its way to make sure that that happens. My tenures in places tend to be [almost] like a startup turnaround culture in some ways." This approach facilitated a lot of progress, but often put adults at odds. He said, "I think it's a little disruptive to adults who get used to the patterns" but his job was to "dive down into culture, making it highly relational so that kids can get the most out of this place," and sometimes that required disrupting patterns and behaviors that otherwise would remain unchanged or unexamined. He also noted that, even with the disruptions of reorganization and changes

inherent to a transition, the administration performed "strategic visioning and strategic planning, which just aligned us to the spine of the institution. So [it wasn't] changing so much. And there has been more of a reconnection of people to the community because it feels more aligned in some ways." Focusing change as a realignment to the roots of the school helped Dodson both communicate the justification for changes and build more consensus on the need for progress as his tenure continued.

Reflective Leadership

When examining his time at Redwood Academy, Dodson said that he kept a "highlight reel" of his major accomplishments and that his reflection on his work centered on aligning himself with his own goals. "To me, as long as I'm aligned with my goals, and I'm feeling like we're achieving those, and that my team and the faculty and the students and the parents are happy, then I'm good." Achieving community satisfaction and coherency, more than the list of projects completed, money raised, or initiatives undertaken, underpinned Dodson's measurement of his impact as a leader.

Interview E: Meadows School

The Meadows School frames its identity through the lens of *family* and the importance of close-knit groups. This is most evident in the tenure of the head of school, who, while relatively new to that specific position, has worked at Meadows for more than 30 years. Meadows is located in Connecticut and is the smallest school in the study, with only 100 or so students, roughly 80% of whom board at the school and nearly 20% of whom are international students from nine countries. The school cultivates an intimate atmosphere centered around relationships, emphasized by its small size and extremely low student-to-faculty ratio. Meadows is run by the head of school, "Evans," with several

dean-level positions in support, but no formal assistant heads, and a faculty of under 30. Evans was a long-time faculty member at the school before becoming the head, but they have been in the role for roughly five years. There was no mention of the membership or composition of the Board of Trustees available. The academic program was described several times as "flexible," which offers at least a semantic alternative to the "individualized" methods promoted by the other schools. The school offers traditional department-based courses and expanded support for language-based learning differences. Meadows did not advertise its total financial aid award but stated that at least 25% of students received some financial assistance from the school. There have 11 interscholastic athletics teams of varying levels. The school also performs two theatrical productions each year to complement its artistic program offerings. Meadows had a dedicated DEI director and emphasized belonging in several spaces on its website. They also offer a substantial opportunity for student engagement with the DEI experience through several boards and committees with student and faculty participation, making it the most robust and transparent program examined in this study.

Communicating Mission and Vision

Evans stated that the mission and vision of Meadows School were "intrinsically tied" together. "I think it's built into our mission that we want our adults to be kind of constantly having that [knowing the student as a person first] as a mantra in the back of their heads to be approaching every single thing that they do with the kids with that idea of figuring out who they are. You can't support a kid if you don't know who they are." This focus on understanding the student as a human being was further emphasized in Evans's discussion of the core values of the school. "Every school has its core values,

[like] responsibility and respect, and we have a huge service element. But we really expect our kids to care about each other, to care about the programming, to care about serving people outside the community, which circles right back around to the mission." This approach extends to communication with members outside the community, where Evans says, "I think we do a very good job when we talk about the culture at [Meadows] when someone is here on campus or when we're doing a *Zoom* interview, or something like that, to really hammer home this idea that this is a place where you're going to be known, where you're going to be seen, where you're going to be valued." This core mission, she said, centers around approaching each interaction from a place of community and connection.

Societal Challenges to Leadership

The COVID-19 pandemic presented a massive challenge to schools of all types, but Meadows faced some challenges that were unique to boarding schools, including managing a geographically dispersed student body. Evans said that the pandemic shifted the operations from long-term planning to the immediate needs of the school: "There was no real time to think about any of that with COVID. It was all about management. If you were really lucky, you could get your kids back on campus. You could keep things going relatively smoothly. Thank God we're coming out of that." The challenge of immediacy versus long-term operations was further explored through other events and trends:

> You've got the immediacy of issues. You've got the immediacy of George Floyd. You've got the immediacy of the threats from social media. You've got the immediacy of COVID. You've even got personal immediacies. We had an

employee die in front of a student in a tutorial room of a heart attack, and that really throws you for a loop, and it sends you back to the drawing board.

The combination of major challenges and the need to deal with pressing issues, Evans noted, requires leaders to "put aside being the pro, or the know-it-all, or somebody who really has got their finger on the pulse, and [you can't be] emotional about it. [You must be] confident being able to share that there is doubt in attempting to do things that are difficult, [things] that are challenging." This authentic and honest engagement was a focal point in navigating both the short- and long-term challenges of leading a school.

Unifying Organizational Purpose

When presented with challenges or the need to pivot from a path, Evans maintained, "I think it's just all about continuing to make sure that your people internally are on board, because the worst thing that could possibly happen is that your message gets blurred or mixed up because people are taking the opportunity to talk about their [own] perspectives over the school perspective." This was underlined by her position that "presenting a united front as a school is really important" when approaching any kind of challenge or communicating the core values of a school to the community and the world.

This notion arose regarding collaboration with parents, as well, where Evans emphasized the importance of relying on the work done in the background. She noted that you must "feel confident in what you have done to create community with your various constituencies so that even at times when you may disagree, they do know that you're acting from a place of responsible care." When pursuing unity, she focused on the communication and collaboration aspects of leadership.

Investing in People

Evans focused a great deal of the conversation on the importance of finding great people and trusting them to do good work within the context of their role at Meadows. She said, “I just keep coming back to the fact that you can't have a great school if it's not for the people who are working here, and the trust that you have to have that they understand that same fine balancing act between what kids need to know and what you want them to know, and who you want them to be.” The impact of empowering those people and working with them in a democratic, rather than top-down approach, also arose during the conversation, with Evans discussing a group of “senior administrators who are meeting and they're looking at program elements or bringing in a group or a speaker or something like that, and [they definitely] want to do this, but then the head walks in and goes, ‘we're not doing any of that,’ and everybody's [like a] punctured balloon.” She noted that it made them question what they were even doing there. This dialogue-based approach was echoed in her final thought on the need to provide a two-way street in the leadership role at a boarding school, “I've tried to really increase communication, to not have it be a monarchy. It’s a very collegial senior administration, and I've also tried to give back power and responsibility where it belongs.”

Balancing Tradition and Progress

When Evans assumed the role of head of school, she had a breadth of experience at the school and had seen the highs and lows of the institution throughout her career. She noted that, in her conversations with the Board, she told them, “What this school needs is some consistency. It needs to get back to its roots. It needs somebody who can remind it of who it is. We have a lot of really long-term people who were very chagrined and felt

kind of lost but stuck with the school in some tough times." This meant defining the school, its mission, and what population of students Meadows School was trying to serve.

Embracing change is important, Evans maintained, but it is equally "important to be really thoughtful," because "there are a lot of opportunities out there for things that you could do, but just loading up on the flavor of the month without being thoughtful about how it's going to impact you down the line" is not a good idea. Taking a measured approach included utilizing feedback from students on everything from course progression to the school's counseling model:

> For many years, we had a counselor on staff who was a full-time employed faculty member, but he was also the soccer coach and his kids were at the school, and he was great, but as the kids started really kind of trying to navigate more complex challenge—and certainly with the rise of things like social media—they really began to want somebody to talk to and confide in who was not somebody they were then going to see in the dining hall, or was coaching them on the team, or driving them to a to a weekend activity. So, we abandoned that model.

Taking stakeholder feedback into account allowed Evans to examine the needs of the community, as well as the immediate needs of the school.

Reflective Leadership

Evans mentioned that her most common reflective act comes from one of her predecessors at the school. She said, "I have a sticky note on my pencil holder in my office. When I first was asked to take this job by the board of trustees, a former head of [Meadows] was on the board at that time, and he said the most important things [to remember were] consistency, visibility, and calm." Evans keeps these three words on the

sticky note. They have been her guide when things are challenging, and they helped her frame her work as a leader. She said,

> You've got to take the perspective of just being able to be somebody who's rooted in the culture of the school, but in the history of the school as well. See the struggles, see the successes. Have an open door; be willing to take on the difficult conversations, to entertain new ideas. I think those are all a function of senior leaders.

This list of traits and behaviors created a guide for examining her practice and her work as the leader of Meadows School.

Leadership in the "Bubble"

The nature of leadership at a boarding school is one of "both giving and taking," according to Evans, and despite the insular nature of the campus *Bubble*, it is one where "you can't just live on an island at a boarding school." Instead, she stated, "You've got to be constantly looking to get [time, energy, and engagement] from other people, of course, because of the nature of education and teaching and people who love to do it. Certainly, in an environment like this, you have to be constantly willing to give." This approach, combined with a constant cognizance that a career in a boarding school is an "all-encompassing, triple threat type model" where, according to Evans, she is "working so hard" that she "can't see the forest for the trees sometimes."

The triple threat model is one that many boarding schools employ, where teachers also coach or lead co-curricular activities and reside in campus housing. Evans emphasized the importance of positive, meaningful feedback in this context, saying, "I love taking those opportunities to just remind people that what they're doing is valuable"

because she understands how much the daily routine of boarding school life can impact the happiness and effectiveness of the community.

Interview F: Highland School

Highland School is located in Vermont and boasts a large campus with a student population of just over 200, 70% of whom are boarding students. While Highland does not advertise its international student population as a percentage, it does note that there are more than 30 countries represented on campus. The school is guided by a progressive educational model that emphasizes student engagement and agency. The head of school, "Fowler," and Board of Trustees run the school, with several dean-level positions in support, but no formal assistant heads. The total faculty is advertised as about 60, with nearly half of those being part-time faculty or staff. Fowler has been the head of Highland for two years but was a head at other boarding schools in the United States. The Board is entirely comprised of graduates and parents of current or former students. The school has a variety of extracurricular programs, including interscholastic athletics and a wide variety of recreational opportunities. It also includes a variety of non-athletic experiential offerings that go well beyond the scope of the traditional "arts and athletics" offerings of many schools. The school awards close to $3 million in financial aid to 40% of its student population, including roughly 67% of boarders. Highland School offers a prominent and robust DEI program that incorporates both communal and individual aspects centered around the concept of belonging and its associated actions.

Communicating Mission and Vision

Fowler focused on communicating the school's identity and purpose with various groups, stating, "Internally, I talk a lot about the principles of pedagogy. Externally, I talk

about how this [approach] fits into the puzzle of raising a kid. That resonates with families. Our faculty and staff internally are interested in the process and pedagogy of progressive education. Families are interested in what's good for their kid." This "kid-based" approach was also reflected in the mission and identity of the school:

> [Highland] has really existed for the convenience of students and not really for the convenience of adults in different ways. So, I think when you come to campus, hopefully, you'll see a little bit of a messy place in some ways, like a little disorderly, and always about what's good for students. That means everything involved is part of the learning process from what happens in the classroom, obviously, but [also things from] governance to upkeep and maintenance. I think the goal is if you can preserve and protect the community, you're going to learn to preserve, protect, and defend democracy in the long run. That feels as relevant to me today as it did 90 years ago. So, it really is a place for, about, and by students.

The approach to student-driven experiences also framed the conversations Fowler has had with community members about the purpose of education. He said, "We are far less concerned about products than almost any place that I see. So, when someone begins talking about something like excellence, the conversation almost immediately turns to, *but what did people learn?*" He emphasized that Highland is heavily focused on the learning and development of the students, rather than the final product of a given task. This necessitated a level of individualization that the school prided itself on:

> There [are] 235 kids on campus who have pretty wildly divergent expectations, like goals, hairstyles, perspectives, interests, and they're all okay being who they are. And sometimes it can feel like you're reinventing the wheel because [every

> day] there's a different kid with a problem than there was the day before. So, we're trying to look at it [the situation] again to see what's good for that individual kid. It's not particularly efficient all the time, but it always comes from the heart and interest in what's good for the individual in front of you and their individual development.

When speaking to prospective families, Fowler noted that he often asks families what they're looking for in a school and how that message is really centered around "whether they're looking for like a fancy prep school for their kids or one that is going to fire up their kid's soul." His belief is that everyone wants their child "to be safe, valued, affirmed, seen, and challenged," and that desire provides the avenue for discussing how he thinks progressive education, "which really puts the kid at the center and makes sure that his hands get dirty, as well as just tired from taking notes, is the best form of education." This approach focuses the message of the school on its mission and his leadership vision for its execution in the context of the students who join the community.

Unifying Organizational Purpose

A common theme for Fowler was how making sure there was clarity in both strategy and tactics ensured that the school would operate successfully, if not always smoothly. He said that a large part of his regular work involved, "working really hard on making sure that everyone is working from the same strategic priorities and working from a pretty refined and thoughtful set of goals." He said it "helps quite a bit so each member of the admin team is thinking strategically as well as trying to manage the day-to-day on the ground around us." This tied into his belief that many of the administration's initiatives "will evolve as long as we're all on the same page about the

mission. [They will work] as long as we're working from clear strategic priorities." The role of a head of school, he said, was to make sure that communication was clear and consistent, even if it meant repetition. "Things move so fast, and you think that you're being transparent and communicating, but you're living in a bit of your own bubble. So, you're thinking, 'Oh, I just did that [communicated the priorities],' and that was six months ago." This conscious approach to communication and reiteration, without relying on people internalizing messages the first time, helped Fowler ensure he was effective and transparent in his own communication.

Investing in People

The principle of specialization and planned obsolescence was a goal for Fowler, who said, "If I'm doing the work that other people can do, I'm probably not doing my job correctly. I really see myself as supporting and empowering others to do the best work that they can." He emphasized that his role was to push things forward, but also to "expose some principles to create momentum to explain need and to make sure that the right people are in the right seats in the bus and support them and help them to set and achieve concrete goals toward moving those things forward." This work, he said, resulted in a different dynamic of leadership and interaction. He noted, "I'm a little bit of a prop. Sometimes, each of those people [the administrative team] will [tell me] it's time to talk in a faculty meeting and share the urgency of this work [an initiative or approach], and then I'll go do that." This helped him support his administrative team visibly while allowing them to also perform their jobs without his constant input. He said, "I joke about being a prop, but I will go anywhere internally or externally and talk to just about anyone in a way that gives the people on our admin team, who are working really hard to

implement a lot of these things [educational plans], the space and the room that they need to be successful." This approach, he felt, allowed his team to do the work that they were tasked and trusted with while providing a layer of cushion in using him as the face of the work.

Balancing Tradition and Progress

The issue of tradition and progress stood out to Fowler, who believed that change is inevitable. He said that, while schools often emphasize tradition, he also believed that "almost any school founder in the United States, if they came and looked at where their school is today versus where it was when it was a crappy one-room schoolhouse, especially in New England where schools are ancient, [they] would be shocked at what the school has become." This knowledge, combined with his firm belief that "in some ways, the school keeps truer to its original mission than any place" he'd ever seen. "I recently found a viewbook from 1937, describing the school. When I read the description of the school in 1937 and the pillars that upheld it then, [I noticed that] they're really similar to what students see today." Such observation helped him focus his work around "the next 100 years of the school" without losing sight of the history of Highland. He also said this balance was "one of the hardest things" that he does, despite the fact that, he felt "fairly lucky that a lot of the most cringeworthy traditions that you might see in schools, [Highland] has managed to shed through the years." He said, "I'm grateful for my predecessors for ensuring that some of the most low-hanging fruit is gone or has been taken care of." His work, then, was not to balance the traditions of the school with its progressive nature, but instead to embrace that progressivism through the lens of the school's mission and ideology.

Interview G: Bear Valley Academy

At over 200 years old, Bear Valley is the oldest of the schools in this study. It is located in New Hampshire on a relatively modest-sized campus and enrolls around 350 students, 25% of whom are international students from nearly 20 different countries. The school advertises a large financial aid outlay, with over $5 million awarded to more than 35% of the student body. Despite its size, the school has a 5:1 student-teacher ratio and emphasizes its small class size as a cornerstone of the educational model. The head of school, "Galloway," supported by a Board of Trustees that is more diverse in connection to the school than most in this study, highlighted the importance of collaboration and community in her description of the school. Bear Valley has the largest faculty and staff of the schools examined, with nearly 150 listed employees. Galloway became the head of Bear Valley during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic but worked at the school prior to becoming head. The school offers 37 interscholastic sports teams at various levels and has a theater program that puts on several productions yearly. There are also a variety of recreational activities, clubs, and student programs highlighted in the school's materials. Bear Valley emphasized diversity in both its operations and DEI offerings, focusing on creating an inclusive environment for diverse learners, and explored definitions of diversity that go beyond traditional visual diversity categories.

Communicating Mission and Vision

In her interview, Galloway spoke about Bear Valley Academy's mission in terms of comprehension and communication, saying, "We have a pretty clear mission that I think most of our faculty, staff, and probably most of our kids, can recite on demand if you walk up to them on campus. I think it is pretty important to be able to actually live

out your mission and for people to know it." This emphasis on clarity and understanding permeated the discussion about how that mission was put into action as well. Galloway noted that Bear Valley focused on helping its students discover "who they are as learners" and "how they understand others and the way that they learn differently from them." She also noted the importance of how students "understand themselves in the context of community." Galloway said, "There's so much packed into our mission statement, and I think it allows us to be a really mission-driven school that drives our culture in a lot of ways." This is tied to her firm belief that the mission should reflect not just the purpose of the school, but also the underpinning values: "Our mission is so much about what we value. We value growth. We value kids being here who want to grow and want to invest in themselves in the preparation piece. I think our commitment to diverse learners is so much of what we are."

This work to define, articulate, and communicate the school's mission involved a memorable story where a previous head of school asked the faculty, "If [Bear Valley] became the school on the planet that every student wanted to go to, would we change who we admit? How would that change us?" and Galloway noted that this created a purpose-defining moment for the faculty. She said,

> Our faculty got really almost up in arms saying what [they felt was] special about [Bear Valley] and our classrooms is the fact that we cater to a diverse range of learners in one classroom, and we are helping kids at a young age understand that not everyone thinks the same way they do, and that there's power in that.

This kind of reflective internal communication allowed Galloway and her predecessor to truly examine the mission of the school and how it tied to the identity of the people

working there. She noted, “It was this really wonderful moment that tied mission and culture, and how you test your mission against what you want your culture to be. So, it's one of the moments in my time here at [Bear Valley] that I think back on a lot and echo a lot when I speak with different groups.” This experience helped Galloway frame the identity of the school both internally and externally, as it provided a platform for her to explain what Bear Valley’s core identity was to those who would otherwise not be familiar with it.

Societal Challenges to Leadership

Galloway noted that they took an aggressive approach to the COVID-19 crisis, not just in their management of the immediate challenges, but in the derivation of strategy from the crisis, saying,

> As we realized how bad it was going to be, we wanted to make sure that our school emerged stronger after COVID than when we went into it. A lot of folks, I think, were just feeling like we're hunkering down; we've got to just survive this. We said, we can have that attitude, or we can have an attitude that we're going to look for opportunities here to come out stronger.

She noted that “I think most schools learned a lot about stress points during COVID when their enrollments were challenged and there was so much uncertainty, and you had to be managing such an uncertain landscape.” While Bear Valley was not immune to those challenges, she said they also used it as an opportunity and “really dug into strategy and focused on what do we want to look like. We made some pretty bold decisions in that time.” This approach, she felt, helped set Bear Valley up for success in the long term by

allowing the administration to thoroughly examine where the gaps and opportunities in their program and plan existed.

The politicization of education was another focal point for Galloway, who explored cultural shifts in the United States around educational priorities. She maintained that preparing adolescents for the future was inherently tied to some "buzzwords" that "have suddenly become politicized," such as *cultural shifts*, noting, "I've been surprised by the degree to which social and emotional learning has taken on a negative tone. I don't quite understand it. Especially when I come back to preparing kids. Again, [our] mission [is about] how we prepare kids. They are not learning by osmosis."

Such preparation of adolescents for the larger world is inherently connected to some of the more challenging conversations around identity and belonging. Galloway noted that having a clear mission helped with these conversations:

> We are a community that's made up of a lot of different minds and a lot of different backgrounds, and we're a place that wants everyone in our community to thrive. We have to be offering programs that help further diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives [so that] people are intentionally learning how to communicate across differences and intentionally working towards a school community where everyone belongs, where every story gets told.

This emphasis on the diversity of learners and the inherent acceptance of that diversity was a focal point of cultural identity for Galloway, and she said that the purpose of development in this area was to focus on the components of this discussion and "boil down social-emotional learning" while focusing on items like "self-awareness, awareness of others, empathy, conflict resolution skills, goal setting." She said, "then you pull out

those pieces and weave in pieces of health and wellness and diversity, equity, and belonging" while destigmatizing the concepts as a whole. She concluded that topic by stating that, despite the politicization of terms, "I don't know that people have issues with any of those components, especially when they think about their own child and what their child needs to be successful in the world."

Balancing Tradition and Progress

Galloway noted that, while her experience with boarding schools is somewhat limited, "I think we're really lucky in some ways. I worked for years in higher ed and then I came [here. My impression is that traditions in some schools [are] almost like the tail wagging the dog. *This is what we've always done*. So, therefore, it must be this way, and we can't evolve, and it's like an act of Congress to make a change." This impression created an appreciation for the culture at Bear Valley that is, in Galloway's words, "nimble," and "something that's been cultivated over multiple generations of leadership where there's a willingness to say [that] times have changed. And [Bear Valley] will change with the times as it needs to support kids because it's the student-centered thing to do."

A nimble culture doesn't fully insulate the school from the issues of tradition and change, however. Galloway noted, "I think for alumni who've seen that evolution over those years, there's a lot of different feelings." While she says alumni have been generally supportive of the evolution and that there is an "overarching feeling [of] pride that we have been willing to make the hard choices to grow in service to kids," there is a more complex challenge when communicating with alumni or former members of the community because, according to Galloway, "there's always going to be the harder

conversations with alumni who feel like, [they] never want [their] school to change. [They] never want it to evolve. 'Why is it evolving? How are modern initiatives impacting my school?'"

These conversations led Bear Valley to "do a lot of survey work [and] a lot of institutional research" with the goal of communicating with constituents. Galloway said this work provides "the data so that we can explicate why we feel like changes might need to be made. Then, we have an intentional strategy process that we follow and that we get a lot of people involved in." Using this work to create buy-in around change has helped Galloway balance these competing interests and expand the conversation around progress.

Reflective Leadership

When asked to reflect on her leadership, Galloway stated,

> One thing I've learned over the years is [that] I can't assess a day at the end of the day. I've learned that the hard way because, at the end of the day, you have zero perspective left, especially after a hard day. To spend time trying to dissect and review that at the end of the day is kind of the worst idea.

This approach helped her piece together short-term issues or processes and further framed her perspective on her time as head of school. She noted that, "As a leader, you're only in a role for so long, and you're kind of in the role of a steward, and there's going to be parts that you just don't get to as much as you wish."

This notion led her to the importance of preparing the school for future transition, stating, "That's the next person's job, and you hope that you've done at least the enabling work to send them in the right direction." She took the holistic position that, when

evaluating whether her tenure was successful, she would ask whether she "left the culture and the school in a place where whoever comes in next is going to be able to pick up and do great work themselves." She added, "The people around you are contributing and the structures and systems are there for that next person to step in. I feel like that's what I inherited from my predecessors, the ability to hit the ground running."

Interview H: Southview School

The final school in this study is located in Maine and boasts a substantially sized campus. Southview is roughly 200 years old and enrolls more than 200 students, with 35% international students and 70% of students residing on campus. Southview is led by a head of school, "Holden," and a Board of Trustees with more than 25 members, as well as a faculty/staff population of just under 90. Holden has been the head at Southview for six years, which puts him in the middle of the group in terms of tenure. There is one associate head of school in a support role, and a leadership team of eight, including several dean-level positions. The school advertised that over 50% of its students receive financial aid, which is by far the highest percentage in study, but it does not specify its overall financial aid award totals. The school devoted substantial space in its materials to the concept of belonging as a central facet of its identity and DEI work, and it employs a team of faculty who work on DEI initiatives and programming.

Walking the Walk

Holden defined the daily tasks of leadership through the lens of authenticity, stating, "Whatever I'm leading or doing, I have to live the values, live the mission, [and the] vision. I have to be out front on that," and that in order to do this, it was vital that he be honest. He said, "I try to be authentic" in who he was and how he interacted with the

campus community. This came about in terms of big-picture items like the mission, but also in smaller interactions like the school dress code, “I'm one of the few heads of school probably that wears jeans to work, [because] this is Maine. I used to be super uptight about the way I dressed. I mean, it's a little thing, but people need to feel comfortable living that value of Maine.”

He also emphasized that leadership and authenticity come about through “talking about [identity and purpose] relentlessly until they plug their ears when you come in the room. Until that's the case, you haven't talked about it enough.” This approach allowed him to put himself forward as the face of Southview School while simultaneously modeling the approach that he felt would provide the right guidance to the community.

Communicating Mission and Vision

Holden reflected on the lack of a clear mission for Southview, stating, “We don't have a crisp mission [statement] that is less than a sentence, that really rolls off the tongue, and everybody knows and can recite,” but he noted that he felt strongly that the strategic vision provided a path for the school. Instead of focusing on the mission, he said, “What we talk most about is our strategic vision, which I think is actually quite good. It has four cornerstones that have become our guideposts.” His approach to this came from realizing that “Our mission is a page [long]. It was written before I got here and it's nice. It's everything to everyone. The part where I probably failed was that we skipped mission and went [straight] to vision and strategic plan.” To frame the school’s mission more effectively, Holden said that he worked closely with his administrative team and that it is “pretty much what we spend a lot of time working on.” Trying to drill down to a core mission also involved understanding that there was a gap between the

page-long mission statement and the practice of implementing it. He noted that this was probably due to the question of what it truly is, and what others actually think it is. Instead, he focused on the guiding principles. He said, “We've got a new strategic vision. This is a transformative experience for kids. That's not really our mission, but I think that's the through line.” This permeating, transformative experience helped him to frame the conversation with people, despite the lack of a clear, concise mission for the school.

Societal Challenges to Leadership

Holden centered his approach to challenging social and cultural issues in “Really reminding people that this isn't new stuff.” This was especially true in conversations around identity and the DEI work inherent to much of modern education, where he said, “I think one of the most challenging things for all of us to talk about is *inclusivity* and that spikes [upsets] a certain group of people…mostly older white males…particularly the hardest one for them is trans, right? That’s like a total freak-out issue.” Instead of approaching this reflexive reaction confrontationally, Holden emphasized leaning on the school’s history. He said, “So, part of what I try to do is talk about how we’ve always been an inclusive place. We included women before most schools included them; we included people of color.” This history of the school’s approach centered on his firm belief that he wants every child to be “the best version” of themselves’. “That's what [Southview] is brilliant at’ We don't need to worry about what makes [people] different. We need to make sure [they] understand that they're part of our community and how we make them feel [as a member of the community].”

When talking about the implementation of policies centered around inclusion, Holden focused on ensuring that people understood the *why* of the school’s actions, rather

than centering the discussion on what those actions entailed, “I think it is really about making sure that people understand our values, not the execution of our values. Because that's our job.” This communication extended to ensuring that stakeholders understood that the school was “built on belonging.” Holden noted that it was crucial to make sure “every member of our community is seen and heard. That means every member wherever they [come from] so it's kind of like trying to make sure you hit the right level with the right people.”

Investing in People

Holden emphasized how important it was that Southview invested in attracting and retaining good teachers who were also effective at the various aspects of the role, stating, “I would contend, if you have the right people, the other stuff will follow.” Furthering this discussion, he said that the people make the difference in a boarding school and that, while sometimes leadership wants to talk about “the 20-million-dollar idea,” his focus instead is ensuring that the school needs a million-dollar idea and then “20 million-dollar people” because it’s necessary that they have the “right people who believe in kids and who believe in in the community” and that they ensure “everyone is reaching their potential.”

Reflective Leadership

When asked about his tenure as head of school, Holden noted, “I've said this to lots of people, my leadership team is so much stronger than the team I inherited. [In theory], I could literally fire every single person on my leadership team, promote the number two [in line], and it would be a stronger team than when I got here.” This was a

point of pride for him because it reflected the growth of the institution rather than anything individual or more tangible.

He also noted that he was focused on creating a culture where people could be authentically themselves in a place and not feel ostracized for it. He recalled,

> We had a student share in a meeting that they were transgender. That was a moment for me where [I was] really proud of the work that I, and we, have done to make this a safe place for them to share and to begin the process of sharing that information with their family. That is a pretty big culture piece."

The focus on the human aspect of his tenure was evident throughout the conversation with Holden, and he spent a great deal of time pondering the impact of his leadership on Southview School.

Leadership in the "Bubble"

In his interview, Holden noted that the challenges faced by boarding schools are unique because of the various roles its faculty and staff must hold. He said,

> It is a hard job. We're asking a lot to be an awesome teacher and oh, by the way, live in this dorm with 72 boys, drive the bus every Wednesday and Saturday, and coach the JV girls' softball team. By the way, when you don't play a kid, the parents are still gonna call even though it's JV and their daughter said they didn't want to play.

This statement reflected his understanding of the challenges of leadership within the campus atmosphere, and he further noted that this becomes a challenge for leadership at times because, when trying to lead an institution like Southview, sometimes it is necessary to understand that "there were lots of nice people here who cared about kids,

who frankly just weren't that good at their jobs. That's one of the problems in boarding school is we ask a lot of people, so we tolerate good people who are bad at their jobs."

The issue of finding good people who are willing to perform the often-all-encompassing task of being a boarding school educator resonated with Holden, who noted that the job has changed dramatically since he first started. "This job used to be fun. When I started, and I don't mean that it's not fun anymore, but I lived in a big boys' dorm. I coached three varsity sports. I taught my four sections, but I didn't have email. I didn't have a cell phone. Parents came for parents' weekend. It was just a simpler time." He said that the expectations of what a boarding school can and should provide have shifted dramatically in his time in education, which changed the implications and focus points for leaders when they work in a boarding environment.

Summary

Throughout the interview process, common themes emerged repeatedly and, while each head of school took a different approach to their view of leadership and their priorities as a leader, each also took a great deal of pride in their approach. These common themes included: a) *walking the walk*; b) communicating mission and vision; c) societal challenges to leadership; d) unifying organizational purpose; e) investing in people; f) balancing tradition and progress; g) reflective leadership; and h) leadership in the *Bubble*.

Table 4.1 shows the cooccurrences across the interviews and identifies which heads of school focused on specific aspects of each theme. Data reported in Table 4.1 will be used to organize the analysis in Chapter Five by enduring themes and sub-themes.

Table 4.1

Thematic Development and Cooccurrences

Initial Deductive Codes	Secondary Inductive Coding	Common Themes	Enduring Themes	Thematic Cooccurrences
Artifacts	Daily Habits and Actions	Communicating Mission and Vision	Leadership in Schools	Arnold, Baker, Christensen, Evans, Holden
	Communicating Mission and Vision	Walking the Walk	Leadership in Schools	Arnold, Baker, Christensen, Evans, Holden
Espoused Beliefs and Values	Challenges and Change	Investing in People	Leadership in Schools	Baker, Evans, Fowler
Underlying Assumptions	Faculty and Staff Growth	Unifying Organizational Purpose	Leadership in the *Bubble*	Arnold, Baker, Christensen, Dodson, Holden
	Stakeholder Buy-In	Balancing Tradition and Progress	Embracing Change and Honoring Tradition	Arnold, Baker, Dodson, Evans, Fowler, Galloway, Holden
	Human Nature and Social Interactions	Societal Challenges to Leadership	Embracing Change and Honoring Tradition	Baker, Christensen, Dodson, Evans, Holden
	Reflective Leadership	Reflective Leadership	Leadership in Schools	Arnold, Baker, Christensen, Evans, Holden
	Balancing Tradition and Progress	Leadership in the *Bubble*	Leadership in the *Bubble*	Arnold, Baker, Christensen, Evans, Holden

Chapter Five provides a summary of findings, as well as cross-interview comparisons from an analysis of the eight interviews. Chapter Five will use the enduring themes that were created by condensing the common themes present in the interviews to organize the findings through a thematic analysis of the research questions. This thematic analysis includes the literature and theories explored in Chapter Two as a framing and analytical tool for each of the enduring themes. Chapter Five also includes a discussion of implications for professional practice and an examination of future research recommendations in the context of independent boarding schools.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this exploratory study was to understand the connections between leadership and culture in a field of education that has not been deeply researched. It utilized interviews with eight heads of small, independent boarding schools in New England. The researcher sought to identify the leadership role of heads of school serving in independent, secular boarding secondary schools in New England and how they may be related to shaping organizational culture. This chapter will answer the four questions that guided the research:

1) How do school leaders at long-standing private boarding schools define and articulate the identity and mission of their respective institutions?
2) How do school leaders at long-standing private boarding schools ensure that their school's identity and mission are reflected in its curriculum, culture, and policies?
3) How do heads of school at long-standing private boarding schools enact their respective role in shaping and leading the culture of the school?
4) How do heads of school at long-standing private boarding schools balance the cultural preservation of tradition with the need for change?

Answering the questions that guided this study will begin with an analysis of the enduring themes and sub-themes identified in Chapter Four (Table 4.1). The enduring themes include: a) leadership in schools; b) embracing change and honoring tradition; and c) leadership in the *Bubble*.

Participating heads of school are identified and subsumed under each enduring theme and sub-theme. In the following section, interview data related to each theme and sub-theme are reported using a summary format and direct quotes as appropriate. Then, relevant literature and theoretical concepts are recapped and subsequently used to analyze these data. Contributions to the knowledge base will be briefly reviewed at the conclusion of each analysis section. At the conclusion of the thematic analysis, the researcher will pose and then systematically answer the research questions that guided the current study. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of study findings for practice, recommendations for future research, limitations, and a concluding statement.

Leadership in Schools

The enduring theme of leadership in schools encompassed the actions, conversations, and interpretations of leadership in the context of a school head's purpose and engagement with various members of the community, as well as outsiders or prospective members. The common sub-themes included: a) communicating mission and vision; b) *walking the walk*; c) investing in people; and d) reflective leadership. This enduring theme incorporated elements of the theoretical framework categories of Artifacts, Espoused Beliefs and Values, and Underlying Assumptions, which is explored further in successive sections.

Communicating Mission and Vision

Heads of school utilize various concrete methods to explain the identity of their school to those who are involved in the organization, as well as to the world at large. Responses indicated that the participating heads approached this communication in a

variety of ways, but that most of them considered this communication to be a vital aspect of their role as a head of school.

The missions of the schools examined in the study varied widely in their scope, content, and their descriptive terms. Each head emphasized the identity of their school as a communication tool as well as a centering factor that both explicated and centered in their work. Evidence suggests that the sub-themes of communicating mission and vision reflected the schools' identities as well as and how that was made tangible by school heads in word and deed.

For example, when speaking to individuals or groups about the school's identity, each head emphasized the importance of a clear and unified purpose for the school. This extended to both internal conversations, with Evans saying, "It's very much [about] involving as many constituencies as possible in the life of the school and the life of the students." Fowler echoed the unifying purpose of internal communication, "I think working really hard on making sure that everyone is working from the same strategic priorities and working from a pretty refined and thoughtful set of goals." Several of the heads focused on the consistency of messaging across demographics. When Galloway was asked how the messaging changed for those outside of the school community, she said, "I'm not sure they do, to be honest, because it really our mission is so much about what we value." This was furthered by Baker, who reflected that many heads focus on a lot of the same items in their conversations, "We talk about the community. We talk about the campus, the family atmosphere, what living in a residential community means, because it is different. It's an anomaly from where and how the rest of the world lives." The consistency of the message and the emphasis on clearly articulating the identity of

the school, regardless of the context, permeated the conversations with the heads about their practice.

The importance of a clearly definable mission and vision (i.e., purpose and guiding principles) for schools surfaced in various ways through interviews with the school heads. Several schools had distilled their mission to a single sentence, while others had guiding principles or core values, and still others focused their mission on description of the characteristics of their student population and the desired outcomes for their graduates. Of those with simple, clear missions, Fowler's and Galloway's comments stood out. Fowler noted that his school is "really a place for, about, and by students," while Galloway said, "We have a pretty clear mission that I think most of our faculty, staff, and probably most of our kids, can recite on demand." This clarity of purpose allowed these leaders to frame and convey the school's core principles. Baker, on the other hand, noted that he let the stated core values fall by the wayside early in his tenure because "they existed on paper, but not through any of the living and learning and life of the school," and the school really focused itself on its model of education. He said, "our pedagogical approach is going to be through differentiated learning and differentiated instruction" rather than on a statement or catch-all set of values. Holden's experience provided a counter to Baker's, where the creation of core values helped balance a mission that was "everything to everyone" in its construction and wording. Two of the school heads, Arnold and Christensen, framed their mission almost entirely through the type of student they sought to attract. Arnold noted, "The mission is very clear for Eastwood. It has been clear throughout its history," and such clarity ensured the mission was "uniquely defined because we're very clear about who our student is." Christensen broadly defined

the school's mission "to be an institution that's adaptable or agile enough to meet the needs of each individual student," and one that "trusts us with their education." Christensen added, "We have been able to serve a lot of kids who [are] all-stars academically, who can get down to it at any other school, but for the most part, our kids are coming here because they want that relational driver." This communication around mission and vision (i.e., purpose, population, and values) helped each head of school frame the focus of their schools in a way that was accessible to both current members of the community and those outside the community.

Deal and Peterson's (2016) definition of a leader as a *visionary*, whose task is to "communicate communal hopes and wishes, capturing the essence of the school's purpose and mission" (p. 229), focused on the importance of communication. In addition, they noted that school heads communicate the identity of their schools by crafting cohesive expressions of the school's "soul" (Deal & Peterson, 2016, p. 71). Furthermore, Schein and Schein (2017) underscored the importance of verbal and written expressions of why schools "do what they do" (p. 19). In this regard, school heads articulate the importance of culture within their schools and communicate that culture outside the boundaries of their institution.

Multiple participating heads of school, including Baker, Dodson, and Fowler, explained that a large part of their role is determining the needs of their audience and centering the messaging on the mission of the school. Baker's expression that "heads of school need to be chameleons" exemplified the need to package the communication specifically for the audience at the time. Furthermore, the emphasis on *community* as a core aspect of mission and vision was ubiquitous in the interviews with the heads. They

emphasized the power of community and its importance in achieving the developmental outcomes that formed a core facet of their schools' missions.

In "Communicating Mission and Vision," the heads utilized aspects of each level of Schein's (2011) Organizational Cultural Model. Several heads, including Evans, Dodson, and Baker, noted that they wrote regular white papers and blog posts about the school, policy updates, and decisions. These papers constituted Artifacts in Schein's (2011) model and represented tangible evidence of the mission and vision each head held for their school and their desire to communicate these items to the community at large. Written and oral communication also allowed heads to communicate their Espoused Beliefs and Values as an organization to both members of the community and outsiders, with a focus on the "why" of the school's operation. As Fowler said, he often served as a "prop" to communicate the identity of Highland to various groups. Further, Galloway's emphasis that "mission is about what we value" explicitly tied the concepts of mission and values together in communicating the identity of the school. Fowler, in discussing his role as a "prop" also touched on his Underlying Assumption that "progressive education is the best form of education" and that this belief informs how he communicates the benefits of Highland to outsiders and how he centers the "for students and by students" mission of the institution.

Extant literature emphasized the importance of communicating mission and vision in organizational leadership (Argyris & Schon, 1996; Blake & Mouton, 1969; Bolman & Deal, 2021; Hollander, 1979; McGregor, 1960; Rost, 1991). However, the centrality of this activity for the participating heads of school was greater than research indicated in the literature. In fact, several heads in this study noted that communicating the purpose of

their school, more than any other, was their primary role. From an organizational standpoint, this transmission superseded structures, daily activities, or the interplay between various groups. As a primary function of school leadership, centering the work in communicating mission and vision emphasized that identity and purpose are vital to successful headship. The holistic impact of boarding schools also represents a vital aspect of this study. The need for heads to be evangelists for not simply the academic program, but the entirety of the experience and its value in education showcases a dynamic that is inherently different from other forms of organizational leadership. The communication of a school's mission and values encompasses the full day, rather than just the school day, and this allows heads to discuss the mission of the school beyond the classroom and co-curricular experience to encompass residential life and community living. This finding increases our understanding of the leadership role of school heads by expanding that work to boarding school campuses and systems. It further increases our understanding by specifying the lessons of communication in organizational culture to boarding schools through the lens of leadership practice and the experiences of heads of school in this display of their cultural role.

Walking the Walk

The idea of *living* the mission and identity of the school came across in several of the interviews, with the heads noting that a great deal of their role involved modeling the behaviors, identity, and even attire of their institutions to communicate identity and purpose. Of the eight heads interviewed, two had been in their role for more than 15 years, while four were in their first four years in the position. This fact, by necessity, informed the style of modeling and "living the identity" that each head employed. Those

newer to the role emphasized the need to model the identity of what they wanted the school to become, while those with longer tenures focused on how they utilized the mission they'd developed to model what the identity of the school was to those who entered during their guidance. For example, Christensen noted, "I suspect different heads of school kind of play different roles, given where their institution is at the moment in which they are the head. I suspect a little bit, right now, my role is really modeling and setting an expectation in terms of how faculty behaves and how faculty interacts with kids." This was contrasted with Arnold who said, "I've spent over 30 years in a variety of different boarding schools. I'm continually coming back to *how does what we're doing relate to the mission?*" Evans, who worked at her school for years before assuming the role, felt that a big part of her respective approach stemmed from that experience. She said, it "was really important for people to feel that they had my ear because I was their colleague, [and for them to] feel like they had a voice beyond whoever happened to be sitting in this office." This institutional approach to living the identity of the school and creating routines and conversations around it helped each of the heads enact their role as the figurehead and visible leader of their schools.

It was equally important for the heads to approach each day and interaction with the intent of communicating their involvement with the core functions of the institution. Holden said, "I'm one of the few heads of school who probably wears jeans to work." This statement reflected his belief that authentically displaying his approach to the school's core values involved how he portrayed his own approach. He added, "We're not going to get dressed up just because it's admissions visit day" to further emphasize that his approach involved authenticity. Christensen used conversations and modeling

behaviors to display the interactions he wanted to see and to establish that interactions create “the tone that we set for the kids, the manner in which we speak with one another. The manner we speak with one another is actually the tone that we set for the kids. Because they're watching.” Baker also discussed the importance of authenticity, noting that his “core values as a human” certainly "inform his core values as a leader, and hopefully those inform the values of a school.” He added, “there's a connection because I don't want to be disingenuous of who I am as a person with what I'm trying espouse to the community.” This modeling of culture included even smaller actions, with Evans noting it was an important thing for her to “know every kid's name within the first week of school,” and that just by doing that, she could uphold her belief that “there's a community identity for sure, but there's also valuing that individual identity for everybody.” She added, “You can't do that if you are not focused on knowing and supporting every single individual.” These different focal points centered on the heads approach to their daily work that showed their beliefs in the identity and purpose of their respective schools.

The disparate approaches taken by the participating heads of school often reflected their tenure in the role as a school head. The notion of experience as a head and understanding the importance of culture as a dimension of leadership was informed by several bodies of research on cultural leadership that emphasize the importance of comprehending the culture of a school before attempting to exert influence over that culture (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Leithwood & Reihl, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2001). Heads of school’s behaviors and physical presentation exert tangible influences on the daily culture of the school. Deal and Peterson (2016) noted that heads are often “Living Logos” (p.

44), and that how they presented themselves reflected directly on how those around them perceived their own engagement. Schein and Schein (2017) also posited that groups and organizations learn from leaders because "all group learning ultimately reflects someone's original beliefs and values" (p. 19), and that these beliefs and values were displayed by how leaders operated within the culture of their organization. One of the key roles of a leader, according to Deal and Peterson (2016), is that of the icon. Icons' "interests and actions send powerful messages" (p. 230), and this allows them to teach culture and showcase their focus or values. From the clothes they wear to work to the conversations they have with faculty, staff, students, parents, and various other stakeholders, heads' behaviors are seen as "placards, posters, and banners of symbolic meaning" (Deal & Peterson, 2016, p. 44), which communicate the direction in which a school will be guided by its head.

Within the context of boarding schools, the head operates as a full-time model of culture and identity. Heads of school often reside on the campus of the school, eat meals in the dining hall with students and faculty, and attend sports games, concerts, and theatrical performances. Their commitment to setting the tone and "walking the walk" transcends the school day and incorporates every single action and interaction they may encounter during the course of a full day. Evans' noting that "knowing every kid's name" early in the school year, therefore, would not apply simply to hallway or in-office interactions, but to meals, scholastic and extracurricular events, casual campus moments, and many smaller or even cursory opportunities to showcase cultural identity and leadership. The participants indicated that this continuous, positive cultural presence and

modeling interactions, attitudes, and behaviors represented a significant piece of their role in leading their respective schools.

Tangible Artifacts within this theme may include events held at the heads' residence, formal or informal celebrations of accomplishments and identity, the accessibility of the head to members of the community in informal or unscheduled interactions, and the presence of the Head at formal school events like assemblies, sports competitions, performances, or similar cultural touchpoints. Many of the heads interviewed stressed the importance of community within their schools, and this Espoused Belief helped them to communicate the identity and impact of community and belonging as cornerstones of their schools. Further, the constant and consistent approach to modeling and embodying the identity and culture of the school that the head desires represent an espousal of these ideals in myriad aspects of interaction and practice, whether this espousal is linguistic or behaviorally based. Lastly, the belief that leaders should act as models is found in much of the modern extant literature about leadership practices and behaviors, and therefore likely operates as an Underlying Assumption of the heads interviewed.

This study confirmed the findings from the literature that leaders must immerse themselves in organizational culture to effectively shape it (Bolman & Deal, 2021; Deal & Peterson, 2016; Leithwood & Reihl, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2001). In their role as leaders, heads of school cannot simply guide actions and behaviors, but they must consciously display them in order to be seen as effective beacons of organizational identity. This active modeling of behaviors and expectations were an important dimension of the extant literature and were also affirmed in the interviews with heads. Additionally, these

interviews provided expansion on the literature by including the context of resident leaders in the boarding school environment, a situation that did not arise in the literature review on organizational leadership. This more complete level of immersion in the daily life and culture of the school provided a new level of leadership beyond the confines of a traditional organization or school.

Investing in People

Holden's statement that "if you have the right people, the other stuff will follow" reflected the common theme that many of the heads focused on as a tenet of their own practice: empowering people as a bedrock of institutional success. Arnold echoed this, saying his most important job was to "hire really good people who are smarter than me to oversee different areas of the school, and then build a collaborative culture around that." Fowler makes sure that "every third admin meeting [is] just reserved for people to share their goals with someone else and to talk through what's going well [and] what's not going well" in order to provide avenues for people to have reflective and collaborative discussions about their practice. Baker and Christensen both discussed the need to improve feedback to ensure they were responsive to their faculty and staff, with Christensen saying, "I'm regularly surveying faculty in key areas of what I perceive my priorities are in terms of leadership: trust, communication, organizational clarity," and he regularly ensured that his actions were in line with the needs and perceptions of the community. Baker also wanted to increase the regularity of feedback and conversation in a way that supported growth, noting, "It's about goal setting. It's not about doing a performance review every time." Evans stated that one of her earliest actions as a head was centered around making sure the people working with her felt they had the authority

to do their jobs. She said, “I've tried to give back power and responsibility where it belongs” because the transition left “a lot of really long-term people who were very chagrined and felt kind of lost, but stuck with the school in some tough times,” so her focus was ensuring they were supported in their roles.

Argyris and Schon’s (1996) Model II organization, with its focus on communication and inquiry, explained the behaviors of the heads. Most of the school heads in the study emphasized open communication, feedback, and conversation as the foundation of a well-run school. Additionally, the importance of placing people in the correct role and allowing them to do their jobs echoed tenets in Bolman and Deal’s (2021) human resource frame and relational leadership theories, such as Rost’s (1991) exploration of leader-follower interactions. This approach to empowerment particularly connected the role of the heads on developing and supporting their people. Evans’ comments on empowerment also reflected Maslow’s (1954) Hierarchy of Needs, specifically regarding “Ego” and the importance of esteem, respect, and recognition. Additionally, the clear definition of roles and responsibilities represented a tangible display of culture and was therefore an Artifact in keeping with Schein’s (1992) Organizational Cultural Model. Allowing people to embrace their roles and providing them with opportunities for growth and mentorship helps a school head transmit culture and establish “the way we do things around here” (Deal & Kennedy, 1982, p. 4) in the context of their individual school.

The boarding school model, as discussed throughout this study, is one that relies on individuals to embody multiple roles within the institution. This is often referred to as the “Triple Threat” model which, as discussed both in Chapter 4 and later in Chapter 5,

necessitates faculty to teach, coach or lead activities, and often reside on campus in the dormitories with the students. While the details of the Triple Threat model are explored further in other sections, the need to invest in people is paramount when employing this model. Heads, as noted by Evans, and Christensen, need to identify the needs of faculty and support their personal and professional growth. Baker echoed this and discussed the "work-life balance" equation that is inherent in finding and retaining skilled individuals within this model. Hudson further emphasized this when he said, "if you have the right people, the other stuff will follow" and that ensuring that people felt supported, promoted, and appreciated was even more vital in an organization where more is asked of them. In public schools, Hudson noted "[people] were really focused on just being the best teacher they could. They weren't asked to coach or to [spend nights and weekends on campus]" in the way that boarding schools do.

Investing in People incorporates elements of all three levels of Schein's (1992) model. The Artifacts of this theme include professional development funds, teacher longevity statistics, faculty satisfaction surveys and policy or programmatic changes that result from them, the availability and quality of faculty housing on campuses, and many other potential tangible pieces of culture connected to the concepts of belonging and growth in a personal and professional setting. Heads spoke repeatedly about the need to attract and retain engaged and effective individuals in their community, which is an Espoused Belief that may be supported by artifact evidence in an individual school. Additionally, heads' determination of what makes for an engaged and effective community member relies heavily on their own Underlying Assumptions about what engagement or quality work entails. This final piece was difficult to assess through

interviews but may provide a great deal of insight into the cultural roots of a given boarding school.

Scholars have noted that organizational leaders may enhance the effectiveness of their organization by investing in the people who comprise it (Argyris & Schon, 1996; Fayol, 1949; Gulick & Urwick, 1937; Maslow, 1954; McGregor, 1960; Rost, 1991). In this regard, empowerment, promotion, purpose, and acknowledgement of the importance of work were reflected in the extant leadership literature, as well as in the interviews conducted for this study. The notion that organizational leaders strive to improve their organizations is evidenced in this study by participating heads of school. Their active investment in the development and well-being of their faculty and staff were key elements of their cultural leadership. Findings from this study affirm and extend the general understanding of these dimensions of leadership, particularly with regard to heads of independent boarding schools. This extension focuses primarily on the need to find and promote good people who are committed to the model of boarding education. Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs was referenced by several heads in the interviews, and this consideration may take further importance when considering that the lower-level needs are provided by the same organization and leadership as those who provide the opportunities for higher-level needs to be realized.

Reflective Leadership

Each participating head of school was given the opportunity to reflect on their own leadership practices, and most noted that this was a vital aspect of their own analysis and practice. While all heads had different responses to their use of reflection in their work, several common themes appeared in the interviews. Several heads noted, for

instance, that formal, reflective practice is often difficult in the context of an independent school. Christensen said, “We're a school that prides itself on being reflective practitioners and giving meaningful feedback to our students. Yet we don't actually meaningfully collect any feedback on ourselves.” In concert with this, Baker said, “One of the things that I don't do, that we don't do at the school, [is] the concept of doing a 360-degree review assessment. [It] would be a really interesting instrument to create.” Other heads took a less structured approach to reflection, with Galloway noting that “I can't assess a day at the end of the day,” and that it was important to allow space for reflection and processing to occur. Evans reflected that she measures her leadership based on what issues require the least attention: “I guess it's [the challenges that she’s faced] the things that I feel perhaps proudest of, and I'm willing to not spend so much time worrying about” and that if she could add to this list of issues that she did not have to worry as much about, she was making progress. Still further, heads noted the importance of *legacy* in their reflection, with Dodson stating, “I keep a highlight reel [in writing]. There [were] basically 32 things on it, but [they were] probably culled from about a 100 [to] 150 things that we accomplished in a very short amount of time,” and that this practice allowed him to point to tangible progress during his tenure. Both Fowler and Holden emphasized the strength of the institution in their reflection on leadership, with Fowler saying (about his first headship) that the school “was immeasurably stronger the day I left than the day that I arrived.” Holden added to this, saying “My leadership team is so much stronger than the team I inherited. We're going to continue to iterate and get better.” This varied approach to reflection emphasized that heads of school must engage in reflection with both

immediate issues, as noted by Galloway, longer-term projects like those Dodson mentioned, and the impact of their work on institutional strength.

The act of reflecting can result in Artifacts, such as "State of the School" meetings, blog posts, or personal and professional journaling. However, it most accurately applies the individual heads' Underlying Assumptions to their work in order to ensure that their practice aligns with both their beliefs about education and the values that their school espouses as elements of the core identity. As Baker noted, his "values as a human [inform] his values as a head" and this reality necessitates a reflective and conscious approach to practice. Additionally, the act of reflection can help heads ensure that the Espoused Beliefs and Values they communicate to the community are aligned with the policies, initiatives, and activities that they create in their role as leaders of a school community.

Schein and Schein (2017) defined leadership as the understanding as well as "the management of culture" (p. 125). Interview data suggest that reflection was an inherent dimension of knowing and managing culture and was reported by heads in different ways. Whether it was exploring their long-term impact or finding ways to improve the regularity and quality of feedback, heads engaged in active reflection and invited their constituents to do so with them. This highlights Fiore's (2000) assertion that "embedded in school culture is an understanding of the need for schools to operate as communities" (p. 12). The consistent act of reflection allows heads of school to embody two roles of a leader, as established by Deal and Peterson (2016): those of the *Potter* and *Healer* (p. 234). The Potter "contours the elements of school culture" (Deal & Peterson, 2016, p. 234) while the Healer addresses fissures in the culture and helps navigate challenging

times. Heads must use the tools of reflection themselves, as well as engaging with “staff and community members and, at times, students" (Spillane et al., 2004, p. 227) in the act of examining their actions and priorities.

Fiore’s (2000) comment about schools as communities is supported further in schools that operate as residential communities. Christensen’s comparison of the role of head to a “mayor of a small town” echoed this approach and necessitated the ability to reflect and process the daily highs and lows as well as the bigger picture. None of the heads interviewed, however, discussed operating with formal review systems of their leadership within the community, though the lack of these metrics were only explicitly discussed by Baker and Christensen when asked how they assessed their leadership. This contrasted with the literature on many organizations and the need for consistent reciprocal feedback within organizations. Bolman and Deal (2021) discuss the importance of vertical and horizontal communication and feedback in the Structural Frame, and the lack of formal communication around performance was notable in its absence.

The extant body of literature about organizational leadership suggested that highly effective leaders celebrate their wins, tally their losses, and examine the actions and behaviors that got them to those points (Bolman & Deal, 2021; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Schein, 1992; Schein & Schein 2017). These characteristics were identified in the current study by several heads, emphasizing the need for reflective behaviors, including active and honest feedback and developing a communicative structure. All of these were found in various theories and studies of leadership in diverse organizations, as well. The absence of formal review structures presented an opportunity

for practice and research that is discussed in the Recommendations sections later in Chapter 5. This research added to the extant literature in the context of collecting and analyzing meaningful feedback in independent boarding schools as a function of the reflective process. It also added the possibility of concrete feedback policies and structures as Artifacts in Schein's (1992) model within the context of these leaders in independent boarding schools.

Embracing Change and Honoring Tradition

The second enduring theme, embracing challenge and honoring tradition, is a key element of school leadership and involves the navigation of turbulent times and guiding progress over the years. This can include community, local, national, or global crises, but it also involves critically examining the past with an eye toward the future. An examination of this enduring theme incorporates two of the common sub-themes: a) societal challenges to leadership; and b) balancing tradition and progress. This enduring theme incorporated elements of each of the categories of culture outlined by Schein's (1992) Organizational Cultural Model, which are explored further in successive sections.

Societal Challenges to Leadership

The insular nature of boarding schools frees the schools in some ways from the pressures of the outside world, but it does not absolve heads from confronting social or economic issues or the global COVID-19 pandemic. While only four of the heads were in their current position during the initial stages of the pandemic (Arnold, Baker, Evans, and Holden), Galloway assumed her role in the summer of 2020, and so the early pandemic responses and return-to-school procedures were a large part of their collective experience. As such, The COVID-19 pandemic was the most commonly referenced as a societal

challenge both to the operations and, in some cases, the existence of the schools led by the interviewed heads. Arnold's comments, for example, encapsulated the early challenges heads of school faced:

> When it hit us, we were on break, which I think most boarding schools were, and the sense was initially [that] it was just a delay. And then the delay became longer, and then eventually, the state [ruled that we were] not going to reopen this year and [that we] better have a plan if you plan on reopening next year.

This initial challenge required a shift in both operations and in the knowledge of heads, with Baker noting:

> The impact of what a global health pandemic has done [for] the way school leaders need to think about overall institutional school safety, human beings, and becoming pseudo-public health policy experts [was eye-opening]. There are all these jobs they don't tell you about when you become a head of school, like you need to be a junior meteorologist to figure out snow days, right? [Or,] I need to [understand] the level of COVID that's in the waste. How do I monitor this?

This shift in focus necessitated a critical examination of what Galloway called "stress points" for each school, but also provided several heads with the chance to chart a new path forward. Evans said:

> I think any school that says that they just went back to the way things were [before the pandemic] is lying because everybody learned something good from COVID. Not that we want to go through exercises like that, but they are valuable. I do think [we need to take what other schools say with a] grain of salt.

This was echoed by Galloway, who noted that, while COVID-19 created situations for schools where "their enrollments were challenged and there was so much uncertainty and you had to [manage] in such an uncertain landscape," it provided her team with the chance to "really [dig] into strategy and focus on what we want to look like 10 years out, 15 years out. We made some pretty bold decisions in that time." Framing the yearslong crisis as an opportunity for bold decision-making helped several of the heads apply the important lessons learned from the pandemic to their future planning.

The COVID-19 pandemic's immediate effects were noted by many of the participating heads of schools, but the lingering issues of mental health, especially adolescent mental health, also came up during discussions on the challenges the heads faced. Baker mentioned that the mental health challenges adolescents faced required a shift in his understanding and prioritization of learning:

> I need to make sure that kids are warm, and they are fed, and they have emotional, socio-emotional support, and they feel safe and secure, and [that they have] roofs and heat. You [need to] start with all of those building blocks before you can even think about self-esteem and self-actualization, and being the best version of yourself, which are at the top of the pyramid. So, we as school leaders have had to actually think about that. It's not just my school [that] already works with a group of students [who] are more at risk because of their learning differences or their social emotional needs, but even the most elite prep schools in New England [do too], because suddenly the social emotional support needs of their student body [emerged]. Maybe in terms of their [academic] skills and their intelligence [is not] the issue. The issue is they're having a tough time getting out of bed and going to

school because they feel isolated from their peers—because they actually *were* isolated from their peers for a year or two.

Dodson noted that, when the school was coming out of the pandemic early in his tenure as head, they wanted to make sure that they improved the connection of their students to the community and each other, "Our operating instructions around our intention was to connect individuals to community. That's how you become the healthiest school possible." Dodson noted that this approach centered first on helping students reinvest themselves in the social and interactional relationships that were missing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Holden additionally explained that the pandemic had resulted in an acceleration of the trends in phone usage and the mental health challenges adolescents face with a constant connection to the outside world, saying,

> The phones are really bad from a mental health standpoint. [Not only did] COVID [cause] social isolation, [but students seemed only connected] by phone. I think there was a time we [thought] the phones are actually good for some kids because [they provide some] social connection. [But phone usage is actually] increasing or exacerbating the problems in the social development of kids.

The lingering effects of the pandemic, even the unanticipated ones, affected how heads of school must approach culture. Arnold mentioned a trend in socio-emotional growth that has been explored in many contemporary articles: that of delayed development due to social distancing:

> We have seen [from] the pandemic that kids understand the routine of school, [but], certainly for the first couple of years after the pandemic, [we felt like the]

> kids who were entering ninth grade [seemed more like six graders], just in terms of their maturity.

Galloway also highlighted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the identity and transmission of identity between students, explaining:

> We realized that we turned over [brought in] kids who had been online. We brought in new kids, and then during that whole first year, they were sequestered to their dorm only. They weren't interacting across dorms very much and we were telling them to stay six feet apart from one another and [we discouraged] relationships [in order to be safe from illness]. And then, a year later, when we could start to intermingle again, it was like we had to rebuild [our] culture from scratch.

Many of the schools studied emphasized relationships and personal connection as cornerstones of their identity, and the pandemic forced a shift in how that ideal was approached, as well as a cognizance of the impact of these changes on the health of their population.

Several heads of school participants discussed the social and political issues that were paramount in the challenges they faced during their tenures, with issues of gender inclusion and identity, and the consequences of a political culture that provides people the opportunity to, as Holden put it, “say whatever they want, whenever they want, and then deny [saying it].” This was becoming a major challenge to both institutional and personal health. Heads of school often brought the culture and the values of the institution to bear when confronting these challenges. Arnold responded to this issue as follows: “The way that [our students talk to each other] …it shocks me. Maybe that's our political culture

playing out. Maybe social media [causes this] because people have felt they can anonymously say horrible things. They don't understand [that] you can't do that in public to other people."

Galloway approached this challenge by "intentionally working towards a school community where everyone belongs, where every story gets told." She noted that "when it has become polarized, it's been pretty easy to come back to mission." This was a common strategy used by heads, as Christensen said:

> It's our job to create a safe space for [our students] to muck through the vocabulary and not feel like they're also going to get totally ostracized for saying the wrong thing. They're [still] learning how to process these challenging things. And that's actually what I think the role of the school is. I do think it's the responsibility of school leaders [to create that space for development].

Other heads echoed the normative function of schools and their role in it, with Dodson saying, "Our job is to connect individuals to community; [put] our community first, and the larger community next. There is a norming effect when that happens."

Culture is variously described as "the way we do things around here" (Barth, 2001, p. 39) and a "cohesive and shared set of values" (Deal & Peterson, 2016, p. 18), and the impact of heads of school on that culture, especially when it comes to crises or external challenges, can be "pervasive" (Deal & Peterson, 1994). When schools are faced with these "stress points" as Galloway called them, heads often take on a norming and healing role. This connects to the role of leaders that Deal and Peterson (2016) named the *Healer* (p. 243). In this role, the head crucially helps the school mend its fissures and address the core of what makes the institution unique. The issues of temporary, or even

lingering crises can impact the culture of a school but can often initially impact its climate.

Multiple researchers (Lewin et al., 1939; Martin, 2006; Schein & Schein, 2017; Schneider et al., 2011) suggested that climate and culture separate entities, however they are closely intertwined in practice. Martin (2006) defined climate as the "day to day feelings of the members of the organization" (p. 2), which is what many of the challenges the participating heads in the study discussed. Culture provides an opportunity for leaders to refocus climate and to ensure that the climate reflects the more stable and pervasive culture the school has developed in their tenure. The changes forced by the COVID-19 pandemic and other societal challenges forced heads to examine their own formal and informal organizational policies, practices, procedures, and routines in keeping with the definition of climate put forward by Schneider et al. (2011). Such examination and resulting adjustments provided varying levels of success, according to the interviewees, and this connected directly to Peterson and Deal's (2002) conundrum of whether "culture [can] be shaped by leadership or is it so amorphous and unalterable that it has a life of its own" (p. 20).

Various heads pointed to tangible elements of culture when describing their approach to handling crises. These Artifacts included school meetings, as discussed by Dodson and Holden, where students could engage with challenging issues in the presence of their community. They also included health plans and COVID-19 policies, cell phone usage policies, and disciplinary policies around substance use and inappropriate interactions. Baker noted that his school hired more mental health professionals in the wake of COVID-19, as it became clear that the lingering effects of the pandemic were

impacting more than simply classroom learning. The desire for healthy and present students was a consistently Espoused Belief, as was the importance of community in facing challenges, whether geopolitical or local. In this area, however, heads showed diversity in their Underlying Assumptions, with several (Christensen, Dodson) discussing their idea of the role of educational institutions in navigating geopolitical crises being that of a place where discussion was fostered, and mistakes were encouraged. Baker took a different route, which showed a more interventionist or activist belief to education and a school's positionality being vital to the safety and promotion of community. These assumptions reflected their underlying beliefs about the purpose and function of education, as well as their own role in leading their school toward this purpose.

The use of mission, identity, and values as the guideposts for action, as discussed by several of the heads, echoed the "normative and moral" function of these core ideas in shaping the culture of their institutions (Schein & Schein, 2017, p. 20). The conscious application of the school's history and traditions helped heads both honor that tradition by tying current action to the foundations of their school's identity, but also frame changes through the lens of the maturation and progression of that identity in a modern age.

Boarding schools were initially founded to separate their communities from the day-to-day of society and provide their pupils with the opportunity to pursue knowledge relatively unmolested by events outside of the campus. Despite the variety of school types, pedagogical approaches, and locations of the schools included in this study, this separation was still evident in the divergent approaches to societal challenges. This was most challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced residential communities to

operate remotely and removed many of the benefits and safeguards that a boarding school provided to its students. Heads discussed focusing their leadership on building, affirming, and supporting their school communities, with the emphasis on "getting the community together" being paramount in many discussions of the response to this societal crisis. When it came to other challenges, heads expressed differing approaches to circumstances. However, the emphasis on the role of leadership to create a sense of belonging and community transcended the approaches or philosophies espoused by individual heads in their interviews. This, as Dodson coined it, "doubl[ing] down on community" was employed in various ways by many of the heads in their reflections on how they led their school during challenging events or situations.

Scholars noted that leaders use the notion of organizational history to create, affirm, and perpetuate a public image that enhances their stature, reflects their values, and affirms their culture to those participating in it and outside observers. The extant literature on school leadership reflects these notions, as well, and findings from this study suggest that they also apply to independent boarding schools. There are founding myths and ideals that establish a school's purpose, and it is the role of leaders to rely on these pre-existing stories and events to help guide a school through times of turbulence. The literature showed that leaders use these stories, rituals, and traditions to affirm purpose during upheaval or to manage change effectively (Bolman & Deal, 2021; Deal & Peterson, 2016; Schein & Schein, 2017; Martin, 2006). Participating school heads in this study emphasized the need to center approaches to these challenges in the identity and mission of the school and to refocus efforts that strayed from this path in order to achieve sustainable approaches in the face of external or even existential crises. These findings

affirm the importance of history and its role in centering organizations through times of challenge, as well as providing insight into the challenges faced by independent boarding schools. This study adds to existing literature around the role of residential educational institutions and those who lead them in shaping or guiding children as they develop their own belief systems and values within this specific context.

Balancing Tradition and Progress

The eight schools in this study have an average age of 130 years in operation, with three of the eight schools approaching, or just beyond, their bicentennial year. The rich history, traditions, and founding principles of these schools often play a large role in the current identity and mission of the school, as well as the impressions of the school held by stakeholders. The heads of school participants in this study often noted the challenge of appeasing these stakeholders while remaining responsive to the needs and challenges faced by students in the modern world. One head noted, "I am the sixth head in 100 years in the school" and said that it was important to act within the context of that tradition. Galloway added, "You're only in a role for so long and you're kind of in the role of a *steward*" when discussing the impact of history on the actions and behaviors of heads. The challenge of balancing this history with the need to evolve was encapsulated by Dodson: "I think it's [balancing change with tradition] sometimes at odds with each other. Here, even though people are very, very happy with the culture, you [institutions] either keep growing or you [they] die." This need to continually evolve presented heads with the challenge of understanding culture in order to push it forward.

Various heads also noted that, while their schools have rich and historic traditions, it is also important to, as Baker put it, "get to understand how important traditions are and

know what your flexibility is in moving things [make changes to traditions] if you want to move things. But don't just wantonly move things because you think they'll actually improve the experience for the community."

This was echoed by Christensen, who said that he needed to "make sure that [I articulate] how whatever change or initiative [I create for the school] is really done in the spirit of the mission." He noted that this action helped him both communicate the necessity of change while framing it within the core of the school.

Several of the heads stated that their schools were flexible and approached change with a relatively high level of investment and relatively low friction from the faculty or students. Baker, for example, said, "My school is not one that is set in lots of traditions. It's not a traditional school. It's a much more progressive school. And as a result, people are willing to kind of move through things [easily. If we did something last year,] it doesn't mean we have to do it this year."

Galloway noted that change was part of the culture of their school: "I will say that Bear Valley has never felt like that [stuck in the past] to me. And I take no ownership in that [willingness to change]. I don't think my predecessor would either. There is a culture here that preexisted us that is nimble."

Arnold highlighted the importance of including stakeholders beyond the current study body and faculty, saying, "Our constituency, especially if you talk about alums and parents, [believe that] the traditional way is not [always] the right way. We're open to change."

Christensen stressed the need to frame change effectively for members of the community: "I really try to be cognizant of my own language and how I invite people

into that initiative. [I think it] helps people see that it's actually not like a *change*, but it's a *maturation*. It's a maturation of the school."

All of the heads emphasized that flexibility was made easier by a commitment to communication and consensus-building. Hollander (1979) explained that leadership was a mutual-influence process and that the exchange of social interactions creates cohesion and helps organizations evolve. This approach, defined as *relational leadership* (Drath, 2001; Murrell, 1997), emphasized the process of creating interactional webs in organizations that helped leaders respond to followers, and followers influence leaders. This approach matches the statements of the participating heads of schools regarding organizational flexibility and the approach to change. Bass (1998) said that leaders should embrace the iterative process of transformation and that this would then result in growth, understanding, and empowerment for those within an organization.

The reflection of heads on their intentional approach to change centered on the identity of their school, which reflects Leithwood & Jantzi's (2009) assertion that transformational leadership involves centering change in shared values while building an increased capacity for action. Most of the heads noted that their schools were flexible, nimble, or primed for progressive work, and these traits therefore set them up to work with stakeholders to increase their commitment to shared organizational goals or, as Sergiovanni (2001) called them, "higher-level goals" (p. 125). This shared commitment—the building of coalitions in pursuit of organizational goals—involves leaders addressing the various interest groups vital to the political process of change (Björk, 2005). They must manage the conflict between tradition and progress effectively and strike the right balance to achieve the "maturation" that Christensen espoused.

The history of each school represents a tangible Artifact, as do founding documents, school traditions, and stories or myths about the founding of the school, such as Fowler's quotation that his school's founder "believed you could fit 72 hours into every day." These elements of culture are clear, easily referenced, and provide cogent connections between a school's past and present. This provides heads with the opportunity to leverage institutional history in bother reverential and progressive ways. The connection between history and progress provides an opportunity for heads to Espouse their beliefs about the connection between the past and future of the school, and to utilize the tangible artifacts to reference change and flexibility. Interviews with heads implied that the general Underlying Assumption of participants was that change is beneficial and necessary, with several heads referring to themselves as agents of change, and Dodson's comment about "startup culture" standing out as a particularly cogent example of change as a necessity.

As previously noted, schools rely on their rich histories and traditions as focal points to create a unique identity for their school (Bolman & Deal, 2021; Denning, 2005; Fulgham, 1995; Schein, 1992). However, the literature also suggested that this process not only requires an acuity for projecting organizational identity, but also the time needed to effectively transform an institution. Furthermore, this study indicated the importance of acceptance when traditions fail to enhance a school's capacity to adapt to changing circumstances. Participating heads emphasized the importance of understanding, relying on, and utilizing traditions and stories without being wed to them at the expense of progress. Findings from this study may add to the findings from the literature, particularly as they relate to organizational change, transformational leadership, and the

need to adapt to changing times while maintaining organizational identity and cohesion within the context of boarding schools. Schein's model does not directly address change, but the shift in values and beliefs may be displayed in the avenues of change that are explored in this field. The context of boarding schools was not specific to the examination of change and tradition, but the longevity of these schools provided an opportunity to compare adaptation and change with other organizations of similar age.

Leadership in the "Bubble"

Boarding schools often resemble colleges with their campus environments, athletic facilities, and dormitories. Unlike most colleges, however, boarding schools house some or all of their faculty on campus, making it a residential environment for students and adults alike. As such, the environment of a boarding school becomes simultaneously a school, a home, and a village. It is common for people to refer to a campus-based institution as a *Bubble* as a way to encompass the academic, extracurricular, and residential community that operates within the confines of campus. This environment has implications for all members of the community, whether that is a student who can walk across campus to meet their teacher for tutoring after sports, the children of faculty members acting as local celebrities, or the variety of roles held by boarding school faculty.

The *Bubble* asks its residents and community to invest themselves fully in the experience, and this provides opportunities and challenges that are unique to this type of institution, contrasting not only with other forms of secondary education, but also with the colleges that these schools often resemble. To understand this process and its impact

on leadership behaviors, two common themes emerged: a) unifying organizational purpose; and b) leadership in the *Bubble*.

Unifying Organizational Purpose

Communication and collaboration are vital elements of successful organizations, and that often becomes even more important in the tight-knit and highly relational world of boarding school campuses. Heads of school are responsive to different constituencies, including the Board of Trustees, parents, faculty and staff, students, and alumni. These groups have differing perspectives and interests, and it is the role of the head to craft a unified organizational purpose from these disparate groups.

Baker noted that, when it comes to understanding the school, the "trustee expects a much more refined answer [to the purpose of an action]" than the average person, and that one of his major challenges is to inform the Board about initiatives and challenges. He noted, "I'm blessed that I have an aligned Board," when defining the goals and actions of the school.

Evans added that it was important to get people invested in the process, saying, "I think it's just all about continuing to make sure that your people internally [part of the community] are on board" when approaching issues of culture, identity, or change. She further stated that it is important, as the head, that when discussing challenging issues within the school, "You feel confident in what you have done to create community with your various constituencies, so that even at times when you may disagree, they know that you're acting from a place of responsible care."

Fowler added that it was his job as head to ensure that "everyone is working from the same strategic priorities and working from a pretty refined and thoughtful set of

goals." He noted that he was "working really hard" to ensure that these priorities were communicated effectively.

Bolman and Deal (2021) defined the first assumption of the political frame as organizations made up of coalitions and interest groups. This theory emphasizes that conflict is a natural and inevitable condition based on the differences between these groups. Leaders are therefore tasked with managing conflict effectively and balancing the needs and interests of groups to improve an organization's adaptability and effectiveness (Kotter, 1985).

The empowerment and motivation of others is also a key facet of leadership, as explored by the Harris (2004) study of transformational leadership. The importance of empowering teachers and other staff with leadership responsibilities is correlated with an increased capacity for change and growth (Harris, 2004). This approach, combined with the interactions between various stakeholders, leads to a more engaged and democratic culture (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009) in schools and helps to bring together the various elements of the community in pursuit of a common purpose.

Many of the same Artifacts found in "Communication Mission and Vision" serve to support this theme. Heads regularly communicate with various constituencies and work to educate and inform these groups about initiatives and projects. Some other tangible pieces of culture in this context include Board meetings, faculty/staff meetings, regular newsletters or white papers from the administration, all-school meetings, and formal events like groundbreaking ceremonies or baccalaureate ceremonies. These events allow heads to bring different members of the community together to cement the purpose of the school and to communicate the Espoused Beliefs and Values of the school,

whether through convocational speeches or regular updates about daily happenings on campus. The benefit of consensus and unity is an Underlying Assumption in this theme, and one that drives heads to leverage their leadership and bring the community into alignment, whether around change or to reaffirm identity and purpose.

Extant literature on transformational leadership focuses on the imperative to identify or create organizational purpose and to communicate the need for change through collective action (Bass, 1998; Harris, 2004; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009; Sergiovanni, 2001). Findings from the current study reported that school heads emphasized the importance of this dimension of transformational leadership in their discussions of creating cohorts for change, finding the right people to do the right jobs, and building a cohesive organization with a strong central purpose. This study affirmed the findings of the literature—especially the importance of building collective purpose to effect change. This study extended the literature and Schein's (1992) model to the context of boarding school models and the role of this discrete population of leaders operating in "the Bubble."

Leadership in the "Bubble"

As noted previously, the boarding school model presents unique challenges to leadership that stem from a residential environment that interweaves roles and interactions around academics, family, sports, theater, discipline, mental and physical health, economics, cultural exchange, and inevitably many more less-considered aspects of life in a diverse community. As such, the *Triple Threat* model for boarding school employment emphasizes the depth of both the connection and the commitment that those who work in the boarding school *Bubble* are expected to embrace. In fact, this type of

school depends on these people. The Triple Threat, as defined in several interviews, is the recognition that faculty and staff cannot simply teach their classes and go home, as is the case in many independent day schools, and is often contractually required of public school teachers. Instead, these teachers teach classes, coach sports, or direct productions, and then often retire to apartments attached to dormitory wings where the students also live. Indeed, it is a situation that creates a familial atmosphere, but it is also one that can be consuming and exhausting, and it is certainly unparalleled in other educational models.

Such a model was acknowledged by several of the heads as a factor in the development of the identity of their community, as well as the necessity for leadership to remain cognizant of this reality. Holden contrasted the boarding school experience with his time as a teacher in public schools, saying, “I worked at a top public school in New Hampshire and all we did was teach. We didn't really advise; we didn't coach. Everybody was focused on being the best teacher they could be.” He said that, by nature, boarding schools “ask a lot of people,” and that this was a consistent consideration as a leader in a boarding school.

Evans echoed this, saying, “In an environment like this, you have to be constantly willing to give,” and that the “all-encompassing, Triple Threat model” created an environment where leadership had to be conscious in their communication as well as ensuring they celebrated the high points and addressed the low ones.

Dodson agreed, inadvertently affirming several of these statements that boarding school life was about more than just the classroom education, saying, “When people come to Redwood, they've never worked so hard in their lives. But once they get here,

there is a large expectation [to shift their thinking] so that [they keep in mind whether they are] really helping kids out and keeping them accountable."

Christensen noted that, while heads always try to address the big picture items and be leaders, sometimes the daily realities take precedence. In a possible scenario, he said, where "there's no heat in the dorms, and we've had turkey chili for nine straight days," it would require the head of school to split his time between alleviating the quality of daily life and those of greater organizational purpose.

In environments with such divergent challenges, Evans reflected that it was incumbent upon good heads of school to make sure they were "taking those opportunities to remind people [faculty and staff] that what they're doing is valuable," and to be present, noting that sharing these positive experiences also helped solidify identity and purpose. She said that a visible function of leadership in a community setting was:

> About keeping your eye on the prize in terms of who you are, what defines you as a school, what defines your culture, and making sure to remind people of that in any way you possibly can. Whether it's a celebration [or] the reason that you give a headmaster's holiday, getting the entire school to show up for the play, or for the debate, [it is important to just be] visible.

Baker noted that he uses retention as one of the benchmarks for school health, with an emphasis on the trends that can give underlying hints about whether or not the model is working, "I think retention is a really important. You try to figure out how to quantify this area of school culture and climate and community. There are very few data points that you can look to, to give you a sense of how you're doing in that, and faculty staff retention and student retention, I firmly believe, is one of the most important."

In what Christensen described as a "tuition driven, contracting market," the need for a head of school to recognize the dilemmas, address the daily challenges, celebrate victories of any size, and retain students and faculty at consistent rates exemplify the considerations that leaders of this type of organization face.

The various and often contrasting needs of a residential institution force heads of school to combine the traits of leadership and management. Kotter (1990) argued that the inherent functions of management and leadership are different, "The central function of management is to provide order and consistency to organizations whereas the central function of leadership is to produce change and movement" (pp. 3-8). Additionally, Tucker (1981) distinguished leadership and management as to the timing of direction, stating, "In ordinary, day-to-day group life . . . groups are in need of being directed. But routine direction might better be described as *management*, reserving the term *leadership* for the directing of a group at times of choice, change, and decision" (p. 16). Therefore, heads often engage in management while simultaneously enacting the leadership tasks that Uhl-Bien (2006) noted were required to transition the focus of the problem from "the individual to the collective dynamic" (p. 662). As members of the community and, as many heads were, individuals who had also been part of the Triple Threat model, these leaders had the chance to "see relationships other than those built from hierarchy" (Murrell, 1997, p. 39).

As Bolman and Deal (2021) noted, life in organizations is "packed with activities and happenings that can be interpreted in a number of ways" (p. 316), and how heads approached and prioritized these activities and happenings directly impacted their perceptions of effectiveness and the impact of their leadership and management on their

school. The holistic impact of boarding schools necessitated that heads consider each potential impact point of the *Bubble* in their leadership decisions, hiring practices, and policy adjustments.

Artifacts that support leadership in "The Bubble" include Head's Holidays, which are often ad hoc days off that recognize momentous occasions or a much-needed break in the schedule. Some schools also celebrated "Mountain Day" or a similar, community-focused shared experience for the school that heads use to create a sense of cohesion early in the calendar. On campus, tangible evidence of faculty embracing the Triple Threat model would likely be found during weekend events, proctored evening study halls, or families eating dinner with boarding students in the dining hall. This further establishes the Espoused Beliefs and Value of community and its importance in this educational model. The nature of these schools requires community to function, and the heads' role in shaping their communities and engaging with students and faculty in a variety of settings was paramount as they balanced the daily needs of the school and the longitudinal aspects of leadership. The Underlying Assumptions inherent in communal operation are almost impossible to ascertain without immersion in the individual schools studied, but a careful examination of the artifacts and the espoused value of community may yield some information about the basis for traditions and interactions in each school.

The importance of leaders understanding the culture of an organization is a ubiquitous dimension of the extant literature. Leaders must immerse themselves in the culture of the organization, as previously noted, and this includes understanding the various pressures exerted on their constituents (Argyris & Schon, 1996; Bolman & Deal, 2021; Deal & Peterson, 2016; Maslow, 1954; McGregor, 1960). Findings suggested that

the Triple Threat model (i.e., teaching, coaching, and residential life responsibilities) and its associated benefits and challenges may be unique to boarding schools, and so applying this facet of organizational structure to the study of leadership allows for a new lens to examine how a leader connects the daily life and interactions of their organization to this specific school context. The exploration of the Triple Threat model may be a new avenue for research, as the literature about the impact of the model and its application in these schools is sparse, at best. This indicates that this may be an addition to existent literature on leadership and may provide opportunities for further research, as discussed later in Chapter 5.

Answering Research Questions

Answering the following research questions that guided this study will draw upon the foregoing thematic analysis and use a summative format.

Question 1

The first guiding question of this research addressed communication and articulation surrounding culture and identity: *How do school leaders at long-standing private boarding schools define and articulate the identity and mission of their respective institutions?*

Heads of schools utilize various methods of communication to articulate and define their schools' missions. These methods depended on both the content of that articulation and the audience for a particular message. Several of the heads in this study noted that they wrote regular, formal updates to their faculty in the form of emails or newsletters. Others said they wrote regular policy *white papers* and outlined their priorities to the greater community through the articulation of future goals. Heads also

participated in videoconference interviews, open houses, or meetings with prospective families, where they emphasized the benefits of attending heir school by communicating mission and identity and focusing on community and belonging. Many heads also participated in regular all-school meetings where their in-person presence and words communicated the identity and norming aspects of the school's *why* to the students and faculty. The emphasis on the role of the head of school as a mouthpiece for the school's mission and identity surfaced in multiple interviews and indicated that heads viewed this as a primary role of their position.

Question 2

Research question 2 focused on the daily actions, behaviors, habits, and decisions about some of the more tangible aspects of school culture and identity: *How do school leaders at long-standing private boarding schools ensure that their school's identity and mission are reflected in its curriculum, culture, and policies?*

The participating heads of school in the current study discussed the responsive nature of their policies and culture, emphasizing the need to evolve as the needs of students and faculty changed, as well as the reflective nature of leadership in this context. Heads also noted that a progressive approach to education allowed them to change curriculum or policies based on feedback and daily interaction. Such emphasis on responsive practices also centered the work of heads in their approach to traditional practices and the change inherent in the evolution of academic and socio-emotional development of adolescents. Furthermore, heads noted that the impact of external challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, technological advancement, and world events, required that they be flexible in their approach to policies. They focused heavily

on the human and community elements of these policies. Much of the interview data emphasized the impact of these challenges on individual people, rather than exploring blanket policy or academic planning. Throughout the interviews, the considerations of community and individual development were echoed by heads in their approach to connecting the planning and policies of their school with the needs of their community.

Question 3

The third research question centered on the participating heads of school's understanding of their own position and what that meant for their interactions and decisions as leaders of an organization: *How do heads of school at long-standing private boarding schools enact their respective role in shaping and leading the culture of the school?*

Heads universally felt that shaping and leading culture was a vital aspect of their formal role and approached this task in numerous ways. They discussed modeling and setting the tone in both student and adult interactions, and how that showcases culture. Additionally, numerous heads explained that they focused on various aspects of organizational planning to ensure that people were engaged, supported, and appropriately compensated for their work. They noted that each of these aspects of culture were vital in the context of boarding schools, especially as faculty are asked to embody a variety of roles and positions. This emphasis on the structural aspects of culture also presented heads with the challenge of determining the right "seats on the bus" for faculty and staff and ensuring that those tasked with the administration of climate-impacting elements of daily life represented individuals who felt empowered to perform those roles and adequate to the task. Finally, heads communicated that they centered a great deal of this

culture-building work in the original mission and vision communication they undertook on a regular basis.

Question 4

The fourth research question sought to explore how heads balanced the identity that comes from institutional history with the need to modernize and change operations as the world changes in and around boarding schools: *How do heads of school at long-standing private boarding schools balance the cultural preservation of tradition with the need for change?*

Each head noted the importance of school identity when discussing the traditions and historical understanding of the schools' cultures. Acknowledging the past and a mindful approach to change permeated the interviews with heads when they examined their work to create a responsive atmosphere without losing sight of the origins, values, and underpinnings of their respective school's identity. There was near-universal understanding of the importance of truly understanding a school's culture and history before attempting to change traditions or introduce new ones. Several heads also mentioned the importance of communicating with the various stakeholders of a school, including students, faculty, parents, alumni, and trustees, when undertaking any substantive changes to a school's traditions or curricular approaches. Multiple heads focused on the progressive or nimble nature of their school as a trait that was celebrated and embraced by those same stakeholders, and that their role included stewarding that nature through changes without losing focus on the mission of the school. This knowledge of culture and reflective approach to the genesis of traditions. as well as the

desired outcomes of them, guided heads in their approach to moving the needle on important changes.

Expanding Leadership Theories

Schein (1992) stated that "The only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture" (p. 11), and the context of boarding schools provides a unique opportunity to examine this culture holistically. This research aimed to expand the understanding of Schein's (1992) Organizational Cultural Model in the context of independent boarding schools. This context operates distinctly differently than public school models, as is further discussed below, and exploring the behaviors, beliefs, and stories of this discrete group of leaders may aid in the development of the model in a new context. Heads of boarding schools focus a great deal of their leadership on continuing and reinforcing the school's culture in an environment where they hold sway over nearly all elements of the organization. Boarding school heads operate as both leaders of culture and community and managers of daily operations. They work with, and in some cases select members of, the school's Board of Trustees on strategy and policy. They coordinate with an administrative team to tackle daily challenges and ensure that the school is operating within the parameters of its mission and resources. Heads fundraise and solicit donors from within the extended school community of alumni and parents, but also from external sources, which requires these heads to be capable of espousing the virtues of their institution in a manner that is digestible to disparate parties. Heads also often reside on the campus of the school they lead, giving them perspective on the entirety of the residential community and its operational needs. The role of a head of

school in this context is multifaceted and encompasses aspects of a variety of leadership and management actions.

The very nature of boarding schools presents a novel context for exploring leadership. The holistic experience of the boarding school environment presents challenges and opportunities that do not exist in public schools, private day schools, or other non-residential educational organizations. These include situations where, as Christensen noted "there's no heat in the dorms, and we've had turkey chili for nine straight days" as well as opportunities to craft cultures and communities that transcend the school day. Interviews with heads indicated that there were distinct differences between the context of leadership in boarding schools and leadership in public schools and day schools. The residential status created an environment where cultures mixed not only in classrooms, but in dormitory life and beyond. This necessitated those heads of school factor in diverse cultural backgrounds and residential situations, and often created a community that was more diverse than the population of the state where the school was situated. While no school published their racial demographics, for example, three of the states in New England are over 90% White, which indicated that schools with substantial international populations likely offered a more diverse student body than the public schools in their region. This phenomenon, as well as its potential for examination, are discussed further in Recommendations for Future Research later in this chapter.

Implications for Leadership Practice

As Bolman and Deal (2021) stated, leaders develop their methods of leadership practice by embracing one or more frames of understanding. A frame represents "a mental model—a set of ideas and assumptions—that you carry in your head to help you

understand and negotiate a particular 'territory'" (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 10), and these conversations illustrated the need to employ strategies from each of the frames discussed in Chapter Two in order to effectively guide schools into the future.

Most of the heads discussed elements of the Human Resource Frame, especially with regard to their role in leading culture at the school. This was evident in the answers around hiring and retaining staff, knowing and understanding students, and working to ensure that the school felt like a community. Several heads spoke on issues of the Structural Frame, with the "bus" and "boat" metaphors standing out and echoing elements of strategic management and hierarchical organizations, with Evans discussing the need to empower people to do their jobs and Fowler noting that if he was doing the work he hired people to do, it would mean a failure of leadership. However, relatively few heads highlighted elements of the Political Frame as Baker did when discussing the various constituencies that he needed to both appease and guide. Other heads, like Holden, spoke about specific constituencies (The Board), but most focused heavily on the students and student involvement in the culture they were leading. This presents a possible need for heads and prospective heads to incorporate elements of the Political Frame into their practice, especially when it comes to managing the often divergent desires of the various groups within a school. Leaders must work to create a culture that provides the best and most comprehensive experience for students while addressing the needs and capacities of the faculty tasked with enacting these policies. They also have to consider the overall strategy and engagement with the Board and its goals for the school in accomplishing both.

The heads who participated in this study shared many of their experiences and thoughts on leadership in the context of their specific roles, but also in the context of boarding schools as a whole. While they framed their work differently at times, many of them emphasized the need to engage in clear and consistent communication around both programmatic and aspirational tasks. This communication included repeating key ideas, framing the work in the mission, finding multiple avenues for communication, and ensuring that the message was consistent even as the messaging could vary. Modeling desired behaviors and interactions, being present, and "living the mission" also permeated the conversations with the heads of school, emphasizing the importance of providing a role model and a guide for the daily life for members of the school community. The heads who were interviewed universally highlighted the need to collect and internalize feedback from various stakeholders in the reflective process as both a guide to future action and a check against assumptions of intent or interpretation of prior events. The interactive nature of leadership was a connecting thread in each interview.

There is a great deal of emphasis on change, transformation, or progression in many leadership theories and the education of future leaders. However, most of the heads noted that change for the sake of change was at best neutral, and at worst, actively harmful to the development of culture in boarding schools. Instead, there was an emphatic message of intentional and thoughtful approaches to change, with terms like *steward* being used to describe the role of heads, especially those early in their tenure.

It was further emphasized that truly understanding and knowing the culture, history, and traditions of a school was a vital step prior to enacting changes that would impact any or all of those areas. Prospective leaders, and those who educate them, may

enhance that preparation by focusing on strategies for learning and observing a culture as they enter it. In the situations where those leaders are promoted from within the culture, as was the case with several of the heads, it may be further beneficial to engage with their former peers around what issues, gaps, or needs are pressing for many, rather than immediately pushing to align their vision and their new role. Regardless of the method of internal promotion or external recruitment, taking the time to immerse oneself in the culture of the organization, to understand the "third rails" and "sacred cows," as several heads named them, may benefit future heads in their practice.

Several concrete recommendations arose from the participant interviews, with the most prominent being the opportunity for leadership development programs in schools of this size. As Holden noted, building a strong team is vital to success in a leadership role, and the opportunity to develop leadership skills within a smaller faculty and staff population provides heads with both improved support structures and a more invested faculty. Schools of this size often require faculty to wear "many hats" beyond the Triple Threat model, but there is very little information on how they are prepared to do so. Developing formal leadership programs, administrative training, and emphasizing internal professional development aimed at leadership and management would provide systems for continuity in schools. These should include elements of management, like budgeting, planning and programming, and organizational training, as these are important elements of the dual-sided leadership discussed by several heads. However, they should also include work with culture building and leadership training. This training would focus on the micro-culture concepts emphasized by Schein (1992) and the creation of cohesive teams as a precursor to cohesive school culture development. Additionally, leadership

training for faculty and staff could include elements of cultural maintenance like feedback receptivity and delivery, communication tools and strategies, and vision development. Preparing potential administrators to be leaders and familiarizing them with the tools and strategies of leadership in the context of the culture of the individual school will likely increase both the investment of those individuals in the school and provide a sense of purpose and ownership of their role in that development process.

There is also an opportunity for increased collaboration and lateral professional development among heads. While several heads mentioned peers and colleagues in similar positions, none discussed any kind of formal or regular comparison or sharing of practices. While this no doubt occurs on some level, it would benefit heads to create or strengthen the habit of comparison in practice and experiences with other heads. This recommendation may be challenged by the tuition-driven model of independent schools, which necessitates a certain level of differentiation and competition between peer schools, but the act of engagement could lead to beneficial results within and across leadership teams at these institutions. Nearly all of the heads who participated in this study noted that the opportunity to articulate their practices and reflect on their work was beneficial and even enjoyable. Creating a more consistent association of boarding school heads, or emphasizing existing ones, could provide these heads and their peers with the opportunity to do this work more often in an environment of similarly positioned individuals. The specific context of each school would render some of the comparisons moot, as different schools and varying populations or locations have different needs and limitations, but the act of regularly comparing practices, sharing triumphs and challenges, and exploring the "how" of leadership with those who understand the positionality and

contextual challenges of boarding school leadership could provide for a more impactful experience and better-informed leadership in this field.

Lastly, as several heads mentioned, there is often a lack of formal feedback within the structure of independent schools. When it comes to leadership, consistent and actionable feedback helps increase the potential for reflective behaviors and validity checks of policies or plans. Christensen mentioned that he would like to do some sort of survey feedback quarterly. While the implementation of this regular feedback, as well as the collection and interpretation of the responses, would likely take significant time throughout the year, it would also present heads with the opportunity to check that their messaging, plans, and leadership were in alignment with the school's mission and their goals. Determining an effective method for collecting feedback, especially with the power dynamic of an employer-employee relationship, would likely necessitate that this feedback be anonymous, which some of the heads noted was not their ideal scenario. However, anonymous feedback often increases the willingness of participants to be honest, even if it can trend somewhat negatively given the protection of anonymity. It is also more likely that community members will deliver feedback on issues that affect them the most, which presents an opportunity to leverage heads' knowledge of the Human Resource Frame and the Political Frame in exploring their practice and leadership behaviors.

Limitations

The main limitation of this study was in the size of the potential research population. This small group of schools meant that disclosure was an omnipresent possibility, and ethical considerations limited the use of supporting data. Data analysis

was therefore restricted to interview responses only and lacked the ability to compare the words of heads with their schools' published materials. Mission statements provide a great deal of context when exploring school identity and culture, but they are also tailored to specific institutions. These mission statements are often, as previously noted, displayed prominently on school websites and in promotional materials. This meant that directly quoting or referencing the responding schools' mission statements would have guaranteed disclosure of participating heads. Since so much of culture and identity is wrapped up in the mission of a school, this presented a limitation on connecting the words and actions of heads to direct documentary support. This consideration also limited the use of documentary evidence to contextual references rather than analytical application. The use of school websites and information was therefore limited to demographic, geographic, and historical information rather than providing analytical material to connect interview responses with documentary support.

A second limitation of this study was the lack of member checking in reviewing the narratives as transcribed from interview audio. While this was mentioned as an option to participants during the informed consent portion of the discussion, none asked to review their interviews after the fact. There is ongoing scholarly debate about the implementation of member checking in the validation process, as some scholars (Goldblatt et al., 2010; Hallett, 2013) note that member checking could cause harm to participants in the wrong circumstances, while Buchbinder (2011) warns that power dynamics in research may impact the validity of member checking in assessing responses or narratives. Member checking is a common tool in qualitative research, however, and may present a limitation in this study.

The exploratory nature of this study also limited the evaluation and transferability of the information discussed. The goal of the study was to better understand leadership in the context of boarding schools in New England and to establish whether further avenues of inquiry were warranted. This field publishes very little data and there are few studies of the field in literature, so the outcome for this research study could have spanned a large spectrum of results. The lack of data meant that heads' experiences and interpretations could not be checked against enrollment trends, parent surveys, faculty and staff experiences, or other external metrics. Evaluation of individual practices or the validity of participant answers, therefore, was not possible in the context of this exploratory study. However, this limitation provided several avenues for potential future exploration.

Recommendations for Future Research

There is a dearth of research findings on the leadership role of school heads in boarding schools. Although findings from this study may affirm extant literature and also contribute to the knowledge base in the field, additional studies may be conducted to enhance our understanding. Findings from this research study indicated that communication, collaboration, and relational interaction were all vital elements espoused by the heads as necessary tools and goals for their work. Several of the heads mentioned the challenges in gathering and assessing feedback in a regular manner during the year, although some did not mention any coherent feedback system whatsoever. A potential line of inquiry for future research would be to explore how faculty and staff interpret the communication and feedback efforts of their respective institutions. This could identify any synergies or gaps between the perceptions and desires of heads and the understanding

or engagement of their faculty. This work could, potentially, operate in two stages: a) exploring the perceptions; and b) designing and testing feedback tools. The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) already surveys heads of school semi-annually about their job satisfaction and performance, so it may be that individual heads would be comfortable and familiar with such a tool being used in their organizations.

A second avenue of future inquiry could be expanding the study of leadership and leadership behaviors to varying levels of administration in schools. Like many organizations, schools have layers of administration and bureaucracy that interact and exert influence on different aspects of boarding school communities. It may be, for example, worthwhile to survey assistant heads about their own practices or to explore the interplay between student life (residential, programmatic, disciplinary, and socio-emotional work) and academic (curricular, grading and assessment) roles and perceptions in this type of school.

A future study could broaden the range of schools examined, either by expanding the size of the potential pool to include more schools or the geographic region to examine whether themes and experiences carried over. There is a decent amount of geographic movement among independent school leaders, so the possibility of leadership behaviors and practices traveling is present. While the concentration of boarding schools is highest in New England, there are over 200 boarding schools outside this geographic region, and this would present an opportunity to expand the exploratory work to a national scale or to conduct comparative work between regions of the country. A future examination of this sector of education could yield more generalizable data and expand or alter the findings of this initial, exploratory study.

The regular discussion of COVID-19 and its impact on the boarding school model provides another opportunity for future research in this context: crisis management and adaptation to rapidly changing environments. While several heads spoke about their individual experiences with COVID-19, especially with regard to its impact on cultural transmission and the necessity of a rapid response, a more thorough study on the impact of the pandemic on boarding education could involve changes to demographics and funding models, the impact on head and faculty longevity, or the impact of crises on culture and programmatic opportunities. There has been a great deal of discussion in media about the teacher shortages and the exodus of teachers from the profession in the public school world, and a similar examination of independent schools, especially boarding schools with the Triple Threat model, would present an opportunity to compare the impacts and explore the industry in a holistic fashion.

DEI programming and policies were loosely discussed in this research, but they were present in the majority of schools interviewed. Many private schools have increased their stated commitments to DEI work and the impact of equity within their organizations. However, the approaches to this relatively novel aspect of culture and community varied between the schools studied; some had formal programs with leaders and administrators, others had student committees, and others made no mention of this work in their published materials. An examination of these policies, their genesis, and their impact or lack thereof on the culture of independent boarding schools would likely yield a diverse picture of school actions and behaviors, as well as their impact on the culture and identity of the schools in question. Several heads emphasized community and belonging as cornerstones of their school's identity, and examining how that is put into

practice through the lens of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion actions presents a fascinating avenue for further research in this field. Looking at how heads and schools have approached this work is a study in culture as well as leadership behaviors, making it a natural extension of this preliminary, exploratory work.

Finally, future researchers could work to combine the interviews with site visits and "on-the-ground" reporting. This could enable them to both hear the stories and perceptions of the heads, but also to see how those fit into a typical day in the life of a community member at the institutions under examination. As noted in Chapter Two, theorists have emphasized the difficulty of understanding and observing the underlying assumptions of a school and, while a visit to campus would not confer insider status on a researcher, it would likely provide a chance to record a great deal of observational data that interviews and websites do not convey or do not provide context for.

Conclusions

This exploratory study examined the influence that heads of small, independent boarding schools in New England exert on the culture of their institutions.

Each of these heads clearly and consistently espoused the virtues of communication, engagement, and presence while interacting and engaging with members of their community. They emphasized the unique impact and potential for transformation that boarding schools provide, as well as the challenges for leadership and management while operating a residential environment based on a tuition model. In New England, where the rich history of private schools predates the founding of the United States, these heads were cognizant of their schools' pasts and unambiguously invested in leaving their school a better place than when they entered. The tuition-based model of independent

schools, especially boarding schools, caused heads to find ways to magnify and communicate the potential benefits of boarding schools, and specifically their own school, to people both inside and outside the community.

The curricular flexibility and community approach to education in independent boarding schools allowed heads to approach challenges in innovative ways based on their understanding of the identity and culture of their school. They approached their work with a clear focus on the impact of their program on students and their role in creating an environment that was conducive to the progression and development of their students. The heads also universally emphasized the importance of communication and collaboration among faculty and staff members, as well as parents and other adults in pursuit of organizational cohesion.

This study explored the world of independent boarding schools, where heads of school have tremendous latitude in shaping the policies, curriculums, and identity of their institutions. While this exploratory study only captured the stories of a small number of heads in this field, it provides a level of insight into the priorities, reflections, and challenges faced by leaders in the independent school world. The experiences of these heads may reflect the experiences, challenges, and aspirations of other school leaders, and their approaches can be used to help future leaders find their own points of emphasis when faced with similar decisions.

APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

XP Initial Review
Approval Ends: 12/20/2024
TO:
FROM:
SUBJECT: DATE:
IRB Number: 90940
Ian MacPhail, Ph.D. Educational Leadership Studies PI phone #: 3363919112
PI email: idma227@uky.edu
Chairperson/Vice Chairperson
Nonmedical Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval of Protocol
12/21/2023
On 12/21/2023, the Nonmedical Institutional Review Board approved your protocol entitled: The Influence of Independent Secondary School Heads on Shaping Organizational Culture

Approval is effective from 12/21/2023 until 12/20/2024 and extends to any consent/assent form, cover letter, and/or phone script. If applicable, the IRB approved consent/assent document(s) to be used when enrolling subjects can be found on the approved application's landing page in E-IRB. [Note, subjects can only be enrolled using consent/assent forms which have a valid "IRB Approval" stamp unless special waiver has been obtained from the IRB.] Prior to the end of this period, you will be sent a Continuation Review (CR)/Annual Administrative Review (AAR) request which must be completed and submitted to the Office of Research Integrity so that the protocol can be reviewed and approved for the next period.

In implementing the research activities, you are responsible for complying with IRB decisions, conditions and requirements. The research procedures should be implemented as approved in the IRB protocol. It is the principal investigator's responsibility to ensure any changes planned for the research are submitted for review and approval by the IRB prior to implementation. Protocol changes made without prior IRB approval to eliminate apparent hazards to the subject(s) should be reported in writing immediately to the IRB. Furthermore, discontinuing a study or completion of a study is considered a change in the protocol's status and therefore the IRB should be promptly notified in writing.

For information describing investigator responsibilities after obtaining IRB approval, download and read the document "PI Guidance to Responsibilities, Qualifications, Records and Documentation of Human Subjects Research" available in the online Office of Research Integrity's IRB Survival Handbook. Additional information regarding IRB review, federal regulations, and institutional policies may be found through ORI's web site. If you have questions, need additional information, or would like a paper copy of the above mentioned document, contact the Office of Research Integrity at 859-257-9428.

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Section 1 Page 1 of 1

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT COVER LETTER

Dear Participant,

Ian MacPhail, a doctoral student at the University of Kentucky College of Education, Department of Educational Leadership is seeking participants who are current heads of boarding schools with under 400 students in New England to participate in a research study titled, "The Influence of Independent Secondary School Heads on Shaping Organizational Culture." Your email was identified because you are the current head of such an institution. The purpose of this study is to explore the intersections between leadership, school culture, and school identity in this particular environment.

Participation in this study takes approximately 60-75 minutes of your time and includes the following activities:

- A response to this email indicating willingness to participate.
- A 60 minute Zoom interview about your experience as head and your role in developing culture at

  your school

  It is important to remember that participation is voluntary. You will not receive compensation for participation. For more information about this study, please contact the principal investigator, Ian MacPhail, by phone at 336 391 9112 or email at idma227@uky.edu.

  Thank you,

  Ian MacPhail, Principal Investigator, Ph.D. candidate (336) 391-9112
  Idma227@uky.edu

  Dr. Lars Björk, Faculty Supervisor (859) 257-2450
  Lbjor1@uky.edu

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

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WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS OR CONCERNS?
If you have questions, suggestions, or concerns regarding this study or you want to withdraw from the study contact Ian MacPhail of the University of Kentucky, Department of Educational Leadership at 336-391-9112 or idma227@uky.edu. The faculty advisor for this study is Dr. Lars Björk, who can be reached at 859-257-2450 or lars.bjork@uky.edu.
If you have any concerns or questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact staff in the University of Kentucky (UK) Office of Research Integrity (ORI) between the business hours of 8am and 5pm EST, Monday-Friday at 859-257-9428 or toll free at 1-866-400-9428.

DETAILED CONSENT:

ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU WOULD NOT QUALIFY FOR THIS STUDY?
The qualification for this study is to be a current Head of School at an independent, secular, and coeducational boarding secondary school in New England with under 400 students. There are no reasonable determining factors that would exclude potential participants, and no physical requirements or disqualifications for physical or age limitations, as only persons in the role of Head of School will be contacted and interviewed. Non-qualifying individuals will not be contacted nor interviewed.

WHERE WILL THE STUDY TAKE PLACE AND WHAT IS THE TOTAL AMOUNT OF TIME INVOLVED?
The research procedures will be conducted virtually via Zoom, Google Meet, or Microsoft Teams. You will need to participate one time during the study, for a duration of up to 60 minutes. The total time commitment for participation in this study is 60 minutes over the course of one, as described above.

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?
You will be asked to participate in a recorded Zoom, Google Meet, or Microsoft Teams interview discussing your role and experiences in culture creation as a Head of School. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes and consist mostly of open-ended questions. Your role will be limited to one 60-minute interview. Other Heads of similarly situated schools in the region will also be interviewed. The target, maximum response is 8 Heads of schools.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?
The possible risks are minimal, and center on inadvertent identification of participants through deductive reasoning based upon interview answers. Interviews will be recorded (video and audio or audio only) and then transcribed. Interview data and information will be anonymized to the greatest extent possible, and in accordance with legal responsibilities, there is always a chance that identifying information could be released through digital or human error. In addition to risks described in this consent, you may experience a previously unknown risk.

WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?
We do not know if you will get any benefit from taking part in this study. However, some people have experienced satisfaction from knowing they have contributed to research that may possibly benefit others in the future. However, if you take part in this study, information learned may help others.

IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY, ARE THERE OTHER CHOICES?
If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study. Because of the long-form nature of the interviews, recording is necessary. If this is a roadblock to participation, you are welcome to withdraw or decline participation.

WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?
There are no costs associated with taking part in this study.

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WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?
When we write about or share the results from the study, we will write about the combined information. We will keep your name and other identifying information private. We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. Paper records will be stored in a locked cabinet and will be destroyed when they are no longer needed. All electronic data will be stored on an external hard drive and locked when it is not in use.
You should know that in some cases we may have to show your information to other people.
For example, the law may require or permit us to share your information with:

- a court or agencies, if you have a reportable disease/condition;
- authorities, such as child or adult protective services, if you report information about a child or elder being abused;
- authorities or a mental health professional if you pose a danger to yourself or someone else (e.g. suicidal thoughts).

To ensure the study is conducted properly, officials at the University of Kentucky may look at or copy pertinent portions of records that identify you.

CAN YOU CHOOSE TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY EARLY?
You can choose to leave the study at any time. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study. If you choose to leave the study early, data collected until that point will remain in the study database and may not be removed.
The investigators conducting the study may need to remove you from the study. This may occur for a number of reasons. You may be removed from the study if you are not able to follow the directions or they find that your participation in the study is more risk than benefit to you.

WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?
You will not receive any rewards or payment for taking part in the study.

WILL YOU BE GIVEN INDIVIDUAL RESULTS FROM THE RESEARCH TESTS/SURVEYS?
There are no tests/surveys associated with this study. Recorded interviews will be available to the individual interviewed upon request.

WHAT ELSE DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?
If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about 10 people to do so. The primary researcher is a doctoral candidate at the University of Kentucky. He is being guided in this research by Dr. Lars Björk. There may be other people on the research team assisting at different times during the study.

WILL YOUR INFORMATION BE USED FOR FUTURE RESEARCH?
All identifiable information (e.g., your name and the name of your school) will be removed from the interview transcripts generated in this study. After we remove all identifiers, the information may be used for future research or shared with other researchers without your additional informed consent.

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INFORMED CONSENT SIGNATURES

This consent includes the following:

Key Information Page

Detailed Consent

You are the subject or are authorized to act on behalf of the subject. You will receive a copy of this consent form after it has been signed.

_____ _____

Signature of research subject *or, if applicable, parent or guardian* **Date**

_____

Printed name of research subject *or, if applicable, parent or guardian*

_____Ian D. MacPhail_____ Date: _____

Printed name of [authorized] person obtaining informed consent

ORI F2.0150 Rev 04/25/2023

APPENDIX D

HEAD OF SCHOOL INTERVIEW SCRIPT AND SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Introduction

Hello, my name is Ian MacPhail, and I'm interested in exploring the experiences of heads of school with regard to their role in culture development and school identity. I'm working to build a more thorough understanding of the role that culture plays in identity formation on an institutional level and how the pressures of both change and tradition impact the efforts of leaders in independent schools in maintaining and changing their respective organizational cultures. Because of the unique role that heads of school operate in, the potential for tremendous, transformative impact represents both an understudied and possibly outsized phenomenon.

Interview Questions and Procedures

After a brief introduction and explanation of the process, I plan to utilize the bulk of the time asking open-ended questions (see below) and allowing the interviewee to guide the conversation in a semi-structured manner.

Opening

Dear ma'am/sir, thank you for taking the time to meet with me today to participate in this exploratory study as I attempt to build a more complete picture of the intersection between leadership and culture in independent schools. I'm going to ask you some questions about your school's identity and mission and your role in crafting, communicating, and building these core aspects of culture.

Please confirm, before we get started, that you received a consent form and that what we discuss will be kept confidential, apart from any mandated reporting, including

data storage measures, to the greatest extent possible. Your name or the name of your school will not be mentioned in any write ups, the information will be coded to maintain confidentiality, and the recording of today's interview will be deleted once transcription is completed and verified.

Sample Interview Questions

- 1) Can you describe the identity and mission of your school?
- 2) How would you articulate and convey this to the school community?
- 3) Can you tell me how you develop the identity and mission of your school?
- 4) Can you tell me how they are reflected in the curriculum, culture, and policies of the institution?
    - Possible follow-up Question:
        - Can you provide specific examples?
- 5) How do you view your leadership role as the head of school in shaping the culture of your institution?
    - Possible follow-up Question:
        - What strategies or approaches do you employ to effectively influence and guide the school's culture?
- 6) Could you share some examples of the initiatives that you have taken to change, maintain, and transmit the culture within your school?
- 7) Can you tell me about your experience balancing tradition and the need for change in your school?
    - Possible follow-up Question:

        - Can you provide examples of how you have preserved the school's tradition while also incorporating necessary cultural changes?
- 8) How do you ensure that the school's culture remains dynamic and responsive to the changing needs and aspirations of the students, as well as the evolving educational landscape?
- 9) Can you talk about the identity and mission of your school and how it may or may not be influenced by the broader social, cultural, and educational contexts in the United States?
    - Possible follow-up Question:
        - Can you tell me about how you navigate these alignments or divergences?
- 10) Tell me about how you engage various stakeholders, such as faculty, students, parents, and alumni, in shaping and preserving the culture of your school?
    - Possible follow-up Question:
        - What strategies or mechanisms do you use to gather their perspectives and input?
- 11) Can you tell me about the challenges or obstacles you have encountered in aligning the school's identity and mission with its culture, curriculum, history, and policies?
    - Possible follow-up Question:
        - How have you addressed or overcome these challenges?
- 12) Tell me about how you measure the success or effectiveness of your efforts in shaping and leading the culture of your school?

- Possible follow-up Question:
  - What indicators or benchmarks do you use to evaluate the alignment of culture with the school's identity and mission?

Close

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today and to articulate your own experiences as they connect to your role as head of school. The impact and importance of culture are areas that represent a core piece of what makes independent schools unique, and the chance to hear more about your experiences in the field will, I hope, help build a better picture of the formation of identity in these institutions.

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT EMAIL

Dear Participant,

Thank you for expressing interest in participating in this exploratory research study. Your participation will consist of a 60-minute Zoom conversation about your experiences in your current role relating to leadership and its interaction with organizational culture. I recognize that your schedule is likely quite busy and will work with you to schedule a mutually appropriate time for our conversation. Please respond with the following information:

- - Dates and Times that work for your schedule. Nights or weekends are fine, as long as you can devote 60 minutes to the conversation.
- - The best email to send a calendar invite to (if it is not this email address)

I will send a calendar invite for one of your approved time slots and will include the list of potential interview questions for your perusal.

I truly appreciate your willingness to participate, and I look forward to our conversation!

Please remember that participation is voluntary, and you will not receive compensation for participation. For more information about this study, please contact the principal investigator, Ian MacPhail, by phone at 336 391 9112 or email at idma227@uky.edu.

Thank you,

Ian MacPhail, Principal Investigator, Ph.D. candidate (336) 391-9112
Idma227@uky.edu

Dr. Lars Björk, Faculty Supervisor (859) 257-2450
Lbjor1@uky.edu

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